Introduction
A Colicky Muse

Like many literary critics, I have a personal stake in what I read and how I read. I turned to Sappho for the first time, in a sustained fashion, at a moment when I had lost faith in the relay between reading and writing; reading no longer felt like the creative, generative process it had always been. My writer's block, I later realized, was spurred by the critique-based tradition, whose high-stakes and competitive approach to interpreting literary texts had left me paralyzed – too aware of how I would be challenged to even want to risk committing a thought to paper. Sappho was what I read "just for fun." It was my avocational, naïve readerly fascination with Sappho that instilled in me a feeling of kinship with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "reparative reading" and the related approaches of other queer theorists. This way of reading, to which I devote Part I of this book, finds aesthetic coherence and sustenance in literary forms and episodes typically characterized by their incompletion or failure; it also values the experiences and insights of nonprofessional readers.[1] Only after I had already embarked on my personal venture, which felt both urgent and necessary if somewhat unfocused, did I learn that this style of reading was in fact part of a larger movement, one whose broader outlines I attempt to sketch in Chapter 2.

Sedgwick and Sappho are both consummate readers, readers who relish the process of engaging with others' compositions, and who center that experience – of falling in love with, resisting, and refashioning what they have read – within their own texts. I accordingly use the term "reader" in its broadest sense: for the act of listening to and being moved by texts and poems (whether heard or read), but also for writing or composing in

[1] I borrow here from Lee Edelman's reflections on reparativity and survival in Berlant and Edelman 2019: 43: "Assembling, conferring plenitude, giving the inchoate a sustaining form: the work of reparativity grounds itself in a notion of aesthetic coherence that opposes the incompletion, division, and defectiveness of failure." These comments are in dialogue with Sedgwick 2003: 149–150. On reparative reading, see the section on "What Readers Can Expect to Find," in this Introduction, and Part I.

response to those "texts." I think we can say, in the case of both Sappho and Sedgwick, that their intimate engagement with the works of other artists is very much on the surface of their own creations. Their works invite readers to contemplate not only the finished product but also what it means to have immersed oneself in the act of reading (in interpretation, response, recomposition). In theorizing reparative reading as an alternative to the style of literary criticism she (and many others) had been schooled in, Sedgwick brings this focus on collaboration and responsiveness to the foreground.

Reading Sappho alongside Homer and Sedgwick will not help us recover the historically contextualized performances of either of these archaic Greek poets. But Sedgwick *can* help us hear some of the contemporary resonances in Sappho's lyrics, by attuning us, for example, to Sappho in the act of reading, or by inviting us to read Homer and Sappho side by side, without the diachronic, hierarchical filter of historicist approaches (those that aim to reconstitute the original ritual and performance contexts for archaic Greek lyric).[2] Reading Sappho with Sedgwick will also put us in touch with some of the queerer aspects of Homeric epic, as these are elicited by Sappho's lyrics. I gesture here to the unusual cohabitation of beauty and brightness alongside shame and ugliness that one finds in her verses – and to the self-consciously nonheteronormative ways in which both female and male sexualities are evoked. A famously impossible term to define, "queer" receives one of its now iconic formulations in *Tendencies*, where Sedgwick describes it as "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically."[3] This is perhaps the single most frequently cited sentence in Sedgwick's entire oeuvre.[4] As a working definition, it will serve us well.[5] I appreciate in particular how it acknowledges that sexuality is both fundamental to and yet incommensurable

[2] In Chapter 1, I elaborate on "side by side" (avuncular) reading, and I also discuss some possible scenarios for interactions between Homeric epic and Sappho's lyrics on Lesbos; I maintain throughout this book that the oral-poetic contexts of archaic Greek performance culture can and should be brought into conversation with contemporary practices of intertextuality. For a complementary perspective on reading poetry as poetry, see the Introduction to Foster, Kurke, and Weiss 2020.

[3] Sedgwick 1993: 8 (emphasis in the original); notably, she introduces this formulation as "one of the things that 'queer' can refer to" (i.e., not as *the* definition).

[4] I will return to it in Chapter 2.

