

Re[a]ding and Ignorance: Poetic Constraints of Lyric

by

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For no one

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Table of Contents

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Abbreviations	vi
List of Figures	vii
Chapters	
1. Introduction	1
2. The Edges of Anne Carson's Sappho	24
The Fragments of [Anne] Carson	27
Mutilation	45
3. Chocolate Bittersweet: Tawara Machi Translating Yosano Akiko	69
Bitter	71
Sweet	97
4. Separate but Equal: [un]Equating Catullus with Sappho	110
Impar	115
Par	128
Silence	140
5. Un]Tangled Hair: Yosano Akiko's <i>Midaregami</i> Unravels	145
A Tangle of Loose Threads	146
Ukifune	163

6. Conclusion, i 畏 B wiθ U: Shiina Ringo Reding Her Self	177
“Perhaps you would like to know my name...”	181
The Ease of Indifference	197
Bibliography	208

List of Abbreviations

GSS – Goshūiwakashū

KKS – Kokinwakashū

MG – Midaregami

MYS – Man'yōshū

List of Figures

Figure 1 – The first five stanzas of Sappho Fr. 1 in <i>If not, winter</i>	28
Figure 2 – Last two stanzas of fr. 1 in <i>If not, winter</i>	29
Figure 3 – Sappho fr. 2 in <i>If not, winter</i>	31
Figure 4 – Sappho fr. 6 in <i>If not, winter</i>	33
Figure 5 – Sappho fr. 6 in Voigt's <i>Sappho et Alcaeus: Fragmenta</i>	42
Figure 6 – Sappho fr. 31 in <i>If not, winter</i>	46
Figure 7 – Sappho fr. 31 in <i>Eros the bittersweet</i>	47
Figure 8 – Cover of volume one of Tawara Machi's <i>Chokorēto goyaku Midaregami</i>	80
Figure 9 – Poems 1-3 of Tawara Machi's <i>Midaregami</i>	86
Figure 10 – <i>Midaregami</i> 385 as it appears in Tawara Machi's translation	93
Figure 11 – <i>Midaregami</i> 385 as it appears in Itsumi Kumi's edition	94
Figure 12 – Fujishima Takeji's illustration <i>Gendai no shōsetsu</i> [Modern Novels] in the first edition (1901) of the <i>Midaregami</i>	96

Chapter 1

Introduction

Once upon a time, not so long ago, if you wanted to study art, you wouldn't have had many options; just *studying* art was an expensive endeavor, as expensive as studying literature once was as well, because of the relative cost of books. The study of art was also laborious, if at times it wasn't as much of a drain on the pocketbook, for, if you were unwilling to purchase plaster casts of statues or hire an artist to etch reproductions of famous paintings and facades, you'd have to make them yourself. You'd have to travel to "where the art is" (generally speaking, "Europe," but also the "near" and "far" East), and should you desire a record of what you'd seen, the easiest and quickest method was simply to sketch it in a notebook. But with the advent of cheap photography and photographic reproduction, the necessity to draw the very objects one sees in order to "preserve" them for later consideration has nearly disappeared. I can imagine that should you quiz a group of fifty contemporary art historians as to whether they possess any skill at drawing or etching that you would happen upon a number surprisingly close to zero. The same question asked even a hundred years ago would have been pointless and absurd. Similarly, if Petrarch wanted a copy of that weird Catullus manuscript that in his time had just recently emerged from obscurity, he would have to copy it himself or send it off to a *scriptor* (or *librarius*) to copy it for him; that's what a writer used to be, as much an *auteur* as what we might call a mere scribe. Readers were in a similar position: a *lector*,

like a lector in any given church service, was someone who read a given text aloud for the benefit of those who cannot themselves read or for the benefit of a wealthy patron (or master – *lectores* were often slaves) who wouldn't trouble with straining his eyes to read a text on his own. In this ancient context (ahistorically understood), a reader only interpreted insofar as he deciphered what he saw on the page (or scroll) and vocalized it. Likewise, a writer, a *scriptor*, was a conduit between two means of communication, between two complexes of symbols, between two texts (be it letters to letters, or sounds to letters). What we consider skills anyone out of primary school should possess used to constitute genuine professions, due in no small part to reading and writing, taken as a whole, being rather difficult. Prior to standardizations in type and even in handwriting, one needed to spend a great deal of time exposing himself to a large number of handwritten documents that varied wildly even within a given time period—much more so across the centuries—in order to read much of anything. If you find yourself unable to sympathize, take a good look at Emily Dickinson's manuscript fascicles and see how well you decipher them in real time. A facsimile edition is available, so you don't even have to haul yourself all the way to Cambridge just to see what I mean. Go ahead, I can wait.

A scribe's act of interpretation, which above I made to seem straightforward and nearly automatic, is, in fact, anything but. The wild variances we see in the manuscripts of nearly all pre-modern texts is testament to the fact that even this "automatic" mode of interpretation, namely copying, is as fraught with difficulties as "higher order" modes like, say, literary criticism or divination. If a given scribe or copyist should be at a loss as to what a text says, due to the difficulty in simply reading it, he will guess, not arbitrarily, but based on his understanding (limited or not) of what the text *should* say: the text in

that moment becomes what he thinks it says in very real terms, as he is in the process of writing a completely independent copy. Any textual critic or fellow traveler could tell some variation of the tale above, adding or subtracting bits of trivia as suit the circumstances. Often, the *scriptor* is more willful, he judges his copy text to be deficient in some way, and emends it as he sees fit. He may add his emendation to the copy text at hand, he may write his correction into his new copy, or he may hedge his bets and preserve the reading he finds unacceptable while adding his new, superior reading so that others may judge for themselves. In case my point remains too implicit, let me be clear: these men (let's be honest, they were generally men) would *rewrite* the texts as they read them, often much more freely than any contemporary textual critic would. I tell this story to belie the convenient and misleading distinction we often make between reading and writing, between the interpretation and the interpreted. The interpretation literally becomes part of that which it interprets, becomes a text, even becomes *the* text, and over time the seam between the "original text" and the emendation begin to heal over into a scar that diminishes in visibility. Recognition of the emendation *as* emendation, and of the act of interpretation that produced it *as* interpretation, decreases over time, the emendation becomes hard to recognize at all, and the presence of interpretation *within* a text tends toward invisibility. For lack of a better term, I call this writing as reading mode "reding," the verb being "to rede."¹

I would like to conceive of reding (my neologism) and reading as interpretive

¹ In various conversations with friends and colleagues, I have run across the problem of how this word "rede" and its participle "reding" are to be pronounced. In this text, this dissertation, pronunciation is a non-issue, because the text is, for the most part, silent. German speaking friends tend to attract the word toward *Rede*, saying something to the effect of rē-dě or rē-dē, while others have tried out something akin to the color red. I have asserted and will continue to assert that it has the same pronunciation as read, considering, after all, rede and read are etymologically identical and where rede has appeared historically it has the same pronunciation as read. However, as I said, it really doesn't matter here.

strategies with relative advantages and disadvantages, and in order to do so I would first reject an overly facile distinction of active and passive, respectively, as if by reding one made texts happen and by reading one let texts happen to her, and prefer to think of them as aggressive and receptive. The aggressive reding, like that of the textual critic and the *scriptor*, intervenes in the text's conditions where the receptive reading observes them and accepts the tradition of reception that follows along with a text. This distinction between two modes of interpretation is only ever provisional, as the two are merely tactics to be mixed and matched as one sees fit. This spelling, "rede," and its sense come from a time in the history of the English language when reding had nothing to do with what we now know as reading, that is when the verb was *rædan*, whence come both verbs read and rede, which in the *Beowulf* means to advise or govern and, in affinity with its Germanic cognates, to control.

Then at the beer-feast	an old fighter speaks,
who sees the ring-hilt,	remembers it all,
the spear-death of men	—has a fierce heart—
begins in cold sorrow	to search out a youngster
in the depths of his heart,	to test his resolve,
strike blade-spark in kin,	and he says these words:
'Can you, my comrade,	now recognize the sword
which your father bore	in the final battle,
under grim war-mask	for the last time,
that precious iron,	when the Danes killed him,
controlled the field,	when Withergyld fell
in our heroes' crash	at Scylding hands?
Now some son or other	of your father's killers
walks in this hall,	here, in his pride;
exults in his finery,	boasts of his slayings,
carries that treasure	that is rightfully yours." ²

Beowulf 2041-2056

Beowulf has returned from saving Hrothgar from the menace of Grendel and his mother

² *Beowulf* trans. and ed. Howell D. Chickering, Jr. (New York: Anchor Books, 1977) 169.

and reports to his uncle, Hygelac, of the threat from the Heathobards which Hrothgar has abated by offering his daughter in marriage to Ingeld, but Beowulf is not convinced that peace between the Danes and the Heathobards will hold. He imagines some old man still smarting keenly from the feuds of the past approaches a younger man and tries to kindle in him the spark of the old hatreds that keep peoples apart. The old man tells the younger to look at the sword hanging from this *other* man's belt—that treasure “rihte rædan sceoldest” “you should rightly *rede*.” The use of the verb *rædan* here implies more than mere possession as the translation above would have it. The sword is ostensibly the young man's father's, thus rightfully his after his father's death, and to *rede* it would be not merely to have inherited it but to control it, to have mastery over it as well. While the old man says, “that guy stole your dad's sword,” he says implicitly as well, “that man has stolen your birthright,” in an attempt to inflame him with the kind of anger that continues, does not settle wars. This other, more sinister kind of reading is kept separate from our more modern notion of visual input and interpretation of text by means of the archaic spelling *rede*. The verb *rede* only really survives even as an archaism until the late 19th century, and then only in the much weaker sense of “to advise” or “give counsel.”

WITH that he turned, and silent, full of thought,
From out the hall he passed not noting aught,
And toward his home he went but soberly,
And thence forth an ancient man to see
He hoped might tell him that he wished to know,
And to what land it were the best to go.
But when he told the elder all the tale,
He shook his head, and said: Nought will avail
My lore for this, nor dwells the man on earth
Whose wisdom for this thing will be of worth;
Yea, to this dreadful land no man shall win
Unless some god himself shall help therein;
Therefore, my son, I rede thee stay at home,
For thou shalt have full many a chance to roam

Seeking for something that all men love well,
Not for an unknown isle where monsters dwell.³

Beowulf's young man and Morris's Perseus have very little to do with each other both in the history of English poetry and in English history generally, the texts of each having been separated by at least 800 years. However, there is a peculiar symmetry in these two moments of reding: in each a young man is advised by his elder as to the proper course of action and that advice is centered around an act of reding. The ancient man *redes* Perseus and the young man should *rede* his father's sword. In neither case is the sense of interpretation we impose on the verb *read* appropriate for the words *rede* and *rædan* themselves, yet in the two examples cited above in both cases the young men are prodded by their elders to participate in an act of interpretation, i.e. in an act of *reading*, where they are to understand what they see/receive in terms of how elder generations perceive it. Beowulf's old fighter tells the young man to look at the sword, who's wearing it and when, and goads him into a particular interpretation of what it means. Here, the meaning of the sign, the sword, is not simply a function of pure reference—that the sword is the young man's father's is quite striking in and of itself—but of the condition in which it is found. Its meaning comprises not only the thing itself, what it is and to whom it refers, but also where it is (in the halls of the Heathobards), who possesses it (a Dane), and how it came to be there (through the spoils of war). The old fighter alludes to a crude form of what Jerome McGann calls “the textual condition;” he understands implicitly that the object of interpretation is more than the thing—the text itself.

The physical object... is coded and scored with human activity. An awareness of this is the premise for interpreting material culture, and the awareness is particularly imperative for literary interpretation, where the linguistic “message” regularly invisibilizes the codependent and equally

³ William Morris “The Doom of Acrisius” *The Earthly Paradise* 813-828.

meaningful “medium” that codes all messages.⁴

But Beowulf’s parable examines this mode of interpretation in order to take it further than McGann so as to try and understand the ramifications of seeing the world in this way. The old man is perpetuating a particular mode of interpretation and with it the historical problems and hermeneutic blind spots that come with it; he doesn’t understand that for history to change so too does his way of *reading*, or at least the young man would have to *ignore* the old fighter. Unfortunately, in Beowulf’s tale the young man does as the old man says, and in so doing perpetuates the cycles of violence that Hygelac and his men would escape. Is Beowulf suggesting the young man and thus we should willfully ignore the sword?

The advice Perseus receives from the ancient man is just as destructive, though in the way it enervates rather than invigorates. Personal agency in his own destiny will come of naught, says the old man; Perseus should stay home, operate within a pre-existing discourse so to speak, and accept what adventures he might find there (what they may be is anyone’s guess). I bring this passage from Morris’s *The Earthly Paradise* to bear not merely because of the use of the verb *rede* but also because it speaks to a particular kind of interpretive melancholy, that there is no outside of critical discourse⁵ (a point, I should note, I basically agree with), and that critical discourse constrains the possible meanings to derive from a work of language.

[T]he meaning of the utterance would be severely constrained, not after it was heard but in the ways in which it *could*, in the first place, be heard.

⁴ McGann, Jerome. *The Scholar’s Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) 136. The classic text in regard to “the textual condition” is, of course, *The Textual Condition*, but I find this quote from *The Scholar’s Art* a much pithier statement of what in *The Textual Condition* is largely performed and not reducible to a tidy soundbite.

⁵ This is, in my mind, a conflation of Derrida’s notion of there being no “outside the text” and Stanley Fish’s “interpretive communities.”

An infinite plurality of meanings would be a fear only if sentences existed in a state in which they were not already embedded in, and had come into view as a function of, some situation or other... sentences emerge only in situations, and within those situations, the normative meaning of an utterance will always be obvious or at least accessible, although within another situation that same utterance, no longer the same, will have another normative meaning that will be no less obvious and accessible.⁶

The values the old man seeks to impart to Perseus as he redes him, i.e. understands and advises, to accept his situation as it is, mirror closely the condition of the utterance Fish describes above, not merely in its normativity (Perseus shouldn't go looking for meaning) but in its effacement of agency . Normative meanings are somehow just present in the text of an utterance that seems to exist for no reason. In the “experiment” he performs with a class of students who had been studying Christian metaphysical poetry, he marvels at how they take a list of names he had written on the board for a previous class and perform a poetic reding of that text.

I am less interested in the details of the exercise than in the ability of my students to perform it. What was the source of that ability? How is it that they were able to do what they did? What is it that they did? The questions are important because they bear directly on a question often asked in literary theory, What are the distinguishing features of literary language? Or, to put the matter more colloquially, How do you recognize a poem when you see one?⁷

I wonder whether Fish is not being somewhat disingenuous—“What was the source of that ability?” Fish specifically framed the names as a page, writing “p. 43” in the corner, and told his students that it was a religious poem of the type they had been studying.⁸ Of course they interpreted it as a poem! The conclusion Fish draws from his experiment—that “[i]nterpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing. Interpreters

⁶ Fish, Stanley. *Is There a Text in This Class* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980) 307-8

⁷ *ibid.* 325.

⁸ *ibid.* 323.

do not decode poems; they make them”⁹—I largely agree with, but the degree to which he effaces his own agency is striking, because it has a direct bearing on the situation that determines the normative meaning. It’s as if the old man weren’t aware that *he* is the one to suggest to Perseus to stay at home, as if the advice suddenly materialized. Fish is in precisely the same position as the textual critic but unaware of how his presentation of text is itself an interpretation that precedes the activity his students engage in.¹⁰ No one act of interpretation—note, this is purely hypothetical (and thus perhaps useless); there is never but one act of interpretation—involves to some degree acts of reading and acts of rereading, reception and aggression. To receive a text *in some way*, along the lines of one of Fish’s “interpretive communities,” is to *yoke* it more or less to the particular tradition in which it is received or transmitted. Pure reception would imply a text is wholly without context, luckily an impossibility, and would render the text uninterpretable.¹¹

I again bring textual criticism to bear in this argument not merely because of its relevance to readings intervening in texts but because it points to an entire field and mode of interpretation that literary critics have become perfectly comfortable with quarantining themselves from. Surely, someone would hold a classicist or medievalist—this is not to say that classicists and medievalists aren’t literary critics; far from it—accountable for not dealing with the textual condition of a given literary work, especially when its instability reflects directly on the matter at hand. It may be very hard to make an argument in regard to the significance of a text if in fact it may not say what you think it

⁹ *ibid.* 327

¹⁰ For an extensive discussion of the importance of the “pre-interpretation” of a text in both linguistic and graphic terms, see McGann’s chapter “Rethinking Textuality” in *Radiant Textuality: Literature After the World Wide Web*.

¹¹ I have to admit this is a rather bald assertion. There is no way to produce the conditions of “pure reception,” as I say, and such no way of knowing whether a text would, in fact, be uninterpretable.

does. Yet, as the texts under scrutiny come closer and closer to contemporaneity (with us), the textual condition has historically been considered, tacitly, less relevant to literary interpretation. While textual investigation and preservation of the documents that make up a text's conditions are now common with those authors whose relationship to publication is problematic at best (e.g. Blake, Rosetti, Dickinson), those poets who have participated intimately in established hierarchies of publication and distribution are less subject to these investigations, even when to do so may be more than just relevant. But if you look past mere printed literature to song, for instance, contemporary reading does in fact grapple with primary iterations of texts in the interaction of performances, recordings, and printed lyrics. According to the liner notes, two lines of Regina Spektor's song "Edit"¹² should read

you don't even have good credit
you can write but you can't edit

Which seems simple enough, if incomprehensible, but when Spektor sings the last of those two lines, she holds the nasal in "can't" and lets the terminal stop fall on top of the word "edit." Upon first and subsequent listens, the lines rede to me as "you can write but you can't debt it," which makes more (logical) sense given the preceding line. The whole song is merely a repetition of the following.

white lines on your mind
keep it steady
you were never ready
for the lies
you don't have no Dr. Robert
you don't have no Uncle Albert
you don't even have good credit
you can write but you can't edit

As the song reaches its end and becomes increasingly frantic, the line "for the lies"

¹² Spektor, Regina. "Edit." *begin to hope*. Sire, 2006.

merges back into the beginning of the song producing the string “for the white lines on your mind.” That the common idiom “white lie” already exists in English only helps to buttress the overlap Spektor creates here between white lines and white lies. The phrase “white lies” is not actually in the song, but to an extent a reding could be forgiven for putting it there.

Not to participate in a text’s condition, not to red it, is to be resigned to having a large degree of the work of interpretation be done for you. But in the end I don’t know how useful McGann’s model of the textual condition ultimately is for reding because of its extreme inclusivity. Textual criticism operating along McGann’s principles is avaricious, always wanting more documents (wanting them all!) and more relations and relativities of those documents to each other, because this approach is holistic (or totalizing, depending on what connotation you want to lend the practice). And while I believe the techniques textual criticism brings to texts are useful to reding, no matter how fervently I agree with McGann’s criticism of the kind of “eclectic” editorial theory that emerged in the mid 20th century, I don’t think reding operates purely along these lines. Redings know what documents they want and what they *want to ignore*, because the presence/absence of those documents is inscribed on the reding itself. This ignorance, rather than indicating a simple lack of awareness (of the existence of a particular document or even of a critic who speaks to the same concern) or even mere stupidity, is a willful act: the ignorant reding effaces a text’s bibliography to productive ends which sometimes—I will endeavor to show—even the redings themselves may not intend.

My model for this type of reding comes from Martin Heidegger, who in his later writings on language (and poetry—for Heidegger the two are never quite distinct: poetry

is pure language, and the fundamental characteristics of language are always to be found in poetry) shows himself to practice the kind of ignorant reading I want to concern myself with in this dissertation. The ignorance in his texts is what, for me, makes them so compelling. It may be presumptuous of a lowly graduate student to call Heidegger “ignorant,” but it is only presumptuous so long as we persist in thinking of “ignorant” and “ignorance” as pejorative and in believing that what Heidegger with and to a text is more valuable than what we do.

The basic mistake critics of Heidegger make is in asking fundamentally *essential* questions: “what is Being-there (Dasein)?” “what is language?” This latter question points to a particularly damning misprision because it often causes the critic to ask a follow-up question in this way: “what is *Heidegger’s* language?” Abandon the *essential* approach for a moment and ask instead, “what does language *do*?” and “what does Heidegger’s language *do*?” You may find that all those frustrating moments in Heidegger’s text become eerily clear.

It seems strange to me that so much attention has been given to the discussion of language in the essay “The Origin of the Work of Art,” where it really is an ancillary issue, while “A Dialogue on Language”¹³ is either written off or quickly dispensed with, as any close reading of this dialogue will show that it is a kind of nexus between several other Heideggerean texts that treat language at one point or another, especially *Being and Time*, “...poetically Man dwells...,” and “Language.” What is maddening, so frustrating for so many of Heidegger’s readers is revealed in “A Dialogue on Language” to be very straightforward and clear, but only so long as we set aside the *essential* questions that

¹³ I have a real problem with the translation of “Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache” as “A Dialogue on Language,” but I’ll leave it be for the moment.

plague Heidegger's commentators and focus instead on what language, for Heidegger, *does*. Take the tautology of the statement *die Sprache ist: Sprache* in the lecture "Die Sprache" ("Language") to which Heidegger appends the "explanatory" statement *die Sprache spricht*.¹⁴ What language *is* is what it *does*: Speech is speech. Speech speaks, which I rede as a succinct statement of language having its own subjectivity. You have to look at the way in which Heidegger employs his own language, both German and his idiolect, *poetically* if ever you wish to know what language for Heidegger does and as such is. The etymological relationship between *Sprache* (language/speech) and the verb *sprechen* (to speak) to which Heidegger alludes in the simple statement *die Sprache spricht* lends a kind of compelling obviousness to the conception of language he presents. The hint as to how we should read Heidegger is in the various essays on language themselves. Just as Heidegger's object of investigation when he turns to language is nearly always poetry¹⁵ (the discourse on the second chorus of Sophocles' *Antigone* in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Hölderlin in "...Poetically Man Dwells...", Georg Trakl in "Language," etc.), I assume when reading Heidegger I need to do so as if reading poetry, i.e. examine how what the text does to some extent is lay bare the machinations of language. If this speaking, speaking poetically, is language, then we must also consider how Heidegger divorces this language from any speaking subject, more specifically any human subject. For the speaking subject of language is, ironically, language itself. Heidegger's distaste for words that seek to *embody* language, to reinforce the connection between speaking and the human tongue, makes this clear.

¹⁴ "Die Sprache" in Heidegger, Martin. *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske, 1959) 13.

¹⁵ The notable exception is Heidegger's discussion of the relationship between discourse (Rede) and language (Sprache) in *Being and Time*.

- I:¹⁶ Then, as the name for language, what does *Koto ba* say?
 J: Language, heard thru this word, is: the petals that stem from *Koto*.
 I: That is a wondrous word, and therefore inexhaustible to our thinking. It names something other than our names, understood metaphysically, present to us: language,¹⁷ *glossa, lingua, langue*. For long now, I have been loth to use the word “language” [*Sprache*] when thinking on its nature.¹⁸

Even *Sprache* is brought in line with other words Heidegger is loth [sic] to use when thinking on language, because, even though it has no specific relationship to the tongue, etymologically or otherwise, it still roughly implies an organ of speech. And yet, “saying” [*die Sage*], which he only reluctantly reveals to his “Japanese,” could easily imply that organ as well, thus, perhaps, the reluctance. But almost immediately after revealing *Sage*, Heidegger is already drawing it toward its cognates, particularly *das Sagenhafte*,¹⁹ pushing out the bounds of its semantic possibilities even beyond what might seem reasonable in German. The situation is similar for *Koto ba*.

- I: What is the Japanese word for “language”?
 J: (*after further hesitation*) It is “Koto ba.”
 I: And what does that say?
 J: *ba* means leaves [*Blätter*], including and especially the leaves of a blossom—petals [*Blütenblätter*]. Think of cherry blossoms or plum blossoms.²⁰

My interest here is that Heidegger’s “Japanese” is technically wrong: while *ba* (the morphological transformation of *ha*) does mean “leaves” (*Blätter*) it does not mean the

¹⁶ I and J refer to the “Inquirer” [*Fragenden*] and “Japanese” [*Japaner*] respectively, the two characters in the dialogue. It becomes clear quickly that the “Inquirer” is Heidegger, but the “Japanese” does not seem to be anyone in particular.

¹⁷ In the German, Heidegger uses the English word “language” here left untranslated for obvious reasons.

¹⁸ “A Dialogue on Language” in Heidegger, Martin. *On the Way to Language* trans. Peter D. Hertz (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1982) 47.

¹⁹ Given the persistent use of *sagen* “to say” in place of “to mean,” it seems appropriate to translate *die Sage* as “saying” though generally it means “legend” (like the English saga), which meaning *das Sagenhafte* makes explicit again. This “story-telling” Heidegger draws *die Sage* back to likewise pulls the verb *sagen* to *Sagenhafte*. One could, I think, re-de Heidegger’s “what does that say?” as “what story does that tell.” Language so conceived is personified as the narrator of its own story.

²⁰ “A Dialogue on Language” 45.

“leaves of a flower” (*Blütenblätter*), i.e. “petals,” and yet somehow has still managed to keep consistent with the classical Japanese aesthetic conception of the relationship between speech/language and vegetation. In the preface to the second of the imperial anthologies, the *Kokinwakashū* (hereafter *Kokinshū* or *KKS*), the editor, Ki no Tsurayuki, says, “Japanese poetry is a seed in the human heart that grows into a myriad leaves of words.” [*yamato uta wa hito no kokoro o tane to shite yorozu no koto no ha to zo narerikeru*] The word *ba* (*ha*) manages to say what it should, despite not having the correct lexical “meaning.” This is a seminal moment when Heidegger devalues “meaning” in favor of speaking and saying; it matters not so much what the word for language *is*, i.e. what it means statically, as what it *does*, what it says (thus the question “*Und was sagt dies?*” “And what does that say?” not “What does it mean?”)—what the word can be made to do. What *Koto*²¹ says, then, according to Heidegger’s Japanese, “would be the appropriating occurrence of the lightening [*lichtenden*] message of grace [*Anmut*].”²² But when this statement is “repeated” later in the dialogue, grace (*Anmut* – grace in terms of elegance, where in English someone might be called “graceful”) here becomes something else, *Huld*, grace in the sense of favor, as in “to be in one’s good graces.” The move from *Anmut* to *Huld* is marked by the mention of Heidegger’s “...Poetically Man Dwells...” where grace is thought of explicitly in Greek terms.

J: Beautifully said! Only the word “grace” easily misleads the modern mind...

I: ...leads it away into the precincts of impressions...

J: ...whose corollary is always expression as the manner in which something is set free. It seems to me more helpful to turn to the Greek *charis*, which I found in the lovely saying you quote from Sophocles, in

²¹ Generally, Japanese words are transliterated into the lower case, but I leave *Koto* in the uppercase to keep in mind that this is very much Heidegger’s Japanese, that ultimately it doesn’t matter what *Koto* actually is in Japanese, but how Heidegger causes it to fall in line with a system of “grace” in the dialogue.

²² “Dialogue on Language” 45. *Anmut* is a kind of comeliness, “grace” as in “graceful.”

your lecture "...Poetically Man Dwells...", and translated "graciousness" [*Huld*]. This saying comes closer to putting into words the breathlike advent of the stillness of delight.²³

"Explicitly in Greek terms" is a bit misleading in that it ignores how Heidegger has to bring these Greek terms back into German.

"Kindness" [*Freundlichkeit*]*—*this word, if we take it literally, is Hölderlin's magnificent translation for the Greek word *charis*. In his *Ajax*, Sophocles says of *charis* (verse 522):

Charis charin gar estin he tiktous' aei.

For kindness [*Huld*] it is, that ever calls forth kindness.²⁴

We can begin to see how Heidegger constructs systems of terms that "inevitably" point to each other and how the character of language is a poetic one.

I: And something else, too, that I wanted to say there but could not offer within the context of the lecture. *charis* is there called *tiktousa**—*that which brings forward and forth. Our German word *dichten*, *tihton* says the same. Thus Sophocles' lines portend to us that graciousness is itself poetical, is itself what really makes poetry...²⁵

Freundlichkeit → *charis* → *Huld* ← *charis* ← *Anmut* ← *Koto*. This is Heidegger's system of "grace," and although *Anmut* cannot refer to Christian grace *per se* nor *Huld* nor *Freundlichkeit**—*none of them can mean God's grace in German, at least*—*somehow they can't help but say it as a result of the lengthy syllogisms by which Heidegger comes to make words say different things. *Charis* and *Anmut*, *charis* and *Huld*, *charis* and *Freundlichkeit*, *Koto* and *charis*, *Koto* and *Anmut/Huld*; isn't this what Heidegger wants to say? But *Koto*, in the history of the translation of the Gospel of St. John, also usually

²³ *ibid.* 46. Due to space concerns, I have eliminated a lengthy discussion of how Heidegger and his Japanese interlocutor are always continuing (not necessarily finishing) each other's statements, and how understanding this mechanic of the "Dialogue" is key to understanding the poetic language of discourse (*Rede*) and dialogue (*Gespräch*).

²⁴ Heidegger, "...Poetically Man Dwells..." in *Poetry, Language, Thought* trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 229.

²⁵ "A Dialogue on Language" 46.

stands for *logos*, especially the “Word of God,” and *charis* can be another kind of grace, namely God’s. As a result, despite his best efforts to cut *charis* off from its Christian context, using Heidegger’s own method of propelling words towards each other across languages, we can make *Anmut*, *Huld*, and *Freundlichkeit* say God’s grace, even if that isn’t what they mean.

The dialogue sits at the nexus of several lectures which all orbit/consider in one way language—that is the closest I feel comfortable in coming to explain how these texts relate to each other and to language, because Heidegger actively resists saying anything *about* language, in the sense of regarding language from some position beyond it. In fact, he asserts that speaking “about” language is an impossibility or at best absurd. One can only ever speak *in* language; Heidegger is very particular about his prepositions.

I: Speaking *about* [*über*] language turns language almost inevitably into an object.

J: And then its reality vanishes.

I: We have then taken up a position above [*über*] language, instead of hearing from [*von*] it.

J: Then there would only be a speaking *from* [*von*] language...

I: In this manner, that it would be called *from out of* [*von...her*] language’s reality, and be led *to* its reality.

J: How can that be?

I: A speaking [*ein Sprechen*] *from* [*von*] language [*die Sprache*] could only be a dialogue [*ein Gespräch*].²⁶

The way in which Heidegger lets language (*Sprache*) flow into its etymological tributaries is indicative (cryptically—words only ever hint²⁷) of how he wields language, wields it poetically; for the flow of one kind of speaking into another (*Sprechen* → *Sprache* → *Gespräch*) is synonymous with the flow of the interlocutor’s line in the drama of the dialogue. By invoking tragedy, thus hinting at its drama, and imposing a lyric flow

²⁶ *ibid.* 50-51

²⁷ The hint, here, is *Winke* and “to hint” is *winken*, which is obviously related to our word “wink.” The connotations of wink are likely not appropriate to the German, but I leave it here regardless.

on his own statements, Heidegger attempts to shatter the illusion of simultaneity in a text—in *his* text. The dialogue—the text comes into being in time, just as language/speaking/*Sprache* do, with the kind of rhythm that is such an essential feature of poetry. In this light, I have no real qualms with Heidegger’s seemingly facile equation of poetry with language. It’s perfectly clear.

Not only is “A Dialogue of Language”²⁸ the nexus into which Heidegger coalesces much of his earlier work *of* language and its clear kinship to poetry, but it also points to later essays where language and its poetry figure prominently, particularly “The Origin of the Work of Art,” where the primal figure of art, poetry, brings Heidegger once again back to language. Not only is the dialogue a *place* between where Heidegger’s work of language up to that point might mingle and engage in discourse (*Rede* again) but is also a point between in the historical and ideological flow from the earlier lectures (“Language,” “...Poetically Man Dwells...,” etc.) to the later “Origin.” The poetic rhythm of the dialogue reflects the intercourse between language and poetry as well as the intercourse of the disparate lectures and essays. So just as language (*die Sprache*) stands between a speaking (*ein Sprechen*) and a dialogue (*ein Gespräch*) in the aforementioned line, “A Dialogue *of* Language” is *of* language—Heidegger’s and more generally—i.e. amidst it: language is both the dialogue’s concern and its manifest substance. Heidegger takes the disembodiment of language to a logical extreme, even beyond the absence of the speaking subject, where language is without medium, and if there were a medium, it would be an abyss.²⁹ Where we might not be able to come to

²⁸ I have substituted the more ambiguous “of” for “on” in the dialogue’s title to emphasize the double duty Heidegger makes *von* perform.

²⁹ The idea of language as an abyss is a prominent theme of “*Die Sprache*,” a point to which I will return my conclusion to address the issue of subjectivity within and *of* lyric.

grips with the poetic power of this abyss, the gap between conversants in a dialogue *we* are invited to fill as implicit conspirators, bespeaks a prejudice that any abyss must be a pit, like Tartarus or Hell, where we are punished for believing in the fake idols of language. But Heidegger inverts this geography, and the abyss raises us up. This is what I think he implies in *Being and Time* with the destruction (*Destruktion*) of the ontology we inherit from “the Greeks,” that by explicitly using the Latinate *Destruktion* he means to say it is not so much pulled apart as pulled down, pulled down to our level where conversely we are pulled up to it.

The second lesson of reading I derive from Heidegger, in addition to his radical philology where, if language won't reveal its machinations willingly, we must make it do so, is the value of reception. There is a beyond (*über*) *in* language—that seems like a logical paradox. Remember, the fundamental being of language can only be in discourse (*Rede*), in dialogue (*Gespräch*), and a dialogue of Heidegger's kind, as it leaps from word to word both intra- and interlingually, creates gaps. These are gaps of language in both a genitive (they are made of language) and partitive (they are in language) sense. The beyond of/in language is the abyss. We must swallow language, when, once its machinations have been unconcealed, we see what it does, just as it swallows us, and when it does we come to dwell there. We accept language as it is, just as it accepts us, and cease to look for some place over (*über*) or outside of it. If anything, Heidegger wants us to come home to language and participate in its continuance.

I: The passing of the past is something else than what has been.

J: How are we to think that?

I: As the gathering of what endures...

J: ...which, as you said recently, endures as what grants endurance...

I: ...and stays the Same as the message...

J: ...which needs us as messengers.³⁰

This is, I think, an obvious counterpoint (in the musical sense—a point of convergence of disparate musical lines) to Heidegger’s reading of the second chorus of Sophocles’ *Antigone* where man imposing his will on the earth and sea from outside is precisely what makes him *deinotaton* (most terrible, most awesome) and *unheimlich* (uncanny, un-home-ly). He cuts off the second choral ode from the drama that frames it, and in so doing makes it appear lyrical again, not just in a contemporary sense, where lyric is hypothesized as the direct expression of some lyric subject, but in what we might understand as a classical sense as well. Anyone familiar with the history of Greek tragedy or at least with Aristotle’s *Poetics* knows that tragedy has its origin in choral lyric of the kind written for festivals or public celebratory acts. That Heidegger causes the second choral ode of the *Antigone* to appear in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* to be like a choral lyric of, say, Alkman or Pindar is no coincidence. By lyricizing this excerpt from the play, he renders it back to its origin, so to speak, in precisely the same way his use of language above calls to and draws the common etymologies of words back into a discussion where they might otherwise remain silent.³¹ This is a fundamentally violent act, and in his interpretation of the ode, specifically his explication of the Greek word *deinon*, Heidegger shows he is aware of this fact.

The human being is *to deinotaton*, the uncanniest of the uncanny [*unheimlich*]. The Greek word *deinon* and our translation call for an advance explication here.

...

On the one hand, *deinon* names the terrible, but it does not apply to petty terrors and does not have the degenerate, childish, and useless meaning

³⁰ “A Dialogue on Language” 54

³¹ Likewise, Heidegger’s recomposition of the *Antigone*’s second choral ode belies how classically there was not a clear distinction between tragedy and choral lyric. They are, in fact, more seamless, a fact which our contemporary genre categories serve to conceal.

what we give today when we call something “terribly cute.” The *deinon* is the terrible in the sense of the overwhelming sway, which induces panicked fear, true anxiety, as well as collected, inwardly reverberating, reticent awe. The violent [*das Gewaltige*], the overwhelming [*das Überwältigende*] is the essential character of the sway [*das Walten*] itself. When the sway breaks in, it *can* keep its overwhelming power to itself. But this does not make it more harmless but only more terrible and distant.

But on the other hand, *deinon* means the violent in the sense of one who needs to use violence—and does not just have violence at his disposal but is violence doing, insofar as using violence is the basic trait not just of his doing but of his Dasein.

...

Humanity is violence-doing not in addition to and aside from other qualities but solely in the sense that from the ground up and in its doing violence, it uses violence against the overwhelming. Because it is doubly *deinon* in an *originally united* [emphasis mine] sense, it is *to deinotaton*, the most violent: violence-doing in the midst of the overwhelming.³²

If we ignore for the time being Heidegger’s predominantly philosophical and ontological ends, we can see that the violence of which he speaks is not only an interpretation of the second choral ode, but a realization of what he has done *to* it in order to arrive at the point he desires to make. In order to rede the ode *poetically* (lyrically?), that is to make meaning of it in the way he chooses, Heidegger does violence to the text, and that violence has the consequence of lyricizing it: in rendering the ode “properly” a poem again (in the way *we* conceptualize poetry) he does violence to the text of the *Antigone*, and being cut off from its “original” context is a necessary condition of it being lyric again now.³³

In the next chapter, I examine how Anne Carson’s criticism and multiple translations in *If not, winter*; *Eros the bittersweet*; and other texts serve at once to dis- and re-integrate the fragments of Sappho. In chapter three, I use Tawara Machi’s criticism

³² Heidegger, Martin. *Introduction to Metaphysics* trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000) 159-160.

³³ To my mind, you can see something similar at work in the way Simone Weil reconstructs the *Iliad* as a series of lyric vignettes in her essay “*The Iliad* or the Poem of Force.”

and translation into contemporary Japanese of Yosano Akiko's *Midaregami* (1901) to reconfigure reding itself in an etymological analysis of the Japanese verb *yomu* (at once "to read" and "to compose"). Chapter four uses the literal treatment of sound in Regina Spektor's song "Music Box" to understand how redings have become almost seamlessly inscribed in the Latin text of Catullus and to make sense of his textual silences. Chapter five returns to Yosano Akiko to see how when a poet abandons any specific responsibility for or to her text that both she and her reader/reder are freed from the trap in which, drawing from Ichikawa's example, Ukifune finds herself in Murasaki Shikibu's *Tale of Genji*. The final chapter is a coda in which Shiina Ringo's various lyric media are rede by me to show that while reding carries with it the possibility of a greater poetics of interpretation, it also bears the risk of being rede in kind. In these chapters, I try to speak from the perspective of the lyric subjectivity of the *text* and its physicality, meaning that even where I use names, people's names, I do so in order to indicate a particular text and the possible cohesion or lack thereof of a collection of texts which travel under those names. This inhuman—perhaps *ananthropic* to avoid the negative connotations of "inhuman"—conception of subjectivity I see as an implicit response to Susan Stewart's understanding of subjectivity in poetry in explicitly human terms in *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*. Her identification of the traces of the human senses inscribed in poetry is useful, I think, but what never quite comes into consideration is how, as text is but half at most of a poetic discourse, those traces demand a reader and a reading to activate them and how they become lost or at least momentarily absent when a reder and reding refuse to acknowledge them and as such reproduce them. I address concerns about the relationship between media and poetry, particularly in response to Marjorie Perloff's

2006 MLA address, but not from the position of the avant-garde or the experimental in poetics. Rather, the example of popular song shows, or unconceals to use a Heideggerian term, how such a destabilization—no—how a more complete conception of lyric was always there and how its failure to enter the critical discourse has less to do with what literary artists themselves do to make us aware of it and more to do with how we read/rede what is already there. Except in approaching these issues from the perspective of a subjectivity *within* a text rather than of some persona beyond it, I seek not to rede the lyrics I do in *opposition* to Stewart, Perloff, Ichikawa, Itsumi, McGann, and so forth but *alongside* them, to occupy for as long I may those critical subject positions others have yet to inhabit. There is also, perhaps, an implicit argument about translation, and if you discover it here, fine. If not, no matter.

Chapter 2

The Edges of Anne Carson's Sappho

I'm a fountain of blood
in the shape of a girl
you're a bird on the brim
hypnotized by the whirl

Drink me - make me feel real
wet your beak in the stream
the game we're playing is life
love's a two way dream

Leave me now - return tonight
tide will show you the way
if you forget my name
you will go astray
like a killer whale trapped in a bay

I'm a path of cinders
burning under your feet
you're the one who walks me
I'm your one way street

I'm a whisper in water
a secret for you to hear
you're the one who grows distant
when I beckon you near

I'm a tree that grows hearts
one for each that you take
you're the intruder's hand
I'm the branch that you break

—Björk “Bachelorette”

Anne Carson's 1986 collection of short essays, *Eros the Bittersweet*, has as its governing rubric, when it no longer quite seems to be interested in *eros* per se, edges; the edge of the consonant signifies for her the important development of the Greek alphabet from its Phoenician precursor, literacy gives edges to words (i.e. gives them definition), and *eros* somehow comes to live between what we write and what we mean.

The words we read and the words we write never say exactly what we mean. The people we love are never just as we desire them. The two *symbola* never perfectly match. Eros is in between.³⁴

Ironically, then, there is one arena where edges are so significant that never quite gets a mention and yet figures so prominently in what Carson does in these essays, namely translation. The crossing of boundaries between languages and their respective literatures – Carson has no qualms about quoting Basho one moment then Plato the next – occurs so often in the text of the essays that a lack of consideration for the relevance of translation is very peculiar. Of course, one possible reading of this “omission” is that it is in fact intentional, a subtle contradiction that productively undercuts the rigorous attention to edges and boundaries. This is what we would expect of an obviously intelligent postmodern reader.

