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Immigrant Muse: Sapphic Fragmentation in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*, Hoa Nguyen's "After Sappho," and Vi Khi Nao's "Sapphở"*

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ABSTRACT: This article explores three receptions of Sappho by Asian American writers, arguing that Sappho's fragmentation has made her a fellow immigrant in the eyes of these diasporic authors. Divorced from her social and cultural contexts on archaic Lesbos, Sappho signifies primarily as fragmentation itself, the loss of an originary whole. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha uses the corporeal fragmentation of fr. 31 LP in *Dictée* to interrogate the violence endured by the Korean people throughout the twentieth century, Hoa Nguyen ventriloquizes an always already fragmentary Sappho in "After Sappho," and Vi Khi Nao melds an array of fragmentary discourses in "Sapphở."

KEYWORDS: Sappho, Asian America, Reception

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> Since then she has told a thousand stories, she has lived a hundred million lives. She is born again in every generation: Sappho. Hypatia. Scheherazade. Woolf. And all the rest unhailed, unnamed, erased. Returning and returning, she is the tale embodied. Long may she live, again.[1]
>
> —Catherine Chung

WHAT IS THE ALLURE OF A FRAGMENT? Many people find the temptation to fill in the gaps irresistible, but for others the very fact that something is missing, the insinuation of loss, is the point. This article explores the uses of Sappho in the works of three Asian American writers: the Korean American novelist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and the Vietnamese American poets Hoa Nguyen and Vi Khi Nao. I propose that for these diasporic authors Sappho becomes legible as an immigrant. This conception of Sappho as an immigrant is meant to articulate the dislocation characteristic of her survival into modernity. I argue that the three Asian American authors discussed in this article, all of whom are themselves immigrants, engage with this dislocation in their various receptions of the ancient poet. Divorced from her social and cultural contexts on archaic Lesbos, she signifies primarily as fragmentation itself, the loss of an originary whole.[2] I also trace the contours of linguistic violence in these works, suggesting that Sappho's forced assimilation by some nineteenth-century scholars evokes the experience of contemporary immigrants.

The fragmentary nature of Sappho's survival has rendered her an immigrant of sorts for modern readers.[3] The extant text of Sappho's poetry consists

[1] Chung 2019: 2. The Korean American novelist Catherine Chung begins her 2019 novel *The Tenth Muse* with a prologue entitled "An Invocation," which recounts how there was once a tenth Muse, who, dissatisfied with inspiring men's songs and desiring to sing songs of her own, abandoned her divine sisters to become a mortal woman. This narrative engages with the ancient conception, attributed to Plato at *Anth. Pal.* 9.506, of Sappho as "the Tenth Muse."

[2] While Sappho signifies as fragmentation itself, these authors engage with Sapphic fragmentation in three specific senses: (1) the textual sense of transmission both through quotations by other ancient authors and on papyri, which, as far as their tendency to express an integral utterance, map onto the respective approaches to translation of Barnard 1958, on the one hand, and Carson 2002, on the other; (2) the figurative sense of corporeal disintegration in fr. 31 LP; and (3) the metaphorical sense of a disruption in someone's identity, e.g., the inaccessibility of the historical Sappho. This third sense informs my conception of Sappho as immigrant.

[3] Sappho has always been an immigrant in a certain sense. *Marm. Par.* 36 reports that she sailed to Sicily as an exile, and Cic. *Verr.* 2.4.126–27 accuses Verres of stealing a statue of her that once stood in the Sicilian city of Syracuse. Campbell 1982: 125 suggests that fr. 98(b) LP might reflect her circumstances in exile. Scholarship has long noted the

of quotations by other ancient authors and tantalizing fragments recovered mostly from Egyptian papyri. The current corpus is a mere fraction of what was attributed to her in antiquity. The Alexandrian edition of Sappho's poems was divided into eight or nine books, meter being the primary structuring criterion.[4] The total number of lines of her poetry might have approached 10,000, of which roughly 650 survive.[5]

In addition to the material fragmentation of Sappho's poetry, scholars in the nineteenth century, trying to depict Sappho as heterosexual, advocated for fictitious scenarios in which she served as the leader of a school or initiatory group.[6] These fictions have made the task of accurately reconstructing the social and cultural contexts in which she performed her poems extremely challenging.[7] Page duBois notes that "the history of classical scholarship on this author abounds in attempts to assimilate her into the cozy world of nineteenth- and twentieth-century academic life, to apply criteria of the present to her very distant past."[8] This history of assimilation resonates with the experience of contemporary immigrants, who are often forced to abandon their native language in deference to the language of their new country. The accretion of these accounts has contributed to Sappho's fragmentation by making the flesh-and-blood woman who wrote these poems impossible to access.

Several prominent English translations of Sappho's poetry were published during the last century, each of which renders the fragmentation of her extant poetry in its own way. Mary Barnard published a particularly influential trans-

alignment of her aesthetic sensibility with that of Asia Minor. For discussion of Sappho's perceived foreignness, especially from the normative perspective of mainland Greeks, see Kurke 1992, duBois 1995: 163–94, and Johnston 2023: 103–7.

[4] The *Suda* attributes "nine books of lyric songs" to Sappho, but Lobel 1925: xiv, Yatromanolakis 1999, Acosta-Hughes 2010: 99–102, and Dale 2011: 55–67 have expressed skepticism about the existence of a ninth book. Cf. Prauscello 2021: 224–27, who finds this skepticism unwarranted. As for the division of books, Prauscello 2021: 221 asserts that "the prevailing ordering principle of book-division in Sappho's Alexandrian edition, with the exception of the book entitled *Epithalamia*, was metre. Direct and indirect evidence concur unanimously in this direction. Books 1–3 were metrically homogeneous, whereas Books 5 and 7 were not; so the transition from metrical homogeneity to relative polymetry probably occurred in Book 4."

[5] Rayor and Lardinois 2014: 7 estimate a total of 10,000 lines based on the fact that the first book contained 1,320 lines.

[6] For criticism of this depiction of Sappho, see Page 1955: 139–40, Campbell 1967: 261, Parker 1993, and Stehle 1997: 262–78.

[7] For an analogous discussion of the role of biographical fictions in shaping the receptions of Latin poets, see Goldsmith 2019.