[5] See also duBois 2015: 158, in her chapter on queer Sappho: "The use of the word 'queer', once a pejorative term used to dismiss gay men, became a badge of honour, and came to define not just gay, not just lesbian, but also other forms of 'non-heteronormative' persons, that is, transgender, transsexual, transvestite, bisexual, intersex, sex workers and any other variety of proud deviance from what was once called 'compulsory heterosexuality.'"

with queerness.[6] And how it does not try to define "queer" in any absolute sense. Sedgwick's suggestive language invites supplementation.[7]

In invoking Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick as this book's queer Muse, I am attentive to Charles Martindale's reminder of how important it is to balance historicist and presentist perspectives. Martindale (2006: 9) sounds cautiously optimistic when he insists that "we are not doomed either to a narrow and relentless presentism or to any form of historical teleology."[8] *Sappho and Homer: A Reparative Reading* is "presentist," however, in more than one sense. It takes root in the present I share with others who have been looking for a way of reading that affirms our own pre-(or post?) professional experiences of loving literature.[9] But it is also devoted to a genre – lyric – whose temporality foregrounds the present. Taking up universal and mythical themes, lyric nevertheless embodies them in the here and now, eliciting responses (visceral, verbal, aesthetic) from readers and listeners who may feel as if they are being spoken to directly and intimately by the poetic voice addressing them as "you."

Unlike the lyrics of most modern poets, Sappho's poems come to us in a fragmented and mostly incomplete state, with holes and tears in the papyrus (or other material on which they have been preserved) turning up as blank spaces and brackets in our modern editions. The fragmentedness of Sappho's lyrics presents readers with numerous challenges. But encountering her lyrics *as fragments* has also been regarded by some as essential to the aesthetic experience of reading Sappho.[10] In an essay on the Tithonos Poem, Page duBois connects the fragmentary quality of that poetic text with our own fragility as mortal beings. DuBois (2011: 668) suggests that "the pleasure of the ancient text, in particular, may lie in part in the fact that all bodies fall into ruin."[11] Like the

[6] See Muñoz 2019b: 153–157 on queerness and the incommensurate. As Karin Sellberg (2019: 189) aptly puts it, "[queerness] arguably has always involved an engagement with sexuality, but where the limits of this sexuality are to be set and what sexuality itself entails is by the very definition of queer theory (if there is such a thing) a notion that will and should continually be problematized."

[7] Fawaz (2019: 8) regards Sedgwick's investment in certain works of art and her language of "tending towards" as coextensive with her commitment to queer studies, which, in his words, is "the first arena of humanistic inquiry to take seriously the public and political dimensions of erotic and affective desire, intimacy, attachment, and kinship; *it is a theory, in short, of what we tend toward*" (my emphasis).

[8] Telò and Olsen (2022: 7) likewise in their Introduction to *Queer Euripides* embrace a mode of reading that pushes against "historicist contextualism and its ostensible distance from the past it aims to reconstruct."

[9] On the longer history of affective labor within the discipline of literary studies, see Lynch 2015.

[10] See, for example, duBois 1995: 35–39; duBois 2011. On the early modern romanticization of Sappho herself as "the perfect fragment," see Prins 1999: 3–8.

[11] duBois 2011: 668: ". . . and that therefore the encounter with ancient objects offers not just the pathos of a fragment broken from a whole, but also the consolation of the persistence of these remnants."

body of the singer lamenting her old age in the Tithonos Poem, Sappho's "body," her entire poetic corpus, has also been transfigured by time.[12]

The Middle Years

Eve Sedgwick's trio of books, published between 1985 and 1993 (*Between Men*, *Epistemology of the Closet*, and *Tendencies*), were foundational for the field of queer theory; in the later years of her career, as I discuss here and in Chapter 2, she turned her attention to what she called "reparative reading," a less combative, less antagonistic way of interacting with texts than tends to be encouraged by the "paranoid" critical tradition (more on which, later). I never consciously set out to write a book on Sappho and Sedgwick by way of Homer. But stranger things have happened in middle age. I wrote most of this book while I was forty-six, although I had begun dreaming it at least ten years before that. And so, during that year of writing, I was especially attuned to the way that the number forty-six crops up in Sedgwick's work – and the way middle age in general, the no-longer-young body, are thematized in both Sedgwick and Sappho.[13]

Sedgwick herself was also at something of a crossroads by the time she reached the age of forty-six. As she recalls in "Making Things, Practicing Emptiness," she had always loved textiles, but only in middle age did she free herself from linking her investment in textiles to her self-presentation, her self-adornment:

> It's funny that it wouldn't happen before age forty-six, or that it could happen then, but somehow I think I finally got it, that to tie my very acute sense of beauty to the project of making myself look beautiful was definitely a mug's game. Apparently the notion of a visual or tactile beauty that might be impersonal, dislinked from the need to present a first-person self to the world, came as news to me – late, late news. But exciting![14]

Liberated to pursue her love of fiber arts without the interference of her ego (her "I"), she discovers that her fingers are "very hungry to be handling a reality, a beauty, that wasn't myself, wasn't any self, and didn't want to be."[15]

[12] On the vulnerability of bodies in and of poetry, see Nooter 2023, chapter 6.