And yet, I do not think so, or, to put it more accurately and less rigidly, I suspect that this omission of any lengthy consideration of boundary crossing, translatory or otherwise, is symptomatic of an issue within Carson's greater translation practice. In her translation of the fragments of Sappho, the poet whose *glukupikron* (which Carson translates sometimes as “bittersweet” sometimes as “sweetbitter”) figures so prominently in the aforementioned essays, entitled *If not, winter* takes this obsession with edge to its logical extreme. The edges of the Sapphic fragments become a distinct visual element of

³⁴ Carson, Anne. *Eros the bittersweet* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986) 109.

Carson's translations. The use of square brackets to mark the borders of loss (i.e. where loss and thus by a perverse reading *eros* begin) is a scriptural reification of the philosophy of edge and its relationship to *eros* she posits in her earlier essays. The translation itself is a reification of edges, for what is not subject to translation from the Greek, which Carson reproduces on a facing page, are not only the various marks of punctuation that point to uncertainty and doubt but also those strings of letters without clear definition, be it pictorial or lexical. The occasional]ousa becomes lost only after Carson *redes* the text, even though it can be parsed with a reasonable if not perfect degree of certainty. It is likely a feminine singular participial ending, "[ing]" if you will, though not absolutely. The "whole word," whose clear edges would make it susceptible to translation, could just as easily be *poi]ousa*, "making," as it could be *m]ousa*, "muse,"³⁵ though in either case the feminine is still present.

As you read, you may notice that this chapter has several characters you might want to keep straight (Sappho, *a text*; Anne, *a translation*; Carson, *a commentary*; I, *a reding*; You, *a reader*; Björk, a song) though doing so may not always be simple. There is also a set of appended figures from *If not, winter* to serve as props. It is important that, as you read, you look at them; don't just read them, really *look* at how their visual features contribute to the construction of the text. To this end, you may wish to keep them at the ready as you read along. You never know when you might need them.³⁶

³⁵ This "making" and "muse" are purely hypothetical, of course. After all, the feminine form of the present participle ends in *-oisa* in Aeolic, the dialect of Sappho's Greek. I apologize for the error.

³⁶ This is the first and perhaps most important decision you need to make before you approach this (and any other text): for whom are you reading? yourself or someone else? What will you do when you decide for whom you read, or what will you do when you refuse to decide?

The Fragments of Anne [Carson]

Let us begin yet again: Carson says of Sappho 1 (Figs. 1 & 2) in her endnotes, that place where the critic takes over translation (and says outright that to which the translation may only hint), “**1.1 ‘of the spangled mind’**: two different readings of the first word of Sappho’s first fragment have descended to us from antiquity: *poikilothron*’ (printed by Lobel, Page, Campbell and Voigt) and *poikilophron*’ (printed here)... 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.”³⁷ It fascinates³⁸ me how much work a little word like “perhaps” can be made to do: it helps deflect the reader into believing such and such really could be the case without in fact genuinely claiming any such thing. It is an elegant (academic) way of saying, “well, obviously this is what the poem *means* so maybe this is how it should *read*.” This is easy for Carson to claim, because by refraining from restating the (academic) arguments that undergird the choices of readings to print, she can keep the reader from knowing that *poikilothron*’ has the force of critical consensus that *poikilophron*’ does not. By equivocating the two readings, Anne can reshape (as all good poets do) Sappho for a kind of reader kept well hidden from the critical tradition by the barriers translation always erects. Moreover, in the case of this translation, the reshaping is more than a mere intermediate, whimsical figment, as Anne audaciously re-produces the Greek text beside hers—but they are both hers: the English and Greek text she wants: “for if she flees, soon she will pursue. / If she refuses gifts rather will she give them. / If she does not love, soon

³⁷ Carson, Anne. *If not, winter: fragments of Sappho* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002) 357n.

³⁸ Originally “annoys.”

1	<p>Ποικίλοφρον ἀθανάτ' Ἀφροδίτα, παῦ. Δί.ος δολιόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε, μή μ' ἄσσειαι μηδ' ὀνίαιαι δάμνα, πότνια, θυμον,</p>	1	<p>Deathless Aphrodite of the spangled mind, child of Zeus, who twists lures, I beg you do not break with hard pains, O lady, my heart</p>
<p>ἀλλ' ἄ τιν' ἔλθ', αἶ ποτα κατέρωτα τάς ἑμας αὐδάσ αἰοίσα πῆλοι ἐκλυες, πάτρος δὲ δόμον λίποισα χρύσειον ἦλιες</p>	<p>but come here if ever before you caught my voice far off and listening left your father's golden house and came,</p>		
<p>ἄρμ' ὑπασδεύζαισα· κάλοι δέ σ' ἄγον ὤμεις στρουθοί περὶ γῆς μελαίνας πύκνα δίνεντες πτέρ' ἀπ' ὠράνω αἴθε- ρος διὰ μέσσω·</p>	<p>yoking your car. And fine birds brought you, quick sparrows over the black earth whipping their wings down the sky through midair—</p>		
<p>αἴψα δ' ἐξίκοιντο· σὺ δ', ὦ μάκαιρα, μειδαιίσαις ἀθανάτωι προσώπωι ἦρε' ὅττι δηῖτε πέπονθα κάρτι δηῖτε καλέγημι</p>	<p>they arrived. But you, O blessed one, smiled in your deathless face and asked what (now again) I have suffered and why (now again) I am calling out</p>		
<p>κῶπι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι μηνόλαι· θυμῶι· τίνα δηῖτε πείθω σιγήην· ἐς σάν φιλότατα; τίς σ', ὦ Ψάπφ, εἰδίδησαι;</p>	<p>and what I want to happen most of all in my crazy heart. Whom should I persuade (now again) to lead you back into her love? Who, O Sappho, is wronging you?</p>		

Figure 1: The first five stanzas of Sappho Fr. 1 in Greek and English from *If not, winter*

καὶ γὰρ αἰ φείσῃ, ταχέως διώξει,
αἰ δὲ δῶρα μὴ δέκῃ, ἀλλὰ δώσει,
αἰ δὲ μὴ φίλει, ταχέως φιλῆσει
κωὶκ ἐθέλοια.

ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλέπῃν δὲ λῦσον
ἐκ μερίμναν, ὅσσα δὲ μοι τέλεσσαι
θύμος ἴμερσῃ, τέλεσον, εὖ δ' αὐτὰ
σύμμαχος ἔσσο.

For if she flees, soon she will pursue.
If she refuses gifts, rather will she give them.
If she does not love, soon she will love
even unwilling.

Come to me now: loose me from hard
care and all my heart longs
to accomplish, accomplish. You
be my ally.

Figure 2: Last two stanzas of fr. 1 in *If not, winter*

will love / even unwilling.”³⁹

I like to think that, the more I stand out of the way, the more Sappho shows through. This is an amiable fantasy (transparency of self) within which most translators labor.⁴⁰

A translator is marked just as much by what she does as by what she undoes. So, if we skip ahead a poem to what we (unfortunately) call Sappho 2 (Fig. 3), we would notice, that is if we bother to read the Greek, or at least look at it, there’s a bit Anne has left to its own devices, i.e. to silence: *..anothen katiou[s]-*. Anne has remembered to stand out of the way, but is Sappho what shines through? These two half-words, though difficult, are not untranslatable, so the question of Anne’s intentions remains. The best, the simplest, and thus the most frustrating answer is a mere <shrug>. Her sometimes cavalier, sometimes coy presentation of the text (in both languages) is perplexing, because in the same way she wanted the text of fragment 1—should we even be calling it that? It does appear to be a complete poem, after all—to be consistent with her own vision of its imagery, so what is legible is determined largely by what Anne wants to *rede*. I’d prefer consistency from her, though, at least with her own claims.

In translating I tried to put down all that can be read of each poem in the plainest language I could find, using where possible the same order of words and thoughts as Sappho did.⁴¹

My desire to rewrite Anne (writing Sappho) stems from a (rather weak) authority I bring to the Greek. As a result, I can easily climb the wall (or cross the river or whatever the metaphor) translation puts up. Perhaps I know where the gate is or like Pyramus peer back at Sappho through a lucky hole. I don’t know: these metaphors are so imprecise as

³⁹ *ibid.* 5

⁴⁰ *ibid.* x

⁴¹ *ibid.*

<p>2</p> <p>] . . . ανοθεν κατοῦς δευρυμμεκρητέσσι· ἔφ]· ναῶν ἄγνον ὄππ αι] χάριεν μὲν ἄλλος μαλί σιν· βῶμαι δ' ἔκνι θυμιάμε— νοι] βανώτωκιν·</p> <p>ἐν δ' ὕδαρ ψύχρον· κελάδει δι' ὕδαων μαλίων· βρόδοισι δὲ παῖς ὁ χῶρος ἔσπίσαστ', αἰθουσομένων δὲ φύλλων κῶμα κατατρῶν·</p> <p>ἐν δὲ λείμων ἐπρόβοτος τέθαλε τωτ· . . . (.) ἄνθοις ἄνθεσιν, αἰ <δ> ἄηται μέλλιχα πνέου σιν []</p> <p>ἔθρα δὴ σὺ σὺ·σιν ἔλοιτα Κύπρι χρυσάσιν ἐν κοιλίεσσιν ἄβρωσ <δ>·με·μεί χμενον θαλάσσι νέκταρ οἰνοχόσεια</p>	<p>2</p> <p>] here to me from Krete to this holy temple where is your graceful grove of apple trees and altars smoking with frankincense.</p> <p>And in it cold water makes a clear sound through apple branches and with roses the whole place is shadowed and down from radiant-shaking leaves sleep comes dropping.</p> <p>And in it a horse meadow has come into bloom with spring flowers and breezes like honey are blowing []</p> <p>In this place you Kypris taking up in gold cups delicately nectar mingled with festivities: pour.</p>
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Figure 3: Sappho fr. 2 in *If not, winter*

to be maddening. That's public transportation for you:⁴² it's cheap, it gets you roughly where you need to go, but you'll have to hoof it the rest of the way.

deurummekretesip[- in reprinting Voigt's text, Carson presents us with this word that isn't a word; though she prints it as a single string, it is obvious from the translation, "here to me from Krete," and from her note to the first line, "**2.1 'here'**: adverb of place that means 'hither, to this place' with verbs of motion or 'here, in this place' with verbs of rest, often used as an interjection 'Come on! Here now!' when followed by an imperative verb"⁴³ that she has relied on the typical parse. The "here" here is representative only of the *deur'* in *deurummekretesip*[-, that word that is not a word, not *not-a-word* so much as *not-a-single-word*, and not a compound word because unparsed it is without lexical meaning, meaning not in any dictionary I or anyone else owns. Anne has decided, implicitly, that the string is translatable because it is legible: the two go hand in hand. This is yet another kind of reding the "fragment" permits.

In general the text of this translation is based on *Sappho et Alcaeus: Fragmenta*, edited by Eva-Maria Voigt (Amsterdam, 1971). I include all the fragments printed by Voigt of which at least one word is legible; on occasion I have assumed variants or conjectures from her apparatus into my translation and these are discussed below (see Notes). In translating I tried to put down all that can be read of each poem in the plainest language I could find, using where possible the same order of words and thoughts as Sappho did.⁴⁴

It is important to understand how Carson has mapped translatability onto legibility and vice versa, for in *If not, winter* translation is not only the sign of what *can* be read but to a greater extent what *should* be read as well. As we have seen with the *deur*[e in *deurummekretesip*[- the parsed translation is not only an English figure to read for itself

⁴² In modern Greek, the word *metaphora* from which at some point we derived our word *metaphor* can mean either what we mean in English or buses, trains, and such.

⁴³ *If not, winter* 358n.

⁴⁴ *ibid.* x.

but an implicit commentary on how the Greek ought to be parsed and thus how it should be read. Then what is not translated in Anne's text is not only illegible in Carson's eyes but also, following this logic, not to be read at all. Of course, at no point does Carson in fact say something to the effect of "don't read this; it can't be read; just read what I tell you to," because that would somehow cut off the reader from that space of "imaginal" adventure she wants so much. Certainly any reader of Greek could do with Sappho's text as she may wish, but this translated text likely does not assume that kind of reader, and so anything Carson does in her text to erase particular words or half-words with her square brackets or grammatical parses should be taken as an attempt to constrain any reading thereof.

doom: "so go, so we may see, lady of gold arms, doom." (fr. 6, Fig. 4) Starting with what *is* there (absent all the brackets you may or may not read) is just as problematic as reaching⁴⁵ beyond the frayed edges of the lines for filler to keep separate words and images that in close proximity would take on entirely sinister undertones. But it doesn't matter whether an interpretation fails anymore than if it succeeds, for all failure means in this context is "failure yet to convince" and by success we mean "failure yet to fail." All interpretations are failures at some point, but that fact doesn't take away from their usefulness.

Like eros, puns flout the edges of things. Their power to allure and alarm derives from this. Within a pun you see the possibility of grasping a *better* truth, a *truer* meaning, than is available from the separate senses of either word. But the glimpse of that enhanced meaning, which flashes past in a pun, is a painful thing. For it is inseparable from your conviction of its impossibility. Words do have edges. So do you.

⁴⁵ It's funny (or irrelevant) that as I was writing this chapter, I consistently substituted subconsciously "read"/"reading" where in fact I wanted the text to read "reach"/"reaching."

6	ὡς θα.	6	Go
	καταχ		so we may see
	αργι]]
	κατα.		lady
].		of gold arms
	θα]]
	Κρηχ		doom
	ὡς ἰδη]]
	ῥὺς ἐτ.]]
	πονα.]]
	χρυσου		
	καππο		
	ανη		
	κατα.		
].		

Figure 4: Sappho fr. 6 in *If not, winter*

Translators of ancient poetry (my shorthand for old poetry that exists for us in numerous often inconsistent iterations), who usually have a critical tradition to rely on, typically ally themselves (or refuse to) with one of various positions regarding the text's transmission before rendering it into the target language. Where Sappho 1 invokes none other than Aphrodite to be her ally (*Aphrodita yada yada yada su d'auta summakhos esso*, "may you yourself be my ally *yada yada yada* Aphrodite"), translators are dependent on certain minor deities ("if this reading [Diehl's 1923 conjecture] is correct, Sappho may be pursuing her own night thoughts... or else participating in a nocturnal ritual.")⁴⁶

I don't fault Anne for leaving *anm* (in fr. 6) as it is; there are so many things it could be, which makes those 3 letters truly untranslatable, even back into Greek. Besides, some random conjecture would ruin the poetic force of that single word, "doom." *anm* isn't even a word anymore, much less poetry. It may not even be three letters in the same word. Ancient texts usually mash all the letters together, so *anm* could be the remnant of some feminine noun or adjective in the accusative case (*-an*) followed by some word (any part of speech) beginning with an *m*. There's not even anything to say that *a* and *n* are part of the same word. It could easily be a contraction of some word ending in a long *a* with the enclitic *en*. It is a literary artifact in a very literal (artificial) sense of what we can reasonably assume at some point was a poem. We can agree, I hope, that it is legible, if only partially (it can be read in at least *some* way), but as such it is only ever a means to a reading that, because it is largely speculative, scarcely involves that chunk of letters as it is. You'd hardly notice *anm* if it hadn't been *rede*.

Go [
so we may see [
]

⁴⁶ *If not, winter* 359n.

lady
of gold arms []
]]
doom]

The lines may hang separately in the ether to be enjoyed merely as if they were passing clouds, but my analytical mind tends to turn these things into sentences: “go, so we may see lady of gold arms, doom.” Syntactically, for whatever syntax is worth here, the lady could just as easily be the person the poem addresses as it is in my rendering the desired object of the poem’s gaze, which would leave “doom” the bomb Sappho—that is Anne drops on our idyllic, erotic glade. When in doubt the pedant like myself would ask what the Greek says, but What the Greek Says is irrelevant. The problem with producing a reading—writing a reading, i.e. reding—is that it can be rede again in turn. Anne reads Sappho (and rewrites her), I read Anne (and Sappho—and rewrite them both), someone in turn reads me (and Anne/Sappho—and perhaps even leaves us be). Even literature is subject to the law of the conservation of matter: nothing is created or destroyed. Everything is transformed.

To the extent that *anm* is nearly illegible, *tas* in the previous strophe is not. Standing relatively alone as it is, there is little to complicate it, which from the point of view of translation is precisely the problem. It isn’t the kind of basic noun or verb that could be rendered in a straightforward fashion: it is a relative pronoun—or a definite article, seeing as the grave accent over the *a* is no doubt a supplement—no, I shouldn’t say that. The accent *is* there. This fact does not eliminate the possibility of *tas* being an article, as the ` could just as easily be a remnant of any of the syntactical constructions in

Greek that make accents float around. That doesn't really matter, what does is that the very lack of a context to clarify its usage leaves *tas* perfectly legible but untranslatable, at least not in a basic sense—I suppose you could easily say “whom” or “the”—but in that Anne was unable or unwilling to carry the word over from one page to the other.

This does not preclude *me* from reding *tas*: it is a relative pronoun (or a definite article), it is feminine, it is plural, and it is in the accusative case. What “we may see” is, perhaps, a group of women or some noun in the feminine gender. That is a bit misleading, though, as *tas* would be in the accusative, if we still assume it to be a relative pronoun, because it is the object in a relative clause whose verb remains unnamed. Thus, to permit an edit,

Go [
so we may see [
(whom) [
lady

comes into possibility, assuming *tas* is not the definite article, in which case I might say

(whom/the) [

instead. It does not have to be one or the other, but nothing much in the context favors one *over* the other. Nor can the context persuade me away from the silly possibility that *tas* is in fact genitive (“of the”/“whose”). There is a kind of semantic context in that there are other legible chunks on the page, but the gaps in the text would permit an ignorant reader to supply whatever words may be necessary to justify even the most outlandish reding.

I have to admit I haven't been entirely honest with *tas*; I have until now ignored the matter of the little dot below the *t*. I can't imagine it was a feature of the papyrus (as it would be foolish to assume even the words are a feature of a papyrus scrap), that it was

a stray dribble of ink from the pen of a lackadaisical scribe. These dots, these little underdots are everywhere, hiding sometimes under letters sometimes under nothing at all. Anne doesn't tell us what all these extra marks are, assuming a reader of Greek would either know or not particularly care. What little advice she gives in reading her diptych text may at first seem to provide some insight into what we are to make of all this, but in time it becomes clear she is only willing to help (or steer) the reader of English.

When translating texts from papyri [sic], I have used a single square bracket to give an impression of missing matter, so that] or [indicates destroyed papyrus or the presence of letters not quite legible somewhere in the line. It is not the case that every gap or illegibility is specifically indicated: this would render the page a blizzard of marks and inhibit reading... 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 or smaller than a postage stamp—brackets imply a free space of imaginal adventure.⁴⁷

Luckily for me, I *know* what the dots mean, do you?

[sic] is one of those silly ways we edit other people's texts when reproducing them, to put a flag on the symptoms of what we perceive to be its failures. It is to remind the text (and ourselves) that we know better, that we won't let it get away with ignorance, even if we admire in some way what it has to say. "Translating texts from papyri!" Carson is doing no such thing. She admits in the introduction to using Voigt's edition of the fragments of Sappho and to reprinting it in her translation. Though, on second reading, the statement "translating texts from papyri" is entirely accurate, and I am remiss (even if ultimately correct) in printing that snarky little [sic]. Carson has, in fact, translated texts that are themselves derived from surviving papyri. Her dishonesty, her misprision, her misrepresentation of the facts is a figment of my imagination, entirely dependent upon how I rede (and thus write) her at any given time. So too are Carson and

⁴⁷ *ibid.* xi.

any of her intentions, when we rede them into the gaps of the text. If I were, for a moment, to ignore the gaps,

so
Go
so we may see,
lady
of gold arms,
doom.

As far as fragment 6 is concerned, there is no Carson; there is a brief note on the word “brother” in fragment 5 followed by a longish note on “Doricha” in fragment 7. Is no commentary necessary to read this lyric, or are we given a chance to step into that role?

so
]

“so” and then nothing—no, not nothing, another square bracket, Anne’s ubiquitous mark of lack. So what, then, are we lacking? Anne has already given her reader license to read these square brackets adventurously, but to do so she swept away something from her Sappho to make way for that “imaginal space.” What is it? How do I put this delicately... well, it *may* be poop, dung, feces, excrement, crap, shit. Figuratively I believe I have already established that there is crap in Sappho, much of it hard to read and even harder to translate, but now, literally there is shit mucking up the text. There are very many things *kakk*[can be, and one possible candidate is poop. What does Anne’s text lack? In a word, crap. It is a very clean text: the entire second strophe with its *atri*[, *kta* [, and *tha*[has been homogenized into four brackets lined up vertically that close off nothing and open onto nothing, as if Anne on Sappho’s behalf were inviting the reader to supply whatever she may want because what is there isn’t all that important or what is

there invites speculation of an indecorous kind. This is the condition that Sappho's crap is in; the messiness of all those partwords and peculiar marks of punctuation clogs any simple, clean reading of the fragment. Now, *kakk*[doesn't have to be poop, but you do have to admit that there is a lot of crap there Anne, for one reason or another, isn't willing to permit her translation. You don't even have to read the Greek; you can see that for yourself.

Just now, I said the four brackets in the second strophe close off nothing, but in reconsidering the geography of the open pages rather than just the single page, I have to wonder whether those closing brackets on page 15 are closing off what is opened on page 14. Ignore for a moment the cusp of the two pages and consider

ατρ[]
κτα []
] []
θα[]

Instead of reding the brackets on page 15 as a feature of the English text closed off for a quiet moment of contemplation before the lady receives her marching orders, consider what might go on between Sappho's brackets and Anne's. The order one normally expects for brackets, at least according to modern rules of English punctuation, is for [to be followed by], making "to be followed by" in that previous clause what is contained in the brackets. A] by itself is hard to read *in isolation* because we readers are given no sense of what it closes off. If you forget about the arbitrary distinction of "the page" for a moment, you might realize that Anne has in fact involved herself and, by extension, you in a very clever game: what Anne's Sappho opens up Anne herself closes off. The isolated closed bracket indicates that something precedes the text in which it appears, and if we extend this logic to lines 7, 8, and 11, the open bracket shows that something should

follow. What precedes Anne's text, in this context, should be obvious, but what follows is not. Could the open bracket in line 8 be closed by the bracket in line 9? Maybe, but then how do you account for the open bracket in line 7? This reading of brackets is not without its flaws, as Sappho's bracket in line 1 on page 14 has nothing opposite in line 1 of Anne's text, and the same can be said for Sappho's lines 7, 8, 10, 11, and 14. There seem to be two logics of brackets here: the logic of the textual critic in Sappho where the brackets mark grammatically the edges of the papyrus scrap and Anne's logic where brackets "imply a free space of imaginal adventure." Where Sappho's brackets are the sign of lack, Anne's are the sign of possibility—it begs the question, "is 'lack' in this twinned text just another way of saying 'possibility?'" I don't know.

What Voigt's Sappho has at fr. 6 (Fig. 5) is obviously different from Anne's, but it is an open question whether Voigt's Sappho can assist in reading Anne's. Some notable differences are 1) the target symbol before line 7, which Voigt claims marks either the beginning or end of a poem (*initium vel finis carminis*),⁴⁸ 2) the inclusion of testimonia and a critical apparatus, in which Voigt cites Lobel to deal with issue of 3) the fragment actually being two. He, i.e. Voigt's Lobel, notes fr. 6a (lines 1-4 in both Voigt's and Anne's text) should appear directly above fr. 6b (the rest) and not, one assumes, with some material intervening. The problem of the status of 6 as a whole fragment is called into question not only by the bifurcation of the documents upon which it is based, but also the target that precedes line 7 and the capital that initiates it. Is this the juncture of two distinct verse units? Clearly, neither Voigt nor Anne think so, even though the

⁴⁸ *Sappho et Alcaeus: Fragmenta* ed. Eva-Maria Voigt (Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak & Van Genneep, 1971) 39.

6 metrum: fort. stropha Sapphica

ὦc δα.[
 κακκ[
 -
 ατρι[
 κτα.[
 5 .].[
 θα[
 -
 ⊗ Cτεῖχ[
 ὦc ἰδφ[
 τὰc ἐτ.[
 10 ποτνια.[
 -
 χρυσοτ[
 καππο[
 .ανμ[
 κᾶρα.[
 15].[

TEST POxy. 2289 fr. 1 a [1-4] et b [5-15]. 'certum est fr. a directa supra fr. b stetisse. paulo infra litt. ξ v. 4 adscr. contigua fuisse veri sim. est, sed spatii aliquid interesse non omnino negandum' L. marg. sin. ad v. 3 \uparrow , ad v. 4 ξ (= 500), ad v. 6 coronis. notam stichometricam sec. lin. strophae in libro primo iure adscribi non posse vid. L.; eam propter coronidem paulo infra scr. hic posuisse scribam cens. Gall. '53, 163¹. ad v. 10: S. 157 hic agn. vol. Treu. prim. rec. LP

SIM 7s. S. 30, 7ss. ?

CRIT 3 TP ex alio, fort. litt. Π factum 6 ΘΑ'; 'fort. Α' voluit, sed - certe dextrorsum desc.' L. 8 ΩC; ὦc ἰδω[μεν Treu 9 TAC ἐτα[ίραc non erat; fort. ETI[sive ETH[10 A[, Δ[, Λ[, vix N[δ[? Αῶc (= S. 157) Treu 11 N[vel T[vix magis veri sim., -π[αχυc Treu e B. 5, 40 χρυσόπαχυc 'Αῶc 12 KΑΠ 13]Γ vel]T 14 sive PA[.]A[

7 metrum: stropha Sapphica

Δωρ[]χας.[.....].[
]κην κέλετ', οὐ γὰρ [
 3]αιc
]κάνην ἀγερωχία[
]μμεν' ὄαν νέριci[
].αν φ[ι]λ[.....].[
 7]μα. [

Figure 5: Sappho fr. 6 in Voigt's *Sappho et Alcaeus: fragmenta*

former preserves the signs of that possible disjunction while the latter does not. Well... the capital is still present in Anne's text, but it is hard to assign to it any significance when the only non-letter mark that is given distinction and significance in Anne's text is the square bracket: in English capitals are used to begin sentences, and that rubric could easily apply here. Except in Voigt's text capitals are only used to mark the (likely) beginning of a poem, when not used to indicate proper names, and not the beginning of a new sentence/statement. This is clear, even in Anne's text, in the final stanza of fr. 1 where *elthe* is not capitalized, even though, ostensibly, it begins a completely new thought: the "voice" has returned to Sappho's from Aphrodite's (or perhaps [Anne's] Sappho in the guise of Aphrodite) to pick up again the invocation that was lost somewhere in the fourth stanza.

1.18-24 Sappho's reverie goes transparent at the center when she shifts midverse to direct speech of Aphrodite. There is an eerie casualness to the immortal voice simply present within Sappho's own, which some translators modify with quotation marks or italics.⁴⁹

The "eerie casualness" that Carson identifies may very well be a side effect of how Aphrodite's voice possesses Sappho's and likewise Sappho's poem possesses Aphrodite's. Aphrodite's reprobation (in Anne's text)

For if she flees, soon she will pursue.
 If she refuses gifts, rather will she give them.
 If she does not love, soon she will love
 even unwilling.⁵⁰

flows seamlessly back into what one supposes is again genuinely Sappho's voice, due to the repetition of the invocatory *elthe*, "come,"

Come to me now: loose me from hard
 care and all my heart longs

⁴⁹ *If not, winter* 358n.

⁵⁰ *ibid.* 5.

to accomplish, accomplish. You
be my ally.⁵¹

and by *not* setting off the “For if she flees...” stanza and the two and half lines that precede it in quotation marks or italics, Anne has accomplished a problematic effect, namely, because graphically “Aphrodite’s voice” is not *marked* as distinct from Sappho’s, one wonders whether Sappho, far from being possessed by the goddess, is impersonating her. This logic extends as well to the translator, “is Anne impersonating Sappho?” Though it appears to me, given the treatment of the Greek text, that Anne has rewritten Voigt, if not Sappho too, to some end, whether that reding of Voigt, to which Anne refers without difficulty as merely “Sappho,” is an attempt to take possession of Sappho’s voice is impossible to know. However, the question is enough to destabilize Carson’s gnomic declaration that “[w]ords do have edges. So do you.” I don’t want to open the question of who “you” may be in *Eros the bittersweet*—such a task is, perhaps, better left to you—but this persistent discourse of personification and personified texts is an attempt to rede back into her own text a clear presence of discrete personages even while the graphic nature of the text subsumes any clarity of discretion. *I* would have to rewrite Carson’s maxim in order to be comfortable with it, to see the text (of Sappho, of Anne, of “you”) as having edges inscribed in it only insofar as I rede them there; I don’t know what you would do.

Anne’s text, and perhaps Sappho’s—“perhaps Sappho’s” because Anne’s text is so firmly rooted *in* Sappho’s and would not exist, we assume, without it—calls into question how we read absence and not just when it is punctuated. Looking at these fragments, there is very little on Anne’s pages: it’s hard enough to read the bits of words

⁵¹ *ibid.*

and bits of poo that are there, we can't be expected to read what isn't there. What isn't there is... well... everything. How do you read everything? How do you read nothing standing in for everything? Even that may be easier to answer than "how do you read nothing standing for nothing?" How are we supposed to know when nothing is really just nothing? Unfortunately, "nothing" in this context is still something, for the text itself has invited the reader to see nothing as an exciting something. The blank page, rather those parts of the page that are blank are not a void or vacuum. Something *could* be written there in a way that something cannot be written upon empty space, and Anne's translation has cleared out much of the dross that might fill it up and leave you with less room to play.

Mutilation

There is a problem in Sappho 31—I'm not talking about the "famous controversy" over the occasion of the poem (whether it is a bridal song or something else altogether) or the oft discussed hiatus in the ninth line (though I will take this up somewhat at a later point)—there is a problem in Anne Carson's reprinting and translation of that fragment. Her fragments and her fragmentary translations thereof are doubled, literally: her most recent translation of Sappho 31 in the 2002 volume *If not, winter* (Fig. 6) varies about as much from her 1986 effort in *Eros the bittersweet* (Fig. 7) as the two versions of the Greek text reproduced (from the editions of Voigt and of Lobel-Page respectively) do from each other. Just as we have two Sapphos we have two Carsons to guide them to us. The later paired text is a translation for its own sake insofar as any translation can be so

Φαίνεται μοι κῆνος ἴσος θεοῖσιν
ἔμμεν' ὄνηθ, ὅττις ἐναντίας τοι
ἰσδάνει καὶ πλάσιον ἄδου φωνή-
σας ὑπακούει

καὶ γελείσας ἡμέρην, τό μ' ἦ μαν
καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσιν ἐπύσαισεν
ὡς γὰρ ἔεσ' ἰδὼ βρόχῃ ὡς με φώνη-
σ' οὐδὲν ἔτ' εἴπει,

ἀλλὰ καμὶ μὲν γλῶσσαι ἔαγε, λέπτον
δ' αὖτις χροῖαι ποῦ ὑπαδεύομαιεν,
ὀπτάτεςσι δ' οὐδὲν ὄρημι, ἐπιβρό-
μεισι δ' ἀκουαί,

ἐσάδε μ' ἴδως καχέεται, τρόμος δὲ
παῖσιν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ π.οίας
ἔμμι, τεθινάκην δ' ὀλίγω 'πιδεί.ύης
φαίνομι' ἐμ' αὐτ[α].

ἀλλὰ πᾶν τόλματον, ἐπεὶ καὶ πένητα

He seems to me equal to gods that man
whoever he is who opposite you
sits and listens close
to your sweet speaking

and lovely laughing—oh it
puts the heart in my chest on wings
for when I look at you, even a moment, no speaking
is left in me

no: tongue breaks and thin
fire is racing under skin
and in eyes no sight and drumming
fills ears

and cold sweat holds me and shaking
grips me all, greener than grass
I am and dead—or almost
I seem to me.

But all is to be dared, because even a person of poverty

Figure 6: Sappho fr. 31 in *If not, winter*

Ruse

sits and listens close
to your sweet speaking
and lovely laughing—oh, it
puts the heart in my chest on wings
for when I look at you, a moment, then no speaking
is left in me

no: tongue breaks, and thin
fire is racing under skin
and in eyes no sight and drumming
fills ears

and cold sweat holds me and shaking
grips me all, greener than grass
I am and dead—or almost
I seem to me.

(LP, fr. 31)

The poem floats toward us on a stage set. But we have no program. The actors go in and out of focus anonymously. The action has no location. We don't know why the girl is laughing nor what she feels about this man. He looms beyond the footlights, somewhat more than mortal in line 1 (*isos theoisin*), and dissolves at line 2 into a pronoun (*oftis*) so indefinite that scholars cannot agree on what it means. The poet who is staging the mise-en-scène steps mysteriously from the wings of a relative clause at line 5 (*to*) and takes over the action.

It is not a poem about the three of them as individuals, but about the geometrical figure formed by their perception of one another, and the gaps in that perception. It is an image of the distances between them. Thin lines of force coordinate the three of them. Along one line travels the girl's voice and laughter to a man who listens closely. A second tangent connects the girl to the poet. Between the eye of the poet and the listening man crackles a third current. The figure is a triangle. Why?

An obvious answer is to say that this is a poem about jealousy. Numbers of critics have done so. Yet, just as

• 13 •

Ruse

Let no one enter here who is ignorant of geometry.
(inscription over the door of Plato's Academy)

There is something pure and indubitable about the notion that eros is lack. Moreover, it is a notion that, once adopted, has a powerful effect on one's habits and representations of love. We can see this most clearly in an example; consider Sappho's fragment 31, which is one of the best-known love poems in our tradition.

φαίνεται μοι κῆνος Ἴσος θεοῖσιν
ἔμμεν ἄνηρ, ὅστις ἐναντίος τοι
ἰσθάνει καὶ πλάσσειν ἄδν φωνεῖ-
σας ὑπακούει

καὶ γελᾶσθαις ἡμέροισιν, τὸ μ' ἦ μὲν
καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσσι ἐπάσσειν,
ὡς γὰρ ἔσ' ὁ δῶ δρόχε' ὡς με φθάναι-
σ' οὐδ' ἐν ἔτ' εἶκει.

ἀλλ' ἄκαν μὲν γλαύσασα ἔεαγε λέπτων
δ' αὐτίκα χρῆ πῦρ ὑπαδεδορῆμικεν,
ἀπάτεσσι δ' οὐδ' ἐν ὄρημ', ἐπαρρόμ-
βεισι δ' ἄκουαι.

ἔεκαδε μ' ἴδρος ψῆχος κακχέεται ἄ τρώμος δὲ
πᾶσαν ἀγρεῖ, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας
ἔμμι, τεθνῆκτῆρ δ' ἄλιγῶ πιδεῖσθς
φάινον μ' ται

He seems to me equal to gods that man
who opposite you

• 12 •

Figure 7: Sappho fr. 31 in *Eros the bittersweet*

deceptively simple, whereas the earlier doublet serves to reinforce an argument concerning *eros* (desire, erotic love) as triangulation.

It is not a poem about the three of them as individuals, but about the geometrical figure formed by their perception of one another, and the gaps in that perception. It is an image of the distances between them. Thin lines of force coordinate the three of them. Along one line travels the girl's voice and laughter to a man who listens closely. A second tangent connects the girl to the poet. Between the eye of the poet and the listening man crackles a third current. The figure is a triangle.⁵²

I'm sorry, I almost forgot the poem.

He seems to me equal to gods that man
who opposite you
sits and listens close
to your sweet speaking

and lovely laughing—oh it
puts the heart in my chest on wings
for when I look at you, a moment, then no speaking
is left in me

no: tongue breaks, and thin
fire is racing under skin
and in eyes no sight and drumming
fills ears

and cold sweat holds me and shaking
grips me all, greener than grass
I am and dead—or almost
I seem to me.⁵³

Carson entertains (in order to reject) the arguments that this is a poem of jealousy or that “that man” is a rhetorical device, a mere poetic necessity with which to contrast Sappho's intense, personal reaction.⁵⁴ The theory of triangulation does not stay limited to *eros*, though; its condition becomes a metaphor for reading and writing.

⁵² *Eros the bittersweet*, 13.

⁵³ *ibid.* 12-13.

⁵⁴ *ibid.* 14-15.

Reading and writing require focusing the mental attention upon a text by means of the visual sense. As an individual reads and writes he gradually learns to close or inhibit the input of his senses, to inhibit or control the responses of his body, so as to train energy and thought upon the written words. He resists the environment outside him by distinguishing and controlling the one inside him.⁵⁵

And reading and writing, strangely, are then superimposed on the erotic.

If the presence or absence of literacy affects the way a person regards his own body, senses and self, that effect will significantly influence erotic life. It is in the poetry of those who were first exposed to a written alphabet and the demands of literacy that we encounter deliberate meditation upon the self, especially in the context of erotic desire. The singular intensity with which these poets insist on conceiving eros as lack may reflect, on some degree, that exposure.⁵⁶

Carson has posited convincingly that Sappho (and Archilochus and other poets of the Archaic period) operate between oral and literary cultures, somewhere between, say, Homer and Blake. And throughout *Eros the bittersweet* edges become the primary figure whereby the erotic is linked to reading/writing is linked to reader/writer is linked to letters (you know, *abc* and so forth) is linked to letters (i.e. epistles) is linked to whatever. Each point of departure is distinct, but it is Carson's "reach"⁵⁷ that moves her from one to the other: her text is an acute manifestation of the movement of desire's (*eros*'s) will to know something else, what the text at that point lacks.

It is nothing new to say that all utterance is erotic in some sense, that all language shows the structure of desire at some level... [W]ords that are written or read place in sharp, sudden focus the edges of the units of language and the edges of those units called 'reader' and 'writer.' Back and forth across the edges moves a symbolic intercourse. As the vowels and consonants of an alphabet interact symbolically to make a certain written word, so writer and reader bring together two halves of one meaning, so lover and beloved are matched together like two sides of one

⁵⁵ *ibid.* 44.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ "Reach," as I understand it here is synonymous with erotic desire, especially in regard to the chapter titled "The Reach" (p. 26ff.) whose treatment of a Sappho fragment on apples (fr. 105a) I will consider later in this chapter.

knucklebone. An intimate collusion occurs. The meaning composed is private and true and makes permanent, perfect sense. Ideally speaking, at least, that is the case.

In fact, neither reader nor writer nor lover achieves such consummation. The words we read and the words we write never say exactly what we mean. The people we love are never just as we desire them. The two *symbola* never perfectly match. Eros is in between.⁵⁸

Anne's text, her *Eros*, is replete with metaphors that remain maddeningly discrete (discreet?) and yet seem to indicate each other in subtle but pointed ways: "What is erotic about reading/writing [or reading about writing and reading]⁵⁹ is the play of imagination called forth in the space between you and your object of knowledge."⁶⁰ The irony of this statement lies in how hard it is, because Anne has performed the movement of *eros* so marvelously in her own text, to find this space between the edges that *eros* inhabits.

This place for the *eros* of reading/writing sounds suspiciously similar to the space of "imaginal adventure" Carson lays out in her introduction to *If not, winter*. Are we intended to apply the same logic of the edge here to the edges of the fragments in Anne's translation? The whole logic of the fragment—that the text somehow falls short of being a complete poem simply because of a marked lack of paper, of metric fulfillment, sometimes even of sense—is applied inconsistently there: some edges are frayed, and from those we reach into the void for letters or supposition to ease the lack. But some edges are fixed, or at least treated as such. Because the seventeenth line of Sappho 31 begins a new stanza and with it a new thought, its "incompleteness" points the way for a mind that wishes to reach out for that absent (erotic) something Anne describes in *Eros the bittersweet*.

⁵⁸ *Eros* 108-9.

⁵⁹ The addendum in brackets is my own. That writing and reading are conflated is at the crux of my argument, and the act of writing *in* reading is what I generally refer to as *reding*.

⁶⁰ *Eros* 109.

We cannot certainly say whether Sappho composed this poem for a wedding and intended it as praise of a bride, but its overt subject remains clear and coherent. It is a poem about desire. Both its content and its form consist in an act of reaching:

οἶον τὸ γλυκύμαλον ἐρέυθεται ἄκρω ἐπ' ὕσδω,
ἄκρον ἐπ' ἀκροτάτῳ, λελάθοντο δὲ μαλοδρόπῃες.
οὐ μὰν εκλελαθοντ', ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐδύναντ' ἐπίκεισθαι

As a sweet apple turns red on a high branch,
high on the highest branch and the applepickers forgot—
well, no they didn't forget—were not able to reach

...

(*LP*, fr. 105a)

The poem is incomplete, perfectly... [i]f there is a bride, she stays inaccessible. It is her accessibility that is present. As the object of comparison suspended in line 1, it exerts powerful attraction, both grammatical and erotic, on all that follows; but completion is not achieved—grammatical or erotic. Desiring hands close on empty air in the final infinitive, while the apple of their eye dangles perpetually inviolate two lines above.⁶¹

Another first line, [Anne's] Sappho 31's, *seems* to be a true beginning—*phainetai*, “appears,” and when it does, so does the poem—or on par with one, since, technically, it comes to us in the midst of Longinus. This sharp edge, well defined, stands as a cliff from which we *might* reach but in so doing risk falling to our doom. The way in which Anne valorizes frayed edges—whose primary figure in *If not, winter* is the square bracket—only serves to detract from the possibility that fixed edges may be capable of the kind of imaginative speculation, the kind of *reading* that frayed edges “naturally” permit.

