



Ahadada Books

Chapbook

Sapphic Derivations

Dan Sargent

Dan Sargent

Originally from the rust belt of Pennsylvania's Lake Erie coast, Dan Sargent has spent the past six years in Pennsylvania, Colorado, Texas and Louisiana. After working various jobs (Press Operator, Technical Support Specialist for a national ISP, murderous eighty-hour work weeks for a dotcom, Eighth Grade English Teacher—undoubtedly the most difficult and least rewarding job he ever had), he has finally become a stressed out, yet oddly satisfied indentured servant/graduate student at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.



Sapphic Derivations

...this...
you walk...

...an ocean...
A dreaming field bends forward.

The dance...
Arrived clothed in hyacinth.

Olive...
...
...wine for the...
...on your lips...



Sapphic Derivations

I have been waiting.
Moon risen...
 ...boat mast curls and flows on the water.

There are no tears between us, but—

 ... death also proposes.

 ...

The old labors gone out of our hands
 have found no rest, though we rest.

 ...

Your robes...

 ...temple garden



Sapphic Derivations

I saw her...
Overwhelm the heart...
...
...slowly turning lioness.

A stylus... ...wax...
Soft...

No leaves left...
And the olive branch...



Sapphic Derivations

Fog heaves across the water.

He loves her, only her.
I am broken...

The rocks...

...feathers
Burst from my hands...
...necklace pearls drop.

Chain links open, and become wings.



Sapphic Derivations

I cannot...

...cannot...
...cannot I...

A song...
Your body...

...
Breasts...

...
Moon-eyed...



Sapphic Derivations

...the vase breaks singing to you...

Oxen lean into the yoke.
The cart rattles over stone.
However slow...
...bring you to me...



Sapphic Derivations

If nothing else survives...

...

Now...

...no greater...

After such a long time away—
four pomegranates by the door.



Sapphic Derivations

The mole has a bat-like face.
...no more love than...

...
...

A grave...

Night wind rushes forward...

They say the gods...

Giants are buried under these trees.
The roots hold them down...



Sapphic Derivations

The temple frieze...
Blue lapis...
I once slept...
 ...tress...
 ...eagles...

Broken sandal lace flaying...
As I run...



Sapphic Derivations

...waist...
...Zeus weeps.
...clouds tremble.
Eyes that hold lightning...
...
...contain this sorrow...

...enemy...
...
...creature...
...
We have been too long away.
...what has come.



Sapphic Derivations

...the last...

...of...

Cries...

Of this always...

...never arrived.



Sapphic Derivations

Priestess...
Love...
...
...
Nowhere more beautiful...
We can only...
...our prayer.

...full.
...over the horns.
And you can hear...
...
...white pillars leaning.



Sapphic Derivations

...warmth.

...

With you, Laurel...

A flower...

...victor...

The ground you walk on...

...finds more...

The smallest forgive...

...

Seen among the...

...

...hearth...



Sapphic Derivations

Tired...
No fear...
Crawling out of...

I've given among the last...
...
Can think of nothing... ..you, except...



Sapphic Derivations

Fingers...
Robe open...
Too white...

The evening...
Your hair...
...
...all ways.



Sapphic Derivations

Roots break...
...marble...
...arms...
...dust...

After this, I can envy...
...



Sapphic Derivations

...love has

...

Leather bands...

...

...

The morning howls without you.

...lotus eaters...

...heavy... ...my blood.



Sapphic Derivations

...stone wall...
...fallen upon me.

...papyrus makes the words...



Sapphic Derivations

Not like speaking...

...we two.
...azure god.

...is it the tree...

...sings...

...

The lyre out of a seashell...

...

...we've made

A lion...



Sapphic Derivations

A fallen fig upon..
...after winter...

The palace has grown bolder against the mountain.



Sapphic Derivations

...music for the moon...
Ease around my body...

...
What is this life,
If not permission to love?

I have returned, only to find...



Sapphic Derivations

...feet over marble...

...

...sound among columns...

The god's mouth speaking...

...

...white...

...flows over,
encloses...

...sword, bent out of use
after battle, has become a tool
for the gardens...



Sapphic Derivations

...tells me,

...
“Your... ..has been too long away.”
I write my name...
Lie down together...

Men have said that we...
...never again.
...rose colored...
Arms around...



Sapphic Derivations

Beneath the ocean, a thousand men...
...apart on the...
...or was it the sound of his voice
In the shell...
...
To me...

How could she...
...wind-hewn...
...pearl fingered...
...from the Amazon's bower...
And her armor... ...at the wedding.



Sapphic Derivations

...has gone to the...
...call. My voice—
the only howl over the village tonight.
...where the dogs lay silent.

A dark hand...
The wine...



Sapphic Derivations

...fingers...
...slow crescents on your thigh...
...as now...
...