[13] In "Trace at 46," a poem Sedgwick wrote in 1977 when she was only twenty-seven, a character by the name of Trace is forty-six, turning forty-seven, and on the cusp of various transitions; it begins (Sedgwick 1994: 43): "In middle age his bodily outline / softens and fills in – partly, he supposes, / with femaleness." Middle age here seems to bring with it a blurring of gender, as Trace's once securely masculine body "softens and fills in."

[14] E. Sedgwick 2011: 71.

[15] E. Sedgwick 2011: 75. Hawkins (2010) discusses Sedgwick's attraction, in her later works, to nonidentity and nonbeing. And Snediker (2019: 206–207) rightly points out that "Sedgwick's

This love of impersonal beauty, beauty divorced from the needs or reality of the self, is also highly prized by Sappho. We might think here of Sappho fr. 16V, where, in addition to the outwardly beautiful Helen so familiar from epic and earlier mythical tradition, Sappho gives us Helen the aesthete, a Helen who pursues her own love of beauty, just as Sappho herself is drawn to the bright glance and lovely movement of Anactoria. The impersonal aspect of the beauty that moves both the listeners and the characters within this poem is embodied in that neuter form *kalliston* (fr. 16.3V). Intimately linked with desire, it is a beauty that mirrors the impersonal, non-self-oriented beauty that Sedgwick pursues, in her fabrics and in her theory. And lest the travails of middle age seem far removed from Sappho's purview, let us also recall (in addition to the better-known Tithonos Poem, which will be discussed in Chapter 5) these verses (fr. 168B Voigt):[16]

δέδυκε μὲν ἀ σελάννα
καὶ Πληΐαδες· μέσαι δὲ
νύκτες, παρὰ δ᾽ ἔρχετ᾽ ὤρα,
ἔγω δὲ μόνα κατεύδω.

The moon has sunk as well as the Pleiades. And it is the middle of the night. The season passes by. And I sleep alone.

Most readers focus on the solitary voice – the woman who sleeps alone, without a lover by her side. We have been conditioned to read Sappho as a love poet. But what if, rather than hearing an expression of loneliness, we were instead to allow this voice to speak to us in more neutral, descriptive tones? Sappho experiences her life as an arc, just like the night itself, which is past its midpoint.[17] Middle age is, in this respect, integrated into the celestial movements of moon and stars, and the diurnal rhythms of night and day. The solitude that accompanies the singer's revelation comes from

eventual migration to the differently capacity-making medium of textiles – precipitated by what she sometimes describes as a waning investment in authorial control – is as much an intensification of her long-standing attachment as it is a turning away."

[16] Hephaestion does not quote these verses as belonging to Sappho, although they are preserved in his *Enchiridion*, along with three or four other Sappho fragments; some editors thus treat the poem as an anonymous fragment or a folk song (See Clay 1970). The poem was ascribed to Sappho by Arsenius, the Archbishop of Monemvasia (c. 1500) and it is attributed to Sappho in Campbell's and Voigt's editions. There may also be references to old age at Sappho frr. 21V and 63V; see Ferrari 2010: 203–204.

[17] Sider (1986: 59) observes of the term ὥρα that there are three ways in which it can be understood: "a) the time of the night, b) the season of the year, and c) the passing of Sappho's life." Preferring this last sense, he adds that it "both crystallizes the inchoate personal feelings underlying the first three lines and acts as a glide between the astronomical description of the poem's beginning and its intensely personal last line."

her coming to terms with the "season" of her own life, which glides past her (*para*) while she lies still, perhaps looking up at the night sky (though the woman who speaks is also asleep).[18] The preposition *para* is worth pausing over, too. It indicates a sidling up to; but attached to the verb *erchetai* it also implies a brushing-past, a form of movement. The experience recorded here is one of stillness within movement: solitude, though not necessarily loneliness. What we hear is the tension between the depersonalization of the "I" and the seemingly personal account that this voice renders of a particular moment in a woman's life. Like Eve Sedgwick, Sappho takes the middle years seriously, devoting attention not just to the beauty and vibrancy of youth but also to what comes after. And like Sappho, Sedgwick turns tending to what she terms a "colicky" muse into a source of poetry. In doing so, she reminds us that Sappho's aspirations may not have been those that are typically ascribed to poets by the literary critics who read them.