I have not used brackets in translating passages whose existence depends on citation by ancient authors, since these are *intentionally* [emphasis mine] incomplete. I emphasize the distinction between brackets and no brackets because it will affect your reading experience, if you allow it...

⁶¹ *Eros* 26-7.

A duller load of silence surrounds the bits of Sappho cited by ancient scholiasts, grammarians, metricians, etc., who want a dab of poetry to decorate some propositions of their own and so adduce *exempla* without context.⁶²

What kind of context does Anne want or would think is ideal? Are readers not at least somewhat dependent on these other contexts that rewrite the poet long after her death to understand (well or not) things like historical and linguistic context?

When I desire you a part of me is gone: your lack is my lack. I would not be in want of you unless you had partaken of me, the lover reasons. “A hole is being gnawed in [my] vitals” says Sappho (*LP*, fr. 96.16-17). “You have snatched the lungs out of my chest” (West, *IEG* 191) and “pierced me right through the bones” (193) says Archilochos. “You have worn me down” (Alkman 1.77 *PMG*), “grated me away” (Ar., *Eccl.* 956), “devoured my flesh” (Ar., *Ran.* 66), “sucked my blood” (Theokritos 2.55), “mowed off my genitals” (?Archilochos, West, *IEG* 99.21), “stolen my reasoning mind” (Theognis 1271). Eros is expropriation.⁶³

There’s nothing wrong in using the *context you have* and gleaming from the relationship between it and the snippet of the lyric text provided whatever you may. That other context, the proper one, the one that like the apple you can never have because it has been set on the highest of the highest branches—annihilation—that other context the critic holds out before you to seduce you, to gnaw on you, to pierce you, to wear you down, to suck out your blood, to rob you of your lungs, to mow down your genitals, to devour your flesh, to steal away your reasoning mind so that you won’t rede her the way she redes the text for you. Only the critic as reader can provide that other, proper context, because it has to be created; it doesn’t exist. The danger of the sharp, fixed edge is that it cuts: it cuts you off from “proper context,” it cuts itself off from possibility—but it doesn’t cut you off from possibility. Of course, should you wield the fixed edge too clumsily, you might

⁶² *If not, winter* xi.

⁶³ *Eros* 32.

end up cutting yourself, and the resulting exsanguination might deprive any readings you may perform of the vitality needed to survive the attacks they will likely suffer.

In Anne's Sappho everyone *seems*: "he seems to me equal to the gods" and "I seem to me." But what does this *Sappho* say?⁶⁴ *phainom' ai* is what the text has—well, it has *phainomai*, which, because it does not fit the expectations of the metric pattern at the end of the Sapphic stanza, Anne emends first (following Lobel-Page) to *phainom' ai* ("I appear <?>")—which still doesn't fit the meter—in *Eros the bittersweet* and (following Voigt) to *phainom' em' autai* ("I appear to myself")—which does—in *If not, winter*. What Carson makes Sappho say in either case ("I appear <?>" or "I appear to myself"), either way she appears. If we take *phainom'* a bit more literally, as the middle/passive voice of the verb *phainō* ("I show" or "I reveal"), Sappho says, "I show myself, I am revealed." Indeed, Sappho is revealed in Anne's text, but that is ultimately the problem: Sappho is *only* revealed to us in Anne's text, just as the only reason we have the text of this poem in the first place is because Sappho 31 was revealed in Longinus' long tract on the sublime. The independence⁶⁵ Sappho achieves in finally revealing herself to us is made illusory and, perhaps, misleading by the discourses of translation and criticism in which she always will be embedded. To attempt to look back to some historical moment when the lyric utterance was original and authorial is futile, and the effort to historicize her presence or her critical interlocutors' is to deny—sometimes productively, sometimes not—that literary pasts are *for us, in the present*, flat.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Or "what do I *make* Sappho say?"

⁶⁵ read *interdependence*

⁶⁶ In Book 9 of Augustine's *Confessiones*, he performs a long thought experiment, the end result of which is the realization that what he measures when he measures time is his own mind. This means that the past only exists for him in his perception as a *continuing* manifestation of his present mind and the manner in which he marks it. This has significance for my point here in reminding myself and my readers/readers that when we encounter a recorded, historical past, we first encounter it all *simultaneously* and only later

Lyric pasts (and literary pasts [and pasts]) are flat, because just as Sappho is embedded in Anne (and Longinus and others), so is Anne embedded in Sappho. At first glance the former statement may seem obvious and the latter odd, but if anything both should be equally obvious or equally strange. [Ausonius] spares me the trouble of creating yet another absurd hypothesis.

Thesauro invento qui limina mortis inibat,
Liquit ovans laqueum, quo periturus erat;
At qui, quod terrae abdiderat, non repperit aurum,
Quem laqueum invenit nexuit, et periit.⁶⁷

A treasure found, who was entering the gates of death
Rejoiced and left behind a noose, by which he would have died;
But who returned not to the gold he buried in the earth
Strung up the noose that he found and died.

The chronology of the events the poem describes seems to be as follows: first man buries his gold, second man who had decided to kill himself upon finding that gold leaves his noose behind, first man returns to find his gold gone, and so uses the noose to kill himself. The linear chronology, though, does little to conceal the sense of recursive time in the epigram. The *laqueus* in the second and fourth lines is not just a noose—though that seems to be the immanent sense—but a snare as well; *laqueus* can mean either. So, just as the first man (who in the poem is the second) has serendipitously left behind his gold (seemingly) for the man who has come to kill himself, “he who was entering the gates of death,” the second man (who is the first to appear) leaves behind his noose as a trap for the man who buries his gold where the man who was going to kill himself left behind his noose for—the moment I try to fix the identity of the one I must refer to the other whose

superimpose upon a chronological hierarchy in which one event follows another, cause to effect to effect and so forth. I use the word “flat” here to emphasize the superficial character of history.

⁶⁷ Often attributed to Ausonius but in fact one of the Bobbio epigrams (*Ep. Bob.* 28), similar to two epigrams from the Greek Anthology (*AP* 9.44 and 9.45). I am indebted to Michael Kicey for bringing this poem to my attention.

identity is dependent upon the first: I get caught in the trap the *poem* lays. The words that echo across the two men—*invento* and *invenit* (“found [pass. part.]” and “found [v.]”), *laqueum* and *laqueum* (“noose” and “trap”), *periturus* and *perit* (“about to perish” and “perished”)—bind them together. They might as well be the *same* man, and the poem does everything it can to conflate them. Both are simply *qui*, the relative pronoun “who,” and have little to distinguish them beyond what they do. “Who” and “who” come to us simultaneously and frustrate any attempt to impose a history upon them. Their complementary identities won’t permit it. “Who is read” and “who reads” (i.e. “who[ever] translates”) in Anne/Carson’s text is nearly impossible to determine with any genuine categorical distinction. It would be facile to say, “Anne reads, and Sappho is read,” as Anne and Carson *both* read, Anne and Carson are read, I read, you read, I am read, etc. The silent objection cries out, though, “the distinction between Anne and Carson is thoroughly arbitrary if not unnecessarily violent to boot. They are, after all, the same person.” If the distinction between Anne and Carson is arbitrary, then so is any distinction between Anne/Carson and Sappho: they are, after all, the same text.

In book 9 of the *Iliad*, Odysseus, Ajax, and Phoenix go to Achilles’ tent to try and persuade him to return to the fighting, as things are going very badly for the Achaeans.

Μυρμιδόνων δ’ ἐπί τε κλισίας καὶ νῆας ἰκέσθην,
τὸν δ’ εὖρον φρένα τερπόμενον φόρμιγγι λιγείῃ,
καλῇ δαιδαλέῃ, ἐπὶ δ’ ἀργύρεον ζυγὸν ἦεν,
τὴν ἄρετ’ ἐξ ἐνάρων πόλιν Ἥετίωνος ὀλέσσας.
τῇ ὅ γε θυμὸν ἔτερπεν, ἄειδε δ’ ἄρα κλέα ἀνδρῶν·
Πάτροκλος δέ οἱ οἶος ἐναντίος ἦστο σιωπῆ,
δέγμενος Αἰακίδην, ὅποτε λήξειεν ἀείδων.

They came to the ships and lodges of the Myrmidons,
and they found [Achilles] pleasing his mind with a clear lyre,
beautifully made, with a silver bridge set upon it,

which he looted upon destroying the city of Eëtion.
With it he pleased his heart, and sang of the glorious deeds of men;
Patroklos, meanwhile, sat opposite him, alone, in silence,
waiting on the son of Aeacus, when he might cease singing.

Iliad 9.185-191

It must have been a happy coincidence, or just a coincidence, that when I was thinking about this chapter, thinking about Sappho, thinking about Anne, that I was teaching the *Iliad* and that a student had asked me a question about something completely unrelated to my argument (if you must know, the distinction between “pleasing his mind” [*phrena terpomenon*] in line 186 and “pleased his heart” [*thumon eterpen*] in line 189, a question to which I don’t have a good answer beyond the physiological), and I became fixated on the word *enantios* in line 190. It’s the same word Sappho uses to describe the positioning of “that man” in fragment 31 to the girl who laughs and speaks, i.e. “opposite,” though the word can also mean “opposed,” as of warriors in battle. The passage is already thick with irony in the *Iliad*: Achilles fiddles while his comrades burn, he sings of the glorious deeds of men as they die about him in the very arena where glory is gained, and the lyre itself is a symbol of mankind’s violence, having been taken from a city Achilles himself burned to the ground. Patroklos’ silence is hard to read because he is alone (when seated opposite Achilles it seems as if he is not) like a prop ready to spring into action whenever (*hopote* in line 191 could just as easily be taken as “whenever”) Achilles might need him. His silence is ours, the readers’, and we are needed only so long as the text sings to us. Everyone and everything is opposite someone or something: Patroklos opposite Achilles, the embassy opposite Achilles/Patroklos, that...man opposite “you,” Sappho opposite the pair of them, Anne opposite Sappho (and the pair), the reader opposite Sappho/Anne/that...man/”you.” We are all lonely at one point or another, and we are all waiting for

something (to end), but it is impossible to know what Patroklos (and we) are waiting for because of his silence. Achilles' lyre and his lyric drown out everything else, including Patroklos' capacity for speech, and cut out the embassy for the time being, because no one present can talk to them: not Achilles, not Patroklos, not I, not you. In the moment of Achilles' lyric utterance within epic, we become not merely "opposite" but "opposed;" Achilles, by wielding his lyre as he would any other weapon, cuts us off from each other. As here we see the lyre embedded in epic—thus lyric in epic—in the world of violence, we are reminded that lyric does not *have* to be the poetic mode of self-reflexivity, introspection, or personal suffering. Lyric is part of the world of violence and force—part of the poem of force, as Simone Weil would have it—that epic performs. In this passage, the lyre is the reward for violence and force: lyric rewards them.

Sappho does something to trope Homer: she enters the text as a figure in a way Homer does not. Considering the "proper context," it is the embassy of Odysseus, Ajax, and Phoenix that is opposite the tableau of Achilles and Patroklos, but that embassy figures so weakly in the passage cited above, that we readers might as well be them. Where the voice of the epic narrator is almost completely disembodied except for the brief moments the narrator addresses a character directly, generally just before something catastrophic occurs, Sappho's lyric I sees itself in the course of enumerating its symptoms and seems almost surprised when in line 16 she realizes, *phainomai*, "I am revealed." Perhaps surprise is not the right word: she experiences a moment of terror in which she understands the violent mutilation she has inflicted on herself. But reaching out from Sappho 31 to this moment in *Iliad* 9 fails in several important ways, because the situation of the three figures in Sappho's lyric (you-he-I) does not map well onto the 3 figures in

Iliad 9 (Achilles-Patroklos-Homer) due in no small part to the differences in gender. I'm not trying to say that Sappho replays this moment with alternate players in the title roles but rather that she reconfigures it: the disembodied voice of the Homeric narrative becomes the subject as object of Sappho's lyric. The voice of the epic remains concealed beneath the tableau of Achilles and Patroklos, where Sappho in discarding any possible fiction of that man and the girl whom opposite (opposed) he sits reveals herself explicitly—*phainomai*, "I show myself."

Often, a text of this ilk (read: this book [which book?]) is reread twice by the translator: once as the translation itself and once again in the notes. There's an awkward moment in the first line of the third strophe of Sappho 31:

ἀλλὰ καμὲν γλῶσσοι ἔαγε, λέπτον

to which Anne initially only alludes

no: tongue breaks and thin

which is made awkward by the inclusion of an odd colon between *no* and *tongue*. It makes more sense if we erase the colon and say that "no tongue breaks." It could be a moment of sudden restraint in the context of the previous lines

for when I look at you, even a moment, no speaking
is left in me

no tongue breaks and thin
fire is racing under skin
and in eyes no sight and drumming
fills ears

The sudden moment of restraint seems almost necessary, a brief reprieve before the onslaught of sensation that is to follow. "[N]o speaking is left in me" threatens not only the persona crying out in the poem, but the very capability of the poem to say anything

else. Our rewrite of Anne's Sappho reclaims the power *to say* at the very moment she (the persona) might lose to sensation the ability to name her pain: no tongue breaks. But the colon *is* there. Is it simply a stricter comma? Is Carson's Sappho saying, "no, what I said before isn't quite right. I can speak. The fact the poem continues testifies to that effect. It is merely the organ of speech that has been rendered inert." No, *tongue* breaks, not speaking. If at some point we frustrate our readings or our readings frustrate us, we have Carson's notes (assuming we know they're there) to tell us what's wrong.

31.9 "tongue breaks": the transmitted text contains a hiatus (conjunction of two open vowels) between "tongue" (*glossa*) and "breaks" (*eage*) that contravenes the rules of Greek metrics and convinces most editors to mark the verse as corrupt. On the other hand, the hiatus creates a ragged sound that may be meant to suggest breakdown.

For various ways of reading Sappho's broken tongue, see...⁶⁸

This explanation only continues to frustrate my readings: I know how to read "tongue breaks," it's "no:" that's giving me problems. But Carson isn't telling us how to read her English but rather how to read her Greek. After all, the hiatus she describes is a feature of the Greek text and the secondary readings she points us to lead further in that direction. There are, then, three texts to read or, like the mystery of the Trinity, three in one: the mother, the daughter, and the ghost. The daughter is seated at the right hand (page) of the mother, while the ghost is conveniently off somewhere in the back (of the book). We continue to play with triangles.

Anne's re-presentation of Sappho 31 in *Eros the bittersweet* (Fig. 6), despite Anne's "later" revisitation to the text, is a more faithful translation: looking beyond mere semantics and concerns of fluency, it comes to us (again) embedded in criticism. It is

⁶⁸ *ibid.* 363-4n.

telling, then, that Anne exhibits greater frustration in the very text that would seem to free Sappho of contextual constraints. In her note to fragment 38:

38 Translation of this fragment raises the problem of pronouns in Sappho. Her Greek text [sic] actually says “us” not “me.” Slippage between the singular and plural in pronouns of the first person is not uncommon in ancient poetry; the traditional explanation is that much of this poetry was choral in origin, that is, performed by a chorus of voices who collectively impersonate the voice that speaks in the poem. A glance at Sappho’s fragments 5, 21, 24a, 94, 96, 147, 150, all of which employ a first-person-plural pronoun where the modern ear expects singular, will show the extent of the phenomenon. I translate “us” as “us” in all those other examples. But the fragile heat of fr. 38 seems to me to evaporate entirely without a bit of intervention.⁶⁹

What Anne cannot quite say, so I will endeavor to say it for her, is that we all, to one extent or another, impersonate the voice that speaks in the poem, be it Sappho’s or anyone else’s. The effort to render *amme* “us” as “me” attempts to make these two simple words irrelevant to *me*, i.e. who reads the poem. It preserves the illusion of Sappho in Sappho’s text (not *me*) and the convenient illusions of singularity and authorial autonomy that facilitate interpretation. Sappho burns (not *me*).

On the other hand, I may be reading this sentence all wrong. Erotic fire has a history, not only in Sappho... but also in later lyric poets... The verb I have rendered as “burn” can also be translated “bake, roast, broil, boil” and so suggest a concrete figure for the “cooking” of passion that is to be found in Hellenistic literature... If burning means cooking and “you” is Eros, this becomes a very difficult poem—a cry to the god who plays with fire from the community of souls subjected to its heat.⁷⁰

Eros is an interesting leap from plain old “you.” Rendering *amme* as “me” is almost certainly an attempt to escape the fire, with which *eros* (the bittersweet) played and which may endeavor yet to burn “us.” Who are “we?” Anne and Sappho? *If not, winter* presents the illusion of the flat past (which only really exists for us) where Anne and

⁶⁹ *If not, winter* 365.

⁷⁰ *ibid.* 366.

Sappho are contemporaries, companions, lov—and reflected in *Eros* (the bittersweet) is the reality that Sappho was subject to Anne, to her readings, and still is.

It is not possible *simply* to read Sappho against Anne or Anne against Sappho, as they are codependent, and what you have to say of one reflects on the other back on the one which you understood in the first place from the other—you get the idea. Is the only point of stability, then, against the two of them, like the embassy/Homer/us before the tableau of Achilles and Patroklos?

We have seen how lovers, like Sappho in fragment 31, recognize Eros as sweetness made out of absence and pain. The recognition calls into play various tactics of triangulation, various ways of keeping the space of desire open and electric. To think about one's own tactics is always a tricky business. The exegesis measures out three angles: the lover, the beloved, the lover redefined as incomplete without the beloved. But this trigonometry is a trick. The lover's next move is to collapse the triangle into a two-sided figure and treat the two sides as one circle. 'Seeing my hole, I know my whole,' he says to himself. His own reasoning process suspends him between the two terms of this pun.⁷¹

Two of the three angles of erotic triangulation have been revealed to be one in the same, whereas when Anne first considered triangles in *Eros the bittersweet*, the three angles were the three persons of the poem. Sappho 31, by this logic, is revealed to be not I, he, and she but I and they, or us against them. Anne and Sappho too, I think, are uncomfortable with complicated relationships, so where the latter discards the other and becomes lyrically obsessed with the obliteration of her self, the former discards her own identity in favor of the other. Remember, "I like to think that, the more I stand out of the way, the more Sappho shows through." These two absences never last, because Anne and Sappho and he and she and I and us and them, we're all still there, we're all always there, until the text finally isn't. Are we doomed to be there, trapped by the treasures we

⁷¹ *Eros* 33.

find? As “he” is revealed against “her,” Sappho is revealed against them, Anne is revealed Sappho and them, so I am revealed against Anne and Sappho (and them).

“Yet it must be admitted that Sappho leaves it unclear, at the end of fragment 31. just how many people she imagines herself to be.”⁷² Carson understands what has happened to Sappho in fr. 31—if not how something very similar happens to her—how Sappho has split herself into so many pieces, and in yet another translation that caps “Sappho Shock” she shows, again implicitly, that Sappho is not the only one to carve up the identity of the lyric subject.

Sappho Fragment 31

(from the unfinished sequence *TV Men*)

TV makes things disappear. Oddly the word comes from Latin *videre*
“to see.” Longinus *de Sublimitate*
5.3

Sappho is smearing on her makeup at 5 AM in the woods by the TV studio.
He She Me You Thou disappears⁷³

If the dubious quote from Longinus—I have my doubts Longinus ever watched too much TV—is to be read into Anne’s translation, TV is the sign of seeing and being seen and less the mark of reading, though here, ironically, we have to read what we see. As the personal pronouns appear only to disappear, Anne gives Sappho a unique identity. Anne strips fragment 31 of those other figures that get in the way of Sappho.

Now resembling a Beijing concubine Sappho makes her way onto the set.
Laugh Breathe Look Speak Is disappears

⁷² Carson, Anne. “Sappho Shock” in Prins, Yopie and Shreiber, Maera eds. *Dwelling in Possibility: Women Poets and Critics on Poetry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997) 227.

⁷³ *ibid.* 228.

Anne gives Sappho a unique identity, but that identity strangely doesn't seem to suit her. As the verbs disappear, Sappho ceases to move; she ceases doing much of anything. She is a prop, a set piece.

The lighting men are setting up huge white paper moons here and there on the grass.

Tongue Flesh Fire Eyes Sound disappears

Behind these, a lamp humming with a thousand broken wasps.

Cold Shaking Green Little Death disappears

To make the perfect prop, the perfect set piece, the perfect illusion of a real person Anne strips Sappho of the conspicuous marks of a real human being: organs and the ills that plague them.

Places everyone, calls the director.

Nearness When Down In I disappears

Toes to the line please, says the assistant camera man.

But All And Must To disappears

When Anne—excuse me, in the moment the director tells Sappho to take her place, she loses it. Where is she? Her poem, her fragment of a poem, is disappearing before our very eyes, and there is little we can do about it. This translation has no translated text. A silent objection might creep in and argue, “there’s Greek on page 225.” Yes, but that Greek has its own English. Where is the Greek for this translation? The answer to that question is simple and terrifying: there is none. There is nothing to read against Anne’s Sappho.

Action!

Disappear disappears

As Anne mutilates Sappho, even as she mutilates her own Sappho, nothing is sacrosanct: even the figure by which she brings Sappho into view is eviscerated by the force of her

reading and translation. Sappho boldly tries to reassert herself, but Anne will have none of it.

Sappho stares into the camera and begins, *Since I am a poor man-*
Cut

I want to say something but—excuse me

137

θέλω τί τ' εἶπην, ἀλλά με κωλύει
αἶδως . . .

.....

[αἰ δ' ἦχες ἔσλων ἴμερον ἢ κάλων
καὶ μή τί τ' εἶπην γλωσσ' ἐκύκα κάκον,
αἶδως κέν σε οὐκ ἦχεν ὄππατ',
ἀλλ' ἔλεγες περὶ τῷ δικαίῳ]

137

I want to say something but shame
prevents me

yet if you had a desire for good or beautiful things
and your tongue were not concocting some evil to say,
shame would not hold down your eyes
but rather you would speak about what is just⁷⁴

At times I may have implied that Anne compels Sappho to say certain things and that this is somehow a bad thing. It would be as if Anne made Sappho's tongue break all over again (and again). But *Anne's* tongue breaks as well, because, in translation, it is broken to Sappho's will—to say for her in English what she cannot say for herself. Whether Sappho's tongue breaks is a matter of critical controversy dependent largely on how you read the text, whether Anne's breaks is not. However, there is no shame in this.

The word translated “shame” in the first and fifth lines of the fragment is much more interesting in Greek: *aidōs* (also rendered “reverence, respect,

⁷⁴ *If not, winter 278-9.*

shamefastness, awe, sense of honor”) is a sort of voltage of decorum that radiates from the boundaries of people and makes them instantly sensitive to one another’s status and mood. Proverbially it is a phenomenon of vision and the opposite of *hybris*:

Aidōs lives upon the eyelids of sensitive people, *hybris* upon those of the insensitive. An intelligent person knows this.

—Stobaios 4.230

Aidōs can also connote the mutual shyness felt by lover and beloved in an erotic encounter, which soon becomes an enclosure shutting out the world:

Aphrodite...
cast upon their sweet bed the shamefastness of eros,
fitting together and mingling in marriage
the god and the girl.

—Pindar *Pythians* 9.9-13⁷⁵

We may err in reading Sappho’s opinion of her own dissolution back into our interpretation of Anne through Sappho and Sappho through Anne. The sickness or the sense of sickness implicit in “greener than grass / I am and dead—or almost / I seem to me” tries to hold the sum total of Sappho’s physiological symptoms under one rule, the rule of death, when in fact each piece of herself she breaks off suffers a unique symptom. Her tongue breaks (allegedly), fire races in the underskin, cold sweat clings to the over, her eyes blank out, and her ears drum—shaking grips her in that final moment before she falls apart as a result of her reflexive analysis. We don’t have to accept Sappho’s logic, though, and we don’t have to rehearse it in every rereading of this fragment, because breaking up the lyric subject physiologically, analyzing it, cutting it up, even mutilating it could just as easily show its vitality as reveal its weakness.

On its surface Björk’s “Bachelorette” is just a series of paired existential statements—two lines of “I’m...” followed by two lines of “you’re...”—in which the

⁷⁵ *ibid.* 376-7n.

relation established between “you” and “me” is one where in one way or another “you” feed on “me,” but in the process the lyric subject is not necessarily consumed or destroyed.

I'm a fountain of blood
in the shape of a girl
you're a bird on the brim
hypnotized by the whirl

Drink me – make me feel real
wet your beak in the stream
the game we're playing is life
love's a two way dream

There is something fundamentally disturbing for Sappho in the movements of her body, in the movements *in* her body, i.e. the fire that races and the shaking that grips her and in so doing nearly chokes her to death. But when Björk reduces herself to the circulatory movements of her blood, she acquires a power over “you” to command “your” actions, and as a result “you” enter an altered state of consciousness hypnotized by the whirl of blood she projects. This first verse might come off as an absurd attempt to control how her reader envisions her, if the second verse did not show her implicit understanding of how the reader is complicit in the construction of her lyric subjectivity. Only when “you” drink her can the “I” feel real, but once you think you can rest knowing the stable relationship between “I” and “you,” Björk calls into question the construction of “your” identity as well: “love's a two way dream”—we are each other's fantasies.

Leave me now – return tonight
tide will show you the way
if you forget my name
you will go astray
like a killer whale trapped in a bay

The figure of fluid motion returns in the chorus slightly altered, the lyric subject's command to leave now and return tonight mimics the motion of the tides. The terms have changed but the invitation to participate in the vital motions of the lyric's subjectivity remains, with one small difference: a warning. Should "you" forget "me" you will wander—that seems to be what naturally follows from "go astray" but the image of error here is that of a giant whale trapped, unable to move. Motion in Björk's text only becomes possible once "you" are caught up in the flows that figure not merely in herself but in nature as well. "You" may be a "killer whale," but to become excessively involved in "your" own violent authority, that is to forget how "I" figure in the text, is to be rendered impotent by it. This is what is difficult to see in the relationship of translator and translated: while it may be easy to accept how the translator takes control of her translated text, how she shapes it, how she *redes* it, it is quite difficult to accept that, just as when Sappho's tongue breaks so is Anne's broken to hers, the translator is caught in the grips of and is mesmerized by the text she translates.

I'm a whisper in water
a secret for you to hear
you're the one who grows distant
when I beckon you near

As if the song itself weren't hard enough to read, the video for "Bachelorette," directed by Michel Gondry, only complicates the relationship between lyric subject, reader, and nature even further. Björk as herself finds a book buried in the woods that, as soon as she opens it, begins to automatically write a story, but the story (called "My Story") is the tale of what has just happened to her, i.e. finding a book buried in the woods, and of what follows thereafter. Björk takes "My Story" to a publisher, the book is copied and put on sale, and "My Story" is such a roaring success that it is adapted into a stage play. Björk,

now playing herself as herself, performs the story of the book, which is incidentally the story of her life in the music video. All of the previous elements are in the play: finding the book, finding a publisher, adapting the book into a stage play, performing the story of the book, etc. But the book continues writing this story, the story of her life, which is the story of finding a book in which is written the story that is her life—Björk is now caught in a recursive cycle which will only increasingly alienate her from not only her but from her-self as well. At the moment of greatest aesthetic distance from her audience in the video—Björk is now performing a play in a play in a play—she sings the above verse. Her attempt to capture her subjectivity in a literary artifact for the benefit of some “you,” some reader, is futile. Just when it seems Björk’s performance of herself might spiral out of control, the book begins to dismantle itself, to unwrite itself, and a mass of leafy branches buries everything erected by this trap. Paradoxically, Björk is saved. The mutilation of the text and, as Björk shows, the figure of the poet in the text does not have to be a sign weakness as Sappho would have it—Sappho isn’t a victim; what we do to her she does to herself—but could just as easily be the mark of vitality. Even if the text is destroyed, we aren’t to be too concerned, for Björk and by extension we are only saved from the possible horror of rehearsing a text ad nauseam once it has been destroyed.

Chapter 3

Chocolate Bittersweet: Tawara Machi translating Yosano Akiko

kono yo ni kagiri wa aru no?
moshimo hate ga mieta nara
dō yatte waraō ka tanoshimō ka
mō yaritsukushi da ne

jā nando datte wasureyō
soshite mata atarashiku deaereba subarashī
sayōnara
hajimemashite⁷⁶

But still my dear if the end draws near what should I do?
If you hold me tight I'd feel all right but still be blue
But if a song were to play just for us for a moment
To take the heart ache away

Well then I'd say, I'll make a song for you
Nothing too old, and nothing too new
Sing to the light of day
You'll smile for me, we'll be happy that way

—Shiina Ringo “Kono yo no kagiri”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Is there a limit to this world?
If I can see the end,
How could I laugh or play,
When it's all been done?

Well, I'll forget however much it takes,
As it's so wonderful to meet each other for the first time.
Farewell.
Nice to meet you.

⁷⁷ Shiina, Ringo. “Kono yo no kagiri” *Heisei fūzoku*. EMI Japan, 2007. The song is as it appears in the epigraph with only the first two verses in Japanese and the rest in English.

The illusion of intimacy in the previous chapter—now is the time to explain what I mean: I sought to mimic the seeming intimacy of Sappho and Anne Carson in the latter’s translation of the fragments of the former, *If not, winter*. Carson’s notes are few, far between, highly selective, and exceptionally idiosyncratic. What one gets is not just a translation but a deeply personal experience of Sappho’s poetry. Carson accepts Voigt’s readings of the fragments only so long as she agrees with them, and where she doesn’t she substitutes whatever reading she prefers with minimal justification, sometimes going so far as to conjure some entirely novel meaning. If anything, this is reding at its best/worst, because it goes a long way toward concealing that which is the closest we might come to an historical poet called Sappho. What Anne has *done* to Sappho, often against what she *says* thereof, is to render her (and herself) again a *text*, to recall how that which we give a name and treat provisionally as a human being is, in fact, anything but. Sappho, insofar as that name comprises a body of literary fragments and attributions, is an object: an object of study for the literary historian and, for Anne, an erotic object of her translations even as “she” is a subject within them. The position of the translator permits something the position of the critic does not generally, to willfully abandon the reception and scholarly tradition behind a poetic text when it does not suit one’s purposes and to take that reception up again at a moment’s notice when it does. Thus Anne can *reveal* Sappho for the inhuman object and subject she is while *concealing* the critical history that preserves the illusions of a genuine, historical, and personal Sappho. I juxtaposed *If not, winter* with Carson’s earlier collection of essays *Eros the bittersweet* precisely because between the two, two entirely different positions relative to the text are assumed, and hopefully that of the reader is made more obvious as a result. Yet, Carson

does not take the position of the reader to its logical extreme: she telegraphs not only any use of secondary literature she makes but often explicitly notes where her readings deviate entirely from critical editions, commentaries, etc. The identification of Sappho is nearly seamless, but, because the presence of these other voices, equally valid, serve to position Carson's voice as another among them, *only nearly* so. The "historical" Sappho may be concealed in Anne's text, but Carson is not, never fully, despite her intentions. So I continue with Tawara Machi and her translation of the early 20th century poet Yosano Akiko to see what becomes of the translated when "her" critical tradition is all but completely eviscerated.

Bitter

sono ko hatachi kushi ni nagaruru kurogami no (5)
ogori no haru no ustukushiki ka na

that girl, twenty, her black hair flowing through a comb,
her pride in spring, how beautiful!

hatachi to wa ronguheā o nabikasete
osore o shiranu haru no vīnasu

twenty years-old, streaming out her long hair,
a spring Venus who knows not fear⁷⁸

By the time Machi (the latter of the above) had translated Akiko (the former),⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Tawara, Machi. *Chokorētogoyaku Midaregami* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1998) 9.

⁷⁹ A brief note on some habits that I will try to stick with throughout this dissertation. First, I follow Japanese custom with rendering names, which will seem at times, maddeningly inconsistent. Normally, one lists family name first, given name last (e.g. in Tanaka Kakuei, "Tanaka" is the family name and "Kakuei" the given), and uses surname for simple reference, as in English. However, poets, musicians, some entertainers, and especially women are often referred to publicly by their given names, so here I will consistently call Yosano Akiko "Akiko," Tawara Machi "Machi," Shiina Ringo "Ringo," and so forth. Second, it may at times become confusing, as I am largely translating a translation, who writes what, but I

specifically her first collections of poems *Midaregami (MG)*,⁸⁰ in 1998, her fame, that is Machi's, had been well established. Fame is the only appropriate word, for Machi had managed to accomplish what for a lyric poet is generally thought to be impossible: she achieved widespread popularity by selling over three million copies of her first volume of poems, *Sarada kinenbi (Salad Anniversary)*. Tanka,⁸¹ the 5-7-5-7-7 syllabic verse form as old as Japanese poetry itself, had never enjoyed such public interest and has not enjoyed it ever since. *Sarada kinenbi* was a veritable fad, having given rise to a renewed interest in tanka composition and given rise to various ancillary media, including an album of popular hits to listen to while reading the poems.

kono kyoku to kimete kaigan-zoi no michi
tobasu kimi nari Hoteru Kariforunia

this is the song you choose to fly down
a seaside road: "Hotel California"⁸²

This poem, the first in *Sarada kinenbi*, inaugurates not only Machi's first collection but an entirely new approach to tanka composition. Even in the 80's, that is the 1980's, *tanka* were written—and some still are to this day—in *bungo*, a kind of archaic, literary language whose situation in modern Japanese is not unlike that of *katharevousa* in Modern Greek. *Bungo*'s vocabulary is a mix of the ancient and the modern, as *waka* (i.e. traditional Japanese poetry) was never necessarily restricted to "classical" topics (though conventionally poets did restrict themselves), but its grammar is thoroughly archaic in

will always list Akiko's poem first with my translation thereof followed by Machi's translation along with my rendering of her rendering.

⁸⁰ As far as this chapter is concerned, I will refer to Akiko's first collection by its Japanese title, as the history of its translation and reception into English will become the primary concern of my fourth chapter.

⁸¹ The *tanka*, the primary verse form with which I will be dealing in this and the fourth chapter, is typically written in a single "line" but divided into five *ku* or phrases. My rendering here into 2 lines is to represent the "break" that occurs in these poems and to represent the two traditional divisions, the *kami no ku* (upper verse) and *shimo no ku* (lower verse). It should go without saying translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

⁸² Tawara, Machi. *Sarada kinenbi* (Tōkyō: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1987) 8.

that it is a simplification and homogenization of the ancient grammar, with its elaborate system of verbal affixes, continuously superimposed on what is basically contemporary syntax. Tawara Machi's poetry is not in *bungo*, per se, nor is it entirely contemporary Japanese. Her diction is always something of a hodgepodge, always somewhere between the classical and the modern, as in the poem above, where it is mostly in modern Japanese but with one exception, the classical copular verb *nari* in the latter half. Her style is original in several respects: her consistent use of colloquial diction, juxtaposition with that diction of various archaisms from classical Japanese, and a consistent sense that her poems take place in a specific time, and not in the seemingly eternal present of the relatively limited but not necessarily limiting vocabulary of waka. Her poems are between the "literary" (*bungotai*) style of poetic composition that lingers to this day and a turn to the vernacular, in waka at least, that she largely presaged. Machi is not adverse to using the numerous loan words (i.e. words of foreign origin) that exist in modern Japanese, images from the hyper-commercial Japan that never quite seemed to exist in tanka, even the dialect of her native Osaka. If anything, Machi brought a new specificity back to waka, which must have had some appeal, as her verse catapulted her to prominence not only in literary circles but among the Japanese populace as a whole. She is a well known commentator on literary matters both in her now defunct show on NHK and her weekly newspaper column. In addition to her several volumes of poetry she has written books on reading and composing tanka and has modernized several works of classical Japanese literature. It is in this latter capacity I wish to examine her poetics, particularly in relation to the early 20th century poet and feminist, Yosano Akiko.

Machi's translation of Akiko's *MG*, her "chocolate modernization"

(*chokorētogoyaku*), has its origin in Machi's third volume of tanka, *Chocolate Revolution* (*Chokorēto kakumei*), and that volume has its origin in the following poem.

otoko de wa nakute otona no henji suru
kimi ni chokorēto kakumei okosu

against you who reply to me as an adult but not
a man I raise the chocolate revolution⁸³

This poem is unique among Machi's as the only poem she has read/criticized again and again and has used as the foundation for much of her later poetic practice.

In love, there's no need for things like adult responses. Before you I revolt in bittersweet opposition. "Chocolate revolution" are the words that capture that feeling.

In adult language, the wisdom to avoid friction, the means to protect oneself, and the obfuscation to avoid hurting your partner are all contained. This kind of language, while necessary to go on living, is the sort of thing you don't want to use when in love—or when writing tanka either. If language first puts up an adult face, I don't think the chocolate revolution will begin.⁸⁴

In her Sunday column in the *Asahi Daily*, Machi expanded upon what she means by "adult language," a column that had up to that point been devoted to reading the work of other tanka poets, including, interestingly enough for these purposes, Yosano Akiko. She reads the above poem and says,

"Adult response" [*otona no henji*] in the present poem is a control valve working on behalf of the "adult." My irritation with you [responding in this way] even though I present you with my "childlike" side is perhaps there in the upper half of the poem.

Now that I think of it, that which governs love in the human heart is the part that is the "child." So, here what is expected of a "man's response" is the response of the "child" . . . the "adult" is the wisdom to avoid friction, is the means to protect oneself, is the obfuscation to avoid hurting your partner.⁸⁵

Machi is obviously quoting herself, but it is difficult to determine which came first as

⁸³ Tawara, Machi. *Chokorēto kakumei* (Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1997) 131.

⁸⁴ *ibid.* 165-6.

⁸⁵ Tawara, Machi. *Anata to yomu koi no uta hyakushu* (Tōkyō: Asahi Shimbun-sha, 1997) 224.

both this column and *Chocolate Revolution* appeared in 1997 at roughly the same time. The “bittersweet” opposition Machi speaks of is strikingly similar to what Anne Carson elaborates on in *Eros the bittersweet*.

The simultaneity of bitter and sweet that startles us in Sappho’s adjective *glukupikron* [bittersweet] is differently rendered in [Homer]. Epic convention represents inner states of feeling in dynamic and linear enactment, so that a divided mind may be read from a sequence of antithetical actions. Homer and Sappho concur, however, in presenting the divinity of desire as an ambivalent being, at once friend and enemy, who informs the erotic experience with emotional paradox.⁸⁶

Both poets, and incidentally the poets they read as well, take it for granted that there is a tension inherent in love and songs thereof, a tension that comes as a result of the simultaneous existence of diametric opposites. To say love is bittersweet—this may not be true of *sweetbitter*, Carson’s other translation of *glukupikron*—is nowadays a cliché, accepted as so universally true as to become downright banal. But where Machi deviates from Carson, or perhaps takes this logic of love in poetry to an extreme, is in saying that what is true for love is true for poetry as well, with which Sappho and Anne may agree, that what you shouldn’t say in a relationship you shouldn’t say in a poem either.

One might infer that when Machi says the poet/lover ought to be more the “child” than the “adult,” she means that in tanka anything is permissible, but what she seems to say in her explication is that the poet/lover should be unwise (“the wisdom to avoid friction”), vulnerable (“the means to protect oneself”), and direct (“the obfuscation to avoid hurting your partner”). But reading tanka, as Machi is aware, is complicated by a pun in the very word “to read” in Japanese, *yomu*, which, especially in the context of poetry, can mean either “to read” 読む or “to compose” 詠む.

⁸⁶ *Eros the bittersweet* 5.

In tanka there are two *yomu*. For a thousand years we've "read" [読む] tanka, and, in consideration of my own work, we've "composed" [詠む] tanka as well.

"5-7-5-7-7, that's all there is to it!" As far as this is concerned, I've had a go at both *yomu* in my time.⁸⁷

In *Reading Tanka (Tanka o yomu)*, Machi's first work of poetic criticism after her breakout success with *Salad Anniversary*, she seems to be aware of the common origin of these two *yomu* and yet her persistent separation of them throughout the text implies she either is unwilling to accept it or sees no point in doing so. For her, reading and writing are fundamentally distinct activities, an assumption I believe most people make—I too am somewhat uncomfortable with proposing precisely the opposite—even though the common origin of the two *yomu* would contradict her. Originally, *yomu* had nothing to do at all with reading or writing, as the word likely predates literacy, but meant "to count," rhythmically, as a musician counts time or as we might recite the alphabet. The connection between these "two *yomu*" and the ancient verb would be more readily apparent if Machi had remembered that there is, in fact, a third *yomu* 訓む, "to read" in the sense of pronunciation. Enunciation is implied in all three—the same—verbs, and as such the *reder* is involved again in the act of *poesis*. *Yomu* is *to rede*. In the following poem from the *Man'yōshū* (c. 7th century C.E.), it's clear that "counting" is the very thing that once held the "disparate" senses of *yomu* together.

haruhana no utsurou made ni aimineba
tsukihi yomitsutsu imo matsu ramu zo

I would wait for my love till the spring blooms fall
counting the months and days till I see her⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Tawara, Machi *Tanka o yomu* (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1994) ii.

⁸⁸ MYS 3982.

“Counting the months and days” could be taken less prosaically as “reding the sun and the moon” in order to bring the idea of keeping time, that is “counting” in the musical sense, in line with our modern notions of reading and my concept of reding. This sense, the one above, is absent in contemporary Japanese, having been supplanted by the verb *kazoeru*, perhaps because now we think of counting as merely mechanic, the purview of watches and metronomes. You’d be hard pressed to find anyone claiming clocks are poetic.