[8] duBois 1995: 148–49.

lation in 1958, which manufactures concise sense from the tatters of Sappho's poetry. Her translation of fr. 123 LP offers an illustrative example. The Greek text reads ἀρτίως μὲν ἁ χρυσοπέδιλλος Αὔως, "Dawn with her golden sandals newly," but Barnard 1958: 5 translates this fragment as

> Standing by my bed
>
> In golden sandals
> Dawn that very
> moment awoke me.[9]

The details of Dawn standing by Sappho's bed and awakening her, which produce a complete sentence, are Barnard's own inventions. The Korean American novelist Alexander Chee engages with the peculiar challenge of translating Sappho in his 2001 novel *Edinburgh*, which features a character named Edward "Warden" Arden Gorendt, a student at a boarding school in Maine who chooses Sappho as the topic of his senior thesis. Warden provides this explanation of Sappho's surviving poetry (Chee 2001: 150):

> Sappho isn't really meant to be read. It's meant to be sung and there were dances for the songs, also. Sappho was a performance artist, and now she exists as a textual project. She was saved by her critics, and by people who wrote of her in letters to each other. As the morning sun lathers the pool through the long windows and stripes the opposite walls in gold, I look at the fragment translations. She's paper too. A paper poet for a paper boy. People claim to be translating her but they don't, really, they use her to write poems from as they fill in the gaps in the fragments. A duet. She may have meant for these to be solos but they're duets now, though the second singer blends with the first. The first singer in this case is offstage, like in the old days of stars who couldn't sing, a real singer hidden behind a curtain, which is the velvet drape of history.

He stresses the mediated nature of his access to Sappho, arguing that translators "use her to write poems from as they fill in the gaps in the fragments." While Warden primarily refers to Guy Davenport's 1965 translation of Sappho, this description also applies to Mary Barnard.

Anne Carson's *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*, which was published in 2002, has become the most popular translation of the twenty-first century. Unlike Barnard and Davenport, who produced coherent poems from the haphazard words and phrases surviving on the ancient papyri, Carson emphasized the fragmentation. She provided a bilingual text of Sappho in

[9] I use LP for numeration of Sappho's extant poetry, but I print the Greek text of Campbell 1982. All translations from ancient Greek are my own.

both English and ancient Greek, allowing readers a side-by-side view of her tattered poems in their original form. She also included square brackets and other scholarly conventions in her translation, offering clarification as to how much of a given poem Sappho had composed.[10] Carson 2002: xi explains:

> Brackets are an aesthetic gesture toward the papyrological event rather than an accurate record of it. I have not used brackets in translating passages, phrases or words whose existence depends on citation by ancient authors, since these are intentionally incomplete. I emphasize the distinction between brackets and no brackets because it will affect your reading experience, if you allow it. Brackets are exciting. Even though you are approaching Sappho in translation, that is no reason you should miss the drama of trying to read a papyrus torn in half or riddled with holes and smaller than a postage stamp—brackets imply a free space of imaginal adventure.

The use of brackets as a "gesture toward the papyrological event" foregrounded the historical contingency of these fragments' survival. Circumstances that Sappho could not have imagined, including the formation of the Hellenistic successor kingdoms and the arid climate in Egypt, resulted in the preservation of these bits of papyrus. Carson's translation drew attention to these material conditions, rendering the ancient poet from Lesbos to some extent synonymous with the fragmentation suffered by her poems in the millennia following her death.

The centrality of fragmentation as a theme in Sappho's oeuvre and reception resonates with Korean and Vietnamese Americans' experiences of loss and dislocation. The Korean War (1950–53) and the Vietnam War (1960–75) intervened for these populations as the respective traumas around which life was shattered and reconstructed.[11] These "complex conflicts that were at once civil wars and refracted wars of decolonization shaped by the exigencies of Cold War geopolitics and the violent collision of two competing globalizing economic orders" left the geographies of both countries fractured, and families were sundered as sons, brothers, sisters, and mothers disappeared across the new borders established during these civil wars.[12] A unified state of Vietnam emerged in 1976 after the North Vietnamese victory, but Korea remains par-

[10] Campbell 1982 also presented a bilingual text of Sappho with the relevant scholarly information for the Loeb Classical Library.

[11] Parikh and Kim 2015 view the experiences of Korean and Vietnamese Americans as sufficiently resonant with each other that "The Literature of the Korean War and Vietnam War" comprises a single chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*.

[12] Kim and Nguyen 2015: 59.

titioned. This violence caused many Korean and Vietnamese people to flee their homelands, solidifying the divisions created by war.

Some of these individuals immigrated to the United States, contributing to the burgeoning population of Asian Americans, who were beginning to produce a robust literary corpus. Korean and Vietnamese Americans made their own contributions to this literary activity. American involvement in the Korean War and the Vietnam War became a profound flash point for writers from both immigrant groups, who sought to grapple with the complicated geopolitics that had brought them to the United States. They often expressed an ambivalence resulting from a combination of resentment at the devastation perpetrated by the American military upon their respective homelands and gratitude for the same nation's intervention against the communist forces that had committed numerous atrocities in the course of both civil wars.[13] The literary productions of Korean and Vietnamese American writers reflected the various tensions endemic to these diasporic populations, whose very existence in the United States is itself an index of violent displacement and profound trauma.

The reception of Sappho in Asian American literature begins with the artist and writer Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, who was born on March 4, 1951, in the city of Busan in South Korea. Cha moved with her family to the United States in 1963, settling temporarily in Hawaii before relocating to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1964. She began attending the University of California, Berkeley in 1969, an institutional association that would last for nearly a decade.[14] Cha moved to New York City in 1980 to continue her career as an artist. In a tragic sequence of events, she was raped and murdered by a security guard on November 5, 1982, in the Puck Building in lower Manhattan, where she was planning to meet her husband.

Cha's 1982 novel, *Dictée*, which has subsequently become a canonical work of Asian American literature, was published a mere week before her death. Calling *Dictée* a novel is somewhat of a misnomer, as the work is a literary experiment blending the genres of novel, autobiography, and historiography, while incorporating "avant-garde and film editing techniques such as jagged cuts, jump shots, and visual exposition."[15] *Dictée* foregrounds several historical and mythological women, including the Korean independence activist Yu Guan Soon, Joan of Arc, and Demeter and Persephone. Cha includes an

[13] See Kim and Nguyen 2015: 60.

[14] Cha received a BA in Comparative Literature in 1973, a BA in Art in 1975, an MA in Comparative Literature in 1977, and an MFA in Art Practice in 1978.

[15] Cheng 2001: 140.

epigraph at the beginning of *Dict**é**e*, which is purported to be a quotation by Sappho:

> May I write words more naked than flesh,
> stronger than bone, more resilient than
> sinew, sensitive than nerve.[16]

Sappho, then, introduces this constellation of notable women. Readers familiar with the extant fragments of Sappho will have trouble placing this quotation, which is not in fact genuine, but rather, a fabrication by Cha.