Colicky Muses and the *Moisopoloi*

As mentioned, Sedgwick's early interventions in the emergent field of queer theory had happened by 1993, the year *Tendencies* was published.[19] But by the mid-1990s, she had begun rethinking the mode of criticism with which she was already closely identified. Feeling that it was out of step with certain developments in her own life, including the loss of several close friends to AIDS and the diagnosis she received of what was to become a terminal cancer, Sedgwick sought to bring her critical writing practice more closely into alignment with her evolving sensibilities as a reader: so was born the style of reading she came to call "reparative." But we can trace all the way back to her earliest years Sedgwick's ambivalence toward the "paranoid" or "symptomatic" critique from which she would distance herself.[20] For Sedgwick, being a critic had always been, at best, second best.[21]

[18] On the complexities of the present-tense voice as the sleeper's voice, see Purves *forthcoming*. As Carson (2021: 9) remarks of the similarly confounding poem by Emily Dickinson (465) that begins, "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died – " that "it is unclear where 'I' am positioned in order to write a poem about a noise simultaneous with my own death."

[19] The language of queerness does not emerge explicitly until *Tendencies*, but *Between Men* and *Epistemology of the Closet* were clearly instrumental in shaping debates that became central to queer studies. See Wiegman 2019 on Sedgwick's role within the history of the field of queer studies.

[20] See Best and Marcus 2009 for a critique of Fredric Jameson's "symptomatic reading."

[21] Snediker (2019: 206) puts it well: "Far more than is usually acknowledged, Sedgwick's investment as a critic in her own writerly style is unthinkable apart from her lifelong sense of poetry as a first calling."

As she relates in an interview from 2006, Sedgwick had wanted in the first place to be a poet:

> I didn't start out to be a critic. I started out to be a poet from very, very, very early on, but my muse was very fickle, and so there was a lot of time when I just couldn't write. And so my sense of identity as that kind of a writer was kind of excruciatingly tenuous. So I found my way – I'm talking about college and graduate school here – into seeing myself as a literary critic.

I have taken this excerpt from a piece written by her husband, Hal Sedgwick, in which he discusses Eve's often thwarted attempts to establish herself as a poet.[22] The troubled relationship between the poet and her Muse also figures prominently in Sedgwick's poetry. For instance, in the verses that open the collection *Fat Art, Thin Art*, the speaker asks,

> Who fed this muse?
> Colicky, premature,
> not easy to supply, nor fun to love:
> who powdered her behind and gave her food
> the years when ("still a child herself almost")
> her mother was too blue?[23]

"Colicky" and "premature" are perhaps not the adjectives one would choose for Sappho. She was appreciated, especially in antiquity, for her smooth and polished style. Nevertheless, Sappho, who names herself in her own lyrics, becoming in this way both author and character, grapples also with her Muse.[24] In a two-line fragment preserved for us by Maximus of Tyre (fr. 150V), Sappho tells her daughter, Kleis, not to mourn, for "there is no place for lamentation in the house of those who serve the Muses: this would not be appropriate for us (οὐ γὰρ θέμις ἐν μοισοπόλων ⟨δόμωι⟩ / θρῆνον ἔμμεν'⟨ ..... ⟩, οὔ κ' ἄμμι πρέποι τάδε.)." Sappho identifies herself here as a member of, in her own coinage, the *moisopoloi* (those who tend to the Muses).[25] We would

[22] H. A. Sedgwick 2011: 452.

[23] Sedgwick 1994: 3. Kent (2017: 136) argues that "writing poetry as Sedgwick theorizes it here constitutes a female-female (auto)erotic act" and that this poem and its Muse, who is so closely identified with as to be nearly inseparable from Sedgwick herself, "provides a counterpoint to Sedgwick's male homoerotic identifications and desires" (113).

[24] I discuss this practice of self-naming, an almost autofictional blurring of identities, in Chapter 2 but acknowledge here that it results in my sometimes assuming that a female persona or "I" voice in her lyrics is "Sappho," even when that voice is not named as such.

[25] Hauser (2016: 145) shows that the -πόλος suffix of μουσοπόλος "emphasizes proximity, engaged activity and a dynamic of care and guardianship towards the Muses." This is the first occurrence of the word μουσοπόλος in Greek literature.

call them poets.[26] She never claims to have been anointed with a gift, or handed a staff, as Hesiod tells us he was.[27] In her own lyrics Sappho presents herself as a poet cultivating her craft, tending to her Muse, working and reworking whatever comes to her in the way of inspiration or eros. In such a figure we may recognize a portrait of the woman as artist, especially if we consider that Aphrodite, for all intents and purposes, serves as Sappho's "colicky" Muse.