In this poem the simple act of counting the months and days until the lyric subject sees his/her lover again is made synonymous with the idea of keeping time, thereby bringing it into the sphere of musical composition or performance. But because the subject awaits the beloved, what he composes is silence, silence composed of the suns and moons that mark the days and months to pass. He measures silence chronologically but in visual terms: his waiting is composed not of conversation or even lyric (except by extraction) but the recurring presence of the sun and the moon. It is of that silence substantiated in the visual that this lyric is composed—that is the recitation of his counting time composes the lyric both in abstract and in concrete terms. I say “his,” because the lyric subject awaits *imo*, literally “younger sister,” a term of affection of a man for a younger woman. I make so many assumptions, necessary to my mind, just to rede this poem: the assumption of a heterosexual relationship between the *imo* and lyric subject, the assumption that this relationship is erotic not familial, the assumption that the moon and sun (*tsukihi*) stand in for months and days, the assumption “he” will *wait* till the spring blooms fall rather than *be* with “her” until then (*utsurou made ni* with *matsu*

rather than with *aimineba*), and the assumption that “I” can be equated with the lyric subject. It is this latter assumption that Machi presumes we make for all waka/tanka.

Tanka is said to be the literature of the individual. Even when nothing is written there, the subject [*shugo*] is “I.” Reading tanka is the experience of reading the story of a “life” where “I” am the hero [*shujinkō*]. This is especially the case when the work is set against a backdrop of the drama of fate. Of course, tanka is not above the ordinary. The life which brings to bear the work transcends the individual author and has to be the means by which [that life] closes the distance to us. As a result of that process, we see something truly great and profound compressed into a form as small as the tanka.⁸⁹

Because this quote is relative to the Japanese language and to a verse form specific thereto, the importance of a statement like “even when nothing is written there” is not as obvious as it may initially seem. Whereas English grammar generally dictates that some subject be present in any given statement, even if only something as nominal as “it,” this is not true at all for Japanese. Explicit subjects are not rare, mind you, but they are by no means necessary, so oftentimes a statement in Japanese can be made simply with a verb, a verb whose subject both in the literal and abstract sense is entirely dependent upon context. Another ancient example from Ono no Komachi:

omoitsutsu nureba ya hito no mietsuramu
yume to shiriseba samezaramashi o

is it because I go to sleep thinking of him that he appears?
if I knew it to be a dream, I would not awaken!⁹⁰

In the above poem, there is no “I” to speak of, though I put one in my translation so that the English would read fluently and not like the awkward fumbling of a relative novice. The only subject present is *hito*, “person” (rendered here as “he”), the subject of the verb *mietsuramu*, “would appear.” The longing, knowing, and waking are all *assumed* by the

⁸⁹ *Tanka o yomu* 2.

⁹⁰ KKS 552

conventions of reading *waka* to be the poet's, or, at the very least, those of some generic "I." Because this poem has no other context than the poems with which it appears in the *KKS*, it is generally assumed to be the genuine voice of the poet, Ono no Komachi, and, admittedly, there isn't much reason to doubt this. The assumption of a first person for a subjectless statement is a necessary convention of conversational Japanese, otherwise much of the language as it is used would be genuinely perplexing. The word Machi uses for subject, *shugo*, and the role the "I" plays in its own story, *shujinkō*, are bound by a common morpheme, *shu* 主, "master". The *shugo* of a sentence is its master, *shujin*, and "I" am the one who governs the life in the poem, as Machi would have it, or rather the life of the poem. I want to challenge this fundamental assumption of reading *waka* and show that Machi's own translation practice goes a long way to make my argument for me. The distance that she sees between the reader and the poem is not so great, and her translations of Akiko's poems in the "White Lily" section of the *MG*, poems that challenge the relationship between person and referent, expand Akiko's poetic argument beyond the confines of poet and poem to include numerous other relational permutations: poet and reader, poem and reader, poet and translator, etc. Tawara Machi's translation of the *MG*—no, in Tawara Machi's *MG* one is hard pressed to find the presence of Yosano Akiko. Looking at the cover (Fig. 8), Akiko's name is nowhere present: 俵万智 チョコレート語訳 *Tawara Machi's Midaregami* みだれ髪, that's all there is. Machi is the *shugo* of this text, she is its master, and thru her poetic voice something, which for the moment I will assume to be Yosano Akiko, is made manifest.



Figure 8: Cover of volume one of Tawara Machi's *Chokorēto goyaku Midaregami*

Akiko's thirty-one syllables I translate into thirty-one of my own—the *Midaregami* collection allows for various kinds of commentary, such as this attempt here, because of the depth of expression contained within it.

My single reason for considering translating them in the first place are my painful memories of teaching Japanese at a high school. Even though tanka as they appear in a textbook are comparatively easy to understand, it's a challenge for today's students to do so.

[The textbook] is a factory in which tanka are read by reducing them to components, piling on explanations of the grammar and definitions of the vocabulary. When they transpose the poems into contemporary language, the aroma [*nioi*] that Akiko's tanka possess is completely reduced to naught... Therefore, my purpose here is to aim for "a translation that gives a sense of the *nioi* of Akiko's tanka" rather than "a translation through which one might understand the meaning."⁹¹

The idea that one would write a translation where comprehension is not even a minor concern strikes me as bold, even somewhat strange, though it becomes clear, even after a cursory reading of Machi's translations, that comprehension has not been entirely abandoned.

tsuki no yo no hasu no obashima kimi utsukushi (175)⁹²
uraha no miuta wasure wa sezu yo

at the edge of the lotus on a moonlit night you're beautiful—
the verse on the underleaf I shall not forget!

tsuki no yo no hasu no kimi utsukushiku
ha no ura ni kakishi miuta wasurezu

by the lotus pond on a moonlit night you're beautiful—
the verse written under the leaf I won't forget⁹³

As it stands, Akiko's poem is vague bordering on obtuse—what exactly is a "lotus handrail" (*hasu no obashima*)?—and the connection between the "you" by the lotus and the poem on the "underleaf" is far from obvious. Machi takes it upon herself to explain the geography a bit more and provide this maddeningly brief image a narrative to justify

⁹¹ *Chokorēto goyaku Midaregami* 154-5.

⁹² The numbers I append to the poems are the ordinals commonly used now as reference for Akiko's poems. Note, she did not herself ever number or title her tanka.

⁹³ *Chokorēto goyaku Midaregami* 126.

it: “you,” standing along the edge of a lotus pond, pick up a leaf and write a poem underneath. The narratological (and biographical) reading of these poems, i.e. those in the “White Lily” section, and the justification for that reading go back to the very origin of criticism of Akiko’s poetry. Her two major editors since her death, Satake and more recently Itsumi,⁹⁴ both read a simple narrative back into the poems and use that as a justification for their parses of the syntax. This is what Machi seems to have made explicit in her translation. Syntactically speaking, though, there is a clear break between *utsukushi* in the upper verse, because it is in the sentence final form, and *uraha* below. The attempt to combine, that is *unify* the two halves of the line may be entirely inappropriate: the break between *utsukushi* and *uraha* also indicates a shift in the object of the lyric subject’s gaze, from “you” to “me.” The “verse in the underleaf” may very well be the one “you” wrote, I don’t dispute that, but I would argue that, like in so many of Akiko’s poems, it is something else as well. The *ha* in *uraha* is written in kanji, so Akiko clearly intends the meaning “leaf,” but *ura* is not. As prefixes go, *ura* is likely “under” 裏 but *could* be “heart/feeling” 心, as this is a common *enough* prefix (though still archaic), but, to detract from my argument somewhat, generally only before an adjective. I feel somewhat justified in my odd reading, as classically the word *uraha*, often written 末葉, means the edge not the underside of a leaf, so even “underleaf” is something of an extrapolation.

⁹⁴ Though *MG* was reviewed at the time of its publication in 1901, serious study of Akiko’s poetry arguably did not come until 1957 with the publication of Satake Hisahiko’s *Zenshaku Midaregami kenkyuu* [*Studies in and complete commentary on the Midaregami*]. To this day, Satake’s historical research and individual readings of the poems provide the foundation for all work on Akiko’s poetry. Itsumi Kumi represents a modern development in accessibility to materials related to Akiko’s poetic corpus, having produced in addition to a chronological edition of the *Midaregami* poems, *Midaregami zenshaku* [*Midaregami, a complete commentary*], in 1978 and an *as is* edition in 1996, *Shin Midaregami zenshaku* [*Midaregami, a new complete commentary*], a collection of reviews and criticism contemporary to Akiko and most recently a critical edition of *Koigoromo* [*Lover’s Robe*], a joint collection Akiko put together along with Yamakawa Tomiko, whom I treat here, and Masuda Masako, whom I don’t.

Even so, the syntax is strained to begin with. The use of the vague particle *no* no less than four times, three of them in rapid succession, the lack of any particles at all for *obashima* and *miuta* to indicate specifically their syntactical place, and the nominalization of the verb *wasuru* in order to append the generic *suru* (literally “won’t do the forgetting”) do very little to contribute to a more perfect understanding of what Akiko meant and in many ways hinder it. Perhaps Machi’s translation is an attempt to say, “it really does make sense,” and it impresses me that Machi changes Akiko’s poem only very slightly, having replicated the repetition of *no* in the upper half of the verse and much of the *sound* of the original. More importantly, Machi translates Akiko’s *thirty-two* syllables into thirty-two of her own. One expects the end of the upper half of Akiko’s verse to be only five syllables, but it is in fact six: *ki-mi u-tsu-ku-shi*. Such expansions are not uncommon in *waka*, as the syllabic rules are not hard and fast, not to mention there is the possibility of a slight elision between the syllables *mi* and *u*, though not necessarily as the *mi-uta* in the lower half is certainly not elided. While Machi does not reproduce this expansion in precisely the same location—her third phrase, *utsukushiku*, is exactly five syllables—but does expand the first phrase of the lower verse to eight rather than the expected seven syllables: *ha no u-ra ni ka-ki-shi*.

I alluded earlier to another *ura*, the heart, but what exactly would “heart leaves” be? I have already revealed the tendentious nature of my reading and the argument behind it, but given the common use of *ha* in Japanese as a metaphor and stand in for words—language is, after all, *koto no ha*, “leaves of speaking”—heart leaves may in fact be “heart words,” the record of the impression the lyric subject’s vision of “you” leaves on her senses. The image suddenly breaks off as the upper half of the verse closes, but Akiko is

emphatic (*wasure wa sezu yo*) about how she at least won't forget the verse composed of those "heart leaves" that remain.

take no kami otome futari ni tsuki usuki
koyoi shirahasu iro madowasu ya (176)

the pale moon on a pair of long-haired maids—
tonight, won't the white lotus confuse the colors?

kami nagaki warera futari o terasu tsuki
shirohasu nanka wakiyaku ni shite

the moon shines on the pair of us, our long hair,
with the white lotus in something of a supporting role⁹⁵

With this poem as with the previous one, Machi goes out of her way to preserve much of the sound of the original, even where she changes much of what the poem says: the open *a* in *take* corresponds with the *a* in *kami*, both words two syllables, the *n* in *no* matches with the initial *n* in *nagaki*, the *i* in *kami* also with *nagaki*, not to mention the similarity in ending the upper verse with *usuki* and *tsuki* respectively. This is part of what Machi must mean by the *nioi* of Akiko's poems, because, though in modern Japanese *nioi* quite strictly refers to scent or aroma, classically it could refer to any of various ephemeral qualities that radiate or effervesce, thus amounting to a kind of transient "beauty."

The pair of "long-haired maids" are, presumably, Akiko herself and Yamakawa Tomiko, her friend and rival for the affections of Yosano Tekkan, Akiko's husband, the "white lotus" of this verse and the "you" in the previous one. I know this, because that is what the commentaries say, not because Machi's translation does.⁹⁶ It is an essential feature of this translation that there are no notes or interlinear statements to explain what

⁹⁵ *Chokorēto goyaku Midaregami* 127.

⁹⁶ In the interest of full disclosure, Machi does comment on the use of pseudonyms in her afterword, but my point, that there is a certain "bare" experience in reading these poems, stands, because the reader may not find out what these floral names were supposed to be until well after she had finished reading the collection.

is what, what is who, or why, in particular cases, she translates things as she does. In fact one of the most remarkable features of the page is how bare it is, how naked it appears with only one or two verses, as naked as the young woman who adorns its cover, and this “nudity” is a graphic as well as a textual manifestation of the seeming intimacy of the two poets (compare figs. 8 and 9). Yet, like the young woman whose more pornographic features are conveniently covered by the UPC, something remains concealed.

The “supporting actor” in Machi’s version of Akiko’s poem represents a major change, an attempt to convert a major figure in Akiko’s poems—even if one doesn’t accept “lotus” as a consistent stand-in for Tekkan, you can’t argue that the lotus isn’t a prominent “character” in itself—into a mere bystander. Partially covering up the white lotus or at least pushing it to the side, and in so doing push to the side a more straightforwardly biographical reading of the poem, Machi creates a space between Akiko’s poem and hers where she, that is Machi, could very well be one of the long-haired maids. There is no necessary reason for Machi to change *otome futari* (“pair of maids”) to *warera futari* (“pair of us”), but she does nonetheless. As a result, I’m tempted to rede *nanka wakiyaku shite* not participially as I have rendered it above (“putting the white lotus in something of a supporting role,” which would imply the situation of the white lotus is a natural result of the lighting conditions) but imperatively: “put the white lotus in some kind of supporting role.” The unfortunate result of creating such a bare text, such a *vulnerable* text, is that either reading—any reding of the poems and the relationship between them becomes possible, even plausible. One never knows what a reder might do, so in being vulnerable the text is not only exposed to greater feats but greater failures as well. I’m not sure which is which here.

〇〇六

夜の帳ゆがにささめきあ尽あきし星ほしの今いまを下界かみの人の髪かみのほつれよ
星ほしたちが恋こひのささやきあ交あわす今下界いまかみの我われは心こころ乱あれる

歌うたにきけな誰たれれ野のの花はなに紅あかき舌かみむおもむきあるかな春はる罪つみもつ子
青春せいしゆんの野のに咲さく花はなは恋こひの歌うたその紅あか色いろを否定ひんていしないで

髪かみ五尺ごせきときなは水みづにやはらかき少女せうじよこころは秘ひめて放はなだし
たつぷりと湯ゆに浮うく髪かみのやわらかき乙女おとめこころは誰たれにも見みせぬ

〇〇七

Figure 9: Poems 1-3 of Tawara Machi's *Midaregami*, starting on the right side

hasu nakaba tare ni yurusu no kami no miku zo (177)
misode kata toru wakaki shi no kimi

to whom will the lotus in our midst allow the upper verse,
o young master taking up your sleeve?

shi no kimi ga ha no ura ni kaku kami no ku yo
tsuzuki o kaku no wa ware ka kanojo ka

master, you write a verse on the underside of a leaf—
who will write the rest, is it me or her?⁹⁷

Machi has managed not only to make her own poems seem sinister but Akiko's as well. As I've said, the scholarly consensus is that the "you" and "white lotus" in Akiko's poems (there is very little scholarship on Tawara Machi, much less consensus) is often Tekkan, but given the way Machi both parrots Akiko and seems to address her, her "you" may very well be Akiko and her translations her portion of an ongoing dialogue between the two poets. So, when Machi writes "who will write the rest, is it me or her?", she could be addressing Tekkan ("is it Akiko or me?") or Akiko ("is it Tomiko or me?"). With little beyond the poems themselves to indicate a translator's intentions, a reader can be forgiven, I think, for reading more than a little paranoia into the translator's text. After all, if the invisibility of the translator is something to be done away with, then so too the translation should accept responsibility for what a text is, even what it becomes. Responsibility is one of the first things lost in this "childlike" approach to poetry; adults are expected to be responsible to others *and* to themselves.

omoi-omou ima no kokoro ni wakachi-wakazu (178)
kimi ya shirahagi ware ya shiroyuri

thinking-longing now in my heart I don't distinguish—
are you the white clover, am I the white lily?

Tekkan o omou kokoro ni sa wa nakute

⁹⁷ *Chokorēto goyaku Midaregami* 127.

kimi ga Akiko ka ware ga Tomiko ka

thinking of Tekkan in my heart there's no distinction—
are you Akiko, am I Tomiko?⁹⁸

While it seems amiss to me that Machi would insert an biographical reading back into the poem, she has left open an interesting possibility that exists in Akiko's poem but is made explicit in Machi's, namely it questions precisely who this "you" is: is it, with strict regard for the occasion of the poem, Tomiko or us, the readers? Are we meant to be conflated into Tomiko as we read this part of the sequence? "Am I Tomiko?" An interesting slippage occurs when Machi inserts Tomiko's name into the poem. Machi expands upon Akiko's doubled question—am I you and are these pseudonyms really us? She assumes Akiko's problematic relationship to the poem but takes it one step further. Her questions are doubled as well, not only do they question the reader's relationship to the poem (i.e. who *is* "you?") but also Machi's relationship to Akiko. Imagine another "you:" Akiko. "Are you Akiko?" That is are you *still* Akiko? Or have I, by some sinister effect of translation, become Akiko myself? What the between of Akiko's poem and Machi's translation brings to light is the possibility that the "original" *possesses* the translation in both economic and spiritual terms. As we saw with Anne Carson and Sappho, the threat persists that this possession will lead to an equally dangerous *obsession* in which the poet's voice, though it may try to consume or even destroy the voice of the translated, can't help but get caught in the confused system of I's and you's translation creates. "I" am wholly dependent upon "you" and vice versa, such that in the attempt to subsume and consume "your" voice "I" am likewise consumed.

For as much as I may admire the lyric possibilities of putting Akiko and Tomiko

⁹⁸ *ibid.* 128.

into the translation, I have to marvel at Tekkan’s presence. The verb *omoi-omou* (“thinking-longing”) has no stated object, and the fact that syntactically it modifies *ima* (“now”) cuts it off clearly from any connection to the person in whose heart there is no distinction. To stick in a generic “I” is perhaps counterproductive as well, because positing a stable first person subject would make the questions in the latter half of the poem remarkably flat. The insertion of Tekkan as the object of thinking and longing does precisely that; it makes seem quite banal what could be a remarkably concise consideration of the relationship between poet and her voice. Furthermore, *sa wa nakute* (“there’s no distinction”) for *wakachi-wakazu* (“[I] don’t distinguish”) makes impersonal what is very personal in Akiko’s poem. *Someone* doesn’t distinguish, we simply don’t know who, and, if anything, not knowing who is what the poem is about.

shiroyuri wa sore sono hito no takaki omoi
omowa wa niou beni-fuyō to koso (192)

that is the white lily, that person’s lofty feelings—
the face she puts on smells of the red lotus

shiroyuri no kimi no kokoro wa yuri no shiro
naredo bibō wa beni-fuyō nari

white lily, your heart is the lily’s white;
even so, your beauty is the red lotus⁹⁹

Lotuses are typically white, so the red-in-white dichotomy manifest in the use of the two seemingly disparate flowers is not entirely out of place, but the turn in Akiko’s poem is also dependent upon the similarity in sound of the words *omoi* (feelings) and *omowa* (“face she puts on”). In fact if you were to append the negative suffix to the verb *omou*, whence *omoi*, one would expect *omowa*, but before it can conjugate this not-quite-a-verb suddenly becomes a noun, something else entirely, just as the face the white lily puts on

⁹⁹ *ibid.* 137.

becomes that of the red lotus. Reading this poem biographically, then, is both intriguing and problematic. White as a sign of purity and red as a sign of passion are well established in the *MG*. Is Tomiko the *fuyō*, a type of lotus—as we have seen in the “White Lily” section, the lotus is a pseudonym for Akiko’s husband Tekkan—is Tomiko affecting the attitude of a passionate Tekkan? The parallel of the doubled verb *omoi-omou* in the earlier poem and the not-quite-doubled-verb between *omoi* and *omowa*, both nouns that merely *hint* at the verb *omou*, would indicate that this is another poem to challenge the identification of person with flower and even people with each other. Tomiko, so long as we adhere to all of the assumptions of autobiography that are problematic in themselves, *smells* of Tekkan (*is* Tekkan as far as Machi is concerned) but a Tekkan altered. This poem, however, where the earlier *omoi-omou* does everything to question the associations inherent in representation, invites them. The white lily is clearly a person (*sono hito*) and the poem does nothing to question that, and the emphatic *koso* that ends Akiko’s poem suggests that Tomiko positively reeks of Tekkan!

Somewhere between the pair of Akiko’s *omoi-omou* poem and Machi’s translation the features of representation and identification—identification of person with sign, of person with person, of poet with poem, of reader with poet—come into question, but Akiko (and likewise Machi because she must follow) can’t leave it at that. Somewhere between these two pairs of poems even the challenge to representation comes into question. The “illusion of intimacy” I so easily criticized at the beginning of this chapter is, in fact, not so facile. The poems themselves invite it, and Machi reinforces it by eviscerating the kind of scholarly tradition that would warn a knowing reader from doing something as ridiculous as identifying with a poet or a poem. Reding and reading are tactics, neither

better than the other, one can easily slip between.

yuri no hana waza to ma no te ni oraseokite
hiroite dakamu kami no kokoro ka (191)

the lily has been deliberately snapped by the witch's hand;
does the god have the heart to pick it back up?

yuri no hana no kimi o akuma ni te orasete
nochi ni hirou to iu kami no ishi

your flower, lily, was snapped by the evil witch's hand—
thereafter, the god has the will to pick it up¹⁰⁰

It is not clear who the “witch” (*ma*, generally just a malevolent spirit, a demon, but I have chosen here to embody it, to imply it might be Akiko) is, just as it is never clear what is what, rather who is what in Akiko's poems, but as we—and Machi—have the option to read Tomiko into the lily so too might we read Akiko in the witch. That the question with which she concludes her verse seems to pour salt on the wound would indicate that even if the witch isn't Akiko herself, it is at least the lyric subject.

This problem of “what is what” extends to Machi's text itself, not just her translations but her reprinting of Akiko's text: the question becomes “is Tawara Machi's *MG* Yosano Akiko's, and, if so, in what way?” Akiko's poem 385 reads in the first edition as

wakaki ko no kogare yorishi wa ono no nioi
mimyō no misō kyō mi ni shiminu

as a young girl my longing was for the scent of the axe
today, the wonderful visage penetrates my body

but in Machi's *MG* reads

wakaki ko no kogare yorishi wa nomi no nioi
mimyō no misō kyō mi ni shiminu

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

as a young girl my longing was for the scent of the chisel
today, the wonderful visage penetrates my body¹⁰¹

As Itsumi notes that even though it was originally printed *ono* 斧 (“axe”), it is generally read *nomi* 鑿 (“chisel”) and printed as such in every subsequent edition, because an errata printed in the journal *Myōjō* makes it clear that *nomi* is what Akiko intended.¹⁰² Machi prints *nomi* in her *MG* (Fig. 10), even though the first edition, of which her ostensible source is a facsimile, has *ono* and even though the critical editions (Satake’s and Itsumi’s) print *ono* while noting that it should in fact read *nomi*. The problem in Machi’s text is she has left no room for commentary on the individual poems, so any annotation must be incorporated in the translation or become *part of the text itself*. A fundamental interpretation of the text has become inscribed *on* it as a direct result of the limits Machi has imposed on herself and her text. What Machi has done is analogous to how many Western textual critics, particularly in classical studies, foreground an interpretation in the text while eradicating any “aberrant” readings or subordinating them in an apparatus. But Itsumi’s practice, in particular, is the exact opposite: she foregrounds the reading *ono* (though she does append *mama*, the Japanese equivalent of a *sic*) while subordinating her interpretation. In Itsumi’s *MG* (Fig. 11) the problems of the text are left as a *primary* concern, something to be engaged *as* one comes to a sense of the what the text says rather than after-the-fact once one has established a relatively clear conception of what a given poems says and thus means. I admit the distinction I’m making here may be unnecessarily pedantic, but the kind of reading Itsumi’s text invites is one in which a text’s problems are an integral part of the initial stages in the development of an interpretation

¹⁰¹ *ibid.* 125

¹⁰² Itsumi ed., *Shin Midaregami zenshaku*, 335. The “wonderful visage” is, supposedly, that of the Buddha.

恋をわれもろしと知りぬ別れかねおさへし秋風の吹きし時

「行かないで」君の上着をつかめども風が邪魔する恋は割れ物

星の世のむくのしらぎぬばかりに染めしは誰のとがとおぼすを

罪知らず恋知らぬ我の白き衣こんなに染まったのは誰のせい？

わかき子のこがれよりしは鑿のにはほひ美妙の御相けふ身にしみぬ

名作という名にひかれた若き日よ今ならわかるその美しさ

Figure 10: Poem 385 as it appears in Tawara Machi's translation (on the left)

『全釈みだれ髪研究』では三十三年九月三十日の河野鉄南あての晶子書簡に「われはつミの子に候。わが名を与謝野様にかいし給ひしはあなた様に候。わが今日の名もそれにもとづきしに候。また今日のつミの子となりしもそれにもとづきしに候。何も申すまじ」をあげて標題歌の「誰」を鉄南だと解しているが、標題歌は自身を「むくのしらぎぬ」に喩え、それを「染めし」相手に対して詠みかけたものであるから、その相手を鉄南と解するのは不自然である。この頃の晶子は鉄幹へ心が全面的に傾斜していた。さらに同書簡に

高師の松かげにひとのさ、やきうけしよりのわれはたゞ夢のごとつミの子になり申候。さとりをひらき給ひし御目にはをかしとおほすべし

ともあり、鉄幹への恋心をはつきりと鉄南に伝えている。ここにある「ひと」は鉄幹、「御目」は鉄南のことである。標題歌は右の書簡以前に作っており、鉄南より鉄幹との恋を意識して詠んでいると解すべきである。

二人の恋愛の渦中の作品である「むらさき」と「みだれ髪」の歌を検討した結果、「星」を恋に関わらせて用いるようになるのは、二人の恋が始まってからのことであることが分かった。それまで「星」は七夕として、また天体の星を歌うことはあつた。その意味で標題歌は「初出」から考えると「星」を恋に関わらせた歌として初めて登場した歌ではないかと思われる。

(385) わかき子のこがれよりしは斧のほひ美妙の御相けふ身にしみぬ(春思)

〔初出〕 みだれ髪 〔三版〕 (3) 鑿のほひ (新潮) (1) 御仏に(3) (5) 鑿のほひ微妙の御相けふ身に知りぬ

〔改造〕 (3) 鑿のほひ(5) けふ身にしみぬ *誤植 〔3) 斧のほひ ↓ 鑿のほひ (みだれ髪の誤植) ー 明星 15

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Figure 11: Poem 385 as it appears in Itsumi Kumi's edition

rather than a means to destabilizing a pre-existing one. Problems are *of* the text. Rather than conceal them (as Machi does) or provide an easy, blanket solution (as Anne does with her “free space of imaginal adventure”), Itsumi merely shows how she has dealt with this particular problem (to read *ono* as *nomi*), provides her justification for doing so (the errata in *Myōjō*), but leaves the “aberrant” reading as an issue which each reader must resolve herself. What makes Machi’s concealing of Akiko’s text nearly perfect and perfectly cut off from its source is the seeming presence of Akiko’s *MG* within it, but there is a real danger in believing Machi’s (and likewise Anne’s) source to be authentically other, namely the danger of ignoring how we rede texts, how we revise and recompose them.

In the original 1901 edition of *MG* there are six illustrations, one of which, entitled “Modern Novels” (*gendai no shōsetsu* [Fig. 12]), depicts a young woman on a bench reading a novel with a devil sitting to her right looking over her shoulder and pointing, presumably, to a particular passage. The woman’s expression is a coy smirk, and she appears not at all disturbed by the grotesque creature at her side but rather to enjoy what she reads. There is more than a mere hint of malevolence in Akiko’s poem 191 above, and it represents one kind of resolution to the tension between Akiko and Tomiko that lies just under the surface of the “White Lily” poems. Akiko has won, she has Tekkan, and the temptation to kick Tomiko while she is down is palpable. Machi, however, who has up to this point been doing nearly everything she could to close the gap between Akiko and herself by participating in the games of subjectivity Akiko seems to play, can’t quite accept the implications of pure identification with her literary forebear. Her upper verse is largely unchanged, but by turning Akiko’s question into a statement,



Figure 12: Fujishima Takeji's illustration *Gendai no shōsetsu* [Modern Novels] in the first edition (1901) of the *Midaregami*

she softens Akiko’s cruelty—no, Akiko’s cruelty is still there, Machi simply refuses to reproduce it. In *Tawara Machi’s Midaregami*, there are no illustrations; there is no devil peaking over her shoulder; there is no sadistic young woman with a wicked smile who, though perhaps now reformed, once longed for the destructive power of the axe; and quarrels between friends don’t get so out of line that one would deliberately harm the other.

Sweet

Tawara Machi’s Midaregami is not the first time Machi has rede Yosano Akiko. She dealt with Akiko in a more straightforwardly “critical” mode in her Sunday column.

Ryōkan ga ji ni niru ame to mite areba
Yosano Hiroshi to iu kana mo kaku

[the rain appears to me as the characters in Ryōkan,
writes the *kana* for Yosano Hiroshi as well]

The place is Teradomari in Niigata Prefecture. Ryōkan was born and raised in the nearby port town of Izumozaki. Outside, rain. As the author looked out upon the streaks of rain, she thought of the writings of Ryōkan. Forcefully, but in the moment, gently the lines in Ryōkan appear to her a living thing.¹⁰³

Yosano Hiroshi is the real name of Akiko’s husband, Tekkan, and the second *kanji* in Ryōkan 良寛 is the same one used to write Hiroshi 寛. This poem is difficult to translate into English, at least, as it is so specifically referential to complexities of Japanese orthography. The poem implies that Akiko’s husband’s name is also present in Ryōkan’s, a 19th century Zen monk known for his poetry, calligraphy, and persistent levity, and just

¹⁰³ *Anata to yomu koi no hyakushū* 28.

to be clear on that point the rain writes the *kana*, that is the easier syllabic as opposed to the more difficult ideographic script, for his name. *Kana* are used in Japanese when the reading of a particular character is unclear, either when the word/name itself is obscure or when the author wishes to superimpose the *reading* of one word onto the *meaning* of another. Akiko thinks of the writings of Ryōkan, something appropriate to the occasion of the poem, but within the writing of Ryōkan's name, she perceives the presence of her husband as well. The name may be written *Ryōkan* but the rain and likewise Akiko *rede* it as *Yosano Hiroshi*: if you separate out the first character from the second in 良寛—良 can be read *yo*—it becomes a kind of abbreviation for Tekkan, i.e. *Yo. Hiroshi*. Machi believes the “letters” Akiko sees in the rain are a reference to the woodblock prints of Hiroshige, who commonly represented falling rain as a pattern of long black lines like streaks on the page.¹⁰⁴ These lines, then, are the individual strokes in the characters, and the characters become the people they represent. The collection from which this poem comes, the *White Cherry Collection (Hakuō-shū)*, dates from well after Tekkan/Hiroshi's death, so when Machi says that that the lines appear to Akiko a living thing, that life, a life in letters, is all that is left for Tekkan.

ma no mae ni omoi kudakishi yowaki ko to (208)
 tomo no yūbe o yubisashimasu na

don't point at my friend's night like a witch and say
 she's weak to have crushed her dreams

Akiko's *omoi*, as I've said before “feelings/thoughts,” is written in *kana*, i.e. syllabically, over the kanji for the word *risō* 理想, “dreams/ambitions.” Because the Japanese language has three orthographies, two purely syllabic (*hiragana* and *katakana*) and one

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.* 29.

ideographic (*kanji*, Chinese characters), and because there is a standard for writing the readings of lesser used *kanji* in *kana* above or to the side, depending on the orientation of the text, there exists the poetic capability to double meaning in a single word in a way that is not specifically a pun: the word *is written* one way but *is read* another. Here *risō* is only visually part of the poem, its phonic component having been supplanted by *omoi*. Replacing *risō* with *omoi* is significant because of the pleasant string of nasals and open vowels it creates: *ma no ma-e ni o-mo-i*, “dreams/feelings in the presence of *ma* (same *ma* as above).” Akiko’s witchcraft here is not necessarily malevolent, and the sound of the poem reinforces that. For the smooth sounds that open the poem transition suddenly into the hard stops of *ku-da-ki-shi yo-wa-ki ko to* where the “weak girl has dashed” her dreams. The cruelty that previously had been directed at her friend is now a rush of sibilants running toward those who might accuse her: *yu-bi-sa-shi-ma-su na*, “don’t point your finger.” Akiko’s poems have no fixed position, no fixed attitude, and just as the poem’s sound can slip back and forth easily between smooth and rough, so might Akiko’s lyric subject one minute attack her friend and defend her the next.

*risō sute totsugu kanojo o kantan ni
yowai ko to iwanai de hoshī*

I’d rather you not say so easily that she’s thrown
away her dreams in getting married¹⁰⁵

Machi’s tendency to soften Akiko’s diction, as we have seen above in the *yuri no hana* poems may have seemed merciful there, but in this poem it seems unnecessary. Akiko’s forceful, direct, and passionate command to leave her friend be (*yubisashimasu na*) is admirable, so why would Machi feel the need to be so timid and indirect: *yowai ko to iwanai de hoshī*, “I’d rather you not say she’s weak.” Whereas, in the earlier poem it

¹⁰⁵ *Chokorēto goyaku Midaregami* 148.

seemed that Machi objected to Akiko treating her friend so cruelly, now it seems that Machi objects to the diction itself and to the sounds that accompany it. There is nothing remarkable about the sound of Machi’s poem, and that in itself is peculiar, given her concern was more for the *nioi* of these poems, their effervescent qualities, than for their meaning. Because Machi has given her reading no notes or specific explanation, we can only assume that because she has taken Akiko’s distinct phonic profile and rendered it markedly flat, there is something in it she finds either unnecessary or objectionable. Everything is strong and forceful in Akiko’s poem, even what her “friend” does to her dreams—she crushes them (*kudakishi*), everything is powerful. Machi’s woman is a mere “she” (*kanojo*), not a friend, who throws away (*sute*) her dreams as if they were garbage to begin with. Nothing is awesome or powerful in Machi’s translation, and her banal diction simply reinforces how nothing there matters much at all.

ma no waza o kami no sadame to me o tojishi (209)
 tomo no katate no hana ayabuminu

sealed her eyes, by the will of the god, and her witchcraft,
 my friend: I fear the flower up her sleeve

I’ve rendered only one of two possibilities for the upper verse of this poem, as, because I have left *myself* the liberty of commentary and notation, I can explain the other here now. Simply put, for my purposes above, I have assumed the verb *tojishi*, “closed,” to have two objects, *me* (“eyes”) and *ma no waza* (“witchcraft”). However, where I have also assumed *kami ni sadame to* (“by the will/decreed of the god”) to be a governing condition of the whole phrase, if taken specifically with *ma no waza o*, the upper verse would read more like the following: “witchcraft like the will of the gods, [she] closed her eyes.” The translation assumes the *ma no waza* (literally, “devil’s skill”) to be the friend’s, i.e.

Tomiko's, as in solely the context of the poem that reding makes the most sense; the lyric subject fears what might be up her friend's sleeve, namely the diabolical skill she, supposedly, has locked away. The problem with this reding is, of course, that up to this point the *ma* has generally been Akiko's, or at least the lyric subject's, and not the friend's, who has generally been the object of the "evil spells." We have seen this *waza*, "skill/craft," earlier in poem 191 in the idiomatic phrase *waza to*, "deliberately." There, the craft is clearly the lyric subject's and that craft is directed at her friend. If we rede the *waza* not just contextually but intertextually along with my latter parse, it is possible that Akiko/the lyric subject has in fact *not* sealed off her craft but kept it at the ready so as to counter what she fears her friend might have up her sleeve. Honestly, I don't favor one reding over the other and hope it does not seem as if I do. For I believe that both redings are equally in play, because if the *waza* weren't equally Akiko's and Tomiko's, wouldn't the lyric subject have nothing at all to fear?

unmei to totsuide yukishi tomo no te ni
nokoru tanka no hana o ayabumu

my friend for whom it was fated to get married, I
fear the flower of the *tanka* left in her hand¹⁰⁶

Machi completely removes the supernatural element from her translations of the poems where *ma* and *waza* are distinct presences. Earlier I stated that this evisceration is symptomatic of her objection to the force inherent in Akiko's poetry—and I still believe this to be at least partially the case—but here it becomes obvious that Machi feels that "craft," magical or not, is a metaphor for the skill involved in the composition of poetry. Akiko's poem here has no explicit verbal connection to the poem that precedes—though one might argue that it immediately follows is connection enough—but Machi's does.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.* 149.

“Marriage” occupies the exact same position in both poems—*totsugu* and *totsuide* both begin the second phrase of their respective translations—cementing a connection between Machi’s poems that is only implicit between Akiko’s. This a problem the translator of a bilingual text, and more specifically the translator of a bilingual text of this kind, has, because connections fly out in every direction; Machi has a responsibility to make her poems flow not just with Akiko’s but her own as well. It is difficult to tell whether the way in which she renders Akiko’s text is merely to comment on Akiko’s relationship with Tomiko, the lyric subject’s relationship with her “friend,” or even on Machi’s own literary relationship with Akiko. What I hope has become clear, is that all of these possible connections are in play, *simultaneously*, with this text. Machi flattens Akiko’s forceful poetic diction not only to ease the burden on Tomiko but to ease the burden on herself as well. She knows that what she has Akiko say reflects just as much on her own thirty-one syllables as it does on her literary progenitor’s. Marriage, divorce, and strained interpersonal relationships are prominent themes in Machi’s *Chocolate Revolution*, the collection from which this translation gets its poetic attitude, so one can’t help but wonder whether Machi feels Akiko’s barbs a little too acutely.

tsūhan no ninki shōhin tōshindai
makura o daite nemuru Tōkyō

falling asleep arms wrapped around a popular
life-sized mail order pillow—in Tokyo¹⁰⁷

A personal collection of poems represents a kind of literary loneliness, a single voice yelling out into the void. Literary translation seems like a solution to that loneliness, but certainly not a perfect one.

uta o kazoe sono ko kono ko ni narau na no

(210)

¹⁰⁷ *Chokorēto kakumei* 13.

mada sun naranu shiroyuri no me yo

count the verses! that girl's looks just like this one's:
buds of the white lily still without much measure

In Akiko's resolution to the tensions of "White Lily"—this poem ends the section—she refuses to give up her pride but is willing to acknowledge the white lily, albeit obliquely. Her criticism of the "buds of the white lily" implies both that "she" is worth imitating in the first place and that the lyric subject is clever enough to tell the difference between the original and the imitations. My translation implies perhaps more than it ought to, as "measure," a common enough term in music and easy referential to lyric as well, in the poem above, *sun* 寸, has no necessary connection to verse beyond the fact it appears here in a poem about poems. Perhaps I haven't "over-plied" at all. Both Satake and Itsumi assume neither *sono ko*, "that girl," nor *kono ko*, "this girl," could refer to Akiko, but, honestly, without much beyond the poem, I don't see how you could fault an ignorant reading for thinking so. So many of the poems in the "White Lily" section revolve around problems of identification not only in abstract terms but in terms of poetic authority and craft, that the logical reading to me would see Tomiko, the white lily, as "that girl" and Akiko as "this one," where "that girl's" verses are still just buds coming into bloom and could never measure up to "this girl's."

shiroyuri no me o motsu wakaki hitotachi yo
furimawasarezu wa ga uta o yome

these young people holding the buds of the white lily!
I won't brandish them; I can write my own verse...¹⁰⁸

Once again, Machi, without telegraphing so in any way, implicitly aligns herself with the traditional reading of Akiko's poem. She introduces the third term, the "young people,"

¹⁰⁸ *Chokoreeto goyaku Midaregami* 149.

and establishes a clear hierarchy of poetic prowess with the lyric subject at the top, the white lily one rung below, and the “young people” on the bottom. Yet, a peculiar and highly unlikely reding of the bottom half of the verse, in which *yome* might be taken as the imperative rather than the potential form of *yomu*, creates an interesting comment on Akiko’s poem in Machi’s: “I won’t brandish them; write my verses!” A peculiar reding, because it is semantically awkward and because it implies Akiko has given up. It’s a difficult way to rede the end of this section, saying the two possibilities are diametrically opposed: Akiko either gives up or goes her own way.

ima no wa ni uta no ari ya o toimasu na (96)
 ji naki hosoito kore nijūgo-gen

don’t ask now whether there are any verses in me—
 no bridges for these twenty-five thin strings¹⁰⁹

The koto (a kind of long, plucked zither played on the floor) has individual bridges for each string, and, because each string is tightened to the same tension, these bridges are how one tunes the instrument. The lack of bridges, then, implies the koto, which along with the biwa is commonly used to accompany the recitation of waka, is functionally useless. A typical koto has thirteen strings, so the significance of the “twenty-five thin strings” is an issue. Satake claims the twenty-five strings indicate it is a Chinese koto,¹¹⁰ but I don’t see how that helps us rede this poem. More generally, twenty-five strings is a lot and, more specifically, a lot more than one would expect. The current uselessness of Akiko’s poetic powers clearly mirrors that of the *koto*’s, but the image of the twenty-five thin strings is particularly ambiguous unless rede against an earlier poem in the first section, “Scarlet Purple” (*Enji murasaki*).

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.* 69.

