

“*Greek Poetry in the Age of Ephemerality* offers a bold reassessment of archaic and classical Greek poetry. Sarah Nooter explores temporality as a key aspect of song that allows her to bring together various strands – notably, embodiment, performance, and textual transmission. Her use of new materialism, phenomenology, sound studies, and approaches to affects is sophisticated and yields many original interpretations of poems by Archilochus, Sappho, and other authors. Well argued and engagingly written, Nooter’s book is a pleasure to read.”

Jonas Grethlein, Professor of Classics, Universität Heidelberg

“Sarah Nooter’s new book, *Greek Poetry in the Age of Ephemerality*, is a fascinating exploration of time and the body in ancient poetry and poetics from Homer to Aeschylus. The place where these elements intersect is in song, music, rhythm, and the voice, which present the most ephemeral features of poetry and yet are the source of its most lasting effects. The book is an invitation to recover a richly embodied experience that is not ours, from works that we still treat as timeless today. Such is the paradoxical challenge of this highly readable study, which is certain to make a contribution to the material turn in Classics.”

James I. Porter, Distinguished Professor of Rhetoric and Classics, University of California, Berkeley

“I loved this book. Written with style and wit, Nooter’s *Greek Poetry in the Age of Ephemerality* breathes new life into archaic Greek lyric. Avoiding reductive binaries and clichéd notions of ephemerality and permanence, Nooter reanimates both ancient and contemporary ideas about poetry and poetic immortality. Attuned to extraordinary affect as well as to life’s more ordinary rhythms and temporalities, her readings show us how the body itself endures, whether in mummified form, as a chorus of dancers, or as the movement, rhythm, and sound that both originate from and return us to poet and performer.”

Melissa Mueller, Professor of Classics, University of Massachusetts Amherst

“In this groundbreaking book, Sarah Nooter makes Greek lyric central to theoretical conceptions of time and corporeality in ancient and modern times. Brilliantly dismantling once and for all, in the very practice of close reading, the rigid oppositions and clichés associated with the notion of poetic immortality, she compellingly demonstrates the ways in which Greek poetry construes ephemerality as permanence, evanescence as endurance, vulnerability as a kind of temporal and material affirmation. While always keeping an eye on the big theoretical picture, Nooter offers novel readings of some of the most famous poems of Greek poetry – from Homer and the *Homeric*

Hymns to Archilochus and Timotheus, from Sappho and Simonides to Pindar and Aeschylus – deftly revealing complexities and nuances through beautifully rich analyses that bear the distinctive, elegant markers of a scholar who is herself a poet. The nexus of materiality, time, and the body that specifically shapes Greek lyric is illustrated here and conceptualized as it never was before. This is the bold, holistic treatment of Greek lyric that the field has been waiting for.”

*Mario Telò, Professor of Rhetoric, University
of California, Berkeley*

Greek Poetry in the Age of Ephemerality

This book suggests that poetry offers a way to remain in the world – not only by declarations of intent or the promotion of remembrance, but also through the durable physicality of its practice. Whether carved in stone or wood, printed onto a page, beat out by a mimetic or rhythmic body, or humming in the mind, poems are meant to engrave and adhere. Ancient Greek poetry exhibits a particularly acute awareness of change, decay, and the ephemerality inherent in mortality. Yet it couples its presentation of this awareness with an offering of meaningful embodiment in shifting forms that are aligned with, yet subtly manipulative of, mortal time. Sarah Nooter’s argument ranges widely across authors and genres, from Homer and the Homeric Hymns through Sappho and Archilochus to Pindar and Aeschylus. The book will be compelling reading for all those interested in Greek literature and in poetry more broadly.

SARAH NOOTER is Professor of Classics and Theater and Performance Studies at the University of Chicago. She is the author of *When Heroes Sing: Sophocles and the Shifting Soundscape of Tragedy* (Cambridge, 2012) and *The Mortal Voice in the Tragedies of Aeschylus* (Cambridge, 2017), and co-editor, with Shane Butler, of *Sound and the Ancient Senses* (2018). She is editor of the journal *Classical Philology*.

Greek Poetry in the Age of Ephemerality

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Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-32035-1 — Greek Poetry in the Age of Ephemerality
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Frontmatter
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Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009320351

DOI: 10.1017/9781009320368

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First published 2023

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

A Cataloging-in-Publication data record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-1-009-32035-1 Hardback

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for Polly

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Acknowledgments

This book began with lectures that I felt myself to be writing on the side, while the real book project was something more serious. Then the thing on the side became the thing itself – and this was good. And then came the pandemic – not good. The writing slowed, and then halted for a time. I wondered if there was something I should be learning from the pandemic to bring to the book – something newly understood about fragility, or indeed ephemerality. I did learn things but more about endurance and the rhythms of life, the ones created for us by our society and the ones we make for ourselves; things about our bodies and how much we want for and from them; things about time and how it passes whether in the manner planned or otherwise. There are no temporal parentheses, I learned. The time that is passing, pandemic or otherwise, is the time of our short lives. It is the real part.

