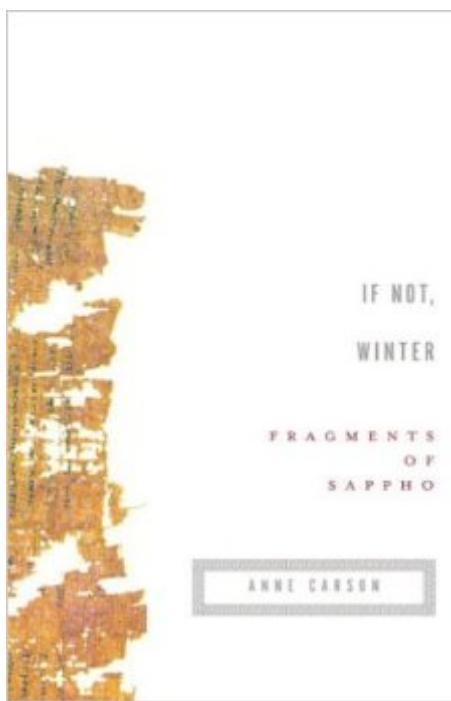


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If Not, Winter: Fragments Of Sappho



Synopsis

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 a *œthin fire . . . racing under skin*. By combining the ancient mysteries of Sappho with the contemporary wizardry of one of our most fearless and original poets, *If Not, Winter* provides a tantalizing window onto the genius of a woman whose lyric power spans millennia.

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Customer Reviews

There is precious little known about the ancient Greek Poet, Sappho. Most of us know the obvious, that she was a famous poet and lyricist (meaning, she composed music to be sung with the lyre) and that she lived on the island of Lesbos off the Greek coast in about 630 B.C.. However, almost all other details about her life, such as they are, come from texts written about her by other ancient writers; of the 9 books of lyrics she is reported to have written, none survive today. Fragments of poetry written by Sappho still exist, but most are damaged or illegible. Hence, here as in other previous works of the poetry of Sappho, the reader is left with only fragments of what clearly must have been delicate and breathtakingly beautiful poetry. As Ms. Carson says in her introduction to her translations, the reader is left with a profound sense of wonder when confronted with the small

snippets of Sappho's poetry. For example, all that survives of poem 36 is "I long and seek after". What, we wonder, does the rest of the poem pertain to? What flowing scenes did she paint with her words that we can never know? I personally am not a Classicist, though I HAVE read through many of the surviving texts of the ancient worlds: Beowulf & The Odyssey, for example, and occasionally I'll attack some texts in Latin and have a go at the translation. However, for the most part, I am not a scholar of ancient times or texts. I'm here to say that one does NOT, even for a second, need to know much about ancient Greek culture, text or times to thoroughly enjoy these translations.

Granted, you will find that most poems are little more than bits of a whole (sometimes only a word or two survives), but even these small pieces will cause your imagination to soar. Ms. Carson has also boldly gone where no translator has gone before (to my knowledge). In previous translations of Sappho's poetry that I've read, the pages are crammed tight with the fragments themselves, explanations and footnotes. In Ms. Carson's book, each page is dedicated to one fragment of Sappho's poetry, regardless of its length. In this respect, a poem that is only three words long has an entire page dedicated to itself. This is a wonderful touch, as it means that the reader's entire attention can be focused only on that poem, no matter how small, without the distraction of commentary by the author (Ms. Carson puts an extensive appendix at the back where she adds her thoughts and comments on the fragment's origin, word meaning and characters). Opposite the English translations are the original fragments in their original Greek characters. I myself cannot read Greek, but I found it a beautiful and thought-provoking touch to be able to look at what Sappho wrote in her own language. Though I'm not able to read Greek, it made the text more alive to have it there for me to look at and examine. In conclusion, anyone who enjoys ancient Greek culture, ancient history or simply enjoys reading poetry should not hesitate to add this book to their collection. I'd personally go so far as to say that if you've got a different volume of Sappho's poetry, make some shelf space to add THIS book as well. For the clean, uncluttered page and lyrical, moving translation, I highly recommend this work and highly compliment Ms. Carson on her work.

I happened across this gem in Vancouver, and have been thoroughly delighted (if ashamed at how rusty my sight-reading of Ancient Greek has gotten). "If Not, Winter" is the best presentation of the Sapphic fragments that I've ever read. Careful attention is paid to presentation on the page, with brackets to differentiate between missing parchments and elided quotations. The arrangement is artistic and makes the fragments flow in as close to a lyric format as we're likely to get in English. Although the translator struggles with the classic tension between transparency of the translator through meaning/intent or through presentation exactly as written, I think she strikes a poetically ept

balance between them, and gives you the Greek on facing pages in as close to an original representation as possible. It warms my little Classicist heart. Her notation is more complex than the presentation in most Ancient Greek texts, and that took a little getting used to, but the added detail was worthwhile content once I became accustomed to it. Sappho is my favorite lyric poet, and the shining and lucid presentation of her work her only strengthens my opinion of her. I'll be sure to search out Professor Carson's other translations now too.

This work is a treasure, I don't know how we can thank Prof. Carson enough. This is a complete collection of all we have left of the greatest poetess of the ancient age. They are all in fragments and the way Prof. Carson has set them out for us they haunt. The title itself says it all, a fragment, what comes before or after may be lost forever: "If not, winter", but even that small snippet strikes. Over two thousand years and Sappho still touches us.

Sadly, much of Sappho's work is lost to the ages. Fortunately, Anne Carson has translated what survives in a wonderful, comprehensive collection. All of Sappho's extant works are here in a dual-language book - the original Greek on one page, Carson's translations on the other. Having read several translations (I do not read Greek), Carson's is my favorite - the images are immediate, the sense of urgency and romance clearly communicated in lyric prose. Some apparently are frustrated by the equal attention Carson gives to each fragment - remnants of poems (even a single word) are given their own page just as longer bits. I enjoyed this, wondering what has been lost, haunted by a voice over 2,000 years old, marveling at the beauty of what remains. If you, like me, are a lover of poetry, I highly recommend this collection above all other translations.

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