¹¹⁰ Satake, Hisahiko. *Zenshaku Midaregami kenkyū* (Tokyo: Yūhōdō, 1957) 110.

hito kaesazu haremu no haru no yoi-gokochi (29)
ogoto ni motasu midare-midaregami

he won't return to when my heart would clear on spring nights—
across the koto lies my wild, wild hair

kimi mochite hareyuku haru no yoi-gokoro
koto ni kasanaru midare-midaregami

with you my heart brightens up on spring nights,
on the koto lies my wild, wild hair¹¹¹

The significance of this poem can not be overstated, given *midaregami* is also the title of the collection. I will have more to say on this poem in Chapter 5, but for now I wish to point to the similarity between the loose, thin strings of the *koto* in poem 96 and the wild, disheveled hair (*midare-midaregami*) of poem 29. The connection between Akiko's powers of composition, the loose hair, and the condition of the *koto* has to be sought intertextually in the *Midaregami*, but it is there. The loose strings without bridges to keep them in tune is a warning, a veiled threat, that the whole enterprise, the collection itself, could easily unravel at any moment.

koi nakute koi no uta nashi ware wa ima
kotoji nakushita nijūgo-gen

there's no love, no songs thereof, as I am now:
twenty-five strings without bridges¹¹²

Machi finds the parallel between the condition of the poet and the state of the koto, so in her translation she chooses to make the equation of the twenty-five strings with the lyric subject absolutely explicit. Once again, keeping true somewhat to the “spirit” of Akiko's poem, Machi generates a link between love and love poetry that is not precisely the same as Akiko's link between instrument and poet, yet it retains the flavor (the *nioi*?) in which

¹¹¹ *Chokoreeto goyaku Midaregami* 25

¹¹² *ibid.* 69.

poet/poetry is both coeval with and wholly dependent upon its “material.” The major difference in attitude between Akiko’s and Machi’s poem is in how Akiko merely *implies* there are no poems left in her, thus why I characterized it as a threat, and Machi makes those implications explicit and exact. For her the absence of love and love songs is a simple fact put simply in simple language, whereas Akiko’s *possible* loss of the will to compose (herself) is something she’d rather not have to reveal. For Akiko, the entire enterprise is only ever on the verge of unraveling. Machi, then, in revealing, making plain, and saying in no uncertain terms what the poet *means* is still acting in a critical mode, even if that criticism is something we might not expect of poetry, translation, and verse translation.

kami no sadame inochi no hibiki tsui no waga yo (97)
koto ni ono utsu oto kikitamae

it’s god’s decree that lives take their toll at the end of our world—
listen to the sound of the axe hitting the koto

"The axe hitting the koto" is even more gruesome in the Japanese than my translation allows.¹¹³ The verb *utsu* here is written without kanji to indicate which of three homophonic verbs it might be. Given the presence of an axe (*ono*), it is most likely "to hit" but "to take revenge" is equally plausible. "To hit" *utsu* and "to take revenge" *utsu*, though they are written differently in modern Japanese (打つ and 討つ respectively), are historically the same verb. Satake is unwilling to take this doubled meaning into account, so I find his rendering of the final command, "listen with disconcert" (*heinetsu toshite okiki ni natte kudasai*), wholly unsatisfactory.¹¹⁴ He would have the poem be an act of

¹¹³ A reader may note the peculiar resonance between the “axe hitting the koto” here and the “axe” for which Akiko may have longed in her youth, but because *ono* there is a “misprint,” I leave it for you to decide what connection there may be.

¹¹⁴ Satake, *Zenshaku Midaregami kenkyū* 111.

consolation, as if to say, "everything has its ends, so this too will have its end," yet this approach fails to accept the violence inherent in the destruction of the koto. Read against the previous poem, 96, the destruction of the koto represents not just revenge but an attempt to make something, some kind of music even when all else seems lost. Machi's translation is as disturbing as I assume Akiko's poem to be, but for a different reason.

koi ga owaru inochi ga owaru wa ga owaru
koto ni ono utsu hibiki nokoshite

love ends – life ends – I end—
the peal of the axe hitting the koto remains¹¹⁵

You can take "remain" *nokoshite* two ways, I think, either as a simple present indicative or as a command. As an indicative, Machi's translation is an expression of melancholy that does not eviscerate the violence of the destruction of song, as Satake would have it, but retains his sense of acceptance. As a command, it becomes something more than melancholy; it is an attempt on the part of the poet to remind herself by means of this unusually striking image not to take herself and her poetry too seriously. If anything it is a precursor to joy not melancholy, and it opens up a space for humor in the poem(s) that follow(s).

hito futari busai no niji o uta ni eminu (98)
koi niman-nen nagaki mijikaki

the two of us laugh at the two characters in *busai*—
twenty thousand years of love, so long so short

“futari tomo sainō nai ne” to warai ori
uta yori omoki koi to iu mono

“neither of us has any talent!” I say smiling;
love is a thing much weightier than song.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ *Chokorēto goyaku Midaregami* 70.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.* 71.

This is how the first section of Akiko's, thus Machi's, *MG* ends, likewise the world and likewise lyric itself, not with a bang or even a whimper, but with a smile.

In the end that began this chapter, Shiina Ringo's "Kono yo no kagiri," the bilingualism of the song is put to a peculiar end where the devil-may-care attitude of the English lyrics seem certainly ironic against the willful optimism of the Japanese, willful in the face of the kind of absolute despair one imagines only emerges at the end of everything. It's questionable, though, whether one is meant to speak to the other, as the shift from one language to the other (and it's worth noting that the song continues in English to the end) marks a distinct break in sense. "But still my dear..." clearly begins not only a new thought but a new attitude toward the end of this world. The English lyrics have none of the willful ignorance in the face of despair that dominates in the Japanese: the lyric subject here has no need to pretend to be happy. She can make do with the limits imposed upon her, and that's what this "end" is, *kagiri*, a limit, like all the European derivatives of the Latin *finis*. It's to Ringo's credit how she can manage to take the incredibly banal language of pop music and transform it; when she sings, "I'll make a song for you / nothing too old, and nothing too new," there is nothing immediately striking about the lines, so too "[y]ou'll smile for me, we'll be happy that way." Read in isolation the words are unrecognizable from hundreds of songs that pour out of radios everyday. But the simple joy to be found in singing a song for someone and having him/her smile for you finds its poignance here somewhere *between* the English and Japanese. While I've noted the clear break between the two languages of the song, this break does not *preclude* reading the between of these two lyric attitudes but in fact *creates* the space in which the two might converse. The English doesn't have to be rationalized

with the Japanese and as such can provide another answer to the questions posed by the voice of melancholy: “how could I smile or play / when it’s all been done?” The only answer the Japanese can provide itself is delusion, a delusion analogous to the gestures of concealment that pervade Anne’s and Machi’s texts, but the English manages to find a solution somewhere between: between me and you, between old and new, between one language and another.

If you were me who would you be when the sun goes down?
Two faces bright but I fear the night might come around
And if reflections appear from the past, all our moments,
smiles, love and laughter, I fear...

Well then I’d say, I’ll make a song for you

The return to the chorus from a different perspective is indicative of the movement of the song and how difficult it is to pin down what the attitudes, as I say, of the two languages there are. The lines “[a]nd if reflections appear from the past, all our moments, / smiles, love and laughter, I fear...” seem to have their obvious referent in the “forgetting” of the Japanese. But the chorus cuts the verse off—in the end it doesn’t matter. You do what you can: you manage your relationship with that other text on your own terms, and you endure its silence by recomposing it and making it say what it won’t on its own.

Chapter 4

Separate but Equal: [un]Equating Catullus with Sappho

Life inside the music box ain't easy
The mallets hit the gears are always turning
And everyone inside the mechanism
Is yearning
To get out
And sing another melody completely
So different from the one they're always singing
I close my eyes and think that I have found me
But then I feel mortality surround me
I want to sing another melody
So different from the one I always sing

—Regina Spektor “Music Box”¹¹⁷

Every classicist knows the text (or should) of Catullus 51 and perhaps a great many more not so inclined to classical studies. And everyone seems to know it is a translation of a celebrated poem of Sappho's (fragment 31 – the poem treated at length by myself and Anne Carson in chapter 2), a famous translation for a famous poem, at least among those who have more than a vague notion of who these two ancient poets may be and what their respective poems entail: Wray – “this version of Sappho competes... for the distinction of being the best known and loved of Catullus' ‘lyrics’;”¹¹⁸ Munro – “[n]o one

¹¹⁷ Spektor, Regina. “Music Box” *begin to hope*, Sire, 2006.

¹¹⁸ Wray, David. *Catullus and the Poetics of Roman Manhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 69. The laundry list of quotations exists to serve two purposes: 1) to perpetrate the illusion that I have attempted to “read everything on the subject” and 2) to give a sense of the critical *Zeitgeist* in which the Catullus to be discussed in this chapter exists.

can doubt that his 51st poem, the translation of Sappho's famous ode, is among the earliest of his extant poems;¹¹⁹ Green – “this free translation of three stanzas from a well known Sappho poem;”¹²⁰ Greene – “[w]hile numerous translations and imitations of fragment 31 have been attempted through the past 26 centuries, Catullus' poem 51 is often thought to come closest to the original;”¹²¹ Miller – “I will examine the work of two representative poets, Sappho and Catullus, and will take as the basis of comparison Sappho 31 and its translation, Catullus 51;”¹²² Segal – “the fact is that Catullus writes this criticism of *otium* in the elaborate and artificial Sapphic stanza and (in all probability) appends it to his fine translation of a famous work of a great poetess;”¹²³ an assumption in Marcovich – “Sappho is not likely to have fallen in love with the girl without even looking at her. Likewise, a man sitting facing and close to... a girl who is talking to him is supposed to *look* at her (unless he is blind). That is why Catullus... [has] added *spectat*,”¹²⁴ Commager – “[a]n obvious example is 51, a close translation of Sappho 2 (Dhl.) and generally agreed to be the first, or among the first, of the poems to Lesbia;”¹²⁵ Weston – “it is, as everyone knows, a free translation, for the most part, of a poem by Sappho;”¹²⁶ Jensen – “[i]t was suggested long ago that the last stanza of Catullus 51, his translation of Sappho, was not originally affixed to the poem;”¹²⁷ Hallett – “the former in

¹¹⁹ Munro, H.A.J. *Criticisms and Elucidations of Catullus* (New York: G.E. Stechert & Co., 1938) 195.

¹²⁰ Green, Peter. *The Poems of Catullus: A bilingual edition*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) 228n.

¹²¹ Greene, Ellen. “Re-figuring the Feminine Voice: Catullus translating Sappho” *Arethusa* 32.1 (1999): 2.

¹²² Miller, Paul Allen. “Sappho 31 and Catullus 51: The dialogism of lyric” *Arethusa* 26 (1993): 185.

¹²³ Segal, Charles. “Catullan *Otiosi*: The lover and the poet” *Greece & Rome* 17.1 (1970): 30.

¹²⁴ Marcovich, M. “Sappho Fr. 31: Anxiety attack or love declaration?” *The Classical Quarterly* 22.1 (1972): 22. Though I quote Marcovich here for effect, it is well worth *looking* at things as he says.

¹²⁵ Commager, Steele. “Notes on Some Poems of Catullus” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 70 (1965): 86.

¹²⁶ Weston, Arthur H. “The Lesbia of Catullus” *The Classical Journal* 15.8 (1920): 501.

¹²⁷ Jensen, Richard C. “*Otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est*” *The Classical Journal* 62.8 (1967): 363.

poem 51, a translation of Sappho fragment 31 L-P;”¹²⁸ Wilkinson – “the poem being a free translation of one addressed by Sappho to a Lesbian girl;”¹²⁹ Baehrens – “[e]st hoc carmen (quod attinet ad tres strophas primae) fere conversum ex Sapphus ode celeberrima;”¹³⁰ Fordyce – “[t]he original of this poem is an ode of which four strophes have been preserved;”¹³¹ Garrison – “[a] free translation of an ancient poem in Greek by Sappho (LP 31);”¹³² McDaniel – “[t]he following poem... is one of the two definite translations from the Greek left by Catullus;”¹³³ Ellis – “[i]n hoc carmine Sapphus carmen II (Bergk. Poet. Lyr. p. 878) convertit Catullus;”¹³⁴ Riese – “[f]reie Übersetzung eines Gedichtes der Sappho;”¹³⁵ Carson – “[i]t is worth noting that Catullus’ translation of the poem into Latin includes, at just this point, an entirely new thought;”¹³⁶ Prins – “the translation by Catullus, who transforms the poem of Sappho into the expression of a man love-struck by a woman;”¹³⁷ duBois – “Catullus translated this poem, retaining the gender markers of the object of desire and transforming it into a heterosexual text;”¹³⁸ Quinn – “[t]he poem is a version of some famous lines of Sappho, in the same metre (Sapphic stanzas) as the original.”¹³⁹ And those who don’t necessarily know it to be a translation at least know it for an adaptation, loose or otherwise, that appropriates the voice and text of the Sapphic verses for its own ends: O’Higgins – “Sappho 31 concerns

¹²⁸ Hallett, Judith P. “Sappho and Her Social Context: Sense and sensuality” *Signs* 4.3 (1979): 452.

¹²⁹ Wilkinson, L.P. “Ancient and Modern: Catullus li again” *Greece & Rome* 21.1 (1974): 82.

¹³⁰ Baehrens, Aemilius, ed. *Catulli Veronensis Liber* (Lipsia: B.G. Teubner, MDCCCLXXVI) 256n. I apologize for the odd citation, but that’s what the book says.

¹³¹ Fordyce, C.J. ed. *Catullus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) 218n.

¹³² Garrison, D.H., ed. *The Student’s Catullus* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989) 119n.

¹³³ McDaniel, W.B., ed. *The Poems of Catullus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931) 103n.

¹³⁴ Ellis, R., ed. *Catulli Veronensis Liber* (Oxonium: Typographeum Clarendonianum, M DCC LXXVIII) 72n. Again, all apologies for the peculiar citation.

¹³⁵ Riese, Alexander, ed. *Die Gedichte des Catullus* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1884) 96n.

¹³⁶ Prins, Yopie. *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999) 43.

¹³⁷ Carson, *If not, winter* 364n.

¹³⁸ duBois, Page. *Sappho is Burning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 66.

¹³⁹ Quinn, Kenneth. *Catullus: An interpretation* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973) 56.

poetry as much as love or jealousy, like Catullus' 'response' in 51, a poem which addresses Sappho's poetic claims and poetic stance as least as much as Lesbia's beauty;"¹⁴⁰ Trappes-Lomax – "[t]he adaptation of Sappho is incomplete, as she wrote at least five stanzas, and we may be sure that Catullus did not abandon his task half way through;"¹⁴¹ Wiseman – "the adaptation from Sappho (51) which ends with the poet's reflection that *otium* has destroyed him;"¹⁴² Della Corte – "[n]on è traduzione, ma l'adattamento dell'ode di Saffo (fr. 31 Lobel-Page) a una situazione personale;"¹⁴³ Godwin – "[t]his poem is clearly modeled on a famous poem of the Greek poetess Sappho;"¹⁴⁴ Fredricksmeier – "*Carmen* 51, based on Sappho's poem... has probably been discussed more frequently than any other of Catullus' poems;"¹⁴⁵ Allen – "Catullus was entitled to the epithet *doctus* as much from his imitations of Sappho as of Callimachus;"¹⁴⁶ Connely – "if Catullus be a real disciple of Sappho in instances other than his *Ille mi par esse deo videtur*;"¹⁴⁷ Rose – "I have said that a poet, ancient or modern, situated as Catullus was, would find other models than those of the prevailing fashion. Catullus seems to have found his in Sappho;"¹⁴⁸ Furley – "[p]oem 31 in our collection of Sappho's fragments is so well-known both through the original version, quoted partially by 'Longinus' (*De Sublimitate* 10.1-3), and through Catullus' adaptation (no. 51), that it is difficult to achieve sufficient distance from one's preconceptions to

¹⁴⁰ O'Higgins, Dolores. "Sappho's Splintered Tongue: Silence in Sappho 31 and Catullus 51" *American Journal of Philology* 111 (1990): 156.

¹⁴¹ Trappes-Lomax, John M. *Catullus: A textual reappraisal* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2007) 127.

¹⁴² Wiseman, T.P. *Catullan Questions* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1969) 15.

¹⁴³ Catullo. *Le Poesie* a cura di Francesco Della Corte (Roma: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 2002) 277n.

¹⁴⁴ Godwin, John. *Catullus: The shorter poems* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1999) 171n.

¹⁴⁵ Fredricksmeier, Ernest A. "On the Unity of Catullus 51" *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 96 (1965): 153.

¹⁴⁶ Allen, Katharine. "Doctus Catullus" *Classical Philology* 10.2 (1915): 223.

¹⁴⁷ Connely, Willard. "Imprints of Sappho¹ on Catullus" *The Classical Journal* 20.7 (1925): 411.

¹⁴⁸ Rose, H.J. "Catullus" *The Classical Journal* 16.9 (1921): 548.

permit reappraisal;”¹⁴⁹ Lidov – “the ancient evidence points to a text flawed at the same places as the one in the ‘Longinus’ manuscript, Catullus omitted precisely the problematic words, and did so very cleverly;”¹⁵⁰ McEvelley – “Sappho’s description of her passionate reaction to the girl, then, is praise of the bride, typically indirect or reflected through a witness. It prefigures the erotic delights which the groom is to enjoy. It is not an expression of jealousy, as in Catullus’ version;”¹⁵¹ Thomson – “[c]learly an adaptation (not, strictly speaking, a translation; see detailed notes below) of Sappho, fr. 31 Lobel-Page.”¹⁵² The distinction here between translation and adaptation is not entirely clear, nor do I have it in mind to elucidate. These lists are by no means inclusive, nor do I intend them to be a representative sample of the critical discourse that surrounds the two poems, as many well-known and not-so-well-known critics have been excluded. I let this wall of critical reference stand as is to get a feeling of what the scholarship is like, a sense of the world in which these poems move and are moved, because it seems *everyone* knows that Catullus 51 is a [something] of the Sappho fragment. And it even seems that everyone knows that everyone knows. Everyone, defined here solipsistically as everyone who does in fact know, knows the text of Catullus 51; it is, after all, one of the great Roman lyrics:

Ille michi impar esse deo videtur
 Ille si fas est superare divos
 Qui sedens adversus identidem
 Te spectat et audit
 Dulce ridentem miseroque omnis
 Eripit sensus michi; nam simul te

¹⁴⁹ Furley, William D. “‘Fearless, Bloodless... like the Gods’: Sappho 31 and the rhetoric of ‘godlike’” *The Classical Quarterly* 50.1 (2000): 7.

¹⁵⁰ Lidov, Joel B. “The Second Stanza of Sappho 31: Another look” *The American Journal of Philology* 114.4 (1993): 521.

¹⁵¹ McEvelley, Thomas. “Sappho, Fragment Thirty-One: The face behind the mask” *Phoenix* 32.1 (1978): 2.

¹⁵² Thomson, D.F.S. ed. *Catullus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 327n.

Lesbia aspexi nichil est supermi
Lingua sed torpet tenuis sub artus
Flamina demanat; sonitu suopte
Tintiant aures. gemina teguntur
Lumina nocte
Otium catuli tibi molestum est
Otio exultas nimiumque gestis
Otium et reges et prius beatas
Perdidit urbes¹⁵³

Impar

Of course, no one knows the above text to be that of Catullus 51: no printed edition, not even the *editio princeps*, has the above as the text of the poem, even though our oldest manuscripts have it and also, we assume, *V*,¹⁵⁴ the archetype from which the surviving manuscripts derive. The Renaissance readers who first encountered Catullus after *V* was recovered and copied (and lost shortly thereafter) never took the manuscript poem seriously and began emending it even in the codices themselves. The first line of this Catullus 51 has never been the object of critical study, as far as I can tell, because even before the cycle of printed editions began in the 15th century, *ille michi impar esse deo videtur* (“he seems to me to be unequal to a god”) was not considered to be *the text* even though that is what was, in fact, written in the very books from which the text is derived. Through the centuries *michi* (now *mi*) and *impar* (now *par*) have survived in one form or another, be it the manuscripts (we have yet to lose) or the critical apparatus of the various editions published since the *editio princeps*. These “alternate” readings, which are in fact

¹⁵³ Catullus 51 as it appears in the *Codex Oxoniensis Bodleianus* (hereafter *O*), the oldest of the extant manuscripts of the poems of Catullus.

¹⁵⁴ The Veronese manuscript (*V*) was known to have existed because of its discovery and likewise the re-discovery of Catullus through it. The manuscript itself, however, is no longer extant. See Gaisser’s *Catullus and his Renaissance Readers* for a fuller account of Catullus’ rediscovery.

the primary readings, various editions have carried along with themselves if only out of a philological duty to thoroughness: no one reads them, meaning no one interprets them, and for all intents and purposes they might as well not even exist. They have been relegated to the status of nonsense, and as such, due to the rehearsal of particular texts—there are still numerous Catullan texts in play; the above is simply not one of them—in critical reception, where lies the true genesis of any text, relegated to a worse than tertiary status. Not a single critic since Baehrens in the 19th century has bothered to even address how *ille mi par esse deo videtur* became *ille michi impar esse deo videtur* (or vice versa), making the issue seem to be largely a settled matter. Baehrens, employing the method so often used to ignore aberrant readings, explains *michi* and *impar* away as clerical errors: “extat in V ‘mihi impar’: invenerat librarius in suo exemplari ‘impar’, scripta supra ‘im’ (quod ex ‘mi’ corruptum) correctura ‘mihi’ [‘mihi impar’ is extant in V: a scribe had found ‘impar’ in his exemplar, and would have corrected with ‘mihi’ written above the ‘im’ (which is a corruption from ‘mi’)].”¹⁵⁵ What Bährens proposes is a two stage process in which first some dyslexic scribe wrote *im* for *mi*, and then later, because *impar* is a word, is left as is by another scribe who adds *michi* to correct the sense of the line. It should go without saying that this scenario is highly speculative. The above comment makes it seem as if the path back to *mi par* is an easy one, yet the actual history of manuscript corrections does not bear this out. *Mi* has its origin in a correction by a later hand in *G* (Codex Parisinus lat. 14137), a manuscript which does not contain the correction *par* for *impar*. *Ille mi impar esse deo videtur* is a substitution that really ought to be taken seriously, if only to explain why for the purposes of a modern edition the reading cannot be. It solves one of the major problems with *michi impar*, that it is

¹⁵⁵ Bährens 257n.

immetrical, and does so without changing the sense of the manuscript text. In some ways, the reading of the first line we have inherited, *ille mi par esse deo videtur*, is a much more radical departure (in being, you know, the *exact opposite*) and a departure that is grounded in the fundamental assumption that Catullus 51 is a translation, or at least an adaptation, of Sappho fr. 31.

Set that issue aside for a moment (I will return to it, don't worry), and imagine another poem in which Catullus appropriates Sappho—I don't deny the relationship between the two poems, as it's obvious; I would like to maintain, though, a certain degree of doubt as to what the nature of that relationship is—not so much to translate her or to reconfigure her feminine voice for a more straightforwardly masculine erotics, as Greene would have it,¹⁵⁶ but towards more programmatic ends, as Selden suggests for poem 16,¹⁵⁷ in which Catullus situates himself ironically not only with his poetic precursor but with *otium* (and ultimately poetry) as well.

He seems to me *unequal* to a god,
He, if I may say, seems to overcome gods,
Who sitting opposite again and again
Gazes and listens to you
Sweetly laughing, and it rips out every
Sense from miserable ole me: for once I
Have seen you, Lesbia, nothing is left for me—
But tongue is numb, thin gales spread
Through limbs, ears ring with their
Own din, and my lights are veiled
In twinned night
Leisure, puppies, is troublesome to you,
In leisure you exult and for too much you long,
Leisure till now has ruined both kings
And blessed cities

The manuscript reading actually works quite well, in sense at least, but the picture it

¹⁵⁶ Greene 2.

¹⁵⁷ Selden, Daniel. "Caveat Lector: Catullus and the rhetoric of performance" in *Innovations of Antiquity* ed. Ralph Hexter and Daniel Selden (New York: Routledge, 1992) 477.

paints of a Catullus sarcastically detached from his erotic object is a particularly horrifying one to the legions of commentaries that assume this poem to be a genuine profession of love, the first in a series of Lesbia poems that recount the ups and downs of his amorous affairs. If the first of these poems is programmatic and ironic to boot, what does that say about the rest of the poems in the “series,” which seem, at first glance, to be so straightforward and genuine?

I’d like to use this Catullus 51 to point to a seeming contradiction in his lyric voice. It is a contradiction to we modern readings who make distinctions between a romantic mode in which poetry is a mimetic expression of thought and emotion and a classical mode in which the greater concern is poetic artifice (musicality, meter, structure, rhythm), a distinction I would counter Catullus does not make. This is why I have chosen to consider the poets I have so far and to bring them together even though they have no obvious relationship. Each of the poets, and I include the songwriters in this group as well, subverts our categorical expectations: for each of them, lyrical expression does not preclude an extensive consideration of lyrical form. Under-lying this attention to Catullus’ poetic stances will be a fundamental concern for the nature of the Catullan corpus, the Catullan *texts*, as I would have them, in which we locate these lyric voices.

Everyone may be aware of the potential existence of typographical errors, and a great many people understand that texts of the same work may vary as a result of alterations, both intentional and inadvertent, introduced by the author or by others involved in the production of those texts. Nevertheless, most readers proceed to the reading of individual texts as if such troublesome facts had never entered their minds, accepting the texts in front of them with naïve faith. Critical sophistication in the extracting the meaning from words on a page can—and frequently does—coexist with the most uncritical attitude toward the document itself and the trustworthiness of its text.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Tanselle, G. Thomas. *A Rationale of Textual Criticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989) 16.

Classical scholars, to their credit, generally do not adopt the uncritical attitude toward the textual condition that Tanselle here lambastes, so what follows is in some way a cautionary tale, a fable that shows how ignorance of a text's conditions can emerge even when the critics themselves are zeroed in on issues of textual transmission and emendation.

The reading of *par* ("equal") for *impar* ("unequal"), upon which so much of the scholarship on Catullus 51 hinges especially in relation to Sappho, seems to have a more specific origin than *mi*: Codex Cuiacianus written by Pacificus Maximus Irenaeus de Asculo (commonly known as Asculanus), a professor at Perugia, in 1467.¹⁵⁹ Though this is the oldest surviving manuscript to contain the reading, its acceptance among Catullan scholars of the Renaissance and after is due in no small part to its inclusion in the *editio princeps* published in Venice in 1472 and to Marc-Antoine Muret's identification in 1554 of the poem with the fragment of Sappho preserved in Longinus' *On the Sublime*, which made the necessity of *par* to translate Sappho's *isos* all but obvious. This "obvious" relationship between Sappho and Catullus was revealed by Muret and became cemented in scholars' minds long before the manuscripts *O*, *G*, and *R* (Codex Vaticanus Ottobonianus lat. 1829) in which the reading *impar* is preserved were even known to exist. Thus, Baehrens (et al.) could be forgiven for writing off *michi impar* so easily; they had known the text to be something completely different for quite some time. Because of this assumption of the text, *O* in particular has been the recipient of inordinately snarky criticism. Thomson deems it "unfinished in execution, the work of a good calligrapher but abysmally poor Latinist," and Trappes-Lomax, in his recent

¹⁵⁹ Thomson 78n.

Catullus: A Textual Reappraisal, paints the entire set of early manuscripts as equally worthless.

The problem that has faced every reader of Catullus from the fourteenth century to the present day is simply that one of the greatest of poets was transmitted to us via a single MS, which was so bad that in the case of a decently preserved author it would be accounted little better than waste paper. As a result it is universally admitted that emendation is often necessary in Catullus... But what criterion should we use in order to decide which readings we accept and which we reject? There is only one possible criterion: *si melius est, Catullanum est* [if it is better, it is Catullan].¹⁶⁰

Though the assumption that critics agree *universally* that the Catullan corpus is in need of some degree of emendation strikes one as an exaggeration, it is not without truth. Even I who would valorize the more exotic and ignored manuscript readings would correct the spelling of *tintiant* (here translated as “reng”) and assume that the brief sermon on the perils of leisure is not addressed to puppies.¹⁶¹ But Trappes-Lomax’s criterion for determining textual emendation is not only vague, it is predicated on rather contradictory logic.

The criterion will often lead us to reject the authority of the MSS in particular cases, but it is none the less imposed by the authority of the MSS. The MSS, corrupt though they are, suffice to prove that Catullus is a great poet; having proved that, they deprive themselves of any authority to persuade us that he wrote anything manifestly inferior.¹⁶²

There is a desire among scholars to prove the existence of “Catullan genius,” whatever that may be, but also to make that genius conform to certain regular, perhaps preconceived patterns of lyric genius.

Whether the *melius* criterion is what *should* be applied to emendations of

¹⁶⁰ Trappes-Lomax, J. M. *Catullus: A textual reappraisal* (Oxford: The Classical Press of Wales, 2007) 1.

¹⁶¹ Catullus’ name is regularly spelled with only one l in *O*, so it isn’t much of a leap to assume that *catuli* here is in fact some form of his name.

¹⁶² Trappes-Lomax, *ibid.*

Catullus' text, conformity seems to be the standard that *has* been applied: conformity to notions of "translating" Sappho, conformity to accepted standards of Latin prosody, conformity to meter, etc. For example, moving *te* from the beginning of line 4 to the end of line three would make the first stanza conform perfectly to the expectations of the Sapphic stanza, changing *-que* to *quod* in line 5 makes it scan properly, and there is an assumption that *something* ought to occupy the "absent" line 8, and for many what the something may be is quite clear.

The sense of the missing adonic is clear. The *uocis* which appears in most of the suggested supplements (*uocis in ore* Doering, *uocis amanti*, *gutture uocis* Westphal) is likely enough, though their authors probably wrongly supposed that it corresponded exactly to $\phi\acute{\omega}\nu\alpha\varsigma$ in Sappho. *nihil uocis* is good Latin, but $\text{o}\acute{\upsilon}\delta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \phi\omega\nu\eta\varsigma$ is not Greek... Friedrich's supplement *Lesbia, uocis* has the merit of accounting for the loss of the line.¹⁶³

"Accounting for the loss of the line" seems to be the primary reason underlying any justification for a supplement; even noting the absence, which texts of 51 generally do when not suggesting a line outright, with asterisks or ellipses still indicate that something *ought* to be there.

Lidov has suggested that the absent line 8 for which many substitutions have been proposed (the most common of which, *uocis in ore*, insists oddly on putting a voice in Catullus' mouth just as the text insists there is nothing left) is an intentional omission.

What I am suggesting is that lacuna in the text of Catullus and the lack of guidance for us in other quotations [of Sappho] are not coincidences; the ancient evidence points to a text flawed at the same places as the one in the "Longinus" manuscript. Catullus omitted precisely the problematic words, and did so very cleverly, by constructing a gap that occupies the adonic tag but does not interfere with the general meaning. His audience, who would have known his Greek text [!], could have appreciated both the finesse with which he chose, in this first instance, to acknowledge its uncertainties, and the artistry by which he minimized the interruption in

¹⁶³ Fordyce 220n.

the rhythmic flow of his own poem.¹⁶⁴

This is only one of numerous instances where an argument has been made in favor of a particular reading of Catullus 51 predicated on the belief it must *conform* to Sappho's fr. 31. Thomson¹⁶⁵ and others note that *-que* ("and") is often confused in manuscripts with the abbreviation for *quod* ("what"), making the subject of *eripit* ("rips out") at the beginning of line 6 much less ambiguous. But *quod* is also a much closer translation of Sappho's *to* in line 5, where the relative pronoun is generalized not to refer to some specific thing but the entirety of what has been said in the lyric up to that point. The *change* from *-que* to *quod* seems to be demanded by this symmetry with Sappho 31 in the same way that Lidov suggests the "lacuna" in the text at line "8" be treated as is. In accordance with Lidov's thinking, every emendation suggested for the "missing" line is inappropriate, even the asterisks commonly used to fill the line without suggesting a specific reading, as they still assert *something* should be there. Even speaking of a line "8" at all is inappropriate; just because the meter demands an extra line does not necessarily mean the poem demands it. What then would we do with *flamina* ("gales") in line 10 (9)? It has nothing going for it: it is immetrical, it is a subject that doesn't agree with its verb (*demanat* – "spreads down"), and it is easy to see in the manuscript hand of *O* how *flamma* ("flame"), the most common correction, could be confused for *flamina* (and vice versa). *Flamma* seems to have everything going for it: it is metrical, it agrees with its verb, and it very nicely translates *pur* ("fire") in line 10 of Sappho's fragment. Yet, with no small amount of tortured logic, an argument can be made for *flamina*.

Objection 1 – it is immetrical: if we insist on operating within the mode of Sapphic

¹⁶⁴ Lidov 520-1.

¹⁶⁵ Thomson 328n.

Assimilation, immetrality is not such a problem. Since Nagy¹⁶⁶, an argument has been growing in popularity that asserts the awkward hiatus in line 9 of Sappho 31, *glōssa eage*, is mimetic. At the moment the poem asserts *tongue breaks*, so too the carefully ordered sounds of the words in the line fall apart as well. One could argue that Catullus transfers this effect of sound from his *lingua sed torpet* (“but tongue is numb”), what translates *glōssa eage*, onto *tenuis sub artus flamina demanat* (“thin gales spreads under [my] skin”), and those “gales” would be the verbal manifestation of the hissing sibilants that dominate lines 9 (8?) and 10 (9?).

Objection 2 – it doesn’t agree with its verb: another stretch is needed here, but if we continue to assume Sapphic Assimilation, *flamina demanat* could be a rather subtle nod to Greek syntax—after all, aren’t we dealing with a translation of a Greek poem—where a neuter plural noun, which *flamina* is, very often take singular verbs. Now while this argument seems to be not without reason, it should be noted that if it were the case, *flamina demanat* would be the only example in all of Latin literature, as far as I know, where Latin syntax mimics Greek syntax in this regard. This leads us back to one of the fundamental difficulties in using philological methods to make arguments like the one above: they are singularly ill-equipped to detect peculiarities in texts. In fact, where peculiarities may exist, philologists will, more often than not, completely eviscerate them. When you take comparability as the fundamental assumption of your critical approach, you remain largely deaf to instances of irony (especially when said irony does not fit neatly with established patterns), of metrical and semantic eccentricities (if a word is used all of twice in the extant literature, a philologist is loath to assume it means one thing in

¹⁶⁶ Nagy, Gregory. *Comparative Studies in Greek and Indic Meter* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974) 45.

one context and something else entirely in another), and of textual difficulty in general. The textual critic, sometimes implicitly and sometimes overtly, takes it as his duty to make the text easier to read. Though at first glance my criticism of philology may seem to be a polemical one, I would insist that it isn't. I am first and foremost a philologist myself, if a particularly liberal one, and the aporia I see in certain philological methods, especially word study, is simply philology's ignorance, no better or worse than the ignorances I have enumerated so far.

Objection 3 – it is easy to confuse *flamma* for *flamina*: it is easy to confuse the *-que* for the abbreviation of *quod*, it is somewhat less easy to confuse *mi par* for *impar*,¹⁶⁷ yet scholars accept it happened—“easy to confuse” is not the reason these readings were established nor is it the reason they persist. They persist because of an assumed relationship between Sappho fr. 31 and Catullus 51, be it as a translation (close or loose) or as an adaptation. But that is not the whole story.

Critical opinions of Sappho's text do not feed unilaterally into determinations of Catullus':

The poem has been preserved for us by the ancient literary critic Longinus (*On the Sublime* 10.1-3), who quotes four complete stanzas, then the first verse of what looks like a fifth stanza, then breaks off, no one knows why. Sappho's account of the symptoms of desire attains a unity of music and sense in vv. 1-16, framed by verbs of seeming (“he seems to me,” “I seem to me”), so if the seventeenth verse is authentic it must represent an entirely new thought. It is worth noting that Catullus' translation of the poem into Latin includes, at just this point, an entirely new thought.¹⁶⁸

Rather than justifying the shift from Catullus' third strophe to his fourth, which is not only palpable but the object of much debate, Carson seems to do the exact opposite, use

¹⁶⁷ I could be accused of being disingenuous here, an accusation that really doesn't concern me, because in certain orthographies “im” and “mi” would look almost exactly the same, as a series of four short lines with serifs: *iiii*.

¹⁶⁸ Carson, *If not winter* 364n.

Catullus' text to justify the sudden shift in Sappho's, also the object of much critical debate. The specter of comparability haunts this endnote: difference in each text must be defended, and it is lucky that Sappho and Catullus can serve as exemplars for each other, lest their texts become subject to even greater mutilation than they already are. To drive this point home, Page notes the similarity between Sappho's *glōssa eage* and Lucretius' *infringi linguam* and continues

[T]he "broken tongue" would cause no difficulty to the Roman, in whose language *infringere* was a common metaphor for "enfeeble," "enervate." Catullus' translation, *lingua sed torpet*, is of no critical value: he who turns *kardian en stēthesin eptoaisēn into omnes eripit sensus mihi*, and *oppatessi d' oud' en orēmmi* into *gemina teguntur lumina nocte*, is paraphrasing too freely to help us here.¹⁶⁹

If Catullus' text is useless for establishing the meaning of Sappho's *glōssa eage* and how it is to be emended, why mention him at all? and why be so snarky about it? Page's remark betrays the assumption in the scholarly discourse that Catullus 51 and Sappho 31 have a *special* relationship, one in which his text, because it is much closer to the origin of Sappho's poem than we are, supposedly, can serve as not just a translation but as a *source* too. Examples of this special relationship are numerous and often appear as reprints of Sappho's text alongside Catullus' in editions of his corpus and almost immediate mention of Catullus 51 by classical scholars in most comments on her fragment 31. Would anyone use Carson's, Barnard's, or anyone else's translation of Sappho's fragments to determine the *readings* of the fragments' texts?

This special relationship exists because both texts, Catullus 51 and Sappho 31, contain numerous textual difficulties and the textual critic who wishes to settle the Latin and the Greek has little beside the one to serve as exemplar for the other, and over time

¹⁶⁹ Page, Denys. *Sappho and Alcaeus: An introduction to the study of Lesbian poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955) 25.

the critical discourse itself has served in place of testimonia, contemporary or otherwise, which are scarce for both poets, to establish and justify the patterns of *reading* Sappho and Catullus. But the parallel readings noted above do not emerge spontaneously and simultaneously; they emerge historically, and the pattern of an argument re: Sappho and its effect on arguments re: Catullus can be traced over time. Nagy's brief suggestion in 1974 about the mimetic function of the hiatus in Sappho 31 becomes the lengthier considerations of Svenbro and O'Higgins (in 1988 and 1990 respectively) well before Lidov throws it back onto Catullus to justify what is, ironically, the *original* condition of the text as it exists in the manuscripts. But I included the quote from Page (from 1959) also to give a hint of the arguments that surrounded *glōssa eage* prior to Nagy and how prominently Catullus' text figures in them. We have a scholarly legacy from which, I would argue, the poems cannot be easily extricated (nor should we) and in which Catullus is used to justify the text of Sappho is used to justify the text of Catullus ad nauseam. It is an echo chamber in which as the reality of the two texts continue to harmonize with each other they grow ever distant from the text of their source documents. As a result, certain original readings which should alarm (and excite) textual and literary critics (e.g. *impar* in Catullus 51 line 1 and the abrupt *phainomai* in Sappho 31 line 16) are forgotten, are ignored, and though the arguments *about* the poems continue to rage, as time passes the *texts* become ever more fixed, ever more certain, ever more settled.

The critical scholarship is an echo chamber in which the texts of Sappho and Catullus are continuously rehearsed and performed. But what complicates my discussion here is two modes of imitation: one in which Catullus imitates Sappho (likewise Sappho *seems* to imitate Catullus) and another in which literary scholars imitate their critical

precursors (and in turn are imitated by those who follow). Catullus is framed as a spectator who both observes and imitates Sappho in form and intent, just as Sappho frames herself (likewise Catullus who “follows” her) as an observer fundamentally altered by what she observes. Over and above that, the scholarship that surrounds these poems is not simply a mass of noise in which competing interests yell across the divide in an endless, irresolvable morass of interpretive possibilities but a historically developed series where a later critic does not simply engage a much earlier argument on its own terms but in relation to all the later arguments that have taken it up either to refute or support it. Though the relationship between Catullus 51 and the Sapphic fragment preserved in Longinus was specifically discovered by Muret, mention of which is made in a specific location and in a specific year, modern critics rarely, if ever, attribute this discovery—and a discovery it is; Renaissance critics of Catullus do not necessarily know about Sappho 31: the relationship is not “obvious” to them—to Muret but rather take it as widely known, “obvious,” a fact about which there is no contention and seemingly never has been. The fact of Catullus’ relation to Sappho is taken as given and generally framed in terms of 20th (now 21st) not 15th century arguments. And while there may be knowledge of the historical relationship between Sappho and Catullus as poets, the poems are treated ahistorically. Sappho 31 and Catullus 51, as *texts*, are equated in such a way as to erase the historical relationship between the poets or at least efface notions of who precedes whom and what imitates what.

Instead of speaking of “original texts,” we might consider when and how we, understood as a critical history, first encounter the texts we have. We first encounter Sappho 31 in Longinus but continue to re-engage with the text in each subsequent edition

where it is re-written. It's hard to say when "we" first encounter Catullus 51, because the manuscript from which our texts derive (*V*) no longer is extant and because the oldest manuscripts that do survive were only engaged critically once a fairly clear stream of Catullan scholarship with its own assumptions about the nature of the texts had been established. Ironically, when *O* and *R* did come to light and when it became clear that they do not *as is* support several fundamental assumptions about the Catullan corpus, it led not to the destabilization of established theories but to a marked disregard for what the manuscripts say. Thomson's dismissal of these manuscripts as the being the work of a good calligrapher but poor Latinist is indicative of how the very real documents of these texts are not taken very seriously. We persist in our fundamentally Platonic belief that the *oeuvre* is somehow beyond the text *qua* document and that said document or documents are a disgustingly corrupt prison from which the text (as soul) must be released. This state of affairs is the reason why I invoke Heidegger in my introduction, because the way in which he tries to understand how *language speaks* (itself and for itself) can help us understand how a *text* speaks (or as Heidegger says how "speaking is kept safe in what is spoken")¹⁷⁰ so as, by assuming a subjectivity *of* the text, not to dismiss its condition so facilely.