*Dict**é**e*, whose title reflects the pedagogical practice of dictation, in which students internalize a foreign language by transcribing passages recited to them by their teacher, abounds in moments of unfaithful reproduction. Lisa Lowe has argued that infidelity is the core aesthetic of the novel (1996: 37):

> Rather than constructing a narrative of unities and symmetries, with consistencies of character, sequence, and plot, it emphasizes instead an aesthetic of fragmented recitation and episodic non-identity—dramatizes, in effect, an aesthetic of infidelity. Repetition itself is taken to its parodic extreme, and disengaged as the privileged mode of imitation and realism. In *Dict**é**e*, repetition more often marks the incommensurability of forms to their referents: improper recitations of the Catholic catechism or marriage vow, interruptions of Japanese honorifics, and mispronunciations of the naturalization oaths of American citizenship, each performs this function.

I would note that the supposed epigraph from Sappho differs from the items in Lowe's list of unfaithful repetitions, in that there is no original from which to diverge. The epigraph is a forgery rather than a repetition, and Cha's referent is not a quotation by Sappho but the very idea of Sappho, which evokes fragmentation on multiple levels.

The notion of ventriloquizing Sappho has a lengthy literary history. Ovid wrote *Heroides* 15 as a Sappho heartsick for her lover Phaon. The British writers Katharine Harris Bradley and Edith Emma Cooper published poems inspired by Sappho's fragments under the pseudonym Michael Field in the nineteenth century.[17] The American poet H.D. drew similar inspiration from her fragments in the early decades of the twentieth century, taking them as the basis

[16] *Dictée* features many allusions to the classical tradition. The chapters of the novel are named after the nine Muses, although Cha substitutes Elitere, a Muse of her own creation, for Euterpe. For discussion of Cha's interactions with the classical tradition, see Wong 1994, Chew 1997: 62–66, Lee 2006, and Johnston 2023.

[17] For Sappho and Michael Field, see Prins 1999: 74–111.

upon which to write poems about sexuality.[18] Cha derives her conception of Sapphic fragmentation from the translations that were available to her in the early 1980s. Her epigraph functions as an integral utterance, resembling the translations of Mary Barnard and Guy Davenport. "May I write words more naked than flesh,/ stronger than bone, more resilient than/ sinew, sensitive than nerve," while tantalizingly devoid of context, is also a complete sentence. This conception of Sapphic fragmentation, then, reflects the translator's presentation of a pristine articulation in miniature rather than the lacunose reality of the Greek text.

Cha does not confine her engagement with Sapphic fragmentation to the level of form. She also mimics the bodily fragmentation of Sappho's most famous poem.[19] Commentators since antiquity have noted the vividness with which Sappho embodies her emotions in fr. 31 LP. She articulates the feeling of corporeal dissolution brought about by erotic longing, focalizing that experience around a series of discrete bodily crises (7–16):

ὡς γὰρ ἔς σ' ἴδω βρόχε', ὤς με φώναι-
σ' οὐδ' ἔν ἔτ' εἴκει,

ἀλλὰ κὰμ μὲν γλῶσσά <μ'> ἔαγε, λέπτον
δ' αὔτικα χρῷ πῦρ ὐπαδεδρόμηκεν,
ὀππάτεσσι δ' οὐδ' ἔν ὄρημμ', ἐπιρρόμ-
βεισι δ' ἄκουαι,

κὰδ δὲ μ' ἴδρως κακχέεται, τρόμος δὲ
παῖσαν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας
ἔμμι, τεθνάκην δ' ὀλίγω 'πιδεύης
φαίνομ' ἔμ' αὔτ[ᾳ.

For when I look at you momentarily, it is no longer possible for me to speak a word, but my tongue is broken, and at once a thin fire is racing under my skin, and with my eyes I see not a thing, and my ears are humming, and sweat pours down me, and trembling seizes me whole, and I am greener than grass, and I seem to be a little short of dying.

Pseudo-Longinus, whose quotation of fr. 31 LP in *On the Sublime* is responsible for the poem's survival into modernity, points to the fragmentation of the body, observing that Sappho presents the individual body parts ὡς ἀλλότρια,

[18] For Sappho and H.D., see Gubar 1996: 208–14 and Rohrbach 1996.

[19] Chew 1997: 63 made the same connection, noting that "in their reference to the body, Cha's lines do have something of the sound of Sappho, as in the third and fourth stanzas of poem 31 LP."

"as strangers" (*Subl.* 10.3). He notes the contradiction of a speaker who ἅμα ψύχεται καίεται, ἀλογιστεῖ φρονεῖ †ἢ γὰρ† φοβεῖται †ἢ παρ' ὀλίγον τέθνηκεν ἵνα μὴ ἕν τι περὶ αὐτὴν πάθος φαίνηται, παθῶν δὲ σύνοδος ("simultaneously freezes, burns, raves, reasons, so that it is not a single emotion that comes to light in her, but a gathering of emotions," [Longinus] *Subl.* 10.3).[20] duBois similarly fixates on Sappho's awareness of her own fragmentation, the fact that she "sees herself objectified as a body in pieces, disjointed, a broken set of organs, limbs, bodily functions."[21] Fr. 31 LP, then, offers a unique representation of a body disintegrating because of erotic distress.

Cha similarly fragments the body, but from the outside in. She moves from "flesh" to "bone" to "sinew" to "nerve," penetrating from the body's fleshy exterior to its center of feeling in the nervous system. Paul G. Johnston has recently observed that Odysseus's encounter with his mother Anticlea in book 11 of the *Odyssey* might have served as "some part of the inspiration for the Sapphic epigraph. Odysseus's mother invokes flesh, bone, and sinew as the substances of life: death is nothing more than their absence."[22] While there is no mention of nerve in this Homeric passage, the collocation of flesh, bone, and sinew is persuasive, and scholars have long drawn attention to the influence of Homer on Sappho.[23] The invention, then, of a Sapphic epigraph that repurposes Homeric imagery is particularly ingenious. Eleanor Craig has noted that Cha's epigraph "is a text meant to remain open and alive, to be in organismic relationship with its surroundings," and the metaphor of penetration from outside is operative throughout the text of *Dict**é**e*.[24] Lowe discusses Cha's frequent use of the imagery of corporeal rupture in depicting the various traumas of twentieth-century Korean history (1996: 109):

> Descriptions of blood hemorrhaging, emptying, and flowing, erupt in a text that refuses continuous narration of the wars, insurgencies, containments, and violences that are central to both U.S. neocolonial and South Korean nationalist accounts of the Korean people during this century. Allusions to splitting, breaking, and dividing—of tongue, body, family, and nation—pervade *Dict**é**e*.