The irreverent tone of the Sappho-persona's conversation with her ventriloquized Muse, Aphrodite, in the first poem of her collection – the Hymn to Aphrodite, as it is often called – echoes both the playfulness and the pain concealed in Sedgwick's voice (from both the interview and the verses quoted from *Fat Art, Thin Art*). Both Sappho and Sedgwick are, moreover, obsessed with similar themes: desire, sexuality, bodies, beauty, shame, reputation, mortality, and the very art of making music, a process that each one figures as a kind of plaiting. Trace, the protagonist of Sedgwick's poem, "Trace at 46," is a musicologist who suffers from writer's block ("Why can't he work on getting the current chapter written, /on Fauré?") while having affairs with at least two women, one of whom – Cissy – is a young composer living in New York City. Cissy's composition, "Aquarelle," which is being performed as we read the poem, fluidly blends different sounds, Gamelan instruments with Western, and also features a Javanese god who, with his "tone-deaf and high and irresolute" and yet "transfixing voice" oversees "the *plaiting together* of lines female and male and divine."[28]

Reparative Reading (Sedgwick, Klein, and Sappho)

The term "reparative" comes from Eve Sedgwick, who adapted it from Melanie Klein, a psychoanalyst probably best known for her work in the field of object-relations analysis.[29] Klein focused on the normative patterns of development in the human infant. Using the "play" technique she developed for observing and decoding their unconscious, Klein argued

[26] For this interpretation, as opposed to a cult in honor of the Muses, see Lasserre 1989: 116–118, Ferrari 2010: 147, and Hauser 2016: 141–146.

[27] See Hes. *Th.* 30–34. For Hesiod's self-designation as *therapōn* (servant) of the Muses (Hes. *Th.* 100), see Hauser 2016: 144–145.

[28] Sedgwick 1994: 68. Sappho's own use of the verb *plekō* ("plait") is distinctive: unlike a woven text, the fibers that are plaited together retain their separateness, so that individual threads can still be recognized even as they join together to form a composite new whole (see further Chapter 3).

[29] For Kleinians, object-relations analysis is relevant for the period before children have gained verbal fluency and before the onset of the Oedipal complex; see further Mitchell 1998.

that very young children oscillate between two primary positions.[30] They are "at one" with the mother when their primal needs (for nourishment, affection, etc.) are satisfied, and in the earliest months of life may view the mother's breast as an extension of themselves.[31] But when their primal needs go unmet, these same infants phantasize, to use Klein's spelling, about destroying the part-object (i.e., the breast) that has frustrated their attempts at controlling it.[32] Hurtling in this way between love and hate, satisfaction and aggression, they occupy two successive positions, which Klein termed the "paranoid-schizoid" and "depressive" positions.[33] When the aggression-fueled "paranoid" phantasies in turn yield feelings of fear and guilt, the infant reverts to a "depressive" position from which she undoes her earlier destruction, healing the mother with her "reparative" feelings. Klein thought that the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions, which first manifest in the earliest months of life, remain with us into adulthood, becoming permanent facets of our personality.[34]

Like its psychoanalytic namesake, "reparative" reading emerges from the depressive position, and takes a less aggressive approach to its object of study. If we were to use (mixed) metaphors to describe the process of making sense of a work of literature, we might say that for the reparativist, reading's affect (the feeling one has while reading) is closer to that of inhabiting a text's orbit rather than sparring with it, or trying to breach its façade. Instead of interpreting an inherently alien textual artifact, the reader becomes absorbed into the fictional world that is created through her engagement with the text.[35]

I find Sedgwick's notion of reparative reading helpful for understanding Sappho's reception of Homeric epic. In my experience of reading her, Sappho is not a typically paranoid (or even agonistic) reader of Homer. Her lyrics are not overtly competitive with epic, nor does she primarily turn

[30] Positions are, according to Juliet Mitchell 1998: 27, an atemporal status, "a mental space in which one is sometimes lodged." For a concise introduction to these ideas, see Klein and Riviere [1937] 1964.

[31] See, however, Rose 1998: 144, alluding to a Klein work of 1944: "Even when the feeding situation is satisfactory, hunger and the craving for libidinal gratification stir and reinforce the destructive impulses" because "what the infant actually *desires* is unlimited gratification."

[32] Mitchell (1998: 22) explains that the unusual spelling of phantasize/phantasy is used by Klein to indicate that the process is unconscious.

[33] For Klein (Klein and Riviere [1937] 1964) love and hate coexist from the earliest stage of infancy; even as babies "in our unconscious phantasy we make good the injuries we did in phantasy, and for which we still unconsciously feel very guilty" (68).

[34] Mitchell 1998: 21.