Par

"Settling the Latin" or "determining once and for all what the text says" are only means to preserving the romantic illusion that reading (i.e. interpreting) is an aesthetic experience fundamentally divorced from a textual experience, that the latter impedes the

¹⁷⁰ Heidegger, Martin. "Language" in *Poetry, Language, Thought* 191-2.

former, and, as such, the duty of textual critics is to settle textual issues as cleanly and as decisively as possible before the text arrives at its reader, or as Gaskell would have it:

In light of what the [textual editor] discovers, and of the needs of his own audience, he presents a text purged as far as possible of accidental errors and of deliberate but unauthorized alterations; he equips it with a record of those surviving variants of composition which he thinks readers of the edition will find useful, and supports it with an apparatus of textual notes and of the more important variants of transmission which explains and justifies his version.¹⁷¹

It may seem that I have been advocating the manuscript readings in *O*, or, by accepting some corrections while arbitrarily rejecting others, a hybrid yet to make an appearance in any critical edition or journal publication. Not at all—if anything I’m advocating ignorance, that is *readily* claiming not to know “what the text is,” to preserve its textual problems in all their various manifestations and thereby preserve the *textual* experience of reading Catullus along with the *aesthetic* one, as I believe the distinction between these two types of reading experience to be an unnecessary one. And the “textual experience” of *reading* Catullus is not simply a matter of returning to the origins of our numerous printed editions, i.e. the manuscripts, but to my mind a composite both of the texts’ history, in manuscript and print, and the history of scholarly justification for accepting, rejecting, and mutating (or mutilating) those texts. The “text” cannot, at this point, be simply extricated from its critical history without doing similar violence to what has already been perpetrated. The ignorance of which I speak lends itself well to a critical attitude in which, because it seeks to *use* textual and literary problems instead of resolving them, a reading can fundamentally alter the terms of textual engagement *poetically* while also addressing the concerns of its fellow travelers without rehearsing their arguments *mimetically*. It is an inclusive not an exclusive approach.

¹⁷¹ Gaskell, Philip. *From Writer to Reader: Studies in editorial method* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 2.

Consider how Regina Spektor presents a critic of poetry with an interesting challenge: where with the vast majority of pop lyrics the words and music have so little to do with each other that a critic could easily interpret the lyrics without even knowing the music exists, in Spektor's songs what we tacitly render as the "lyrics," i.e. the words, is not sufficient. What she does to the words, how she deforms and reforms them with her voice, how she renders them sometimes more and sometimes less than language, provides the *literary* critic with an amusing problem, a problem that is perhaps not so amusing by virtue of how ill-equipped a written text is to deal with issues of sound. A simple question: how do you quote a song? The habit established heretofore is generally to quote the lyrics and perhaps describe, with varying degrees of effectiveness, certain non-linguistic features of the song that critic-in-question feels are either relevant or curious. To be honest, this method suffices insofar as the vast majority of songwriters don't manipulate the words they write-to-be-sung much beyond perhaps rearranging a syllable's natural stress or length so as better to fit the melody to which the words are appended. But in the song above (you will have to suspend disbelief for the moment, if I am to get anywhere in this argument) in the epigraph, "Music Box," Spektor literally chokes on the words "mechanism" and "completely" in the last verse of the song. Is it sufficient to say that she chokes? I would say no: saying so does nothing to capture how realistically she does choke—or gag, the sound is, by its very nature, difficult to describe—how the effect it produces in my stomach is nigh vomit, how she chokes and yet manages to keep to the melody. Spektor's voice, both literal and poetic, is more than a simple organ of speech, of linguistic expression. It is, simultaneously, all those other, perhaps less appealing, functions of the throat: gagging, choking, spitting, vomiting,

breathing, etc.¹⁷² What the song captures, but the lyrics cannot, at least not as effectively as a simple recording, are the physiological features of the human voice language effaces. Of course, languages have their onomatopoeia, but even that is an attempt to bring noise under the control of a phonemic system that may or may not accurately represent the sound it is meant to convey, nor should it. “Buzz” is not in fact the sound a bee makes but rather a sign that stands for “the sound a bee makes:” language, by its very nature, only has need of these sound meanings when the sound in question is of some relative significance. There are numerous sounds that have no “word” in our languages, because they are largely irrelevant to the kinds of meaning language seeks to construct. So, when sounds in song that have no simple signs present themselves, we are reminded of how clumsily language, especially in its *literal* form, deals with them. It would be infinitely more efficient and effective simply to listen to the sound itself. The sound represents itself.

The challenge of Spektor’s lyrics, then, depends upon precisely that which falls under the rubric of “lyrics.” By “lyrics” do we mean that which is written somewhere to represent the text of a song, say, in liner notes or a songbook, or do we mean the sum total of what Spektor sings in the performance itself, not only what she sings but *how* as well? *In this text*, the one I’m writing, a written essay to be published in a literal format,

¹⁷² To my mind, this song plays with our preconceptions of voice, when we say “the poet’s voice,” which is a stand-in for the persona or perspective the “poet” adopts in using specific language in a specific way, and plays with the figure of sound within lyric, if only implicitly. “Voice” is less a vibrating column of air in the throat and the idiosyncratic sound it projects, and more the seemingly human figure the poet creates in language. By drawing attention to those “merely” physiological capabilities of the real human voice, the sounds it can produce, and how difficult it is to ascribe linguistic content to those sounds, Spektor reminds us that more often than not there is no voice, no sound, in “the poet’s voice;” it is an alienated construct, like the *oeuvre* we always want to find beyond or behind the textual document. In written discourse we may persist in *saying* (i.e. writing words whose message is) “such-and-such text says yada yada yada,” but a written text only ever speaks in metaphorical terms, a point which the medium of the audio recording is fundamentally better-equipped to make, yet I attempt to do so here anyway.

the latter is much easier to reproduce and therefore more likely to be used. Of course, the “lyrics” can be altered to accommodate or point to certain features of speech a written text can only awkwardly portray, but ultimately this does little to demonstrate precisely what it is the singer does. You’d be hard pressed to tell from the “lyrics,” but Spektor does in fact attempt to sing a new song:

But when I do the dishes—

I run the water very very very hot.
And then I fill the sink to the top with bubbles of soap.
And then I set all the bottle caps I own afloat.
And it’s the greatest voyage in the history of plastic.
And then I slip my hands in and start to make waves.
And then I dip my tongue in and take a taste.
It tastes like soap but it doesn’t really taste like soap.
And then I lower my whole mouth in and take a gulp.

And start to feel mortality surround me...

The “lyrics” change but so does the music: what was formerly melodic and flowing is now crisp, simple, and punctuated by hard staccato on a repetition of just three notes on the piano; the words are no longer a progressing discourse but a simple list of actions in sequence, which, ironically, merge right back into the song they were trying to escape. The point is, then, if there is anything programmatic in this song, that a song cannot escape itself and any attempt to do so within the confines of the song, within the “music box,” only extends the lyric; thus the return to the first verse.

For the purposes of an (academic) argument of literary criticism, there is no “outside” of the history of the reception of Catullus 51—my awkward attempt to “sing a new melody” or at least point to the possibility of other counter melodies does not and cannot escape the tradition of scholarship on Catullus, nor would I want it to. The point is that this kind of *reding* is radical not because of its deviance but because of its

rootedness, rooted specifically in the historical underpinnings of where we are in our collective (and contradictory) understanding of Catullus *qua* text and where we might go from here. Similarly, there is no longer an independent existence for Sappho 31 and Catullus 51, and where critics do consider each text “on its own terms” their arguments quickly become part of the mode of Sapphic/Catullan Assimilation the moment they enter the greater body of critical discourse. This is not to say the “song remains the same,” as I hope I’ve demonstrated above that with each iteration, with each rehearsal of previous arguments and performance of new arguments, the *Gestalt* slowly but steadily changes, and if the reception of Catullus and Sappho (and their relationship) is to be likened to a song, then the song is antiphonal, and it expands as our understanding of the texts (and the seeming understanding the texts have of each other) both widens and deepens. I say the song is antiphonal in that what matters are the intertextual connections made between Catullus and other ancient poets as well as the intratextual connections made between poems within the Catullan corpus. It is essential to philological methods that the acceptance or rejection of an argument be based on points of comparison. For example, Thomson rejects the interpretation of Catullus 8 (*Miser Catulle, desinas ineptire* – “Miserable Catullus, may you cease to be pathetic”) as humorous, an interpretation that originates with Morris in 1909, on the grounds that it must be similar in tone to poem 37, which repeats its fifth line (*amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla* – “loved by us as much as no one is loved”) nearly verbatim.

In fact there are several weighty reasons against accepting either of Morris’... contentions. Line 5 is repeated, almost unchanged, in poem 37, and in a context where there can be no question of humour:

Salax taberna...
 puella nam mi (me, *codd.*), quae meo sinu fugit,

amata tantum quantum amabitur nulla,
pro qua mihi sunt magna bella pugnata,
consedit istic.¹⁷³

If these lines, with so clear and so resonant an echo of poem 8, are intended to be taken as amusing, at least Lesbia did not share this opinion.¹⁷⁴

As I have said, when a word, or in this case a phrase, is used in a seemingly identical fashion in two distinct locations, it is difficult to start from the assumption that it means two completely different things in each context. But the possibility that Thomson doesn't consider, perhaps is loath to do so given the common consensus about poem 37, is that what one might infer from Morris' argument about poem 8 is that 37 could have a touch of humor as well. And if poem 37 were not without a touch of humor, what could one say about its "close" relationship to poem 36 and the *truces iambos* ("savage iambs") that Lesbia finds so objectionable or about its relationship to poem 39, in which Egnatius' habit of cleaning his teeth with urine, first suggested in poem 37 (*dens Hiberna defricatus urina* – "teeth rubbed down with Spanish urine"), becomes the source of much hilarity? In light of the poems to which even Thomson equates 37, it in fact seems more unreasonable to assume that "there can be no question of humour." But perhaps Thomson is right, there can be no doubt of the presence of humor, just not in the way he means.

The first five lines of poem 8 are surprisingly similar to the last four of 51 in that not only does Catullus address himself directly (assuming, of course, the last stanza of 51

¹⁷³ trans. "Seedy tavern...
the girl, who fled from my embrace, by me
loved so much—as much as no one is loved—
for whom by me many battles were fought,
resided there."

¹⁷⁴ Thomson 227n.

is not, in fact, addressed to puppies) but comments on his dejected state. Compare

Miser Catulle, desinas ineptire,
et quod vides perisse perditum ducas.
fulsere quondam candidi tibi soles,
cum ventitabas quo puella ducebat
amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla.

poor Catullus, stop screwing around,
and what you see gone consider gone.
once, brilliant suns shone for you,
when you would go where led the girl
loved by us as much as no one is loved.¹⁷⁵

with

otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est;
otio exsultas nimiumque gestis;
otium et reges prius et beatas
perdidit urbes.

leisure, Catullus, is troublesome to you,
in leisure you exult and for too much you long;
leisure till now has ruined both kings
and blessed cities

where what Catullus says to himself in either case is indicative both of how things don't last and how Catullus is complicit in his own pain. The activity described at the beginning of 8 is *otium*, is what Catullus would do with free time on his hands, and it is *otium* in poem 51 that molests him and destroys even the greatest of cities. But *otium* is precisely that which makes the whole world of these poems possible; having the time to go to parties, write poetry, engage in affairs, is the condition necessary to animate the poems and keep them alive. It is those idle moments that Catullus fills with self-pity in

¹⁷⁵ It should be noted that the text of poem 8 above is not only that printed in most modern editions but is for the most part consistent with the early manuscripts as well. Notable exceptions are the substitution *et quod* for *quod* in the *V* archetype and *candidi* for *candida* in *G*. Though, I don't believe using the "critical edition" of the text is at all inconsistent with what I have been saying about the possible implications of reasserting the manuscript readings as 1) I am not actually championing those earlier readings *over* the modern consensus but rather *alongside* it, and because 2) the variants in this case don't serve or detract from my argument as to how poem 8 and others are sometimes equated with other poems in the Catullan corpus and sometimes not.

poem 11, where he equates himself with a flower needlessly cut down by the plow; with invective, be it genuine or mere locker room banter, in poem 16 where he threatens Furius and Aurelius with penetration of the ass and mouth (*pedicabo et irrumabo*); with the pangs of an unrequited love in 51 (or an ironically detached parody of Sappho's pangs); with Egnatius' peculiar habits of dental hygiene in 39; with mourning for his lost brother in 101; with everything good, miserable, and in between. *Otium* is that which permits Catullus to move seamlessly from one attitude to another to yet another and another—each different from all the attitudes to precede it yet still remarkably *Catullan*. *Otium* is what allows the Catullan corpus to exist, and what permits us as critics to shape, reshape, mutilate, and mutate it to better suit our shifting perspective and changing needs.

Key to my equation of these two poems is the thematic word *miser*, “miserable,” used in the vocative in poem 8 (*Miser Catulle*) and in the dative in 51 (*misero...mihi* – “from miserable [ole] me”), a word which lends either poem to the common enough trope of the dejected lover, but within that trope, Catullus occupies two seemingly opposed positions: he who scolds and he who is scolded, or more generally “I” and “you.” There is an uneasy seamlessness between the first and second person in both poems where a reader almost *needs* to assume a kind of schizophrenia in Catullus' persona (or at least the possibility of multiple personae even within the confines of an individual poem) in order to make sense of what she reads. While such a schizophrenia may be easy to accept in 51—the Catullus of the final stanza appears very clearly detached from the “me” of the previous three stanzas, and the sudden change in tone marks this—in poem 8 not only can the “you” be conflated with the implicit first person voice of the poem but with another “you,” the girl to whom he bids farewell, in the final lines of the poem.

vale, puella. iam Catullus obdurat,
nec te requiret nec rogabit invitam.
at tu dolebis, cum rogaberis nulla.
scelesta, vae te, quae tibi manet vita?
quis nunc te adibit? cui videberis bella?
quem nunc amabis? cuius esse diceris?
quem basiabis? cui labella mordebis?
at tu, Catulle, destinatus obdura.

farewell, dear girl. thus Catullus perseveres,
he won't require you nor ask after you unwilling.
and you will ache, when you are asked after not.
wretch, poor you, what life remains for you?
who now will go to you? to whom will you seem fair?
whom now will you love? whose will you be said to be?
whom will you kiss? whom will you bite on the lip?
and you, Catullus, persevere yet undeterred.

These lines cement Catullus' occupation of every grammatical person—first, second, and third— and his movement into the third person is signaled by the acquisition of a new second, the girl who has abandoned him. But this movement never quite “gets over” Catullus, as we can see he resumes the second person position in the final line. What makes matters worse is that the same conjunction marks the beginning of the lyric subject's interrogation of the girl to be forgotten as reintroduces Catullus in the final line: *at* in *at tu dolebis* (“and you will ache”) and in *at tu, Catulle* respectively. *At* is a problematic conjunction in that it is neither straightforwardly additive like *et* or “and” in English nor simply adversative; it is both. *At* introduces a clause where while information is being appended to what precedes it also marks the following as distinct in some way. What that difference is need not necessarily be clear, though. In the case of *at tu dolebis*, the *at* marks the shift from Catullus, in the third person, as the subject of the verb to the *puella* as “you.” The second *at* in *at tu, Catulle* does not mark a change in subject, as the subject of the imperative *obdura* is still, implicitly, the second person, but

it does mark a change of address, that is the “you” has ever so subtly changed. This is where the matter becomes complicated, because of the repetition of the phrase *at tu*, “and you.” The vocative *Catulle* that follows in the last line is necessary, otherwise the reader might assume the “you” is still the girl from the previous lines. However, the parallel also calls into question whom exactly is being addressed in those five lines of interrogatives; the condition they describe could just as easily be true of the Catullus described in the first half of the poem as it could be true of the *puella* in the latter, with one notable exception: the subject of *cui videberis bella* (“to whom will you seem fair?”) is clearly feminine. Even so, the paired *at tu* rhetorically equates Catullus with the *puella*; the condition is mutual. So, just as Catullus might persevere and get over his love, she might just as easily do the same and get over him.

Catullus, in this poem and in the entire corpus, moves around; he cannot be pinned to any one subject or object position, and in the case of this poem, neither can his erotic other. How does this reflect equation of 8 with 51, though? Well, it depends largely on what we assume 51 (and 8) to be. If we assume 51 is a grave poem concerned deeply with how the lover’s longing for his erotic object slowly but steadily renders him moot (and mute), then 8 (and 37 [and 36?]) is a somber soliloquy on the nature of unrequited love, without humor just as Thomson suggests. But, if in 51 Catullus is laughing at himself and how such a witty, urbane young man might be taken in by the silly extravagances of love and poems thereof, 8 (and 37 [and 36!]) *equally* takes a shot at how the upright Roman citizen returning vigorously to the realm of *negotium* seeks to get over his frivolous love by showing how his *virtus* could just as easily be hers: the poem implicitly questions the value of getting on with your life, if your love does not suffer as a

result.¹⁷⁶ If Catullus 51 is *par* and *impar* as I have suggested earlier in this chapter, it does very little to upset my ironic *reading*, because the question of to what and how it is equated remain. If 51 is more perfectly symmetrical with Sappho fr. 31, it makes sense to see in it a very wild yet somber gravitas that reflects not only on the intense emotional and physical sensations of initial desire but on the entire world of leisure, of *otium* and all it entails. If we equate it with 8 (or 36 [or 37]), we tie it back into all of the problems of literary interpretation that plague the Catullan corpus, which is never perfectly serious, never perfectly detached, never perfectly anything. Perhaps, the problem with (and the joy in) *reading* Catullus is that his corpus is too perfectly *connected*, often to poems, poetic stances, or poetic criticisms that blatantly contradict each other. But just because they speak against each other, it doesn't mean we should give up. We simply need to recognize how intrinsically linked our concerns for literary criticism are with textual criticism, and vice versa.

It surprises me no one has yet made the connection between *superare* (“overcome”) in line 2 of poem 51 and *nihil est super mi* in line 7—perhaps the connection is easier to make in this unsettled vein where “what Catullus says” is entirely up for grabs. The syntax demands that *super* (“above” but here more in the sense of “remaining” or “left over”) stand as an adverb and not a preposition, so there can be no simple parallel of “overcome gods” and “there is nothing over me.” But the possibility of word play remains to insist that not only does “he” overcome gods but “he” overcomes “me” as well. One might read more into this overcoming and assume in it something of what Sappho’s fragment has done to Catullus’ poem: though the masculine demonstrative

¹⁷⁶ Interestingly, I think the “ironic” readings of 51 and 8 actually make poem 37 appear even more pathetic. The implication in this line of poetic equation is that she, in fact, *does* get over him in near total disconcert for how he is cut down like that flower before the plow.

pronoun does not perfectly support Sappho overcoming Catullus, unless one reads in it Horace's "masculine Sappho," it does seem that in the history of reading Catullus 51 Sappho's voice has in many ways overcome Catullus' own text. The irony of this conquest lies in how subjecting Catullus to Sappho has conversely led to submitting Sappho to Catullus. Likewise, just as we readers (and *reders*) have asserted our will over Catullus (and Sappho's) text to overcome the problems of interpretation that plague us, so has Catullus' (and Sappho's) corpus come to dominate and encapsulate what we say. Like Spektor's muse inside the music box, every time we assert ourselves, our voices—critical and poetic—we actually bolster the discourse in and surrounding the poems, no matter how ardently we might contradict everything that has been said.

Silence

Barthes, in his now famous essay on the death of the author, asserts as a kind of summation that the death of the author is precisely that which makes possible the birth of the reader. This assertion is presented directly to contrast the notion that any text can be located within a concept of the author.

[A] text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all traces by which the written text is constituted.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author" *Image, Music, Text* trans. Stephen (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977) 148.

Barthes's "reader" is as empty and presumptive as the author whose death he announces, but it points to the way in which criticism, both textual and literary, treats its own "reader," as a vague ideal who, in the cases cited above, agrees implicitly and unreflexively with everything the critic pronounces as if it were obvious. The "readers" I have endeavored to present, as contra "readers" as Barthes's "reader" is contra "author," exist in history (and their readings are greatly influenced by where and when they come into the discourse), are possessed of biography (which I ignore) and psychology (which I hope I don't), and figure not as "destinations" of the text but way stations, like stops on a railroad headed somewhere but somewhere no one really is aware of. Their agency in conducting where the text goes is pronounced, but the irony of their agency lies in how they, by moving the discourse in a particular direction, eventually become subsumed by and trapped in it. Barthes's "reader" almost seems preferable. While I realize that Barthes is not describing a possible condition for any reader but an ideal, the characteristics of this reader seem to imply by abstraction the only means of escape from a text's critical tradition: don't get involved, don't talk back, don't compel others to acknowledge your existence in the community of reading, *don't write*, and you will be possessed of the freedom to go where the text doesn't. Your ignorance of the text will be mirrored by the text's ignorance of you, and perhaps both might be better off for it.

All along, implicit in my understanding of what reading does is that "reading" and "writing"—or more generally analysis and composition—are not distinct activities, one the purview of a passive body upon whom texts are inscribed and the other an act of pure enunciation which seeks not to constrain interpretation but merely make interpretation possible. These are, of course, gross generalizations, but they reflect certain attitudes

toward reading and writing I find implicit not only in what Barthes says above but in every critic I have treated so far. A reading, understood in this context in the more limited sense of an interpretation but not necessarily so, is meaningless if left unexpressed, left silent, and might as well be no reading at all. A reading may focus (or be focused upon by) the multiple writings of a text, but there is nothing to prevent it from dispersing them again. It is the dissemination of readings that brings them into being (in something of perpetuity), and it is in being read in many ways and at many times that the reading, regardless of its intentions or in spite of them, achieves prominence among others. The (textual) violence it perpetrates and is perpetrated upon it is the natural result of reading aggressively, reading ignorantly, and inscribing a reading on the text itself. Only when the text remains silent is the reading relieved of any historical or ethical burden.

Textual silence and proper silence, i.e. that which is defined negatively as the absence of sound, are two distinct creatures: the latter is a simple negative, and the absence it describes connotes very little on its own. But textual silence is formed half of a real absence, of some enunciation be it literal or otherwise, and half of an expectation that the text ought to say something but for some reason yet to be determined refuses to do so. What I call silence in a text, editors and textual critics more generally refer to as a *lacuna*, a gap, to be filled with our expectations and conjectures. Because of the conditions of this gap, the text almost seems to demand that we do so.

namque mei nuper Lethaeo in gurgite fratris
pallidulum manans alluit unda pedem,
Troia Rhoeteo quem subter litore tellus
ereptum nostris obterit ex oculis.

.....

numquam ego te, vita frater amabilior,
aspiciam posthac? at certe semper amabo
semper maesta tua carmina morte canam,

qualia sub densis ramorum concinit umbris
Daulias, absumpti fata gemens Ityli.

for of late in the Lethean swell over my brother's
pale foot flows the wave and washes it,
upon whom, torn from our eyes, the Trojan land
grinds down beneath the Rhoetean shore.

.....
now, brother more beloved than life, will
I see you hereafter? certainly, I will always love you,
always sing songs made grave by your death,
just as beneath the thick shades of branches canted
the Daulian, bemoaning the fate of lost Itys.

Canam is an emendation for *tegam* (“I will cover/conceal”) and, admittedly, not an entirely satisfactory one. Ellis¹⁷⁸ argues at length in favor of *tegam* and considers it ludicrous that Catullus would sing songs of lamentation until the end of time. The idea that Catullus would “conceal sad songs with [his brother’s] death,”¹⁷⁹ while it may at first appear to be a strange sentiment, implies, so long as we read it against the lacuna after *ex oculis*, that the only appropriate response to death and the emptiness it entails is silence. What the reality of his brother’s death has done is make poems like Catullus 2, where he, perhaps ironically, mourns the death of his girl’s sparrow, very deadly serious, and it is in 65, from which the excerpt above comes, that Catullus claims he is unable to compose new poems, so, as a result, only has a translation of Callimachus to send. Even if what we see here in 65 is just another poetic stance, another Catullan pose, I think we can derive the same programmatic statement: that the most powerful poetic effect, the most poetic of

¹⁷⁸ Ellis, Robinson. *A Commentary on Catullus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889) 355n.

¹⁷⁹ It should be noted that in this latter interpretation I am taking *tua... morte* with *tegam* rather than *maesta*, the only reasonable parse if one assumes *canam*, but this is not to elide my previous understanding of the syntax. Whether *tua...morte* is the means by which Catullus “covers” his songs of lamentation or is the very reason for their being laments in the first place, neither condition absolutely precludes the possibility that Catullus’ brother’s death has done something to the rest of his poetry, made it seem something other than what it was first intended to be.

acts of language, is not to say at all,¹⁸⁰ to resist the temptation to add to the pile, so to speak. Silence is the only means whereby we as critics or readers can escape reading *within* the text and becoming part of it. But silence, especially literary silence, is awkward not only for the poet, whose entire profession seems to be constituted by enunciation, but for reading/reading as well. For a reading, the text *fails* to tell us what to think, and for a reading, the text invites us to speak in its stead. This latter instance may not seem awkward, unless we consider the possibility the text is playing a trick on us: it invites us to fill the gap with all of our wildest conjectures, when, in fact, we shouldn't be reading it at all. We should just move on—but not without difficulty—as Catullus does; we should consider gone what we see to be gone.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Here I have in mind especially Patroklos' silence in *Iliad* 9 (c.f. chapter 1), Iphigenia's silence in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Wittgenstein's silence at the close of his *Tractatus*, or even the "Kumogakure" ("Concealed by Clouds") chapter of Murasaki's *Tale of Genji* in which the blank chapter is meant to signify Genji's death.

¹⁸¹ The perverse irony, though, of this silence is that one can only perceive its existence if something is said both prior to and thereafter.

Chapter 5

Un]Tangled Hair: Yosano Akiko's *Midaregami* Unravels

haru no nioi mo mebuku hana mo
tachi sukumu atashi ni kimi o tsurete wa konai

natsu ga kuru goro wa akegata no ame
shizuka ni yorisotte kakera hiroi-atsumeru

aki ga sugitara kitto atashi wa
nobita kuroi kami o kiri-otoshite shimau

itoshii hito yo hanare kao nante
mikka mo surya sugu ni wasurete shimatta
tada shimi-tsuite kienai no wa tabako no nioi

kimi o matsu hibi wa tarinai setsunai nari-yamanai
fukyōwaon ga hibiki ate
sore ga atashi no karenai tokenai nari-yamanai
kodoku no uta

neither the scent of spring nor the budding flowers
will bring you back to me in my paralyzed state.

when summer comes, rain at dawn;
quietly drawing close, I pick up the pieces.

once autumn has passed I'm certain
to cut off all the black hair I've grown.

my beloved, somehow after just three days
I've completely forgotten your distant face;
yet still lingering, yet to disappear, the smell of your cigarettes.

the days I pine for you [have an] insufficient, sad, ever-sounding
ring of dissonance,
and that is my undying, bound up, ever-sounding

song of solitude

—GO!GO!7188 “Ukifune”¹⁸²

A Tangle of Loose Threads

Of all the horrible things Saitō Mokichi, the prominent 20th century poet and critic, has said about Yosano Akiko, perhaps the most dismissive would be his claim that hers is “poetry in the manner of a precocious young girl babbling on about things” (*sōjuku no shōjo ga hayaguchi ni mono iu gotoki kafū*).¹⁸³ Saitō’s criticism had stood for quite some time, particularly because the entire Araragi movement, grounded in the compositional and aesthetic principles of Masaoka Shiki and in which Saitō was a significant presence, survived the Taishō era (roughly 1912 to 1926) while the Shinshisha, with which Akiko and her husband Tekkan, its founder, were affiliated, did not. Akiko’s death, in the middle of the second world war, went largely unnoticed, and it wasn’t until the mid-fifties with the publication of Satō Haruo’s *Akiko Mandala*,¹⁸⁴ which sought to redeem Akiko’s reputation (for the most part at the expense of Yamakawa Tomiko’s), and of Satake Kazuhiko’s critical edition of the *Midaregami* that her poetry began to be reconsidered for its literary merits. Satake regards the poems as fundamentally autobiographical, and the majority of his efforts are put toward identifying what in each poem corresponds to Akiko’s, Tekkan’s, and Tomiko’s respective biographies. The *MG* acts, then, as a kind of poetic diary whose signs and images are to be decoded strictly in terms of real personages, real places, and real times. This overarching reading, which I have labeled rather uncreatively the “biographical reading,” is compelling and was novel

¹⁸² GO!GO!7188. “Ukifune” *Tategami*, EMI Japan, 2003.

¹⁸³ Saitō, Mokichi. *Meiji taisho tanka shi* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Sha, 1950) 83.

¹⁸⁴ Satō, Haruo. *Akiko Mandala* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1955).

because it went a long way in resolving the question (even Akiko's own) as to what the poems were about. Itsumi Kumi's first and most recent editions¹⁸⁵ of the *MG* both accept Satake's basic reading but build on it by attempting to identify Akiko's poetic influences and to find specific literary parallels to the individual poems. Itsumi's apparatus of variants is also useful for seeing that the *MG* is not a monolith, particularly not in the way the first edition is taken, critically, as not only *the* text but as *the only* text. The process of near total transformation the poems undergo from their initial publication in the journal *Myōjō* (*Morning Star*) to the Shinchō edition¹⁸⁶ makes the collection at its inception and "final" states barely recognizable as the same in anything but name: the first edition has 399 poems where the Shinchō only has 311, and of those that remain almost none were spared revision in some form or another.

Some undergo complete change, if they manage to survive being excised; poem 387 is an excellent example, going from

kari yo so yo waga sabishiki wa minami nari (387)
 nokori no koi no yoshinaki asayū

o wild geese, these here, my loneliness lies in the south;
 the remnants of my love useless in morning and evening

to

kari naku mo nakanu mo sabishi waga omoi (387)
 aki no ashita ni aki no yū ni

the geese who cry and don't – both lonesome; my longing
 for an autumn tomorrow, for an autumn evening

While the two texts differ dramatically, their overall tone does not. On the other hand, some changes are very subtle, yet the impression they give is profoundly different. Poem

¹⁸⁵ The *Midaregami zenshaku* and *Shin Midaregami zenshaku* respectively.

¹⁸⁶ Yosano, Akiko. *Midaregami* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1935).

178 (treated in detail in chapter 2)¹⁸⁷ differs only in a single word, *soyokaze* (“breeze”).

omoi-omou ima no kokoro ni wakachi-wakazu (178)
kimi ya shirahagi ware ya soyokaze

thinking-longing now in my heart I do (not) distinguish;
are you the white clover? am I a light breeze?

Whereas in the earlier version, the poem doubts the nature of its lyric subjects (and their relationships), here Akiko seems to doubt whether she’s there at all. Translated somewhat more loosely, it contains a different set of implicit questions: “are you the representation of me? am I barely there at all?” Why is it these radical variants go ignored? Why is it so difficult to see past the amatory biography for which the collection is so often taken to be?

There is something more profoundly transgressive about Yosano Akiko’s poetry than the exuberance of her open expression of sexual desire, and the key to that transgression is the same as that to her eroticism: *midaregami*. It has been common practice in English to follow Sakanishi¹⁸⁸ and take *midaregami* as “tangled hair,” hair tangled like a net just as the passions expressed in the poems that follow this titular word are similarly wild and confused. But this fundamental *mistranslation* misses several things: 1) the *midare* in *midaregami*—though, I admit, by a certain logical leap could be understood as “tangled” or “tangling”—because it hails from a verb that is not limited to describing things that even can tangle, means something like “disheveled,” “wild,” or “coming apart.” The verb *midareru* (or *midaru* in classical Japanese) names a process of falling from a state of relative order to disorder. The word *midaregami* describes hair that has come undone—is coming undone, thus the image seems to indicate that which is

¹⁸⁷ c.f. pp. 87ff.

¹⁸⁸ Sakanishi, Shio. *Tangled Hair: translated from the works of Yosano Akiko* (Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1935).

falling apart, coming loose, and, in a more positive sense, bursting forth. 2) The morpheme *midare* is not limited in Akiko's collection to hair. In the first section (*Enji-murasaki* – "Crimson Scarlet") alone Akiko gives us, in addition to *midaregami*, *midarebako* ("open box"), *midaregokochi* ("feelings of worry"), and *midaremozome* ("scattered seaweed"). The metaphor itself does not cohere, it scatters like the seaweed, lies open and exposed like the box, and is as ill-at-ease as the young woman of poem 3 in the collection.

kami goshaku tokinaba mizu ni yawarakaki (3)
otomegokoro wa himete hanataji

loosening five feet of hair in the water softens
a maiden's heart I would not let go

Only the third poem and already her hair comes undone, but against this sensuous image of a young woman's hair softening as it comes untied in the water is a tension inherent in the double entendre of *otomegokoro wa... hanataji* ("a maiden's heart... would not let go"). The verb *hanatsu*, of which *hanataji* is the negative suppositional, can mean "to let go" in the sense of releasing a prisoner but also in the sense of "to exile." The "maiden's heart" is both slave and vassal to Akiko's erotic and thus poetic expression, and as such it becomes difficult to discern how one is to take this statement of keeping things hidden (*himate*). Some distinction is being made between the untying of the hair and the secreting of the heart, as we are given the adversative *wa* after *otomegokoro* and not the objective particle *o*, but the adjective *yawarakaki* ("soft") at the very center of the poem resists separation of the two traditional halves of the poem even as *wa* tries to pry them apart. The word *yawarakaki* can easily be parsed with *kami* ("hair") given the rhythm of the poem and the flow from *mizu ni* ("in the water") but, syntactically speaking, can also

modify *otomegokoro*. The tension between keeping things in place and letting them come undone fails to work itself out in the rhythm and syntax of the poem, and it is this failure that the aggressive tensions of the poem and the collection are preserved. This poem in particular shows the lyric subject's apprehension about the predominant image of her collection might be *rede*: the maiden's heart might finally be free to speak or be completely exposed to criticism. Like the hope Hesiod has Pandora keep secure in her jar while the ills roam free and ravage humanity, it's impossible to determine whether the *otomegokoro* is being preserved or imprisoned. Akiko seems to suggest it's both.

tsubaki sore mo ume mo sa nariki shirokariki (5)
wa ga tsumi towanu iro momo ni miru

camellia – that and the plum too – both are white;
in peach see I a shade that won't ask my sin.

In poem 5 as well, the syntax presents a fundamental problem of double entendre, whether to take *iro* in its most basic sense, i.e. “color” or “hue,” or with the connotations of “eros” or “eroticism,” and, given its position before *momo* (“peach”) without a grammatical particle to explain the relationship between the two, one could easily take *iro momo* both in the sense of “the hue of the peach” and of “the eros in the peach,” which would make the second half of the verse “I see eros in the peach that will not ask my sin.” The repetition of sounds in the first half of the poem, despite the actual words being different, shows a kind of exasperation with what must be the implicit moralizing of the white plum and white camellia. The phrase *sore mo* is entirely unnecessary, and given the relative brevity of the *tanka* form, such an extravagance is marked. *Ume mo* repeats the pattern (with difference), and likewise *shirokariki* repeats nearly all of the sounds of *sanariki* that precedes: the words themselves seem to mutter. *Shirokariki* is

interesting applied to *tsubaki* (“camellias”), which in Japan are generally red, though there are varieties that are white in color. The *shiro* here may also be doing double duty, both in its sense of “white” and of “pure.” Just as the *ume* (“plum”) is a pure white so too could the *tsubaki* be a “pure” red. The soft pink of the peach is somewhere between the red and the white, and is indifferent both to the force of her erotic expression and to the rigid morality that buttresses her apprehension—or at least it knows better than to ask. For those who have seen only the erotic and not the reserve, poems four and six tend to serve as perfect exempla.

chi zo moyuru kasamu hitoyo no yume no yado (4)
 haru o yuku hito kami otoshime na

my blood burns! I give you lodging for a night of dreams,
 traveler in spring, spurn not the god!

sono ko hatachi kushi ni nagaruru kurokami no (6)
 ogori no haru no utsukushiki kana

that girl, twenty, thru a comb flows her black hair,
 her pride of spring, how magnificent!

These exclamations should be understood in the context of the hesitancy that precedes them in poems three and five above. In the very structure of the sequence itself is contained the tension between exuberance and reserve that is so poignantly manifest in poem three, and perhaps in that way the poems of the *MG* truly are *tangled*, not as a result of mere happenstance but because someone or some thing seems to be in control of the poems, even at their most wild. Not only are the limits inherent in proper, decorous behavior transgressed by Akiko’s open eroticism, but so too is the fervor of that passion transgressed by the degree to which Akiko keeps it in check. These are not simply poems in which desire is set free at last, in which all moral stricture has been obliterated, but

poems in which morality is still in the process of loosening and is not entirely slack. If anything, morality and worldly desire are being made into one, like the red and white in the peach.

dō no kane no hikuki yūbe o maegami no (7)
momo no tsubomi ni kyō tamae kimi

the temple bell is brief in the evening—recite your sutra
to the peach bud in the forelocks of my hair

Recently, Beichman has called attention to ways in which the *MGi* can be read as sequence, though, I must admit, her conclusions and reasons for reading the sequence in this way differ drastically from my own. Even so, what she proposes, a reading based in the 16th and 17th century Japanese practice of composing linked verse, moves away from a haphazard approach (like mine) where images are traced between poems nowhere near each other in the sequence to a vision of the collection as a careful construct with rhythm and flow.

[T]he poems in *Tangled Hair* [sic] were recontextualized¹⁸⁹ using methods Akiko could only have learned from linked verse. The most noticeable is the use of imagistic connections between the poems rather than narrative ones. Other traces of linked verse appear as well. Sometimes the connections between poems are loose, sometimes tight, which medieval poets called *shinku-soku*, “closely and remotely linked verse”; sometimes a poem can be construed in two different ways, depending on whether it is read with the preceding poem or the succeeding one (called *torinashi*); and poems that present striking and vivid images alternate with plainer ones (*mon-ji*, pattern-ground). Often it is *engo*, or related words, that make the bridge...¹⁹⁰

Of course, Beichman is perfectly aware of the fact that the *MG* is different from *renga* and from any other traditional form of linked verse. The problem is her analysis is

¹⁸⁹ Beichman says “recontextualized,” because many of the *Midaregami* poems had appeared in journals prior to publication of the first edition.

¹⁹⁰ Beichman, Janine. *Embracing the Firebird: Yosano Akiko and the birth of the female voice in modern Japanese poetry* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002) 231.

historically backwards: several of the techniques endemic to the way *renga* links (*tsuke*) are constructed precede the evolution of linked verse as a distinct style and are integral to the composition of all *waka*, because the process of linking is already there in the *tanka* itself. In a note to the paragraph following the quote above, Beichman admits “[i]t might be argued that a better model [for reading the *MG*] is the *tanka* sequence” but quickly dismisses that possibility by claiming “the *tanka* sequence often has a chronological and narrative framework, and *MG* does not.”¹⁹¹ The “*tanka* sequences” she has in mind, though, are the later work of poets such as Masaoka Shiki and Saitō Mokichi, both of whom are roughly contemporary with Akiko, when in fact *tanka* sequences are at least as old as the early imperial anthologies of the tenth century and often have neither a strictly chronological nor strictly narrative framework.¹⁹² The two traditional halves (*kami no ku*, “upper verse,” and *shimo no ku*, “lower verse”) of any given *tanka*, i.e. the 5-7-5 and 7-7 syllabic units, are themselves the alternating units in a linked verse sequence. *Renga* emerges when a clear break is made in *waka* where there was already a fracture, and the elements Beichman identifies, particularly *engo* and *shinku-soku*, are not specific to it. She hopes to identify that which *joins* individual verses, but linked verse is just as much about what holds them separate. Ramirez-Christensen, in an extended book review (that becomes much more than merely that), says

The idea that linking is the adding or joining of two contiguous verses into a poem is I think basically erroneous, or at least misleading. Reading any two consecutive verses in a sequence, one senses a palpable rift, a kind of disjunction between them. It is precisely here, in this momentous

¹⁹¹ *ibid.* 308n.

¹⁹² It should be noted that the *KKS*, for example, has sections devoted explicitly to each season and that within those sections there is a clear chronological progression. However, in the sections devoted to non-seasonal topics, such as love, one can easily identify a sequence without narrative or chronological progressions. In fact, because they are anthologies sampling from the work of numerous unrelated poets, often the only connection between poems is a similar image or topic.

breaking apart of a waka¹⁹³ poem into two independent units, where renga came into existence, and it is in that open space where its unique poetry, the link, occurs.¹⁹⁴

and later adds, in order to clarify how renga is distinct from waka/tanka,

[W]hat is known as *tsukeai* (linking between contiguous verses) in renga is typically a process of analysis and realignment¹⁹⁵ that cannot be adequately grasped by reading the two verses as a single poem. The verses themselves might be, like waka, lyrical in quality, and they might occasionally fall together into a waka-like unity. But what is unique about this genre—the making of designs between verses and in the sequence as a whole—is as impersonal and abstract as modernist art or, in a sense, music. As in music we hear the melodic line by apprehending the distances between the notes, likewise in linked poetry we read the spaces between the verses, the very spaces that have been dropped in the layout and are never sufficiently analyzed in the book.¹⁹⁶

From Beichman's perspective any *waka* sequence would resemble a renga sequence in some way—perhaps even a sonnet sequence would!—because waka and renga are not fundamentally different things: renga is a form of waka, and most, if not all, of the prominent renga poets like Sōgi and Shinkei composed both, because the approaches to creating verses for each are similar.