Several of these passages, beginning with the Sappho epigraph, articulate a fundamental relation between the body and speech. For Cha the body,

[20] I print the text of Russell 1964.

[21] duBois 1995: 70. For further discussion of Sappho's depiction of the body in fr. 31 LP, see McEvilley 1978 and Rissman 1983: 66–104.

[22] Johnston 2023: 117. See Hom. *Od.* 11.218–22.

[23] See Rissman 1983, Winkler 1990: 162–87, and Mueller 2016.

[24] Craig 2021: 88.

which is both a hindrance to speech and the ultimate standard of expression, simultaneously threatens to break down into incoherence and possesses an authority that transcends the impermanence of words.

Cha returns to Sappho fr. 31 LP in the chapter "Urania: Astronomy." She evokes the language of Sappho's poem in a meditation upon impediments to speech (1982: 75):

> One by one.
> The sounds. The sounds that move at a time
> stops. Starts again. Exceptions
> stops and starts again
> all but exceptions.
> Stop. Start. Starts.
> Contractions. Noise. Semblance of noise.
> Broken speech. One to one. At a time.
> Cracked tongue. Broken tongue.
> Pidgeon. Semblance of speech.
> Swallows. Inhales. Stutter. Starts. Stops before
> starts.
> About to. Then stops. Exhale
> swallowed to a sudden arrest.
> Rest. Without. Can do without rests. Improper
> to rest before begun even. Probation of rest.
> Without them all.
> Stop start.
> Where proper pauses were expected.
> But no more.

This conception of the broken tongue alludes to Sappho's expression γλῶσσά̣ <μ'> ἔαγε (9), which Barnard translates as "my tongue is broken."[25] Cha builds upon Sappho's description of interrupted speech, extending the idea of a tongue broken by erotic longing to the immigrant's struggle in acquiring a foreign language.[26] She follows the expression "broken tongue" with the word "pidgeon," a perhaps deliberate misspelling of pidgin, which is a means

[25] Barnard 1958. The manuscript reads γλῶσσα ἔαγε (9), but the hiatus between γλῶσσα and ἔαγε has been the source of scholarly anxiety. O'Higgins 1990: 159, following Nagy 1974: 45 and West 1970: 311, argues that this hiatus "is deliberate, intended audially to reproduce the 'catch' in the poet's voice; Sappho dramatically represents herself as being almost at the point she describes—losing her voice altogether."

[26] One of the anonymous referees astutely notes that the polyvalence of the French word *langue*, which can mean both "tongue" and "language," might have inspired the logic of this passage. Cha engages with the French language throughout the text of *Dictée*.

of communication developed between groups that lack a common language. Pidgins often combine grammar and vocabulary from multiple languages and are usually unintelligible to the speakers of these individual languages.[27] The phrase "cracked tongue," which precedes "broken tongue," suggests a language shattered into its constituent pieces. We might understand a pidgin as the recombination of these pieces of different languages. Cha emphasizes the corporeal realities of speech with the lines "Swallows. Inhales. Stutter. Starts. Stops before/ starts./ About to. Then stops. Exhale/ swallowed to a sudden arrest." The awkward rhythm of these lines mirrors the uncertain articulation of a stammer. For Cha, then, who builds upon Sappho's image of the broken tongue, the disintegration of language occurs on both a conceptual and a material level.

The chapter "Clio: History" communicates the linguistic violence of Japan's occupation of Korea. The Korean Empire, an independent state formed in 1897 by Emperor Gojong, became a Japanese protectorate in 1905, with Japan officially annexing Korea in 1910.[28] The Japanese authorities forced Korean schools and universities to conduct classes exclusively in Japanese. "Clio: History" documents the Korean response to this imperialist violence from multiple perspectives, citing a petition from the Korean population in Hawaii to President Theodore Roosevelt and recounting the martyrdom of the Korean independence activist Yu Guan Soon.

Cha provides her own intermittent commentary on the brutality of Japanese rule. She describes the erasure of Korean culture during this period (1982: 32):

> Japan has become the sign. The alphabet. The vocabulary. To *this* enemy people. The meaning is the instrument, memory that pricks the skin, stabs the flesh, the volume of blood, the physical substance blood as measure, that rests as record, as document. Of *this* enemy people.

"Japan has become the sign. The alphabet. The vocabulary," because Japanese usurped Korean as the language of public life in Korea. Cha highlights this weaponization of language, evoking the violence of denotation under colonial rule. "Meaning is the instrument," taking the forms of "memory that pricks the skin, stabs the flesh" and "the volume of blood, the physical substance blood as measure." Meaning, imposed from outside, embeds itself as memory in the

[27] For discussion of pidgins, see Bakker 1995.

[28] Cumings 2005: 143 reports that the terms of the protectorate consisted of Japan "taking control of Korean diplomacy, putting its police in the streets, running the telegraph system, and the like." For discussion of the Japanese occupation of Korea from 1910–1945, see Lee 1984: 300–72, Eckert 1991, and Cumings 2005: 139–84.

flesh, that is, discourse is made corporeal in the form of trauma. Cha elaborates upon the meaning invested in flesh in the subsequent paragraph (1982: 32):

> To the other nations who are not witnesses, who are not subject to the same oppressions, they cannot know. Unfathomable the words, the terminology: enemy, atrocities, conquest, betrayal, invasion, desstruction [*sic*]. They exist only in the larger perception of History's recording, that affirmed, admittedly and unmistakably, one enemy nation has disregarded the humanity of another. Not physical enough. Not to the very flesh and bone, to the core, to the mark, to the point where it is necessary to intervene, even if to invent anew, expressions, for *this* experience, for this *outcome*, that does not cease to continue.

"Flesh and bone" become the standards of meaning in the face of atrocity. The international community's refusal to act is a denial of the Korean people's embodiment as flesh. The assertion that Korean suffering is "not physical enough. Not to the very flesh and bone" echoes the language of the epigraph, which expresses the hope that words might transcend the body's physicality. For the Korean population suffering under Japanese occupation, the body itself is not physical enough. No amount of pain is sufficient to make this experience intelligible to the international community.