[35] In recent years, paranoid reading has come to be viewed as nearly synonymous with standard practices of literary criticism. See especially Felski 2012 and 2015, and Chapter 2.

to Homer for self-authorization. Sappho focuses on moments from the epic repertoire where a character makes what looks like a "bad" decision (Helen leaving her husband, daughter, and parents and following Paris to Troy). Or she responds to feelings of weakness and humiliation (Aphrodite being wounded and taunted by Diomedes in *Iliad* 5, for example) and calls our attention to the emotions themselves, and the capacity of the injured to endure. Some readers of the *Iliad* have assumed that Aphrodite's silence when she leaves the battlefield is a sign of her defeat. But as I suggest in Chapter 4, her bodily posture also signals shame. The intensity of that emotion – one which is often accompanied by a sense of failure – characterizes the experiences of lovers in Sappho's lyrics.[36] A focus on shame and emotional upheaval, followed by healing (or simply survival), will thus be integral to the mode of reparative reading I develop in this book as a baseline for reading Sappho. But it is important also to acknowledge the moments of levity and playfulness, as well as brash, sexual humor one encounters in Sappho's lyrics.[37] Just as soon as you may think you have captured the poet's tone and affect, another fragment challenges your description.

In an essay they wrote for the volume *Reading Melanie Klein*, Judith Butler (1998: 181) remarks that one of the dangers of being a "paranoid" critic is that one risks "emerging objectless and without attachment in the world." Anxiety and suspicion may, in fact, destroy those potential attachments (whether to persons or texts). Tavia Nyong'o (2010: 245) similarly describes non-reparative reading as a critical strategy that "explains too much, explains too well and, ultimately, explains away the more worthwhile local readings that a critic may produce." In certain instances, such a critical strategy raises the bar so high that the critic ultimately "translates every possible phenomenon into yet another sign of the ubiquity of ideology or disciplinary power."[38] Paranoid reading strategies thus risk subsuming and flattening whatever comes within their purview.[39] By

[36] By "failure" I mean not only the lack of success in getting the object of one's desire, but failure as the repudiation of normative behaviors, or as a form of resistance to achieving culturally sanctioned forms of success. On "queer" failure, see Chapters 4 and 5. See also the chapters in the "Failure" section of Olsen and Telò 2022.

[37] See especially the section on "The Doorkeeper's Sandals" in Chapter 3.

[38] Anker and Felski 2017: 15. For critique's paranoid disposition, see Latour 2004. Castiglia (2017b: 5) sees in "hope" a chance to remedy this: "literary critics, persistent in their suspicion, have overlooked the centrality of hope to cultural theorists who have described its socially transformative powers."

[39] They are, in this regard, what Silvan Tomkins deems a "strong theory," a theory designed to explain a wide variety and quantity of disparate data. See further, Sedgwick and Frank 1995: 27n22: "Tomkins suggests that the measure of a theory's strength is not how well it avoids negative affect or finds positive affect but the size and topology of the domain which it organizes and its methods of determining that domain."

contrast, reparative reading "gives up on hypervigilance for attentiveness," as Heather Love (2010: 237–238) puts it, preferring "acts of noticing, being affected, taking joy, and making whole."[40] Even so, it is not always possible or even desirable to forego the "big truths" and organizing impulses spurred by paranoid reading (as I explore at greater length in Chapters 2 and 6).[41]

What Readers Can Expect to Find

The reparative approach I chart in *Sappho and Homer: A Reparative Reading* does not aspire to be an exclusive, or overarching, theory. It is a form of experiential – and experimental – reading, one that seeks to set the contemporary reader's investments in Sappho's poetry side by side with those of imagined listeners from ancient Greece, and to situate Sappho herself as a "reader" of Homer. I am less interested in reconstructing, in strict historicist terms, exactly which parts of the Homeric repertoire were available for Sappho to engage with than I am in teasing out some of the ways that affect, character, and myths familiar from (what we know of) Homeric epic reemerge, transformed, in Sappho's lyrics. Rather than systematically locating and analyzing the Homeric turns of phrase and metrical schemes that crop up in Sappho's verses, I speculatively explore Sappho's reworkings of, among other things, humiliating failures, affect-laden gestures, and heroic artifacts from the *Iliad* and the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*.

More broadly, I am interested in the personal attachments that develop between readers (both ancient and modern) and their texts, and I try to acknowledge throughout this book that the very act of reading (i.e., how we respond, both emotionally and intellectually, to what we read) can be both quirky and idiosyncratic. I take my cue here from Sedgwick's own resistance to deploying an objective scholarly voice, even in her academic writing, and her frank acknowledgment of the crippling, thwarting effects such a scholarly posture can have. No doubt this attitude will strike some of my readers as, at best, whimsical, and at worst, navel-gazing and self-indulgent. To them my response would be that readers *are* in fact all of these things (i.e., whimsical, navel-gazing, and self-indulgent), and to

[40] See also Lin 2017: 77: "Creativity coincides with the desire to repair the damaged objects and make good the injuries inflicted."
[41] See especially Love 2010.

pretend otherwise is to subscribe to a fiction upheld by the literary critical professoriate.

