



# If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho

By Sappho

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Of the nine books of lyrics the ancient Greek poet Sappho is said to have composed, only one poem has survived complete. The rest are fragments. In this miraculous new translation, acclaimed poet and classicist Anne Carson presents all of Sappho's fragments, in Greek and in English, as if on the ragged scraps of papyrus that preserve them, inviting a thrill of discovery and conjecture that can be described only as electric—or, to use Sappho's words, as "thin fire . . . racing under skin."

"Sappho's verse has been elevated to new heights in [this] gorgeous translation."  
--*The New York Times*

"Carson is in many ways [Sappho's] ideal translator....Her command of language is honed to a perfect edge and her approach to the text, respectful yet imaginative, results in verse that lets Sappho shine forth." --*Los Angeles Times*

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## If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho By Sappho Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

A classicist at McGill University, Carson has mined Greek literature, and Sappho in particular, to tremendous effect and acclaim in her poetry and essays. Her prose *Eros the Bittersweet* (1986) discussed Sappho's term "glukupikron" ("sweetbitter") among other Greek concepts, while the poems of *Autobiography of Red* (1998) reinvented surviving fragments of the Greek poet Stesichoros, to take just two examples. Here, Carson fully channels one of the most iconic yet least transparent Greek poets, whose work comes to us mostly in fragments. In a four-page preface, Carson addresses the fact that very little is known for certain about Sappho, apart from the fact that she lived in the "city of Mytilene on the island of Lesbos from about 630 B.C." and "appears to have devoted her life to composing songs." She bases her translation, beautifully presented here with the Greek en face, on a 1971 transcription by the scholar Eva-Maria Voigt, published in Amsterdam, and includes all the fragments published by Voigt in which "at least one word is legible," using "the plainest language I could find, using where possible the same order of words and thoughts as Sappho did." Since Sappho's texts are fragments, it is inevitable that Carson offers some pages that are mostly brackets indicating missing material, suggestively interspersed with the words "youth" or "sinful," for example, or the phrases "as long as you want" or "my darling one." As with Joyce's Homeric "winedark sea," Carson includes compounds like "sweetflowing" or "farshooting" to render complex Greek words. Carson grudgingly allows a lesbian interpretation for some of the poems, noting that "[i]t seems that she knew and loved women as deeply as she did music. Can we leave the matter there?" (About an equal number of poems in this collection are about loving men.) With 26 cogent pages of notes to individual poems, an eight-page "Who's Who" of names mentioned in the poems, four pages of "Testimonia" about Sappho and Carson's get-out-of-the-way-of-the-poems approach to translation, the uninitiated should have no problem entering this rich territory and constructing their own versions of the enigmatic poet.

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From Library Journal

The lyric poetry of antiquity is often as important to modern poets as it is to translators and classical scholars. Mulroy is a professor of classics (Univ. of Wisconsin, Milwaukee), and Carson (classics, McGill Univ.; *The Beauty of the Husband*) and the late William Matthews (*After All: Last Poems*) are well-regarded poets. Following Pound's dictum to "make it new," Mulroy and Matthews translate Catullus and Horace into modern American idiom, striving where possible to find cultural equivalents rather than literal translations. At the same time, they try to be true to the shifting tones and rhythms of their originals. The results are fluent, giving some sense of the contemporaneity that Catullus and Horace would have evoked in their audiences. Carson's translation follows Sappho's diction and form much more closely and includes the Greek original on the facing page. Much of what survives of Sappho are fragments, often just a stray word, phrase, or even a few letters. Like many modern poets, Carson deploys these on the blank page, letting their suggestiveness fill the gaps and create whole lyrics in the imagination of the readers. All three translators aim for a general audience, though Mulroy and Carson also include notes and introductions of value to the more scholarly reader. All three books are recommended for both public and academic libraries. T.L.

Cooksey, Armstrong Atlantic State Univ., Savannah, GA

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Review

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"This Sappho is whispering in our ear in a language we can understand." —*Time Out New York*

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—*Los Angeles Times*

“A selfless, faithful, and boldly delicate achievement.” —*Boston Review*

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#### **Rose Engle:**

The reason why? Because this *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* is an unordinary book that the inside of

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