While "Clio: History" documents the body's failure to signify under Japanese occupation, "Melpomene: Tragedy" highlights its transcendent capacity for communication in documenting the violence of civil unrest in South Korea during the 1960s. Cha recounts the death of her older brother, which she presents as having occurred in 1962 during student protests that recall the April Revolution of 1960.[29] The April Revolution opposed the presidency of Syngman Rhee, whom South Korea had elected as its first president in 1948. The catalyst for these demonstrations was the discovery of the body of Kim Ju-yul, a high school student killed by South Korean police officers while protesting corrupt elections. Thousands of students from various universities and high schools in South Korea took to the streets on April 19, known as "Bloody Tuesday," and the police opened fire on them. Syngman Rhee resigned from the presidency on April 26, spending the rest of his life in exile in Hawaii.[30]

Cha frames this narrative of her brother's murder as a letter to her mother. Beginning with an account of her mother's return to Korea after the conclusion of the Second World War, she describes her own experience of returning to

[29] John Cha (personal communication), Theresa's older brother, has confirmed for me that this account combines elements of fact and fiction. He did participate in a student demonstration in 1960, when Theresa was nine years old, but he was neither shot nor killed.

[30] For discussion of the April Revolution, see Henderson 1968: 174–76, Lee 1984: 384–85, and Cumings 2005: 344–52.

Korea for the first time since immigrating to the United States. She addresses her brother on the eighteenth anniversary of his tragic demise (1982: 85):

> My brother. You are all the rest all the others are you. You fell you died you gave your life. That day. It rained. It rained for several days. It rained more and more times. After it was all over. You were heard. Your victory mixed with rain falling from the sky for many days afterwards. I heard that the rain does not erase the blood fallen on the ground. I heard from the adults, the blood stains still. Year after year it rained. The stone pavement stained where you fell still remains dark.

Cha stresses that "You were heard." She describes his bloodstains on the pavement as a victory monument marking the success of the protests in which he participated. He has impressed his sacrifice upon the surface of his homeland, and no one will ever forget.

We should take a moment to consider the afterlife of Cha's epigraph, which calls attention to the surprising penetrability of the Sapphic corpus itself. Sappho Bot (@sapphobot), a Twitter account that tweets English translations of Sappho's fragments, tweeted Cha's epigraph on January 16, 2022.[31] The tweet makes no mention of Cha. We might consider Sappho Bot a technological equivalent to the scholarly editions of Lobel and Page (1955) or Voigt (1971), since the accumulation of these tweets has become representative of Sappho's oeuvre for the 89,500 Twitter users who follow the account. Cha's ventriloquism has, then, through the algorithmic logic of the internet, interpolated itself into the corpus of Sappho's surviving fragments. Cha might have intended for her epigraph to illuminate the violence endured by the Korean people throughout the course of the twentieth century, but Sappho has unexpectedly claimed it for herself.[32]

[31] https://twitter.com/sapphobot/status/1482587048448262145. Sappho Bot describes itself as a "bot that posts fragments by Sappho. With translations from Anne Carson's 'If Not, Winter,' and more. Modifications have been made to fit the character limit." The account "posts every 3 hours."

[32] Greenwood 2011: 377 discusses the risks of "double displacement" for authors from marginalized groups who engage with the classical tradition. She cites Toni Morrison's contention that it is necessary for "authors in the African-American tradition to control carefully how they use classical allusions in order to avoid a situation where the perceived authority of the classical text eclipses all other influences, making one's work an orphan, dispossessed of its inheritance." Greenwood argues that "this would be akin to double displacement: displacing characters who have already been displaced from ancestral traditions within their new nascent tradition." Sappho Bot's aggregation of Cha's epigraph into the corpus of Sappho's extant fragments enacts a similar displacement of Cha herself.

Our exploration of the Asian American reception of Sappho continues with the Vietnamese American poet Hoa Nguyen. Nguyen was born in Vinh Long Province in the Mekong Delta during the height of the Vietnam War in 1967. Nguyen's American father had abandoned her Vietnamese mother prior to her birth, and she immigrated with her mother to the United States in 1968. Washington, D.C. was the primary site of her childhood, but she also spent a decade in Austin, Texas, before settling in Toronto, where she currently lives.

Nguyen is the author of five books of poems. Her 2012 collection *As Long As Trees Last* features a poem entitled "After Sappho" (31):

Tell the mists again
The will gains so much

Find my mouth as moss
Latching my key
She holds these

Hold and blow tough as night
  Hope-bow tugged tight

Artful calling how larks
mark heat down low

Can all it be Told
mesh meant Keeping

your your your

While most earlier Sapphic ventriloquisms restore her poetic voice intact, "After Sappho" emulates the experience of reading Sappho's fragments.[33] The poem offers intermittent clusters of words and phrases, eschewing traditional continuity of sense. In what follows I will explore the sources of Nguyen's conception of Sapphic fragmentation, beginning with Anne Carson's *If Not, Winter* and turning to Nguyen's own experience of language loss as a Vietnamese refugee.

Nguyen's Sappho is always already fragmentary, reflecting Carson's presentation of the fragmentary state of her extant poetry. "After Sappho," a fragmentary poem that proceeds through a discordant series of images and expressions, undoubtedly drew inspiration from *If Not*, *Winter*. Nguyen even cites *If Not, Winter* elsewhere in her oeuvre. She dedicated her 2016 collection *Violet Energy Ingots* to "Aphrodite, deathless and of the spangled mind,"

[33] Some of these earlier ventriloquisms even complete the text of Sappho's fragments.

recalling Carson's translation of the first line of fr. 1 LP, "Deathless Aphrodite of the spangled mind."[34] The title "After Sappho" is itself a double entendre that calls attention to the fragmentary condition of Sappho's poetry. The basis of this double entendre is the availability of two distinct meanings of the preposition "after." The first is "in the characteristic manner of."[35] Nguyen uses "after" in this sense elsewhere in *As Long As Trees Last*. "Agent Orange Poem," which includes the dedicatory inscription "After Emily Dickinson," emulates the look and sound of a Dickinson poem, featuring the conspicuous dashes characteristic of Dickinson's poetry.[36] "After Sappho" similarly replicates the texture of Sappho's fragments. The bewildering array of splintered statements and punctured phrases reproduces the tantalizing experience of sifting through the scattered pieces of Sappho's once integral poems. The second meaning is "subsequent to in time or order."[37] Nguyen's evocation of Sapphic fragmentation stresses the impossibility of engaging with the authentic Sappho herself, the archaic poet from Lesbos whose work has largely been lost. This sense of the title "After Sappho" reminds us that we cling to a mere shadow of Sappho's poetic legacy, which made her the tenth Muse in antiquity.