Partly because Sedgwick's contributions embody the sort of insightful idiosyncrasy that is, in my view, central to reparative reading, I have tried to make room for them, not simply as a theoretical framework but rather as a sort of parallel readerly voice, guiding our explorations of Sappho's own "readings" of Homer. In particular, I have woven elements from Sedgwick's biography, and from her auto-theoretical writings and her memoir, into my overview of reparative reading in Chapter 2.[42] I have, however, avoided taking a biographical approach to Sappho's lyrics, and I bracket the critical obsession with the question of Sappho's sexuality.[43] I have found that these scholarly pursuits shed little light on Sappho's poetic voice and her literary engagements with Homeric epic. Although my "reparative" approach is neither overtly antagonistic to, nor in competition with, other styles of reading, it nevertheless will allow us, I hope, to move beyond the idea that Sappho must at some level be trying to subvert, to challenge, or override "Homer" and the Homeric tradition.

In Sappho's case, there has been a mostly unquestioned assumption that she must be hostile to the military ethos of heroic society – that, in her lyrics, she seeks to replace epic, or challenge its dominant position in literary culture. At the very least, Sappho is seen as turning to Homer as a source of legitimation and authority.[44] This way of reading Sappho is not wrong, but it presents us with only a very partial picture. Sappho's lyrics also engage empathetically with epic, drawing out some of the quieter, domestic moments from within the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Sappho, for example, turns our attention to the scene in *Iliad* 22 where Andromache sees her husband's corpse being dragged and mutilated by Achilles; there she casts off the "shining fastenings" which bind her hair, accessories which include a veil that was given to her on her wedding day by Aphrodite (22.466–72). Sappho fr. 44V enables the details of this extraordinary Homeric scene to hold our attention. We slow down and attend to language that would otherwise get drowned out by epic's faster paced, action-focused narrative.

[42] On "autotheory," see Wiegman 2020 and Goh 2020. [43] See further Mueller 2021.

[44] Rissman tends to view the purpose of the Homeric allusions in Sappho as a borrowing of epic language to endow feminine themes with heroic grandeur; for example, she notes that Sappho "repeatedly uses allusion to Homeric scenes and formulae to frame her narrative in heroic terms" (1983: 133). But the purpose may also be to alter how we read the epic scenes themselves by, for example, drawing attention to aesthetic effects that are passed over relatively quickly in the original.

Sappho's interactions with Homer at times resemble the passionate commitments and creative responses of fanfiction writers, who revise or amplify the storylines of canonical works.[45] Fans may know their texts better than professional readers, but their reading comes from a place of empathy and emotional investment. Rather than interrogating texts, fans fall in love with fictional characters. They analyze their relationships; they obsess over the minutiae of their lives. Sappho's poetic voice, I suggest, is intimately personal and responds to Homer not as a competitor but as a reader and fellow poet. She creates fissures in and expands upon the *Iliad*'s fictional world. This does not mean that she herself was not ambitious for her own poetry. Sappho was widely recognized already in antiquity for her poetic achievements, and her reputation has only grown since then. Indeed, her innovative reworkings of Homeric language and motifs are only further testament to her artistry.[46] But her attentiveness to the *Iliad*'s minor characters, particularly those within Aphrodite's sphere (such as Paris, Helen, and Andromache), and their experiences of shame, vulnerability, and failure, makes Sappho herself a sort of Sedgwickian reader *avant la lettre*. Sedgwick, I thus propose, is the ideal companion for my project of untangling Sappho's intense and at times irreverent (though rarely straightforwardly agonistic) engagements with Homeric epic.

Chapter 1 starts with a relatively brief overview of the Homeric tradition to which Sappho and her ancient listeners on Lesbos may have had access and then turns to different models of intertextuality, within both the oral-poetic and textual contexts. Here I also introduce the nonhierarchical, "avuncular" mode of intertextual interpretation as one that allows us to find common ground between poets, rather than focusing exclusively on their latent rivalries. Chapter 2 provides an introduction to reparative reading and the cultures of critique (and postcritique) within which it has emerged over the past several decades. These two opening chapters – which constitute Part I of the book – are designed to contextualize the closer readings and case studies that follow, on the themes of the

[45] Willis' (2006: 158) description of how this process works includes an even more active role for the fans/writers: "writing fan fiction first of all *makes* gaps in a text that the cultural code attempts to render continuous, and then, rather than filling them in, supplements these gaps with intertexts which are not docile."