Alone, every storm terrifies...
...
Your skin a shade of pleasure.
And my robes flowing...
...the cushions...



Sapphic Derivations

...voice...
...lips near my ear...
Was it your breath? The heat on
my skin that...

I went to the spring near Apollo's...

...

The boy asked me...



To Aphrodite, on your throne of inlaid gold,
star-splendor and heaven-woven charms about you—

This is my prayer:

Don't destroy my heart
with suffering; with sorrow—
but come to me.

If you have ever heard, and listened, and left
your lapis-carved threshold—descended
in that golden chariot drawn by swans.
If you've ever come to the dark; the cold
that our world must seem to you, born of sky and sea...

And I remember—

You here, beside me.
That smile on your face!

And you asked,
"What is this sorrow?"

Who is it? Whose heart is closed to you?
Who has done this wrong?

I will right it. I will avenge you
with a love; a madness made just for her.

If indeed she loves you not,
she soon will."

Oh, come now, as you came then. Come and have at my enemy—
this indifference.

Do what I'd have done.
Oh goddess, mistress,
companion in battle.



Sapphic Derivations

The stars are lost to us
When we have the moon...

...by this cool water...
...the wind among the apple-blossoms.
The leaves come alive...



Sapphic Derivations

...to you, I make the offering of a white goat's fat.
I will leave behind for you...

Gold-wreathed goddess, Aphrodite, if only
this fate were mine...



The muses have honored me with their voices...

...

...I have received fame...

Their golden lips, and when I sing no more,
I will be remembered...

...now for the delight of my friends.



Sapphic Derivations

...those I've blessed
hurt me worst of all.

Toward you—you most dear to me—
I will never change...



Sapphic Derivations

As for him—the one who accuses—
may my madness and my pain descend upon him.

Dawn—her golden-slippered...
Had just seen me, when...



Sapphic Derivations

...the many-colored gown reached to her feet.

O, whom do you love best,
if not me?



Sapphic Derivations

That man cares for himself...

I long, I crave—

...

And you burn me so...

...

...pain-giver!

Liar!



Sapphic Derivations

...this laughter...
...where your hand lay upon my arm...
...golden...

All my words...
And yet, that is enough...



Sapphic Derivations

Come, goddess, Queen of Desire.
Bear your jeweled cups—
filled with nectar and happiness—
to these, our friends.

Among my dearest...

...I am still alone.

...six days gone...

...a shadow passes before the window



Sapphic Derivations

No moon...
 ...Pleiades...
 ...over distant mountains...
Shadows the earth itself casts up...
 ...the sky...

I want no high honors.
They can save their perfumes.
Bleed no bulls.
Leave the goats in their fields.
My heart needs nothing...
You... ...you are with me.



Sapphic Derivations

...the spring...
...flows with wine...
...
...sand and water...

Jasmine from the garden
...as sweetly today...



Sapphic Derivations

What can I give?
She already has me...

A cricket sings in the heat
near the altar stone—the only
other worshiper today.



Sapphic Derivations

A cricket sings... ..moon-shadow

...
...the fire...

...and when he spoke,
you'd tilt your head...

...
I bit my tongue until...
...burned the table...
...the gray-eyed dog of...



Sapphic Derivations

The flesh hopes...
The blood hopes...

Persuasion, enchantress of men,
Aphrodite's daughter...



Sapphic Derivations

Nereids, golden ones, grant me this:
My brother's safe return,
And that he be given what he desires.
May he learn from his life.
May his friends find joy in his nearness.
...and may our house be free
from other men's shame.

No term or end to this search.
No term, save death.



Sapphic Derivations

Old fisherman, how...
Yes... ...hands are broken...
...
That I could offer the corral-fingered sea...

Bulls and men have bled for him...

...

The hyacinths have spoken...

...

...

We have stolen their eyes...

After the garden's stillness...



Sapphic Derivations

...old fishmonger, how...
Yes. Your hands are broken...
...net-weaving...
That I could offer the sea...
...
Coral fingered...

...is thick fire...
...is leaning into...
...back... ...stepping among the...
Star-haired dancers.



Sapphic Derivations

...the wind answers...
...bends round my shoulders...

...by the roadside...
When the rain...
...nowhere...
...tower that meets...
...
...the dogs have come...



Sapphic Derivations

It takes more to be a god...
...your cool...
...after...the garden's stillness...
...
White petals, where grass had been.



Sapphic Derivations

...day gains...

...

...

...over the stones...

...a shadow that moves...

...diamond one, for you...

My body is covered with this strange dust
that feels like death. And yet, cannot be,
because you are not here, as you promised,
so long ago...

Suggested reading list

This short list is intended as a starting point for those interested in learning more about Sappho and her work. I would like to make it clear that in no way is this to be regarded as some exhaustive concordance of Sapphic material. The following is simply a list of books I found useful (in alphabetical order, according to title) as I worked on this manuscript.