Nguyen emphasizes the fragmentation of Sappho's voice, but she also retains a sense of continuity, suggesting the deterioration of a once complete poem. "After Sappho" also implies a relationship between the speaker, an addressee, and a third woman, recalling the vibrant community of women depicted in Sappho's extant fragments. We might think of fr. 96 LP, in which, as duBois has observed, "we have the complex interplay of pronouns of address; the addressee of the poem, presumably Atthis, is 'you,' *se*, but most vividly realized is the absent one, far away in Sardis, standing out among Lydian women."[38] "After Sappho" begins with a command, evoking the texture of Sappho's surviving

[34] Carson 2002: 357 takes the initial word of fr. 1 LP as *poikilophron*, "of the ornamented mind," rather than *poikilothron*', "of the ornamented throne," explaining that "it is Aphrodite's agile mind that seems to be at play in the rest of the poem and, since compounds of *thron-* are common enough in Greek poetry to make this word predictable, perhaps Sappho relied on our ear to supply the chair while she went on to spangle the mind."

[35] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/after.

[36] Nguyen 2012: 4.

[37] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/after.

[38] duBois 1995: 192. We might also remember the poignant construction of the speaker, the addressee, and "that man" in fr. 31 LP. Carson 1986: 16 figures this scenario as "three points of transformation on a circuit of possible relationship, electrified by desire so that they touch not touching."

poems, which feature numerous imperative forms.[39] It is difficult to make much of the directive "tell the mists" (1), but the adverb "again" (1) presents this situation as habitual.[40] The third line features another command, "find my mouth as moss" (3), which suggests a conversation between lovers. The phrase "my mouth as moss" (3) resembles χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας/ ἔμμι ("and I am greener than grass," 14–15) from fr. 31 LP. Several other expressions throughout the poem, including "latching my key" (4), "mark heat" (9), and "down low" (9), insinuate a vague sensuality. The interruption of "she holds these" (5) introduces a third figure besides the speaker and the addressee. We are left wondering about this mysterious woman, who flits momentarily into the poem. Is she a rival for the affections of either the speaker or the addressee, and what are "these" that she holds? "Can all it be" (10) articulates the beginning of a question before rupturing into silence. We are tempted to complete the question with "told" (10), but this is a discrete utterance. The poem concludes with a triple articulation of the second person possessive adjective: "your your your" (12). What are these possessive adjectives meant to modify? Your hands? Your neck? Your face? I would note that the only direct references to the speaker and the addressee in this poem are possessive adjectives, and the verbal action of the third woman is "she holds," another description of possession. Perhaps it is appropriate that "After Sappho" emphasizes possession, since the poem's presentation mirrors our own fragmentary possession of Sappho's verses.

While Carson's Sappho is a crucial influence, I would suggest that Nguyen also drew upon her personal experience of language loss in conceptualizing Sapphic fragmentation. In an interview on Facebook Live with Dao Strom for the Diasporic Vietnamese Artists Network (DVAN) from March 19, 2021, Nguyen recounts how she lost her knowledge of the Vietnamese language in the process of emigrating to the United States as a small child:

> I left just short of two years old and I lost my language in that transition by the choices made within my family to assimilate and to do the things that you do to survive, which is to learn the language of your new home. And so I grew up with this gap that I experience in many different ways of languageless-ness.[41]

[39] Nguyen might have been inspired in her use of commands by fr. 1 LP, which has μή ... δάμνα ("do not overpower," 3), ἔλθ' ("come," 5), ἔλθε ("come," 25), λῦσον ("release," 25), τέλεσον ("accomplish," 27), and ἔσσο ("be,"28).

[40] "Again" (1) echoes the habitual nature of Sappho's summoning of her helper Aphrodite in fr. 1 LP, which αἴ ποτα κἀτέρωτα ("if ever on another occasion," 5) and δηὖτε ("again," 15, 16, and 18), indicate.

[41] Diasporic Vietnamese Artists Network (DVAN) 2021. The quoted section begins at 31:22.

She describes the loss of her native language as a "gap," recalling the lacunae in Sappho's text. Fragmentation is, then, fundamental to Nguyen's experience as a Vietnamese refugee. The process of immigrating to the United States and its attendant linguistic violence produced fissures in her identity that cannot be made whole. How might we find reflections of these fissures in the fragmentation of "After Sappho"?

Nguyen's approach to poetry reveals a particular fascination with the possibilities inherent in language. She is known for a challenging style that "eschews linear construction or grammatical cohesion while employing multivocalities, aposiopesis, non-sequiturs, rhymes, syllabic recombinations and vibrations between emotional and linguistic registers."[42] Nguyen's poems, then, tend to produce meaning on levels that transcend the semantic. We might view this tendency as a reflection of her experience as a child hearing the Vietnamese language without the ability to understand it. Vietnamese words rang as empty signifiers in her ears, but she would have learned that the sounds of language resonate beyond their capacity to construct semantic or grammatical sense.

"After Sappho" is a poem that functions on these levels of communication. Nguyen uses sound effects like echoing and rhyme to create meaning between the fragmentary expressions that compose the poem. The first two lines feature echoing of the consonant *l* in "tell" (1) and "will" (2).[43] The sixth and seventh lines highlight the similarities between the two sets of phrases "hold and blow" (6) and "hope-bow" (7) and "tough as night" (6) and "tugged tight" (7). "Hold and blow" (6) and "hope-bow" (7) both follow the pattern of an initial syllable combining the consonant *h* with the diphthong oʊ and a subsequent syllable combining the consonant *b* with the diphthong oʊ.[44] "Tough as night" (6) and "tugged tight" (7) both begin with a syllable combining the consonant *t* with the vowel ʌ and end with one member of the rhyming pair "night" (6) and "tight" (7). The eighth and ninth lines also showcase these sound effects. The words "larks" (8) and "mark" (9) both contain the syllable ark, and the phrases "how larks" (8) and "down low" (9) both follow a pattern in which the first word includes the diphthong aʊ and the second word begins with the consonant *l*. While many of these expressions lack obvious sense, Nguyen exploits the phonetic properties of language to suggest other connections between them. We might even perceive a hint at the process of secondary language acquisition in the rhyming pairs, which are sometimes used in dictation and listening comprehension exercises to ensure that the

[42] Christiansen 2018.

[43] I use the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to represent consonants, vowels, and diphthongs.

[44] The consonant *l* intervenes in the case of "blow" (6).

language learner can differentiate between two words that sound similar.[45] These shimmers of meaning across the fragments of "After Sappho" function as textual traces indicating an extratextual reality of refugee displacement and language loss.

Nguyen's approach to Sapphic fragmentation is both scholarly and deeply personal. She emulates the fragmentary aesthetic of Carson's translation of Sappho, presenting "After Sappho" as a tantalizing series of fragmentary expressions. We also know that Nguyen's own relation to the Vietnamese language, which she lost in the process of immigrating to the United States, functions as a lacuna in her life. Perhaps we see reflections of this lacuna in the poem's ability, despite the breakdown of semantic and grammatical sense, to communicate through the sheer sounds of language.