All this is to say that this project felt fragile itself at times, and might not have crossed over that long gap to completion if not for the rhythms of life and work encouraged by good friends and true colleagues. So my thanks are for those, near and far, who helped at different points: Demetra Kasimis, Florian Klinger, and Rochona Majumdar for the countless walks and talks that kept me pushing through the process; Emily Austin and Jonah Radding for the cheers and boosts over beers and fries; Sofía Torallas Tovar for teaching me so much about the creativity of the papyrological world; Felix Budelmann, Christopher Moore, Melissa Mueller, Tom Phillips, Seth Schein, Deborah Steiner, and Mario Telò for reading chapters, offering excellent advice, and buoying me along the way, even as we were limited to emails and Zoom. All of these wonderful people kept me going and showed me how to write and think more deeply and widely. Audiences and friends at Yale, Austin, Oxford, Johns Hopkins, Columbia, Toronto, Missouri, Princeton, Virginia, Northwestern, Michigan, Manchester, Berkeley, Louvain-la-Neuve, and the Society for Classical Studies listened and challenged me, and brought me new perspectives. Chicago has been, as ever, a rich and supportive environment in which to write, teach, and learn, and I am very grateful to the Franke Institute for the Humanities for a year of fellowship during which I wrote early drafts of a few of these chapters.

I am grateful also to Abigail Akavia, who read through the entire manuscript and offered so many rich insights and trenchant corrections. I thank Michael Sharp for bearing with me and shepherding the project to completion, and I owe much credit to Readers A, B, and C, who carefully and caringly prodded me toward better work. They, and the readers named earlier, are responsible for too many sensible corrections and additions to count. The gaps, mistakes, and imprecisions that remain are truly my own.

Like anyone, I learn and gain the most from the people closest to me. I will not tire of thanking my children – Henry and Arthur, who have become sharp and funny conversationalists, and Ezekiel, who keeps us all laughing. They brighten my days with their sweet, brilliant, and sparkling personalities, and deserve for their efforts an endless supply of pumpkin bread and babka. Finally, I am so very grateful to my husband, Clifford Ando, for offering always his incisive thoughts and gentle critiques but also, and more so, for his constant, selfless care, and his embodied presence.

This book is dedicated to the memory of Polly Nooter Roberts (1959–2018), beloved aunt, still my model and guide.

Notes on the Text

Translations from the Greek are my own unless otherwise indicated. I have transliterated single Greek terms in the main body of the book for smoother reading. Abbreviations for titles of ancient works are derived from *LSJ*, while the abbreviation *LSJ* itself refers to H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th edn (Oxford, 1996). Abbreviations for journal titles in the bibliography are taken from *L'Année philologique*.

Texts of Sappho in Chapter 3 are taken from E. Lobel and D. L. Page, *Poetarum Lesbiorum fragmenta* (Oxford, 1963) or, where indicated, from E. M. Voigt, *Sappho et Alcaeus: fragmenta* (Amsterdam, 1971). Lyric and stichic fragments by other poets derive from D. L. Page, *Poetae melici Graeci* (Oxford, 1962), P. A. Hansen, *Carmina epigraphica Graeca* (Berlin, 1983–9), and M. L. West, *Iambi et elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum cantati* (Oxford, 1989–92), abbreviated *PMG*, *CEG*, and *IEG*, respectively, except when noted otherwise. Other Greek texts are taken from the *Oxford Classical Texts*. The epigraphs at the start of the sections on “Bodies” and “Texts” are drawn respectively from C. Bernstein, *Near/Miss* (Chicago, 2018) 76 and J.-L. Nancy, “Corpus,” trans. C. Sartillot, in *Thinking Bodies*, ed. J. F. MacCannell and L. Zarakin (Stanford, 1994) 24. The illustration on the second page of Chapter 1 is of figures reproduced from B. Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind in Greek Philosophy and Literature*, trans. T. G. Rosenmeyer (New York, 1953), 7.

Some portions of Chapter 3 appear in adjusted form in “Sharon Olds and the Work of the Body,” in *Evaluations of US Poetry Since 1950: Mind, Nation, and Power*, ed. R. von Hallberg and R. Faggen (Albuquerque, 2021), 195–213 and parts of Chapter 5 appear in “Justice and Time in Aeschylus,” *A Companion to Aeschylus*, ed. P. Burian and J. Bromberg (Hoboken, 2022), 308–20. The image on the cover is a reflection of my husband and youngest son on the wet surface of a beach.