Where I differ with Beichman comes from her failure to understand the way in which *renga* sequences themselves are modeled on the movement from poem to poem within the individual sections of the imperial anthologies from the *KKS* on. Akiko was personally no fan of the *KKS* but certainly she was aware of it and the similar narrative

¹⁹³ As a scholar of classical Japanese, Ramirez-Christensen's tendency is to do as Japanese scholars do and use waka where tanka may be more specific. Tanka is a recent coinage made to distinguish types of classical poetry. Thus, even though waka can be used generally to mean Japanese poetry (as opposed to the Chinese poetry [*kanshi*] written by the educated elite), it often specifically refers to the tanka form

¹⁹⁴ Ramirez-Christensen, Esperanza. "The Essential Parameters of Linked Poetry" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 41.2 (1981) 564.

¹⁹⁵ Though she never says as such explicitly, what Ramirez-Christensen refers to here as "analysis and realignment" is likely not just analysis of the previous verses in the sequence to which the poet will append her own but also the practice of *honkadori*, where the poet shows his/her knowledge of the literary canon by imbedding an allusion to some earlier poem (generally little more than a single phrase), because the composition of waka, especially in poetry meetings or *uta-awase*, was as much a scholarly as an aesthetic practice.

¹⁹⁶ Ramirez-Christensen, 566.

flow of the later anthology *Goshūishū*, which she greatly admired. Though I believe the anthologies serve as a better model—and historically a more accurate one—for the kind of sequential reding Beichman proposes, nevertheless, she discovers this reding of the text by ignoring the common treatment of the poems as a buffet from which they are plucked, entirely without context, and where relationships between poems are formed entirely at the whim of the *reder*.

All of this serves as caveat to the fact that I not only wish to accept Beichman's linked verse reding of the *MG* as valid but take it even further. I argue that what makes Akiko's poetry so frustrating (and invigorating) to rede is the manner in which it points in numerous directions but never fully explains how its allusions are meant to work or if they work at all. We all too often run the risk of treating allusion as if it were fact, when, in fact, it is much more akin to illusion: allusion is there if you think it is and is not if you think it's not. Allusion is fundamental if you know of that to which the illusion alludes and is inconsequential if the alluded to has somehow escaped your notice, or if such things, for you, largely go ignored. Allusion, far from being a mere fact of the text's condition, is a process, an act a reding chooses either to undergo or to forego in the process of deciding what to say about a work of (literary) art. Like McGann's "radial reading"¹⁹⁷ we look things up, as we read, or we don't, we make inferences about textual similarities, we confirm them, or we don't, we look up words in lexicons, we infer from context, we check quotations, we think them misleading, we become engrossed in a novel, we puzzle at a poem, we lose focus, we yawn, we're interrupted by the phone or the television or a particularly needy cat, our parents die, our spouses cry (out), and we find

¹⁹⁷ For a rough definition of "radial reading" see McGann's "Theory of Texts" *London Review of Books* (February 18, 1988): 20-21.

ourselves doing anything but reading the books we bought or borrowed or stole—or we don't. We do all these things and none of them; each (or not a single one) is part of how we read. There comes a point where allusion exhausts, and you have to admit to yourself that no one can be aware (I say "be aware" not "know") of everything, though some persist in the mania of believing they really can be aware of *enough* of everything, if there is such a thing—Socrates, the idealized thinker, who no one truly aspires to be (after all, we killed Socrates, didn't we?)—but everyone can know nothing or, at least, such an insignificant little as to pass there for. If a reader can be generalized, this ignorant one is the only honestly *common* reader I can conceive of. As far as reading goes, ignorance is the only thing we have in common.

Allusion is a form of judgment, not something the text does/compels us to discover and respond to. If the author intended for us to see the connection, so what? Does this mean our reactions, opinions, feelings, interpretations are less valid should we fail to notice the connection? According to one school of thought, yes, we are responsible for missing something so fundamental, and our interpretations suffer as a result. What frustrates an ignorant reader is that this school of literary interpretation, if there can be said to be one, is by no means out of line; can you imagine what criticism and explication of Malory's *LeMorte D'Arthur* would look like without any reference to Christian imagery and dogma? All I can say to reconcile the concerns of the gnoscent and ignorant readers is that such knowledge of allusion is not without value, but it is not at all *more* valuable or *most*.

Beichman claims to have stumbled upon her linked verse reding of the *Midaregami* while reading poems 24-26 but chooses the initial poems of the second

section, “The Lotus Flower Boat” (*Hasu no hanabune*), specifically 99-111, to show how linking patterns might be found consistently throughout the collection. She translates the first two as follows.

Slowly your boat
rows home so late at night—
O priest, did you
count more of the flame-red
lotuses, or of the white ones?

Kogikaeru / yūbune osoki / sō no kimi / guren ya ōki / shirahasu ya ōki (no. 99)

In a summerhouse
we hear the water’s sound
through the wisteria night
Don’t, please don’t
leave that low pillow!

*Azumaya ni / mizu no oto kiku / fuji no yū / hazushimasuna no / hikuki
makura yo* (no. 100)¹⁹⁸

Beichman points out that red is a color is associated with passion in the *MG* and that “the lotus on which the enlightened sit after being reborn in the Buddhist paradise is... white,” and notes the allusion to a poem by Bai Juyi in number 100 above.¹⁹⁹ The connection she forms between the two is fundamentally programmatic.

Whereas the first poem hint[s] in riddling form at the superiority of passion to asceticism, [the second] poem, in the same enigmatic way, assumes life is lived for the sake of poetry. Taken together, they restate *Tangled Hair*’s [sic] two great themes: the supremacy of love and the supremacy of art.²⁰⁰

In an effort to show Akiko’s favoring love over asceticism, Beichman has performed a bit of translatory sleight-of-hand; there is no comparison in poem 99. In fact, the paired questions that cap the poem put passion and piety on equal terms: *guren ya ōki shirahasu*

¹⁹⁸ Beichman, *Embracing the Firebird* 234-5.

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*

ya ōki – “the red lotus, are they many? the white lotus, are they many?” The paired questions are similar syntactically to a much more loaded cap to poem 178 (*kimi ya shirhagi ware ya shiroyuri* – “are you the white clover? am I the white lily?”) and indicative of a common pattern, going back to the Heian period, of “elegant doubt.” One of the most iconic examples comes from a poem in chapter 69 of the *Tales of Ise*, where a shrine maiden at Ise sends the following to Ariwara Narihira.

kimi ya koshi ware ya yukikemu omōezu
yume ka utsutsu ka nete ka samete ka

did you come here? did I go to you—I don’t recall;
a dream or a reality? sleeping or awake?

As with the red and white lotuses above, while the poet may be making an implicit comparison or positing two mutually exclusive alternatives, leaving the question open and deliberately avoiding any conclusive resolution is part of how the poetry functions. Erotic relationships, at least as manifest in poetry, in a society where others are, perhaps, somewhat too interested in the affairs of others, have a dreamlike quality, their natures are always in doubt, and the poet goes to great lengths to conceal her loves from the prying eyes of those around her, the so-called *hitome*, “people’s eyes.” Akiko did not live in that world of courtly romance, though to a certain extent people’s affairs always seem to become the food for gossips, but she certainly inherits the diction of her chosen poetic mode. That for which Tawara Machi was praised during her literary debut in the 1980s was true of Akiko as well: her language and topics are somewhere between the modern and the classical. The classical is brought into the modern age to do service to that which the contemporary poet desires. Though where Machi was praised for making waka more accessible, Akiko might very well be accused of rendering it even more

obscure than it already was.

It is easy to see what connects poems 99 and 100 above. In addition to the connections Beichman notes, one could easily imagine the sound of water the lyric subject hears in poem 100 is that of the boat moving through the water in 99. But what would make this reding more renga-like would be to ascertain what it is that keeps them apart, to acknowledge as much the modes of difference in play as the modes of confluence. As I have already shown, there is a distinct similarity between the paired questions of poem 99 (“the red lotus, are they many? the white lotus, are they many?”) and the paired questions of poem 178 (“are you the white clover? am I the white lily?”), and even though there is no real dichotomy in 178, the two bottom halves of their respective verses are syntactically identical. The crimson and white lotuses, while they have fairly clear Buddhist connotations, are also figures within the *MG* sometimes associated with Tekkan—*shirahasu*, “white lotus,” was Tekkan’s nickname amongst the Shinshisha—sometimes with Tomiko. In poem 192, Akiko writes that the face the white lily puts on has the fragrance of the *beni-fuyō*. *Fuyō* is actually a type of hibiscus, but the word is often used to mean lotus (*hasu*). The *beni* in *beni-fuyō* is an alternate reading of the same character as *gu* (絳) in *guren*, so, even though the words *beni-fuyō* and *guren* are not even remotely similar, one could be taken as a different name for the other. This connection, this very loose connection, reinforces how the *MG* works, I think, how associations are made but left just open enough as to leave some measure of doubt as to how one gets from one image or word to the next. The links, then, feel as if they are coming undone without actually completely falling apart, because while the sense of one poem may be moving toward those to which it is adjacent, it also moves somewhere

wholly unique. The allusion Beichman identifies in 100, to Bai Juyi, works in this way as well, as it has little to do with the poem that precedes it. Her claim that the *MG*'s two great themes, "the supremacy of love and the supremacy of art," is more apt than she admits or realizes. Poem 99 is bound up in Akiko's literary representation of the erotic, and poem 100 shows her clear love of literary obscurantism. The two poems pose yet another pair of questions: "is it love? is it art?" That the collection leaves this to the reader to decide (or not to decide) is part of what makes the *MG* more renga-like than it may even first seem to be. But to focus too readily on this sequential reading of the text, especially to the detriment of the smorgasbord approach is to miss what is so compelling about treating the collection like an anthology in its own right, about moving through the collection freely. There are conceits, images, colors, phrases, words, and puns which, seemingly similar, are strewn about the *MG*. The tight order of the linear structure of the poems as sequence is constantly on the verge of coming apart, and it is through repetitive use and abuse of her own poetic conceits that Akiko has managed, either intentionally or not, to infuse her text with the maddening tension that results from reading the *MG* in these fundamentally contradictory ways.

The idea of *midaregami* goes back at least as far as the Heian era, and usage of it can easily be found in Murasaki Shikibu, the author of the *Tale of Genji*, and Izumi Shikibu, the poet and contemporary of Murasaki's. Izumi, like many Heian era woman poets, was known for her romantic poetry, and one of her poems is considered a likely source for Akiko, even though in it the specific word *midaregami* is not used.

kurokami no midare mo shirazu uchifuseba
mazu kakiyarishi hito zo koishiki

unaware of my [tangle] of black hair, lying on my side

I long for the one who first smoothed it!²⁰¹

The poem certainly sounds as if it could have been written by Akiko, with its indirect usage of a primary conceit and lack of specificity. I have taken *hito* (“person” rendered here as “the one”) in the latter half of the verse, as most do, as the object of longing, even though the emphatic particle *zo* obscures the grammatical relationship between “the one” and “longing,” because it replaces what would have been, one assumes, an object or subject marker. One assumes that whoever is unaware (*shirazu*) of the “[tangle] of black hair” (*kurokami no midare*) is also the one lying on [her] side in longing. These are the same reasonable assumptions one, presumably, must make in order to understand what it is Akiko is saying in her *MG*. The word *midaregami* makes its first appearance in poem 29.²⁰²

hito kaesazu haremu no haru no yoi-gokochi (29)
ogoto ni motasu midare-midaregami

he won't return: a spring day fades into a sense of evening;
across the koto drape I my wild, wild hair.

In this poem, hair takes the place of the koto's strings or is at least synonymous with them, but there is also very little reason not to think the image is of a woman draping her hair across the strings, except for the similarity between this and poem 96,²⁰³ where the koto has no bridges, so the strings lay slack. Normally, I would not object too forcefully to rendering *midaregami* as “tangled hair,” but in seeing the connection between poems 29 and 96 it makes no sense. In order for one to *rede* the hair as the strings of the instrument, the hairs must be loose and slack not tight and caught up either in themselves

²⁰¹ *GSS* 755.

²⁰² The image of loose hair is present from the outset in the [woman] whose *bin*, the technical term for the hair on the side of the head between the temples and ears, in poem 1 are coming loose (*hito no bin no hotsure yo*).

²⁰³ c.f. pp. 104ff.

or in the strings of the koto. In both poems, the mood is one of dejection, of things falling apart, both in how the woman of poem 29 is without her lover and the whoever of 96 is without songs. In pointing to this connection in chapter 2 (and its “necessity”), I elide the fact that such a connection transgresses the sequential reading I perform and is not as obvious as I make it seem. The koto and hair both are prominent images in the collection and there is little to favor the link I compose between 29 and 96 beyond the way the way in which I am already reading the word *midaregami* and the collection as a whole. In the movement from *midaregami* as idea to *midaregami* as word to replacement for the strings of the koto to destruction of the koto to being okay with one’s failure (in my reading back in chapter 2), we’ve lost both the image and the word but somehow managed to maintain the mood of coming undone. The images themselves may not perfectly cohere, but isn’t that the point? How images (and words) *adhere* but do not *cohere* across the poems is how the collection both *works* and *fails to work* as simple sequence. In nearly every way *kashū ga midarete*,²⁰⁴ and it is up to the reader to determine to what degree the collection is held together and how.

Only outside Japanese is the *midare* in the *MG* not obvious. One need only look to Tawara Machi’s translation of poem 29 where she renders *midare-midaregami* as *midare-midaregami*. For the most part, the meaning of *midaregami* to a native Japanese speaker is perfectly clear. Yet, this does not mean the poems themselves are. Akiko’s numerous drastic revisions over the course of several editions, including individual poems in *Myōjō*, suggest that what the collection as a whole and as a constellation of single poems that *MG* cannot entirely contain signifies is never obvious, not even to Akiko herself.

²⁰⁴ trans. “the collection is tangling/coming undone”

Ukifune

The Tale of Genji (*Genji monogatari*), Murasaki Shikibu's 11th century novel of court romances and intrigues, is as ubiquitous in Japanese society as nothing is in the West, due in no small part to its being required by the Ministry of Education for study in middle school and high school. So, it's not entirely a shock to find that a band like GO!GO!7188, a rock band better known for such lyric stunners as "Jet Carrot" (*Jetto ninjin*) and "Lizard #3" (*Tokage san-go*), would write a song after one of its, the *Genji*'s, more recognizable characters, Ukifune. She is a quintessential star-crossed lover, caught between the very real, physical desire of Niou and the stated affections of the so-called saint, Kaoru, who sought to keep her hidden from the temptations and intrigues of the capital. Ukifune is the pivot around whom the last chapters of the *Genji* revolve, even when she is not present at all. But "Ukifune" isn't really about that.

kasuka na wakare o tadayowasu koto mo naku
ashioto was totsuzen togireta
aa kanashiku mo utsukushiki shiroi fuyu

aeru mono naraba
hoka ni nani mo nozamanai
furitsumoru wa ano hi mo yuki

without even the faintest waft of a parting
the sound of your footsteps suddenly cut off—
ah, what a sad but beautifully white winter!

if I could just be with you
I would want for nothing else;
piles of it everywhere, but the snow keeps falling...

The song neither begins here nor does it end; the syllable *ki* in *yuki* (*ano hi mo yuki* – “snow that day too”) is elided into *kimi* (“you”) at the head of the refrain.

kimi o matsu hibi wa tarinai setsunai nari-yamanai
fukyōwaon ga hibiki atte

sore ga atashi no karenai tokenai nari-yamanai
kodoku no uta
rai rai rai...

the days I pine for you [have an] insufficient, sad, ever-sounding
ring of dissonance,
and that is my undying, bound up, ever-sounding
song of solitude

The irony of the eternity described in this refrain is that it is delineated entirely in terms of the negative: *tarinai* (“won’t suffice”), *setsunai* (“without end” but in usage “oppressive” or “suffocating”), *nariyamanai* (“won’t stop ringing”), *karenai* (“won’t wither” but also, metaphorically, “won’t mature”), and *tokenai* (“won’t unravel/loosen”). The song Yū (Nakashima Yūmi, GO!GO!7188’s lead singer)²⁰⁵ describes, the one made to be synonymous with the dejected state in which she lives, is literally in denial. The negative statements point to what could be, a world in which things simply end and leave off singing for eternity. The *rai* (来) at the end of the refrain, which in rock songs is used as a nonsense word like “yeah” or “nana”—there solely for its sound—is here converted into the sound of the singer’s expectations. *Rai*, as a prefix, is used to mean “next” or “the coming” as in “the coming month” (*raigetsu*) or “the coming year” (*rainen*). As only a prefix, though, it hangs, and what it anticipates never comes, because the song is as paralyzed as she is in the second line of the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter: the song always *says* the same thing. The song of solitude, taken very literally, can go nowhere, neither can it hope for anyone or anything to come to it. The song is in a state of suspended animation where, I imagine, someone has left it on replay and won’t return

²⁰⁵ The song “Ukifune” was written in collaboration between the lead singer/guitarist Yūmi, who wrote the music, and the band’s base player and backup vocalist, Hamada Akiko (Akko), who wrote the lyrics. Contemporary musicians introduce an interesting problem for the study of lyric, because, often, they do not actually write the words to the songs with which they are associated. Bernie Taupin may have written “Your Song,” but we still generally consider it Elton John’s. I will discuss this issue in greater detail in my conclusion.

to shut it off. This is not another in a long line of pop songs where the lover's sadness is made to seem the worst thing imaginable; it's a cliché by this point how nearly every singer has at some point become so absorbed in his/her own depression or feelings of loss as to assume it will last throughout eternity. If that were the case here, the classical literary motif would be at best a gimmick, but Ukifune's inability to escape the trap that Niou's (and Kaoru's) desire has set for her—even her suicide is a failure—is echoed explicitly and is morphed into the inability of the song to escape itself. There is a progression of time—spring to summer to fall, and eventually to winter as well—but because each season is described in a disconnected, ahistorical present tense one gets no sense that time has passed, is passing, or will pass. Each moment, in its particular season, is crystallized, and the order of progression could be completely rearranged without much changing the song.

The peel (*hibiki*) is an obvious [sic] Buddhist motif of symbolic or, sometimes, very real death; that and the cutting of her hair echo Ukifune's attempt to escape her predicament by becoming a nun. She (either Ukifune or the lyric subject) always seems to be moving from one state to the next—adrift in the way her name implies—yet her circumstances never significantly change. Ukifune is as cloistered as a nun as she was when kept as Kaoru's ward. Kaoru eventually discovers her at the house in Ono where she is staying with the Bishop of Yokawa's sister, and, as a result, the problems inherent in her earlier desire to accept Niou's advances yet need to rebuff them are once again brought to the fore.

However, the song is not a simple retelling of Ukifune's story. While it alludes to the events in the chapters of the *Tale of Genji* in which she appears, it has obvious [sic]

traces of the modern, particularly the smell of tobacco in the ninth line. These are classical motives drawn into the present, an eternal present, where they linger, like the smell, that is problematically, in the manner of a stale odor. Even the word smell/scent (*nioi*)²⁰⁶ lingers, introduced first as the fresh scent of spring and budding flowers which persists as the odor of cigarettes in the bridge. The song and the lyric subject yearn for what might come next in the repetition of *rai*, but as a result of that repetition (without any form of consummation) the nonsense syllable in which meaning is imbued becomes useless again, entirely without meaning beyond the frail construct of the song it attempts to surpass. This implicit melancholy over the limits of poetic expression is all the more poignant because it traps itself in precisely that which should buttress and propel it, its own literary tradition. The cycle of undeath the song describes is a faint echo of the way in which Niou disastrously and recklessly repeats the mistakes of his grandfather, the eponymous Genji, and like the final chapters of the novel, the perspective of the transgressor—Niou only appears by means of hearsay—is entirely abandoned in favor of the transgressed, namely Kaoru and Ukifune. The novel provides them with no real solution; Ukifune has taken her vows and refuses to see either Kaoru, who has just learned that she is alive and living in Ono, or her younger brother whom Kaoru has brought with in an attempt to play to Ukifune’s emotions. All we are left with is Kaoru’s anticipation, unrequited, of things to come. Admittedly, this may be a textual issue, as the novel ends in mid sentence and as such seems to be incomplete, but in keeping with a clear Buddhist conceit, the song “Ukifune” recognizes that the only proper ending to a tale of attachment and desire is no ending at all.

²⁰⁶ Both Niō’s and Kaoru’s names could be taken as verbs meaning “to smell” in the intransitive sense or “to give off a fragrance.” Both men *smell*, so to speak, which is to say their aroma is part of their charm.

Akiko's own wariness of effusive expression and the classical diction she imports may be a tacit acknowledgement of that same trap.

soto himeshi haru no yūbe no chisaki yume (399)
hagure sasetsuru jūsan-gen yo

a brief dream of a spring evening hidden without:
you've cleared it up, you thirteen strings!

Yū's guitar is analogous to Akiko's koto—each is the musical vehicle for the poet's lyric expression; Akiko speaks for her instrument because of the silence inherent in the medium of the book, but Yū does not draw attention to hers. There is no need to; its presence is obvious in the song, so it can “speak” for itself. But Akiko speaks for hers because the koto, be it the 25 or 13 string variety, is for the most part impotent in the *MG*. It has no sound, and in poem 96 its strings are slack, incapable of producing any sound at all. So, it's strange that in this final poem in the collection (399) she should call on those (13) strings to clear up the spring hidden outside in her dream (*soto himeshi haru no... yume*), particularly given her violent reaction to it in poem 97, where the only sound the koto produces is that of the axe destroying it. It's difficult to tell whether the lyric subject *wants* the koto to erase her dream of a “hidden spring evening” or is simply stating the fact, and because the collection ends here, it is left entirely to the reader to make of the koto sounding what she will. When the koto does finally sound of its own, it cuts off the lyric. Perhaps Akiko's earlier violence is understandable—she needs to push the koto aside in order to facilitate her own composition. And there is an echo of that violence in poem 398—if we can't go forward, we can at least go back—in the way the lyric subject *steals* (or, less harshly, takes for herself) the grapes with the same hand she would write her poems.

uta no te ni budō o nusumu ko no kami no (398)
yawarakaki kana niiji no asa-ake

the girl whose poet hands steal the grapes, how soft
is her hair! a rainbow at dawn...

This is, presumably, the same young woman with soft hair we see in poem 3 for whom there is an acute tension between the sinister and the beautiful. Her grip on her maiden's heart is echoed here by her grip on the bunch of grapes. It is the poet's hand that attempts to hold on, even in the end. It cannot be a coincidence that the "hidden spring" too echoes the "hidden heart" (*otomegokoro himete*) in 3. Well, it can, but I don't want it to.

midaregokochi madoigokochi zo migiwa naru (40)
yuri fumu kami ni chichi ōiaezu

wild affections, wandering affections! from the god who
tramples lilies along the shore I cannot hide my breast!

Poem 40 here provides yet another complement to 3 but to a different end: both poems show a woman on the verge, but where in three the maiden was (barely) able to keep her heart under wraps, here the nature of her lover, the god (*kami*) who tramples lilies, and his violence compel her to reveal her desire in a way the maiden was unwilling. The apprehension that was implicit, by my reading, in how the maiden would neither free nor exile her emotions in poem 3 is clarified somewhat here in the juxtaposition of *midaregokochi* ("wild affections") with *madoigokochi* ("wandering affections"). The juxtaposition would seem to imply that the two are equivalent, but once again, because of Akiko's incredibly spare diction, the two words are merely stated without much to show their grammatical relationship beyond the emphatic particle *zo* ("!"). If they are equivalent, one could take this poem as a realization of that which the lyric subject of 3 fears, namely in exposing herself, as the lyric subject here would expose her breast, she

might completely lose control. If they are not equivalent, if, in fact, *madoigokochi* is a correction of *midaregokochi* (rede instead “wild affections? wandering affections!”), it calls into question whether the “heart” (*kokochi*) is the lyric subject’s or the god’s. It is the *kami* who tramples the lilies, who is indifferent to the concerns of those around [him], who compels the lyric subject to expose herself, perhaps even against her will. Her affections cannot wander, only [his] can. If that is the case, if the *midare-* and *madoi-gokochi* can only properly describe the *kami* in this poem, then the “coming undone,” the *midare* in the *MG*, cannot solely be the purview of the lyric subject. It belongs as much to [him] as it does to her, and one wonders to whom else.

If one uses the words “today” and “yesterday” to divide the past from the present, then to speak of my earliest poems, I would have to postulate “the day before yesterday.” I think of that day before yesterday with loathing. For me there was a day even before the day before yesterday. And the fact that I have not written my autobiography, in spite of requests to do so, is because of my intense hatred for yesterday and the day before yesterday. As far as yesterday goes, one can revise, but the day before yesterday is in the unreachable past, and I can only think of my own poems from that time as works by another, extremely remote person.²⁰⁷

One wonders whether Akiko is giving her reader some license to do what she cannot—bring her poems under control—or even license to do something much more drastic and, consequently, liberating: to disregard what she may make of her poetry and do with it what a *reder* will. I prefer the latter, obviously, because even if this is not what Akiko intends, it is clear she wishes to abrogate a certain degree of responsibility for her poetry, which has both the happy consequences of freeing her from it and freeing it from her. The poems are gifted to the reder in a rare display of magnanimity on the part of an author. But I think there is a greater lesson to be learned here: there is a point where the

²⁰⁷ Yosano, Akiko. “Atogaki” *Midaregami Saōgi Koigoromo* (Tokyo: Kaizō Bunko, 1939) trans. Janine Beichman in *Embracing the Firebird* 263-4.

poet becomes just another reader, free to love or hate, protect or molest, her own work according to her intellectual whims. There is a point where she becomes like us and we like her, and our respective criticisms are no better or worse. When the poet is no longer automatically commensurate with the lyric subject, the poet can criticize that subject and its lyric expression without fundamentally altering it or herself. The sad irony is, then, that the poet only frees herself from the trap of her lyrics and being identified with them once she abandons them entirely.

Akiko's detached disdain for her own work and possible desire to be free of it also indicate a desire to be free of her own biography, of which her poems are often taken as a clear manifestation. I have hoped that implicit in my own *readings* (of Sappho, of Catullus, of Yosano Akiko, et al.) are the limits biography imposes on the interpretation of poetry, and the poets chosen here for consideration have been subject to extensive attempts to rede biography in their poems, as if they were insufficient on their own. I don't mean to suggest that such a biography is unimportant or not useful, but we seem to have reached a point where in order to uncover other salient features of a text we must tactically and willfully ignore the important and the useful. Ichikawa Chihiro is keenly aware of the danger of "knowing too much."

[O]ne can say of tanka that every composition constitutes a separate, individual world, and that interpretation is a matter to be left to the reader. There is also a danger that too thorough an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the composition of a work or the influences upon it may actually lead to a distorted understanding.²⁰⁸

This is an odd aside from someone seeking to address precisely the role influence plays

²⁰⁸ Ichikawa, Chihiro. "Yosano Akiko to *Genji Monogatari*: Midaregami to Ukifune o megutte" *Heianchō bungaku kenkyū* 1.2 (1983) trans. G.G. Rowley in *The Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese* 28.2 (1994): 164. Both Ichikawa and her translator here, Rowley, have been deeply interested in the role the *Tale of Genji* has played in Akiko's life and poetics. See especially Rowley's *Yosano Akiko and the Tale of Genji*.

in Akiko's composition, but it needs to be noted that Ichikawa has arrived at her reading of the *MG* alongside Ukifune in the *Genji* precisely as a result of ignoring standard, biographical interpretations. The issue at hand when she makes the statement above is how to take *kano ko* ("that girl") in poem 43, which commentators generally take as referring to Akiko herself. Ichikawa wants to assert that even if *kano ko* is not a specific reference to Ukifune, that Akiko must have had her in mind as a kind of poetic persona. The textual history of the poem does not bear this out, as Akiko changes *kano ko ga kami ni fukazare* ("blow not through that girl's hair") to *wagami o moppara ni fuke* ("blow entirely thru me [my body]") in the Shinchō edition. The change to "my body" seems to indicate that *kano ko* is in fact Akiko, or at least the lyric subject. But while I do not agree with Ichikawa's specific reading, what she uncovers and how is significant. That she is "wrong," if she even is,²⁰⁹ is irrelevant, first because Akiko's own reading, as manifest in her revision, is not to be taken as sacrosanct, and second because she reveals the truly poetic character of Akiko's verse by divorcing it from a singular reading.

"Singular reading" is, perhaps, a stupid and facile way of putting it, and it does nothing to explain precisely what it is about Ichikawa's reading that is so novel. This readerly interpretation has to rewrite the *Genji* as well in order for it to make sense with the *MG* and in so doing obscures much of the irony in Ukifune's "attention to her hair." As Ichikawa rewrites the story she finds latent in Akiko's poems, so too must she reconstruct the *Genji* to support it. Because her reading is based on the premise that the lyric subject of Akiko's tanka is commensurate with Ukifune, then, if a basic understanding of the poems is to change, *so too must Ukifune*. The two interpretations

²⁰⁹ In claiming Ukifune to be a persona Akiko adopts for herself, Ichikawa has left open the possibility that even *wagami* (me/my body) is a subtle reference to Ukifune.

are attracted.

For Ukifune, those few times she is freed however briefly from suffering and anguish are those when she attends to her hair. If we interpret Akiko's *sono ko hatachi* broadly and refrain from insisting on a strictly biographical reading, Ukifune might be included in the field of reference of this expression. Poem 6,²¹⁰ then becomes one which provides a gentle lesson in life, a rich, resonant, delightful poem in praise of youth.²¹¹

That last bit is something of a mystery to me. It is interesting that by constraining her point of view, Ichikawa has missed (or ignored) a palpable tension both in the *MG* and the final chapters of the *Tale of Genji*. It seems that her understanding of the *Genji* is determined more by her reading of the *MG* than vice versa. Her description of poem 6 is somewhat apt if left as is, but as an explanation of what happens to Ukifune after she is discovered by the Bishop of Yokawa, it seems painfully unaware of the irony that lies in Ukifune's beauty being the very cause of her anguish. The clearest manifestation of that beauty is her long, black hair, and it is the bishop's sister who wants to maintain it. When the sister departs Ono briefly to visit her and the bishop's mother, Ukifune convinces the bishop to let her take orders as a nun immediately, before the sister can return and convince her otherwise. As part of the ritual, Ukifune's hair is cut off, and it is to this in particular that the bishop's sister objects when she returns. Ichikawa has, perhaps unintentionally, pointed the way to an ironic reading of *MG* 6.

sono ko hatachi kushi ni nagaruru kurokami no (6)
ogori no haru no utsukushiki kana

that girl at twenty—thru a comb flows her black hair,
her pride in spring, isn't it beautiful!

The sticking point for most commentators, as Ichikawa notes, is *sono ko* and who exactly

²¹⁰ Ichikawa is referring to the sixth poem she has considered up to that point but it also happens, coincidentally, to be poem 6 in the *Midaregami*.

²¹¹ Ichikawa trans. Rowley, 169.

“that girl” might be. *Sono* is an odd choice; it presumes the interlocutor, whomever this poem addresses, knows who “that girl” is or is somehow related to him/her.²¹²

Beichman’s linked verse reding of the poems may be useful here to infer that the lyric subject of poem 5 is *sono ko*, and Akiko’s later emendation to *waga hatachi* (“I’m twenty”) seems to support that.

I’d much rather focus on something a bit more mundane, the word *kana* at the end of the poem, translated above as “isn’t it” and an exclamation point, but it’s also something of a question mark. While it asserts boldly the beauty of the lyric subject’s hair, it also asks, rhetorically, for confirmation of that fact. *Kana* makes the poem equal parts “her hair is beautiful, isn’t it!” and “her hair is beautiful, isn’t it?” *Kana* is, after all, a combination of the interrogative *ka* and the so-called emotive (*eitan*) particle *na*. But the question is a weak one, and it is clear from Ichikawa’s reding that it would be easy to write off the interrogative aspect²¹³ of *kana* or regard it as merely rhetorical. If you believe Ukifune exults in the luxuriant beauty of her long, black hair, then there is no need to see any tension or uncertainty in Akiko’s exclamation. Likewise, if you see nothing ironic in Akiko’s poem, there is no need to see any irony in the bishop’s sister reveling in the beauty of Ukifune’s hair, so long as you assume a relationship between the two. But there is an interpretive possibility that opens up as a result of Ichikawa’s

²¹² In contemporary Japanese, *ano* and *sono*, both of which one would render as the demonstrative adjective “that,” are more specific in their usage than *kano*, *ano*, and *sono* were classically, all three of which mean “that” in one way or another. *Sono* in modern Japanese usually implies an interlocutor, because the “that” is often “that thing I just mentioned” or “that thing that has something to do with you/what you just said.” *Ano*, on the other hand, implies something that is completely divorced from any immediate conversant, implies distance from the speaker and interlocutor, be it spatial or semantic. If the sequence is taken as a contiguous conversation, *sono ko* would likely be the implicit *otome* (“maiden”) of the initial poems, but because Akiko is writing in a classical mode, it is not absolutely certain this connotation of *sono* is intended.

²¹³ Of the numerous usages of the particle *ka*, all imply some degree of uncertainty. *Ka* can be used interrogatively as mentioned above, as a conjunction meaning “or,” and, if appended to an interrogative like *doko* (“where”) or *dare* (“who”), can mean “some” in the sense of “someone” (*dare-ka*) or “somewhere” (*doko-ka*).

approach that she fails to account for not because of some prejudice another reader might bring to the primary text under consideration but because the ancillary material brought to bear is open to precisely the same poetic and transgressive readings the reader is already engaged in with some other text. Far from constraining a particular *reading*, by bringing other materials to bear a reader in fact exacerbates the already polysemous nature of any given text: the interpretive possibilities of one are now *multiplied* by the interpretive possibilities of another. Each transgressive reading makes way for more, such that the risk in reading wildly or loosely is being thereafter wildly reread.

Akiko *seems* to be aware of this fact both within the *MG* and without—or perhaps I merely reread her that way—and the most obvious sign of her gaining or losing control is the state of her hair.

midaregami o Kyō no Shimada ni kaeshi asa (56)
fushite imase no kimi yuriokosu

I changed my loose hair to the Kyoto Shimada in the morning
I rouse you whom I'd told to sleep

The Shimada hairstyle (*Shimada-mage*) is an elaborate one generally worn by young, unmarried women and, especially in Kyoto, geisha. It has become so iconic that there is now a festival for it every year on the third Sunday of September in the city of Shimada. The distinction in the poem is between hair left loose, left to do what it will (and thus subject, one supposes, to the whims of others), and a style in which the hair is pulled back tightly, tied off once near the scalp and again a few inches down a ponytail, the tail is folded in on itself onto the top of the head, and the section of hair between the first and second ties is teased so as to fan out. Every strand of hair is “in its place,” so to speak. There is an easy conceit in the poem of a woman who does everything she can to say,

“pay attention to me,” but that is belied by the rest of the collection. Akiko’s *kimi* (literally “you” but a term of endearment) has heretofore been an object of adoration identified sometimes as a Buddhist devotee (in poem 7), or more generally as a “preacher of the Way” (*michi o toku kimi* in poem 26), and sometimes as an artist (*eshi no kimi* in poem 35). The lyric subject practically fawns on “you,” and prior to poem 56 above what antagonism with “you” there has been has been largely playful. But here there seems to be a subtext of shaking “you” out of “your” complacency, “you who are still asleep.” An alternative, and highly unlikely, reding of *yuriokosu* (“shake awake”) is to take it as the noun *yuri* (“lily”) and the verb *okosu* (“awaken”) rather than as the compound verb. The second line above would then read “you whom I told to sleep the lily awakens.” The lily, generally associated with Akiko’s amorous and poetic rival Tomiko (though it need not be, even for this interpretation to work), is a distinct character in the *MG* often at odds with the lyric subject of Akiko’s poems. In poems 181 and 182 it is the lily “you” visit in “your” dreams, and perhaps the situation is no different here. But the lyric subject is no longer given over in simple adoration to the caprice of “your” wandering affections. She attempts to retake control (of the affair – of the poem) and in so doing must control her hair, her image of herself, and all its resonances. Of course, the lyric subject’s “taking control” is futile, and her sleek, Shimada hairdo doesn’t last; the strands spread out in numerous, often contradictory directions. The lily cannot be contained—her presence is palpable to the very end of the collection—and “you” cannot be stirred in the way either Akiko or the lyric subject may want. What is perhaps truly transgressive about Akiko’s poetics is her willingness, even if only implicitly, to admit to that fact:

my hair

my hair has
once again come loose,
even though
all day the comb neglects it not.

ah, someone
could ignore a lone
strand going
magnificently out of line!

but to come
loose is hair's nature;
before long
I won't know how to control it.

waga kami

waga kami wa
mata mo hotsururu.
asayū ni
naozari narazu kushi toredo.

aa, tare ka
kami utsukushiku
hito-suji mo
midasanu koto o wasuru beki

hotsururu wa
kami no saga nari,
yagate mata
osaegata naki omoi nari.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Yosano, Akiko. "Waga kami" in *Yosano Akiko Zenshū* vol. 9 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1980) 147-8.

Conclusion

i 罨 B wiθ U:²¹⁵ Shiina Ringo Reding Her Self

φαίνεται ἑαυτῷ κῆνος

appears to himself that man

—Sappho fr. 165

In the four chapters that precede, lyric poetry was understood as one thing but taken to be and treated as if two wholly different things, which is to say two things, not necessarily commensurate, were taken to be lyric and unproblematically so. Lyric was *understood* in its very vague, modern sense, as *poetry* that, while it may have its origin in song, has moved so far away from music as to be little more than the (relatively brief) poetry of personal expression concerned primarily with the situation of the self, be it emotional or conceptual. But lyric (the word, the idea, and the “poem”) was also used in an equally vague, perhaps lay sense of it as the words of a song. This other use of lyric remained an unacknowledged problem for the vast majority of this dissertation because the author (whoever he may be) believes the only way to eliminate the arbitrary distinction between lyric as poetry and lyric as song is to completely ignore it altogether. Songs are no more or less relevant to the study of poetry than any one poem may be to

²¹⁵ A phonetic representation of “I wanna be with you” where the word “wanna” is the Chinese character pronounced *wana* in Japanese, meaning a “trap” or “snare.” The line is from the chorus of Ringo’s 2000 single *Gibusu (Cast)*.

another, and to ignore the relationship (which is what the distinction between these two “lyrics” seems intended to do) between lyric poetry and lyric song only makes it that much harder to see how poetry might speak to song and vice versa. The two are not the same, even if momentarily treated as such, but to see the gap between them as composed entirely of difference does little good and much harm to the study of both. So what precedes has been as much an attempt to elucidate how songs can be used to understand poems as a set of case studies in the reding practices of various poets and critics and the role willful ignorance plays therein. What follows, without abandoning the practice above, will attempt to conclude this dissertation—as much as it can be—by seeing how it is poetry and its critical methodologies can be used to understand song.

Reding is a kind of performance. What does that mean? I’d also like to answer an implicit but often unasked question: what does that (i.e. reding) do to the lyric? In a footnote on page 164 I mention offhand that “[c]ontemporary musicians introduce an interesting problem for the study of lyric, because, often, they do not actually write the words to the songs with which they are associated” or even the music. Yet, this does not prevent us from saying “Your Song,” the example given there (lyrics by Bernie Taupin), is Elton John’s, who wrote the tune, recorded the song, and continues to perform it to this day. While this may be an intriguing factoid, it doesn’t signify much, as there is no other version of the *song* beyond Elton John’s.²¹⁶ A more telling example would be Johnny Cash’s cover of Nine Inch Nails’ (i.e. Trent Reznor’s) “Hurt” from 2002. Reznor’s “Hurt”²¹⁷ is a loud, aggressive anthem of angst and pain, whereas Cash’s “Hurt”²¹⁸ is soft

²¹⁶ The same is true of Björk’s “Bachelorette” in chapter 2: she did not compose the lyric, but that fact does not necessarily deter one from associating the song with her. In most respects it seems who performs the song is more important for posterity than who wrote it.

²¹⁷ Nine Inch Nails. “Hurt” *The Downward Spiral*, Nothing, 1994.

and melancholic: when Cash sings, “and you can have it all / my empire of dirt,” there is very little of Reznor’s anger. One could easily take it as a sign of resignation at the end of life, and the music video produced to promote the single certainly tends toward that interpretation. In it, Cash sits at a lavish table of expensive wines and exotic foods singing with sporadic cuts to old performances and a vacant museum to his past and celebrity. Of course, the lyrics are the same, but the song and its “cover” could hardly be more different. Cash’s “Hurt” is an interpretation in a radical yet basic sense: his reding of Reznor’s song has been so thoroughly inscribed *in* it that it becomes the song, just as the textual critic’s reding becomes the text from that point forward. Cash’s possession of the song is so violent and so thorough that Reznor abandons the song entirely.

[T]hat song isn't mine anymore... It really made me think about how powerful music is as a medium and art form. I wrote some words and music in my bedroom as a way of staying sane, about a bleak and desperate place I was in, totally isolated and alone. [Somehow] that winds up reinterpreted by a music legend from a radically different era/genre and still retains sincerity and meaning—different, but every bit as pure.²¹⁹

There is an obvious parallel here between Yosano Akiko’s seeming abandonment of her early work and Reznor’s concession of his song to Cash. The important difference is how Cash’s act of reding *seizes* control of the song “Hurt” so forcefully that its author has no choice, seemingly, but to relinquish it. Coeval with the act of reding, of interpretation, is a violence-doing that is so compelling as to become irresistible. The difference is that Akiko understands what happens to the poet when the reader receives and the reader intervenes; Reznor does not, so he is somewhat bewildered when another singer’s violent act of reception catches him by surprise. Here, the poet/singer does not set aside composition to act as a reader, as an interpreter; the twinned arts of composition and of

²¹⁸ Cash, Johnny. “Hurt” *American IV: The Man Comes Around*, American Recordings, 2002.

²¹⁹ *Alternative Press*, September 2004.

reading are so thoroughly entangled that the author (of this dissertation) feels compelled to call what happens here something else entirely, *reding*, something familiar yet strange—the familiar *in* the strange, the familiarity *of* the strange.