Let us now turn to our final case study in the Asian American reception of Sappho, the Vietnamese American writer Vi Khi Nao. Born in Long Khanh, Vietnam, Nao spent time living in the Philippines as a refugee before immigrating to the United States. Unlike Hoa Nguyen, Nao learned to speak Vietnamese as her first language. Her second language was Latin, which she describes learning as a conduit for English:

> My Latin tutor told me that the best way for me to learn English was through Latin. We would read books in Latin—Greek and Roman mythologies—and translate them into English. I wasn't trained to use Latin as a communication device—it's more like a translation device—and so I move from one translation to another translation to another translation.[46]

These early interests in the classical tradition and translation would persist as recurrent themes in Vi Khi Nao's work.

Nao's poem "Sapphở," which first appeared on the website *diaCRITICS* in May 2020, represents her distinctive contribution to the Asian American reception of Sappho:

I h u s h the etymology of your fingers
By tasting the eternal night around their tips
Fennel immolates your desire into my broth
I am clavicle not vulture cleaving your aniseed for pain
I h u s h the wilderness near your basin-shaped cavalcade
You elevate in your throes of ardor & I bend to meet

[45] One of the anonymous referees helpfully drew my attention to this connection between rhyming pairs and secondary language acquisition. *Dictée* famously thematizes exercises of this sort.

[46] French 2017.

Your feminine furniture legs and all as a reference
For diptyque & civility If your tongue is one type of
Transitive verb Will my lips be able to take
Yours as a direct object for a complication of time?
My left cheek seeks in sequence the grammar of your breath
The translucent material of your fugaciousness
As you lean from syntax into chopstick
If time identifies herself as a pansexual & you agree to be the nodes on my laptop
If my desire is binary + yours has urinary tract infection
Won't it be cruel if I suggest we all sleep together,
Muscle & all, on a bed of salt & oysters?
Won't it be fun for bivalves to be bisexual ?
To open a Vietnamese restaurant for lesbians called Sapphở?[47]

The poem's animating conceit is articulated in the last line: "[Won't it be fun] to open a Vietnamese restaurant for lesbians called Sapphở?" (19). The portmanteau Sapphở reimagines the name of the ancient poet, recombining it with *phở*, the Vietnamese soup. While less directly indebted to the vivid textuality of Sappho's corpus than Cha and Nguyen, Nao maps her conception of fragmentation onto this notion of disparate ingredients melded together. She also emphasizes her queerness throughout this poem, exploring the nuances of her lesbian identity in the language of food and translation.[48] "Sapphở" amasses an associative blend of images and ideas collected from these diverse registers.

Food offers an instructive window into the complex history of colonization and conflict experienced by the Vietnamese people in the twentieth century. Muoi Thai Loangkote, author of the 1999 cookbook *Vietnamese Cuisine*, explains that "Vietnamese cuisine embodies the culinary influences of China, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia. In addition, the influence from many years of French colonization has added a unique blend of flavors."[49] We might think of the *banh mi* sandwich, which uses French ingredients like a baguette, mayonnaise, and pate, as an example of the influence of French cuisine in Vietnam.[50] Turning to Nao's reference to *phở*, I would note the extent to which this noodle soup has attained a mainstream status in the United States and around the world. The chef Bui Thi Suong calls *phở* "a typical

[47] https://dvan.org/2020/05/sappho-a-poem-by-vi-khi-nao/. Nao 2021: 14 also includes "Sapphở," although the use of spaces is somewhat different in that version.

[48] Vi Khi Nao describes herself as "a woman and a lesbian and Vietnamese" in Schreiber 2022.

[49] Loangkote 1999: 5.

[50] Nguyen 2020 discusses the classical tradition as a site of "colonial subversion" during the French colonization of Vietnam, focusing on the life of the writer Pham Duy Khiem.

dish that proudly represents Vietnamese cuisine in the world."[51] The image, then, of a Vietnamese restaurant called Sapphở draws upon the transnational positioning of Vietnamese cuisine for its potency.

Like Sappho and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Nao enacts a fragmentation of the body, but her fragmentation is both culinary and erotic. She refers to "fingers" (1), "clavicle" (4), "legs" (7), "tongue" (8), "lips" (9), and "left cheek" (11). These body parts, some of which belong to the speaker (clavicle, lips, and left cheek), others to the addressee (fingers, legs, and tongue), occupy a curious space in between the imaginaries of food and sex. The "clavicle" (4), which figures as a crucial ingredient in the speaker's "broth" (3), is also involved in the erotic situation. Nao writes "I am clavicle not vulture cleaving your aniseed for pain" (4), associating both "clavicle" (4) and "aniseed" (4) with the lovers at the poem's center. The line "my left cheek seeks in sequence the grammar of your breath" (11) also inhabits this in-between space. We might understand "my left cheek" (11) as referring to the speaker's cheek, which "seeks" (11) the addressee's "breath" (11) in the form of a kiss. Then again, the cheek is a cut of beef commonly used in *phở*. Perhaps the "breath" (11) is emitted from the mouth of an addressee about to ingest the "left cheek" (11), explaining the subsequent appearance of "chopstick" (13). In fragmenting the body, Nao invests it with its potential as both a culinary and a sexual organism.

The metaphorical conflation of food and sex also occurs in Sappho. The poet from Lesbos uses the metaphor of a reddening apple to describe a young woman in fr. 105a:

> οἷον τὸ γλυκύμαλον ἐρεύθεται ἄκρωι ἐπ' ὔσδωι,
> ἄκρον ἐπ' ἀκροτάτωι, λελάθοντο δὲ μαλοδρόπηες,
> οὐ μὰν ἐκλελάθοντ', ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐδύναντ' ἐπίκεσθαι
>
> As the sweet-apple reddens on the topmost branch, on the top of the topmost branch, and the apple-pickers have forgotten it—no, they have not forgotten, but, rather, they were unable to reach it.[52]

These lines have provoked much scholarly commentary. duBois interprets this metaphor as illustrating the young woman's emergence into sexual maturity. She observes, "As the sweet-apple reddens and thus ripens, so the girl blushes and ripens. As the apple lives and grows, it reddens, turning from the immature fruit; the girl matures inevitably as well."[53] John J. Winkler discovers a specific resonance in the image of the apple and notes (1990: 183):

[51] Suong 2013: 14.

[52] Himer. *Or*. 9.16 notes that Sappho compares the young woman to an apple and the bridegroom to Achilles in this poem, which might be an epithalamium.

[53] duBois 1995: 41.