The Ancient Greeks by M. I. Finley (1986)

An excellent introduction to the history—and psychology—of the ancient Greeks.

If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho by Anne Carson. (2002)

Finally, a translator comfortable with fragmentation. A very lyrical approach to this founding figure of the Lyric Tradition.

The Infinite Moment: Poems from the Ancient Greek by Sam Hamill. (1992)

A fine anthology of Sappho, and a host of other Greek poets.

Lyra Graeca (Vol. I) from *The Loeb Classical Library* series. (1934)

For nearly a hundred years, the Loeb series has been a handy anthology for translators and scholars.

Notes on Thought and Vision: And the Wise Sappho by H. D. (City Lights Books, 1983)

H.D. manages to confirm her genius in the space of 72 pages. Only she could so eloquently approach both a new idea of consciousness and the poet(ry) of Sappho in such a brief work.

Poems of Sappho by Willis Barnstone. (1999)

This is the 99th edition—that alone ought to give you an idea of how long these have been around. A decent volume.

The Portable Greek Reader Ed. W. H. Auden. (1948)

A useful anthology for those interested in a basic survey of Classical Greek literature.

Sappho: A Garland by Jim Powell. (1993)

Lovely translations with informative material on the historical Sappho, as well as a discussion of the tasks (and perils) of translation.

Sappho: A New Translation by Mary Barnard. (1999)

Another collection of Sappho translations.

Sappho's Immortal Daughters by Margaret Williamson. (1998)

A very in depth (i.e. scholarly) look at both Sappho and her poems.

Seven Greeks: Archilochos, Sappho, Alkman, Anakreon, Herakleitos, Diogenes, Herondas by Guy Davenport. (1995)

One of my favorite anthologies of translations from the Ancient Greek. Highly recommended.

Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida Ed.

Rainer Schulte & John Biguenet. (1992)

Though not directly addressing Sappho, or the Greeks, this is a useful book on the historical/theoretical/political/etc. issues/attitudes/concerns/etc. facing any would-be translator. I found Walter Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator" to be most formative with regard to my approach to this project.



The Passion of Phineas Gage & Selected Poems (Jesse Glass)

0-9732233-8-3

The Passion of Phineas Gage & Selected Poems presents the best of Glass' experimental writing in a single volume. Glass' ground-breaking work has been hailed by poets as diverse as Jerome Rothenberg, William Bronk and Jim Daniels for its insight into human nature and its exploration of forms. Glass uses the tools of postmodernism: collaging, fragmentation, and Oulipo-like processes along with a keen understanding of poetic forms and traditions that stretches back to Beowulf and beyond. Moreover, Glass finds his subject matter in larger than life figures like Phineas Gage—the man whose life was changed in an instant when an iron bar was sent rocketing through his brain in a freak accident—as well as in ants processing up a wall in time to harpsichord music in order to steal salt crystals from the inner lip of a cowrie shell. The range and ambition of his work sets it apart. The product of over 30 years of engagement with the avant-garde, *Passion of Phineas Gage & Selected Poems* is the work of a mature poet who continues to reinvent himself with every text he produces.

Secret, but Kept it Room (Mike Gubser)

0-9732233-7-5

Secret, but Kept it Room explores the development and stasis over time of self as image—at once real and artificial, subjective and perspectival, engaged in the physical world and torn from it, a self often disappearing into non-self. Mike Gubser treats the art of poetry as, in some sense, the art of experiment and problem-solving by placing the notion of self in various contexts—romance, depression, friendship, travel, memory, isolation—and poetic forms—visual, musical, lyrical modernist, numeric—to see how it reacts.

At That (Skip Fox)

0-9732233-6-7

Skip Fox, with the concern of an entomologist, presents passages sprawling and pinned in a shadow box of observations and odd lots. Framed under double glass, the mounting board of *At That* writhes with a cast of freaks: Ezekiel in the streets, a kitty bomb squad, sadists on steroids, the shadow of Cadmus, kingfishers, omen clad apertures of evening with cicada wings, heart attacks of clouds rolling in off the Gulf, a city mouse, spastic proctologists, and so forth, all projecting their "goods" in spate: smatterings, obsolete creeds, mordacious stumps, "furious opinions, exaggerations, fabrications," neo-prophetic stylings, verbal molestations, elegiac mumblings, the silence above a shallow grave, etc.

Ahadada Reader (Alan Halsey, John Byrum, Geraldine Monk)

0-9732233-3-2

Combines the lively, challenging work of three experimental poets, Alan Halsey, John Byrum, and Geraldine Monk. Halsey's group of poems resurrects past versions of English, turning with peculiar spellings and striking frictions of their grammar. Byrum's work, entitled "Approximations," is a shifting visual text work mainly utilizing the text block, pointing to the form of a word as art itself. The final selection of Monk's work rounds out the book with her varying forms and sharply constructed lines.

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