Quotation (and repetition) is itself a performance: a reader covers a text, so to speak, in the process of analysis. The Sappho fragment above is, as Carson notes, “cited by the grammarian Apollonios Dyskolos in a treatise *On Pronouns* (106a) and believed by some to be a more correct reading of fr. 31.1 (in place of ‘that man seems to me’).”²²⁰ Apollonios’ interest in the partial line is not particularly literary: he cites it for the Aeolic form of the reflexive pronoun οἱ and moves on without mentioning the possibility of its being the “correct reading” of the first line of fragment 31, though, as Voigt notes, such a suggestion is made in the marginalia of manuscript *A* of the treatise.²²¹ These facts are important, 1) because Apollonios is the only source for the fragment in the epigraph and 2) because Apollonios elsewhere cites the first line and a half of fragment 31, there for the Aeolic form of the demonstrative, κῆνος. His interest is entirely that of the grammarian, there is no (literary) analysis of either quotation, but that he treats them as two distinct things is itself significant, if only implicitly. As far as Apollonios is concerned, fragment 165 is *not* a possible substitute for any part of fragment 31, and even though he does not *say* anything particularly exciting about the two fragments, unless the finer points of dialect and syntax turn you on as they do this author, how the fragments are presented, how they are re-written, how they are performed within Apollonios’ text does say something quite intriguing, by extrapolation, namely that (our) ignorance of the historical condition(s) of given text(s) can bring to light similarities that might not

²²⁰ *If not, winter*, 381n.

²²¹ *Sappho et Alcaeus* ed. Eva-Maria Voigt, 146.

otherwise appear to be and that what seem to be multiple iterations of a single text can, and perhaps should, be treated as distinct things. These different approaches lead in different directions but do not contradict each other, at least not in a negative sense, they *ad-dict* each other, each yields to the other, and, so far as they furnish a reading that may supersede them, remain addicted and co-dependent. The lessons one can draw from textual criticism, even of ancient texts, are apropos to the conditions of modern lyric documents: records, videos, scores, performances, memories, poems, etc. What happens to Sappho in Apollonios Dyskolos' treatise on pronouns is not fundamentally different from what happens to Reznor's "Hurt" in Cash's cover, and we should stop treating them as if they were.

"Perhaps you would like to know my name..."

In 2003, at the "end" of her solo career,²²² Shiina Ringo released her "last" solo single, *Ringo no uta (Apple's Song)*,²²³ and begins the eponymous song with what you would expect of an artist introducing herself for the first time: "perhaps you would like to know my name" (*watashi no namae o oshiri ni naritai no deshou*). But before she can answer her implicit question with something akin to "it's Ringo," the possibility of getting the word from the source, as it were, is revoked.

²²² Ringo was in the process of putting together the band Tokyo Jihen, and so this single was meant to mark a shift away from solo writing and arrangement. However, Ringo returned to her solo career in 2007 with the album *Heisei Fuuzoku (Japanese Manners)*. *Japanese Manners* is the English title Ringo herself appends; the *Heisei* refers to the current emperor's reign and the time period during which it occurs. Thus the Heisei period would be the contemporary one. *Fūzoku* means "manners" but is also a euphemism for "prostitution." Prostitution is a recurring theme in Ringo's work: the song "Queen of Kabukicho" (*Kabukichō no jō*) is about a young girl apprenticed to a madam, she plays a (seeming) prostitute in the film *Hyakuiro megane (Teleidoscope)*, composed the soundtrack for the film *Sakuran (Delirium)* about a courtesan (*oiran*) in the Edo period, etc.

²²³ Shiina, Ringo. *Ringo no uta*, EMI Japan, 2003.

watashi no namae o oshiri ni naritai no deshō
demo ima omoidasanakute kanashī no desu

perhaps you would like to know my name,
but sadly now I've forgotten it.

The conceit of the song, or so it seems, is an apple (*ringo*) speaking to a child and asking him/her to give the apple a name, because it can no longer remember what its real name is.

hataraku watashi ni nazukete kudasai
oyobi ni natte dōzo suki na yō ni
5-gatsu ni hana o sakasu watashi ni niai no na o

please give me a name to work with
go ahead, call me what you will
something that suits me blooming in May

The single, along with a CD recording of the song, includes a DVD of the two music videos shot for the song, but “*the two videos*” is misleading, because another video for the song was shown on the NHK children’s program *Minna no uta (Songs for Everyone)* long before the single was ever commercially available. In it, a personified apple peers in longingly at a family of human beings whose world the apple ostensibly desires to join. A sexless child emerges from the confines of the human’s warm, cozy domicile at which point the apple begins to interrogate the child as above and as follows

akebi ga hiraita no wa aki-iro no aizu deshō
kisetsu ga damatte saru no wa sabishī desu ka

the opening of the akebia is a sign of fall colors...
does the silent passing of the seasons make you feel lonely?

It should be noted that this likely refers to the splitting of the akebia fruit in early fall and not to the blooming of the flowers, which occurs in May. The allusion to the akebia fruit and the mention of a flower suited to blooming in May, as the akebia does, seems to

indicate that while *ringo* is asking the child to name it/her, she has it in mind to forge its own identity. She/it only seems to relinquish control.

namida o fuite kao o agete kudasai
hora mō jiki watashi mo mi o tsukurimasu
fuyu ni wa mitsu o irete anata ni otodoke shimasu

dry your eyes and lift up your face
look! soon I too will bear fruit
come winter I'll put in the nectar and send it off to you

What *ringo* says about putting in the nectar in winter makes sense neither with the pattern of the akebia that it has established so far nor with the apple we know her to be. *Ringo* treats itself as if she were a gift, a commodity, but it's clear that there is something *ringo* wants in return.

watashi ga akogarete iru no wa ningen na no desu
naitari warattari dekiru koto ga suteki

what I'm longing for is to be human
to be able to cry, to laugh would be wonderful

Of course, the child cannot make *ringo* human (even if children might anthropomorphize it—perhaps that is what is meant), and it does not seem as if she expects the child to do so. Yet, the child gives it the only thing s/he can, a name, an identity.

tatta ima watashi no na ga wakarimashita
anata ga ossharu toori no “Ringo” desu

ah, now I know what my name is;
it's “Ringo” just as you say.

Likewise, *ringo* gives the child the only thing she can.

oishiku dekita mi kara maitoshi otodoke shimasu
meshimase
tsumi no kajitsu

from the delicious fruit I've made, every year, I'll send you some
bon appétit

my fruit of sin

In a children's song, the line "fruit of sin" (*tsumi no kajitsu*) is oddly placed; is *ringo* a new Eve tempting the child away the safety of his/her family so that it might take her desired place as a human being? There are, however, those two other videos for "Apple's Song" that came with the single upon its subsequent release, two other texts to consider. Visually, the two videos are quite distinct, but they share a perspective on who/what the "apple" is supposed to be. The video for *Songs for Everyone* takes the allegory of the lyric very literally: the *ringo* is an apple somehow gifted with speech, and we presume that the fruit it offers to provide every year is real, even if the final line alludes to the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

In 1945, shortly after the end of the war in the Pacific, Namiki Michiko scored a big hit with the song "Ringo no uta," [not] to be confused with the song considered so far,²²⁴ yet strangely Shiina Ringo's single seems to speak to this earlier postwar hit.

akai ringo ni kuchibiru yosete
damatte mite iru aoi sora
ringo wa nanni mo iwanai keredo
ringo no kimochi wa yoku wakaruru
ringo kawai ya kawai ya ringo

pressing my lips to a red apple;
trying to keep quiet, the blue sky;
the apple says nothing but
I know well how it feels
the apple so cute! so cute the apple!

Ringo's song turns the earlier lyric on its head and inverts its logic: where Michiko's apple cannot speak Ringo's apple will not shut up, and where Michiko's (I assume)

²²⁴ The two are even written differently in Japanese, though pronounced the same, りんごのうた and リンゴの唄 respectively.

human “I”²²⁵ is the only subject to speak here, Ringo’s apple’s song completely precludes any speech from the human child; Michiko’s I is so confident in what it knows, while Ringo’s apple is thoroughly insecure.

ano ko yoi ko da kidate no yoi ko
ringo ni yoku nita kawai ko
donata ga itta ka ureshi uwasa
karui kushami mo tonde deru
ringo kawai ya kawai ya ringo

that girl is a good child, a well-disposed girl
a cute girl who looked just like an apple
no matter who said it, the gossip made her happy
a light sneeze leaps out
the apple so cute! so cute the apple!

A *kidate no yoi ko* is not merely a good child or a good-natured one, but a child who is well-behaved as well. A *kidate no yoi ko* acts as we would expect her to, accepts what we say about her with joy and with silence; the only sense we have of her approval is a light sneeze: she is what we want her to be. It doesn’t seem to matter who says or what they might say, it is true of the apple/girl and makes her happy simply because we say so. The confusion of Shiina Ringo’s apple is an inversion of this characterization that, while it accepts the logic of *ringo*’s identity being determined “solely” from without, points to the sinister possibility that this is precisely what *she* wants. We are given the illusion of control, *ringo* defers to us, because it is the most effective method of concealing how we are being manipulated into *reading* her precisely the way she wants.

utaimashō ka ringo no uta o
futari de utaeba nao tanoshi
minna de utaeba nao nao ureshi
ringo no kimoichi o tsutaeyo ka
ringo kawai ya kawai ya ringo

²²⁵ I have to admit this is even an assumed “I,” as in Michiko’s song there are no pronouns, something perfectly acceptable in Japanese syntax.

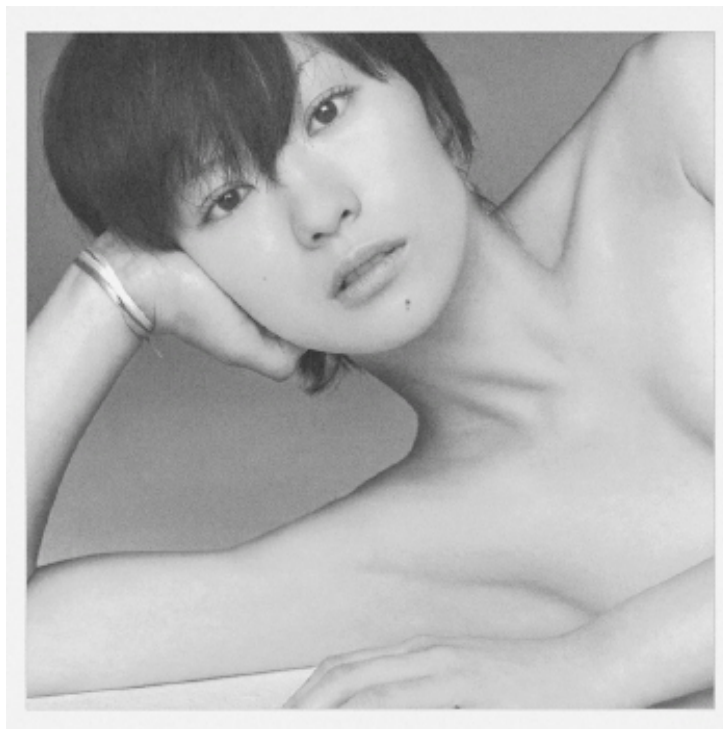
shall we sing it, the apple's song?
if we sing together,²²⁶ so much fun
if we all sing it, so much happier
shall we pass on how the apple feels?
the apple so cute! so cute the apple!

The position Ringo assumes, an “apple” herself, is to take up the call in this final verse and to contradict, in a very literal and etymological sense of that word, that earlier apple’s song and its marked silences. When Michiko tries to keep silent as she brings the apple to her lips and the apple itself can say nothing, Ringo seems to ask back hauntingly, “does the silent passing of the seasons make you feel lonely?” The problem that Ringo raises with lyric or rather the conception of lyric expression as emanating from a singular first person is the omission of the voice of second and third persons. In *her* apple’s song, the lyric subject does not even know its own name and has to ask its apostrophic other for something simply to work with; by the final verse, the apple has accepted the name *ringo* as a *fait accompli*, “it’s ‘Ringo’ just as you say.” It’s difficult to express in English the degree of deference the apple exhibits towards its addressee. Several of its statements are in *keigo*, a kind of formal respect language, creating the awkward situation of being somehow beneath a child in the Japanese social hierarchy. Normally, this would be an impossibility, but because the lyric subject is an anthropomorphized piece of fruit, it is technically possible to be beneath a child no matter how odd such a juxtaposition may first seem. The absurd deference of this apple toward a child calls into question the good behavior as seemingly unruly exuberance of that earlier apple’s song. Her speaking up to a child (and to us) creates the illusion of humility, a humility that, while not entirely disingenuous, is meant to lure us into believing that *ringo*’s sycophancy is concerned more with us and our desires than with her (and hers?).

²²⁶ Literally, “if we sing as a pair.”



But it is Ringo's (very real) image that pervades the single of which the song is only a part, and as she lies exposed, her blank stare serves as the blank slate she plays at being in the song. But remove her (liner notes) from its case, and something changes.



The singular mark of her identity, the mole that for so long stood so clearly for Shiina Ringo, is gone, and a tiny, black dot lingers on the surface of the plastic case. It's odd for a jewel case to contribute to a deconstruction of identity, but Ringo has made even the song's shell serve to conflate our various notions of image: image as a component of celebrity in the disappearance of the mole, image as symbol in the use of the black dot as a point of focus that is itself not fixed, and image as photographic representation. Even the CD itself serves in this *analysis* of image, but where removing the liner notes merely made of Ringo's face a blank slate (and blanker stare), the hole at the center of the disc creates a void where the mole once lay. As you peel back the layers of the medium itself—from case to liner to CD—you only get greater degrees of emptiness, and it doesn't help that Ringo stares back at you in want of something we can never know.



In early 2003, Shiina Ringo had her mole removed, and speculation at the time was that the mole had been discovered to be malignant and was removed as a preventative measure. Ringo makes it hard to avoid attaching any significance to its disappearance:

the abyss created by the progressive iterations on the removal of her mole is one that, like Heidegger's abyss in "Die Sprache" draws us to it even as we draw it closer to ourselves.²²⁷

The first video included with the single, unlike the children's video produced for NHK, is an amalgam of the personae from each of Ringo's promotional videos up to that point. The thread that links them together—literally a long, black CG thread—has as its point of intersection the mole on her face, and as the video progresses, her personae die even as they continue to play; their suicides are as much failures as Ukifune's.



The video has no obvious addressee—it is a pastiche of clips from all of her early music videos—so the only reasonable assumption is that when Ringo says “perhaps you would like to know my name” and asks someone to give her a working name, that we as readers/listeners are meant to supply it. With a simple change in medium, the semantic possibilities of the song have completely changed. It is important to note, though, that the *song*, i.e. the lyrics and music, have not changed at all. Any failure to consider not only the videos to which the song is affixed but the very packaging it comes in would

²²⁷ Heidegger, “Die Sprache” *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske, 1959) ?. In another etymological play between “foundation” (*Grund*) and “abyss” (*Abgrund*), Heidegger introduces the possibility that the idea of an “abyss” *in* language need not mean that language somehow fundamentally destabilizes us but that it can have a grounding within rather than outside itself, whereby we become part of rather than merely within language.

signal a failure to understand the true depth of Ringo's poetic practice. These are not cheap tricks meant solely to entertain but are part and parcel of the questions of identity the song itself lays bear. Even to speak of the "song itself" is to use ill-suited terminology, because it should be obvious by now that each of these material facets contributes to what the song is. The easy identification of *ringo*, the lyric subject, with Shiina Ringo, the author, and the way in which the "song" tries to hold them separate as it conflates them, parallels Yosano Akiko's own inability to disentangle hers and Yamakawa Tomiko's relationship to their respective signs ("are you the white clover? am I the white lily?" *Midaregami* 178) and Tawara Machi's difficulty in establishing herself in relation to that moment in the *Midaregami* text.²²⁸ Ringo's song is perhaps more apt because the sign of her lyric subjectivity is a very realistic, photographic representation of her body/her self and not as obviously distinct from her person as the white lily and clover are from Akiko and Tomiko.

In the second video with the single is simple cuts move Ringo from one costume to the next against a blank, white wall, but with one brief, odd interlude.



²²⁸ c.f. pp. 88-9.

A tiny green apple candle sits lit inside a larger red apple. The *ringo* that takes Ringo's place (an apple in an apple) is as much an object as the flowers that stood/failed to stand for Akiko and indicates, obliquely, that the "real" image of Shiina Ringo (and its celebrity) is an object as well. She does nothing to distinguish herself from it, and it doesn't do anything but hang there for a moment before the lyrics come back in and the sequence of changing costumes resumes and culminates in a naked Ringo looking first away from the camera



and then directly into it as the song comes to a close.



“Ringo” is in fact not her real name, so when she laments that she has forgotten her name and is resigned in the final verse to using Ringo just as “you” say, the song becomes less about the apple’s longing to be human and more about the celebrity’s longing to be more than an inanimate object of adoration. Her “real” name, Yumiko, is not exactly a secret, but because that name never enters into public discourse, it might as well be. The truly disturbing core of Ringo’s lament is the possibility that celebrity, that *image* has become her identity, and as such she must defer to us, the true purveyors of celebrity (and lyric subjectivity), to remind her who she is. That is why hers is the fruit of sin: the relationship between fan and idol is ultimately an erotic one, and Ringo reminds us that we are each complicit in this formation of celebrity as identity.

This reding of *Ringo no uta* is largely dependent on the assumption of a discrete²²⁹ text: the CD, the accompanying DVD, the liner notes, the case, and their respective contents. But any engagement with this text’s discretion already necessitates the transgression of numerous boundaries and edges: the CD, the DVD, and the notes could be taken individually to be as discrete as the “whole” single, and any conception of that single as a complete text demands elision of any distinction between its components. Just because they were purchased as a whole does not mean they have to be rede that way, so if you admit that you are already taking the text to be a composite, at what point do you stop introducing yet more documents into your complex of reding? Where, when, and how you stop constitute willfully ignorant and gnoscent acts, because there will always be something, some connection between texts you can mold into being meaningful. Sometimes texts seem to cry out for consideration, and sometimes you must

²²⁹ i.e. discreet

ignore them. In the 2003 film *Hyakuiro-megane (Teleidoscope)*²³⁰ Katsuragi Kaede (played by Koyuki), standing at the gate to her home, asks the detective Amagi (Kobayashi Kentarō) precisely the same question Shiina Ringo asks at the beginning of *Ringo no uta*, “perhaps you would like to know my name?” (*watashi no namae o oshiri ni naritai no deshō*). The conversation she and Amagi have as they walk back from the movie studio where she works is incredibly fraught, because Amagi has been hired by a man named Komagata (Ōmori Nao) to discover what her real name is. This could pass as mere coincidence if it were not for the fact that Shiina Ringo’s own production company, *Kuronekodō*, produced the film and that she appears as the mysterious woman who seemingly lives at Katsuragi’s house and who haunts Amagi’s dreams. I say seemingly, because Katsuragi claims to live alone, yet every night Amagi peers in through a hole formed by a knot in the wood of the exterior wall at this woman—who or what she may be is never made clear; she is referred to simple as *onna*, woman—who entertains a young man *seemingly* in the manner of a prostitute: she wears a loosely tied kimono, her hair is done up loosely with errant strands falling around her face, and the man lies on his side with his head in her lap. Every night, she says the same thing.

Woman: Be good and keep still (*dame desu yo; jitto nasatte ite*).

Man: [inaudible response]

W: You must go to sleep soon; you have an early start again tomorrow (*sa, sorosoro oyasumi nasai na; ashita mo hayai no deshō*).

M: [i.a.]

W: Don’t say that. If you don’t get up, you’ll be late tomorrow (*sonna koto osharanai de. jara, ichido okite kudasaranai to ashita okuremasu yo*).²³¹

²³⁰ *Tanpen kinema hyakuiro-megane*. Dir. Bamba Shūichi. Prod. Shiina Ringo. 2003. DVD. Kuronekodō, 2003. I choose the more archaic term teleidoscope, as opposed to kaleidoscope, to translate the title for a technical and for an aesthetic reason. Technically, a teleidoscope has no fixed objects attached to the end of the scope but rather a lens, so the world becomes the source for its optic mutations. Aesthetically, the Japanese word *hyakuiro-megane* is itself an archaism; the more common word for a kaleidoscope is *mangekyō*.

²³¹ The translation is from the subtitles by Lynne Hobday.

Each day, Katsuragi's and Amagi's relationship develops into the simulacrum of a husband and his wife: she cooks his meals and takes care of his day-to-day needs as any traditionally-minded, dutiful Japanese housewife would be expected to. Every night, Amagi watches the woman and begins to substitute himself for the man lying on the floor. He begins to supply audibly the lines that were otherwise left incomprehensible, and every morning he wakes, having overslept, and the audience is left to wonder whether what Amagi has just seen was, in fact, a(nother) dream.

He suspects Katsuragi and the woman are the *same* woman but remains unable to reliably confirm that fact. Katsuragi teases both Amagi and the audience into conflating her with the woman, even though the "two" characters are portrayed by two completely different people. She sits at a table, behind her on the wall is a picture of "her" (the woman in the photo is in reality the *woman*, i.e. Shiina Ringo), and when she notices Amagi staring at it, she says knowingly that it looks like a completely different person. When Amagi resolves to discover once and for all who Katsuragi and the woman are and returns to the house where "they" live, both disappear, so when his employer, Komagata, demands to know whether he has discovered "her" real name he responds plaintively: yes, Kaede; Katsuragi Kaede. The pseudonym she had used as an actress, as the dutiful housewife to Amagi, is all she will ever be. Komagata, exasperated with Amagi's quizzical response, leaves him at the doorstep of Katsuragi's house where he stares up at the lintel above the door and sighs lazily. He realizes that the search for deeper significance in her identity was pointless and that the dream through which he drifted over the previous week was all there would be.

The photograph of the woman as Katsuragi returns in the final shot of the film, and as the camera slowly zooms in one can make out a brief dedication written on the picture itself: “to you on the other side of the wall” (*kabe no mukau gawa no anata e*). On first consideration, “the one beyond the wall” would appear to be Amagi, but upon close inspection of the material document of the film—it was released directly to DVD—it becomes clear that the person to whom the image and the film are dedicated is someone else, us, the audience. When you insert the DVD into your player, the film begins immediately to play without any of the intervening previews or menus one has come to expect with digital media. The credits end with thanks: “we give our thanks all of the people involved in this project” (*kono sakuhin no kakawatta subete no hito ni kansha shimasu*), then the screen fades, and “also to you on the other side of the screen” (*soshite sukurīn no mukau gawa no anata e*) appears. Then, at last, the title menu appears, but on first sight, it is difficult to tell even that it is, in fact, a DVD menu. The screen appears to be a series of wooden planks with knotholes like the one thru which Amagi watched the woman. You can select the knots, and while some take you to a submenu of the usual sort (chapter selection, subtitles, etc.), some show a brief glimpse of an interior of the house in which Katsuragi/the woman lived which is immediately closed off by a pair of sliding doors. The medium is “aware” of what audiences do, and its very structure invites a conflation of the audience/the reader with Amagi in the same way it tries to elide Katsuragi and the woman. The DVD for us becomes like the photograph of Katsuragi Amagi carries with him in order to recognize her when he sees her, and vice versa: not only is our act of viewing/reading like Amagi’s investigation of Katsuragi’s “real name” but how we navigate the medium on which the film is inscribed provides a perfect model

for understanding how Amagi must navigate Katsuragi's/the woman's identity and in so doing discover very little beyond what he already knew from the start. The DVD contains numerous dead ends and frustrates our attempts to reread it in the manner we want but never entirely; Amagi is drawn to Katsuragi/the woman *personally* as well as professionally for the very reason that sometimes the woman seems synonymous with Katsuragi in knowledge and playfulness but is sometimes aloof. Despite this frustration, the film would still assert that we and Amagi are in control; a vision of the woman says to him/us, "the face you see is my real face; the voice you hear is my real voice; the name you call me is my real name," as the actual image of "her" face shifts back and forth between Katsuragi's and the woman's, likewise "her" voice. We may be rereading, we may be in control, we may compose the text even as we receive it, but that doesn't mean the text isn't screwing with us.

All of this description of *Teleidoscope* has gone a long way to show how clearly it echoes the textual difficulties Shiina Ringo presents with her single of *Ringo no uta*, yet none of this comparison is necessary. My rereading of "Apple's Song" is fine without everything I have written over the previous three pages; I could perform largely the same rereading for either text, *Ringo no uta* or *Hyakuiro-megane*, without referencing the other and not suffer for it. That they do similar things, draw on similar materials and ideas, show similar personages, does not mean they *need* each other or that there is a want of one to explain the other. As Ichikawa indicates in chapter 5, more information does not necessitate a stronger interpretation. Though what these two texts do show, together, refutes to a certain extent what I said in that chapter. Where Ichikawa's rereading of the *Midaregami* seemed to color strongly her understanding of the *Tale of Genji*, I don't have

the impression that my reading of “Apple’s Song” changes much when I bring *Teleidoscope* into the equation, despite the fact the two texts seem to have so much to do with each other. I tried to assert in that chapter that bringing multiple polysemous texts together only exacerbates the possibilities for how not only the “primary” text might be read but also the “secondary” ones. That in itself is a possibility: you can always choose to make nothing much of a relationship at all.

The Ease of Indifference

In 2000, you could have turned on the television or the radio (in Japan), and heard precisely what you would expect, another thoroughly ordinary pop song proclaiming “I wanna be with you,” and just because Shiina Ringo says it does not mean it has to be any more complicated than that. You might not like the song *Gibusu* (“Cast”),²³² and if you didn’t, then we could stop right here.

Suppose you like the song or are at least intrigued, pick up the single at a record store or rental shop, and as you listen to it on the way back to wherever you come from or back home or just where you happen to be, you follow along with the lyrics in the liner notes. If you don’t follow along, then you can stop right here.

anata wa sugu ni shashin o toritagaru
atashi wa itsumo sore o iyagaru no
datte shashin ni nacchaeba atashi ga furuku naru janai

you want to take a picture right away
I always hate when you do that
if I’m just a picture, won’t I grow old?

²³² Shiina, Ringo. “Gibusu” *Shōso sutorippu*, EMI-Japan, 2001. Cast as in a plaster cast to set a bone, not the players of a theatrical production.

If you've never heard of Shiina Ringo, you might not know about her other experiments with lyric subjectivity. You may also be living in 2000 or 2001, and those experiments in identification may not have even happened yet.

anata wa sugu ni zettai nado to iu
atashi wa itsumo sore o iyagaru no
datte samete shimacchaeba sore-sura uso ni naru janai

you say “absolutely” etc. right away
I always hate when you do that
if you're so cold won't it just be a lie?

Finally, you come to the bit you heard on TV, on the radio,

don't U *think?* i 罨 B wiθ U

and what seemed so

straightforward, perhaps downright banal, becomes anything but. No one made you look at the liner notes, and, honestly, if you hadn't, nothing about “I wanna be with you” would have seemed odd or out of place. The line is clearly in English when you listen to it, you may not have needed to look the line up, but once you look at the lyrics, i.e. the *written* lyric, something about the line fundamentally changes, unless you simply don't care. If that's the case, you can stop right here.

The fifth word of the line is written *wana* 罨, is read “wanna,” but how are we to rede it? Want, here—that is *desire* is a trap or a snare, a fairly obvious Buddhist conceit, similar to how desire creates a trap for Ukifune that even suicide cannot alleviate, similar to how Regina Spektor “wants to sing another melody” in “Music Box” but ends up choking on her own words. The song and the lyrics are two “identical” texts that say different things: you could rede them together, you could rede them separately, or you could not rede them at all. The written lyrics set another trap, another line of

investigation that invites even as it frustrates, and in that way we could easily be seduced by a text, manipulated into thinking our desires (to rede more) are really our own. The rest of the chorus, of which the above is but the first line, perhaps doesn't help much,

koko ni ite
zutto
ashita no koto wa wakaranai
da kara gyutto shite ite ne dārin

be here
always
I don't know what tomorrow will bring
so keep holding me tight darling

and because it helps very little, we have little choice but to probe ever further.²³³ The word *gyutto* is onomatopoeic for a cinching sound like a belt (or a noose), and it seems to imply that the lyric subject's desire, itself a trap, is, likewise, to be ensnared. The song attempts to seduce you, to manipulate you, because it *needs* you in a way you don't need it; it needs you to exist. You can parse that in two not mutually exclusive ways: 1) it needs a reader to be there, and 2) without a reader the text does not exist. If a text can dupe you into believing that you need it as much as it needs you, then you have been trapped; the trap is what the text is and what it wants. Ringo conceives of this trap as a "cast" (*gibusu*), holding you and "her" firmly in place, to set whatever it must be in the text that you or she has broken. Her model for the relationship between "you" and the lyric subject is quite disturbing.

anata wa sugu ni ijikete misetagaru
atashi wa itsumo sore o yorokobu no
datte Kāto mitai da kara atashi ga Kōtonī janai

you right away want to show your shyness
I always delight in that

²³³ Or, annoyed with all these textual games, you might just give up. If that's the case, you can stop right here.

for if you're just like Kurt wouldn't I be Courtney?

Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love's relationship ended, ostensibly, in 1994 with Cobain's death from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. From a rather perverse perspective, you can almost re-de Ringo as happy not because of whatever iconic cachet may be inherent in being associated with Courtney Love but because even if "you" destroy "yourself" in the process of being bound to her, she will survive. There is a latent desire present in this and others of Ringo's lyrics to not only *be* with "you" but to assimilate "you" as well.

Ringo's first album with her band Tokyo Jihen (I say *her* band because at the time she was still writing and singing all the songs), *Kyōiku* (*Education*), contains one song written and performed entirely in English, in which what is merely implicit in *Gibusu* becomes quite explicit.

i say those proverbs as if you had contrived them
i know your arrogance, but do not point it out
and you've not changed a bit in three long dismal years
i think your flaw isn't so much your fault as a charm
maybe i will meet you one day, maybe wednesday, maybe not...
still, i'm sure to meet you anyway, maybe thursday, maybe not...

i want to be you
just like a leaf that has blown away with the wind and the rain
this "romance" is so mellow, and so "real"
just like a song that has died away with a flash in the night

i would like to be composed of you²³⁴

There is a seeming allusion in the last two lines of the first verse to the bridge of George and Ira Gershwin's "The Man I Love."

²³⁴ Tokyo Jihen. "Genjitsu o warau" *Kyōiku*, EMI-Japan, 2005. Ringo includes a Japanese translation of the lyric entitled "Laugh at Facts," though the word *genjitsu* is better rendered as "reality" than "facts," which I will mostly ignore, because the song is never performed in Japanese. Ringo does have a history of translating her *songs*, notably the translation "Stem" of the song *Kuki* that serves as the opening for *Teleidoscope*, and the song *Le Salle de Bain*, an English translation of *Yokushitsu*, where not only are the lyrics translated but the tune is also translated from the techno-pop of *Yokushitsu* to something much more orchestral, almost dreamlike.

Maybe I shall meet him Sunday,
Maybe Monday—maybe not;
Still I'm sure to meet him one day—
Maybe Tuesday
Will be my good news day.²³⁵

Allusion is likely not the correct word; Ringo's song doesn't so much point to the Gershwins' or seek to revise it as it very literally *continues* the thought in the bridge: "The Man I Love" has sufficiently covered Sunday through Tuesday so *Genjitsu o warau* continues by considering Wednesday and Thursday. This is not properly an allusion because it doesn't take a relationship with "The Man I Love" as a necessity or even a given. There is no expectation of going to Gershwin (or Ella Fitzgerald through whom Ringo likely knows the song) to understand what Ringo says, but a reader can if that is what she wants to do. However, there is a real danger in bringing "The Man I Love" into the conversation, the danger that it will be more affected by the nature of Ringo's poetics than it will affect any reading of *Genjitsu o warau*.

When the mellow moon begins to beam,
Ev'ry night I dream a little dream;
And of course Prince Charming is the theme:
The he
For me.
Although I realize as well as you
It is seldom that a dream comes true,
To me it's clear
That he'll appear.

Some day he'll come along,
The man I love;
And he'll be big and strong,
The man I love;
And when he comes my way,
I'll do my best to make him stay.

²³⁵ Gershwin, George and Ira. "The Man I Love" *Strike Up the Band*, 1927.

The way “The Man I Love” can be rede *with* Ringo’s lyric is indicative of what Bloom calls *apophrades* or the return of the dead, where

The later poet... already burdened by an imaginative solitude that is almost a solipsism, holds [her] own [song] so open again to the precursor’s work that at first we might believe the wheel has come full circle, and that we are back in the later [singer]’s flooded apprenticeship, before [her] strength began to assert itself in the revisionary ratios. But the [song] is now *held* open to the precursor, where once it *was* open, and the uncanny effect is that the new [song]’s achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later poet [herself] had written the precursor’s characteristic work.²³⁶

It is worth noting that I have to drastically rewrite Bloom in order for my argument here to work, not just by correcting his terminology (“he” to “she”, “poet” to “singer,” “poem” to “song”) but also by eviscerating both his programme of psychological development within the poet and his whole system of precursors and ephebes. Only when rede in this way can his earlier description of what he calls *tessera*, completion and antithesis, become remarkably apt for describing the way in which Ringo redes her own precursor(s): “a [singer] antithetically ‘completes’ [her] precursor, by so reading the parent-[song] as to retain its terms but to mean them in a different sense, as though the precursor had failed to go far enough.”²³⁷ Though, it is not a relationship with her precursors that produce anxiety in her songs, because they (the precursors) are relatively unnecessary, but her understanding of how she herself will be continued by the reders to follow.

you tell your stories as if you had no respect for anyone
i sing my songs as if I were a prostitute
you take a snap at me, and stuff yourself on my welfare
i feel like I am clinging to a cloud
maybe i will kiss you slowly, maybe quickly, maybe not...
still, i’m sure to kiss you anyway, maybe sweetly, maybe not...

i want to be you

²³⁶ Bloom, Harold. *Anxiety of Influence: A theory of poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) 16

²³⁷ *ibid.* 14

it's hard to spend a lifetime for myself with the quakes and the storm
this "romance" is an error, and surreal
it's clear that i love your insensitiveness like the hills and the sky

i would like to be merged into you

Ringo's awareness of her own poetics is, in many ways, the antithesis of the antithetical relationship Bloom identifies in the poets he *redes*. She doesn't try to rede back toward whoever may stand for the moment as her poetic precursor but rather forward toward the abyss, toward an unknown reder, "you," whose desires, ignorance, and violence she seeks to circumvent or contain even before they come into being. By appearing (to herself at least) to be open, to be willing to let you compose her yourself, Shiina Ringo seemingly avoids the danger that all redings must face, namely to be rede in precisely the same way she redes, perhaps with even greater force and violence. However, this only works to stave off subsequent redings so long as "you" remain truly absent, so long as "you" have a singular, empty identity that can be molded in precisely the same way a reding reshapes texts. Once "you" become a real person, a reder as opposed to a reding, Ringo must face the unsightly task of dealing with "you" doing exactly what she does not want and absolutely cannot have "you" do: ignore her.

The song "Superstar," from Tokyo Jihen's second album *Adult - Otona*,²³⁸ was written, according to an episode of *Bokura no ongaku (Our Music)*,²³⁹ with the baseball player Suzuki Ichirō of the Seattle Mariners in mind. On that same episode, Ichirō confessed something about this song, a confession that left Ringo nearly speechless. But first, a few lines:

"mirai wa shirankao sa, jibun de tsukutte iku"
tabun anata wa sou iu to wakatte iru no ni

²³⁸ Tokyo Jihen. "Sūpāsutā" *Adult*, EMI Japan, 2006.

²³⁹ *Bokura no ongaku*. Fuji TV, Tokyo. 23 February 2007.

honno chotto zawameita asa ni koe o nakusu no

atashi wa anata no tsuyoku hikaru manako omoidasu keredo
moshimo aeta to shite yorokobenai yo
kayowai kyou no watashi de wa, kore de wa mada... iya da

“the future is indifferent... it makes itself”
even though I know that’s probably what you say
I lose your voice in the light hum of the morning

I remember how brightly your eyes shine
but even if I’ve seen you²⁴⁰ I can’t get excited;
today I’m too fragile, like this I’m still... no good.

The switch from *atashi* (the more feminine “I”) to *watashi* (more gender neutral) in the second verse marks an interesting slip. It may not mean anything—vacillation between the engendered and relatively neuter personal pronouns is quite common in spoken Japanese—but it seems that *atashi* permits herself to get caught up in the (submissive) act of adoration where *watashi* is subject to a harsher critical gaze. In this way, subjectivity has been doubled, or rather subject and object are drawn from the same source in a way that is difficult to express. Is *watashi* judging *atashi*, or is the gender neutral pronoun more indicative of breaking out of that position of submission of that should be pleasurable and yet cannot be. It is also possible that the two first person pronouns seek to destabilize the lyric subject of the song. As has been noted already, explicit subjects are not necessary in Japanese, and the last line of the first verse demonstrates this clearly, where *honno chotto zawameita asa ni koe o nakusu no* could be rendered more prosaically as “losing voice in a morning that murmured just a little.” Whose voice is lost and who loses it, neither are clear, but it can be reasonably *assumed*, given the conventions of the Japanese language, that some “I” is the subject. It is hard to accept this convention *prima facie*, because the distinction between “you” and “me” is precisely

²⁴⁰ Immediately after writing that I hated it; *aeta to shite* is more like “assuming I’ve met you.”

what Ringo has been seeking to erode in the songs rede so far.

"kotae wa mugendai sa, jibun de tsukutte iku"
kareyuku ha ga aikawarazu chimen wo mamotte iru
sonna daichi kette aruite wa koe wo sagasu no

atashi wa anata no kodoku ni tatsu ishi wo omoidasu tabi ni
namida o koraete furuete iru yo
tsutanai kyō no watashi demo

“answers are endless, they make themselves...”
the withering leaves, as usual, protect the earth
kicking that ground as I walk, I search for a voice

when I recall how you have the will to stand against despair
I shiver as I hold back my tears
clumsy as I am today

Again, it seems the *atashi* exults in strength, while *watashi* remains aware of the weakness of the lyric subject and its need to draw on “you” for the power to keep from falling apart. Yet again, we can’t help but wonder if we are being manipulated by Ringo’s “weakness.” My translation conceals a possible pun in the second line in the first of the two verses that immediately precede, for the way Ringo pronounces the word *chimen* 地面, “earth,” it sounds like *jimen* 字面, literally the face of a word, its surface or mask. This may not seem like much of a revelation, but the Japanese word for “language” (and also for “word”) is *kotoba*, conceived of as *koto no ha* or “leaves of speech.” In this alternative reading, “the withering leaves [of language], as usual, protect the surface of words / kicking that ground as I walk, I search for a voice.” Despite what may be said in her “Apple’s Song,” she holds out the hope that she can penetrate surfaces, find within more than void, and no longer silently do “just as you say.” Though, having “you,” being “you,” even, pardon the expression, doing “you” are all lingering possibilities, because it is never clear whose voice it is she has lost and for whose she is

looking. This song remains part of her willing indifference to her own lyric subjectivity.

The song begins somberly, from a place of melancholy. There's more than a touch of anguish in Ringo's voice when she sings *tabun anata wa sou iu to*, but as the song progresses, her voice becomes more manic to the point where she is practically screaming the words.

ashita wa anata o moyasu honou ni mukiau kokoro ga hoshii yo
moshimo aeta tokiwa hororeru you ni
terebi no naka no anata
watashi no sūpāsutā

tomorrow, I want the heart to face the flame that burns in you
so that when I've seen you I can boast
that you, on the T.V.,
are my superstar

There is an easy similarity between this song and The Carpenter's "Superstar" from 1971, similar to the one above between "The Man I Love" and *Genjitsu o warau*, but because that has little to do with my point here, I'll stop right there. Ringo interviewed Ichirō on that episode of *Bokura no ongaku*, and he confessed that he hates the word "superstar" so much, the very idea of it, that when he listens to the album this song is on, no matter what he's doing, he always skips that track. For emphasis he repeats he hates it three times, making Ringo's already awkward demeanor (practically the opposite of her stage presence) even more so. The strange advantage the poet enjoys in the absence of her apostrophic other is not only a masturbatory space in which she might mold "you" as she pleases but also a reprieve from the horror of knowing that the other can just as easily have opinions of her. As Ichirō says, it's embarrassing to be fawned over in that way, to know that, even though the song may be more generally applicable (more "you" than "thou"), someone—especially when the poet is that someone—would easily substitute

your name for “you.” Ichirō’s comment destabilizes Ringo’s subjectivity in a way her own songs cannot for the very reason that Ichirō’s act of reding is completely out of her control. She seems to have been aware of that fact, but mere awareness was not sufficient to do anything about it.

“Ringo” is normally such a careful reding of herself: sometimes writing songs in English she translates into Japanese or completely different musical genres; sometimes from Japanese into English; sometimes combining those two disparate versions into an odd amalgam; sometimes writing, composing, and performing entirely by herself; sometimes in duet; sometimes with a band. She is a musical and as such a poetic chameleon; any attempt to classify her music as anything but the uselessly generic “pop” would be frustrated by the sheer range of her lyric expression. But her persistent effort to always be between, ever to avoid labels, leaves her image in flux: if you’re always something different from one moment to the next, then who exactly are you? To resign yourself to being between is to permit yourself the freedom to recompose those things you love or equally hate, but the cost is that you will never have a place, an identity to call your own. Even if you recognize and acknowledge that identity is a construction, such an acknowledgement will never prevent someone from reding that image, that façade, as if it were truly you. Perhaps the only lesson that can be derived from all of this—if a lesson is what you’re looking for; if not, you can stop right here—

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