> *Mêlon* has a wider extension of meanings, and from this we can rediscover why "apples" were a prominent symbol in courtship and marriage rites. *Mêlon* signifies various "clitoral" objects: the seed vessel of the rose (Theophrastus *Hist. Plant*. 6.6.6), the tonsil or uvula, a bulge or sty on the lower eyelid (Hesychios *s.v. kula*), and a swelling on the cornea (Alexander Tralles *peri opthalmôn*, ed. Puschmann, p. 152). The sensitivity of these objects to pressure is one of the bases for the analogy.[54]

We might apply Winkler's conception of "clitoral" objects to fr. 143 LP, χρύσειοι δ' ἐρέβινθοι ἐπ' ἀιόνων ἐφύοντο ("and golden chickpeas were growing on the banks"). The semantic range of ἐρέβινθος, "chickpea," much like that of μῆλον, "apple," encompasses sexual metaphor. Aristophanes twice uses ἐρέβινθος as a metaphor for the male genitalia.[55] It is hardly a stretch, then, to imagine Sappho's imagery evoking the clitoris, since the penis and the clitoris develop from the same ambisexual genital tubercle in the human embryo. For both Sappho and Vi Khi Nao, the sensuous pleasures of food and sex converge.

Translation operates on multiple levels in "Sapphở." We might recall Nao's study of the Latin language, which she described as a "translation device." The poem begins "I h u s h the etymology of your fingers/ By tasting the eternal night around their tips" (1–2). I would argue that these lines translate a famous image from fr. 96 LP: ἀ βροδοδάκτυλος σελάννα ("the rosy-fingered moon," 8). Nao's references to "fingers" (1) and "eternal night" (2) trace the silhouette of Sappho's expression, whose "etymology" (1) is the Homeric phrase ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἠώς, "rosy-fingered Dawn."[56] Nao reimagines Sappho's reworking of Homer, and her translation is a transformation; she adds "your fingers" (1) and "the eternal night around their tips" (2) to her "broth" (3).[57] This image of a "broth" (3) into which everything can be thrown is an ideal encapsulation of Nao's fragmentary aesthetic in "Sapphở." Like the "melting pot," which stands as a symbol of American racial and ethnic diversity, she leverages her *phở* to construct a transnational and transtemporal assemblage of influences and ideas. Nao also uses translation to describe sex. Using the language of grammar, she asks the addressee, "If your tongue is one type of/ Transitive verb Will my lips be able to take/ Yours as a direct object for a complication of time?" (8–10). She parses the addressee's "tongue" (8) and "lips" in grammatical terms as a "transitive verb" (9) and "a direct object" (10). The addressee's mouth, then, becomes a sentence that the speaker construes

[54] Winkler 1990: 183.

[55] *Ach*. 801 and *Ran*. 545.

[56] See *Il*. 1.477; 6.175; 9.707; 23.109; 24.788; *Od*. 2.1; 3.404, 491; 4.306, 431, 576; 5.121, 228; 8.1; 9.152, 170, 307, 437, 560; 10.187; 12.8, 316; 13.18; 15.189; 17.1; 19.428; and 23.241.

[57] For an allusion to the phrase ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἠώς in the Vietnamese American poet Ocean Vuong's poem "Trojan," see Nguyen 2022: 442–43.

through the act of kissing. This idea continues with "the grammar of your breath" (11). Translation offers a teasing metaphor for the intimate access that sex provides to others' minds and bodies.

We might understand the metaphorical representation of sex as a queer throughline from Sappho to Vi Khi Nao. The experience of queer individuals has long been dominated by metaphor. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has observed "the damaging contradictions of this compromised metaphor of *in* and *out* of the closet."[58] Whether stemming from societal restrictions or aesthetic inclination, the expression of queer sexuality has often been circuitous. Sappho is certainly among the foremothers of this tradition, pursuing numerous avenues to the expression of sexual longing.[59] Perhaps we should view queer desire as itself a form of fragmentation. The articulation of queer desire is never fully fluent, but, rather, some form of translation is required. Nao demonstrates an innate understanding of these dynamics, laying bare the intersecting realities of her queer and Vietnamese identities. She makes her own idiosyncratic contribution to the tradition of expressing queer sexuality, discovering novel language with which to describe desire. She translates her lived experience as a Vietnamese lesbian through the simultaneous evocation of Sappho and *phở*. This pun manages to communicate both sides of her identity with economy and humor. She establishes herself as both a spiritual descendent of the ancient poet from the island that has given a name to women who desire other women and an immigrant from a country whose cuisine is seemingly omnipresent mere decades after a terrible war.

"Sapphở" is ultimately a collage of images culled from the mind of Vi Khi Nao. While the poem inherits some of the motifs familiar from other Asian American receptions of Sappho, Nao's vision is stunningly original. The peculiar combination of food, sex, and translation results in a text as memorable as the pun in its title. Like Vietnamese cuisine, "Sapphở" blends together a collection of influences that meld in aromatic harmony. We might even view Nao's imaginative conception as an irreverent inversion of linguistic violence. The tongue or *lingua* is the source both of language and taste. Nao does linguistic violence, that is, violence of the tongue, to the fundamental components of language—etymologies, transitive verbs, direct objects—consuming them with other fragments in her succulent soup.

Sappho herself emerges from antiquity as an immigrant of sorts, bereft of her social and cultural contexts. Each generation of readers constitutes

[58] Sedgwick 2008: 72.

[59] For Sappho's use of martial language in describing sexuality, see Rissman 1983 and Winkler 1990: 162–87.

her anew from the meager fragments of her poems. This fragmentation has profoundly influenced the three Asian American writers discussed in this article. The traumatic experiences of war and displacement, which often involve linguistic violence, have made these authors especially sensitive to the various fragmentations operative in Sappho's extant oeuvre. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha uses the corporeal fragmentation of fr. 31 LP to interrogate the violence endured by the Korean people throughout the twentieth century. She depicts the body as both an impediment to speech and the ultimate standard of communication in the face of atrocity. Hoa Nguyen ventriloquizes a Sappho who is always already fragmentary. Inspired by Carson's translation of the ancient poet and a personal experience of language loss, Nguyen communicates through the sheer sounds of language in "After Sappho." Vi Khi Nao mobilizes the eponymous portmanteau of her poem "Sapphở" to explore the diverse registers of food, sex, and translation. Melding a bewildering array of fragmentary discourses into her broth, she produces a text that defies description. Sappho has signified differently for different audiences since antiquity. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Hoa Nguyen, and Vi Khi Nao have invented a Sappho whose fragmentation is the thing that constitutes her.

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