[46] Rissman (1983: 122–123) puts this well when she writes, of Sappho fr. 44V, that "the frequency with which Sappho in this poem employs epic phrases which violate the laws of her own Aeolic dialect, vocabulary and prosody . . . indicates that she is not unconsciously under the sway of Homer," adding a bit later that "Sappho is in full control when she crosses the boundary between Aeolic monodic and epic usage" (123).

materialities of poetic craft (Chapter 3), shame, failure, and periperformatives (Chapters 4 and 5), queer futures (Chapters 5 and 6), the queering of epic desire, and the poetic syntax of remembering and forgetting (Chapters 7 and 8). As I argue in Chapter 3, Sappho's lyrics self-consciously display traces of Homeric language – "plaiting" turns out to be an important metaphor. But where Sappho is critical of Homer, she seems more interested in ameliorating the wrongs suffered by individual characters in the Homeric poems than in contesting epic ideologies, writ large. Shame suffuses Sappho's Hymn to Aphrodite, a composition that traces its lineage back to minor episodes in Books 3 and 5 of the *Iliad*. This type of affect-centered intertextuality amplifies and expands upon, rather than contesting and co-opting, Homer, as I argue in Chapter 4.

Sappho's lyrics respond to the absences and silences in epic, as well as to what is more explicitly present. Often, the body in Sappho can be understood as providing cues for the voice, with symptoms arising within the body prompting the singer's recall of certain mythical parallels. In the Tithonos Poem, for example, the singer's own groaning lament becomes intertwined with that of Dawn for Tithonos, but it also potentially channels Achilles' mourning for Patroklos. Sappho ventriloquizes the voices of Homeric characters. This has been acknowledged in the case of Helen but, as I propose in Chapter 5, Achilles' mournful lament also provides a surprising and powerful zone of contact between the worlds of epic and lyric.

We will attend to features within epic (hair coverings, bright items of clothing and jewelry) that appear to gesture to Sappho's own repertoire: *Iliad* 22, as mentioned already, includes a detailed description of Andromache's elaborate headdress, with its shining hairbands (*desmata sigaloenta*). These appear to be distinctly Sapphic objects embedded within the Homeric narrative. As I elaborate in Chapters 3 and 6, however, we do not have to read Sappho's preference for feminine adornment as in any way a repudiation of masculine armor, or of the heroic values such weapons evoke. This is because Sappho reconciles what the *Iliad* frames as mutually exclusive alternatives: love and war, in particular. Where the *Iliad* denigrates Aphrodite's realm and those who dwell there, especially if they are men, Sappho fr. 16V questions the opposition between manliness and battle, on the one hand, femininity and Aphrodite, on the other. In Sappho's lyrics, as will be explored in Chapters 7 and 8, both women and men transgress traditional gender ideologies, pursuing what to them is *kalliston* (most beautiful).

As part of its representation of the wedding entourage of Andromache and Hector, Sappho fr. 44V invites us to reconsider the value of "undying fame" (*kleos aphthiton*). In Chapter 6, in a somewhat a different mode of reparative reading, I analyze what happens to this eminently heroic commodity when it is imported from martial epic into a poetic space where love, desire, and marriage overshadow military pursuits. Finally, there is an aspirational, even recuperative, impulse to some of my readings. An entire generation of gay male scholars and artists was decimated in the 1980s and 1990s by the HIV/AIDS epidemic; some of their works were posthumously curated by friends, family members, and colleagues. Sedgwick herself collaborated with her student and close friend Gary Fisher, editing and overseeing the publication of his poetry collection, *Gary in Your Pocket*, after his death.[47] I begin Chapter 5 by reintroducing readers to a mostly overlooked essay on Sappho fr. 58 by John J. Winkler. Like Fisher's poetry, Winkler's essay on the Tithonos Poem was published posthumously (in the *Journal of Homosexuality*, in 1991); it deserves a wider readership.[48]

As a feminist living with a life-threatening illness in the 1990s, Sedgwick found that the "people with whom she had perhaps most in common, and from whom she might well have most to learn" were the people living with AIDS, the AIDS activists (of which she was one), and the people "whose lives had been profoundly reorganized by AIDS in the course of the 1980s."[49] This is the historical and cultural horizon within which both her theoretical and embodied understandings of queerness developed.[50] And it is a context that continues, somewhat more obliquely, to shape how we understand things like queer temporality and queer sociality even today. As Ramzi Fawaz (2019: 9) has recently commented, Eve Sedgwick's writings seem to be drawn irresistibly to how "people are made vulnerable to one another through physical illness and aging, desire (requited or not), loneliness and emotional need." Reading these words, I think of Sappho, too. In tracing some of the reparative elements that characterize Sappho's reception of Homer, we will encounter a poet whose voice, more than ever, retains the power to delight, console, and surprise her readers.

[47] On this complex and controversial collaboration, which resulted in Sedgwick 1996, see Hanson 2011 and Muñoz 2019b.
[48] See further Chapter 5. [49] Sedgwick 1993: 14.
[50] See Fawaz 2019: 25–26, Nealon 2019: 168–170, and Chapter 2.