

## Sappho's Garden: A Queer Utopia?

Sappho's poetry exhibits a queer utopian vision built on relationality and futurity. This essay follows the work of recent scholars who describe Sappho's poetry in terms of queer affect, as well as those who identify the queer feelings present in Sappho's poetry as being recognizable to modern queer women in particular (Mueller 2021, Haselswerdt 2017, 2023). I analyze the queer affect present in Sappho in terms of Muñoz's 'queer utopia', which emphasizes that queer is an "ideality" or a "potentiality", the latter defined as "a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense" (Muñoz 2019, 9). Queer utopia utilizes hope as "a critical methodology [that] can best be described as a backward glance that enacts a future vision" (Muñoz 2019, 4), or, in other words, queer utopia may be understood as something not (yet) achieved but longed for in an ongoing way, an envisioned future made manifest by awareness of the present that is informed by the past.

Sappho's poetry demonstrates utopian longing. Even the smallest fragments, such as fr. 36 (which reads only καὶ ποθήω καὶ μάομαι, "I long for and seek after") demonstrate that desire and longing are pillars of Sappho's (queer) poetic affect. This comes paired with a repeated theme of remembrance, such as in fr. 94 where the poet seeks to remind a departing lover of the good times they shared and the tactile delights they enjoyed together. Between these two themes—longing for something one does not have and remembrance of something one *used* to have—is a vision of utopia: a queer existence that does not exist in the world as it is, and yet with a keen awareness of what *might* be. Despite (or because of) being grounded in the past, Sappho's poetry contains a sense of queer futurity rooted in longing. It is a poetics of absence

(even leaving aside the fragmentary nature of Sappho's poems), which only further serves to show us "the ghostly presence of a certain structure of feeling" (Muñoz 2019, 42).

This sense of longing for something not (yet) achieved also extends beyond the poet's own voice and toward the other, including at times the reader. Queer utopia is inclusive of both a remembrance of past togetherness and a desire to build "a belonging in collectivity" (Muñoz 2019, 20), and so too does Sappho's poetry involve another person directly in the vision of utopia that she presents. Whether this takes the form of apostrophe (Greene 1994) or an open 'may you' or a 'may we', the desire for a queer future is necessarily relational, built upon the connection between self and other. This fundamental relationality also extends through time thanks to the futurity of Sappho's poetic longing discussed above. Perhaps the most famous fragment of Sappho among modern queer youth is fr. 147, particularly as translated by Anne Carson: "someone will remember us, I say, even in another time" (Carson 2002, 297). This fragment captures not only Sappho's ancient sense of a queer future which is arguably embodied by modern queer communities, but also the modern queer utopian longing for a future queerness not (yet) achieved by those reading Sappho as part of their/our own past. In this way, the queer utopia imagined in Sappho's poetry by its depiction of absence is one that has been both partially fulfilled by modern queer people (because we do, indeed, remember Sappho and her loves) and at the same time pushed further into the future by those who find in her poetry a companion to their own longing.

## Works Cited

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