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*Victorian Sappho*. By YOPIE PRINS. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1999. xiii + 279 pp. £13.95.

Sappho has recently become a fruitful area of enquiry in literary studies. Monographs by, for example, Joan DeJean, Page du Bois, Jane Snyder, and Ruth Vanita demonstrate the importance of Sappho. Yopie Prins turns away from such thematic, historicist, and revisionary approaches in order to address the metaleptic significance of the figure of Sappho for Victorian poets and feminist critics. *Victorian Sappho* begins with a chapter outlining the project's methodology, explaining the attraction of Sappho as a name, signature, and trope: 'out of scattered texts, an idea of the original woman poet and the body of her song could be hypothesized in retrospect; an imaginary totalization, imagined in the present and projected into the past' (p. 1). Recent criticism, however, has continued to fantasize an originary presence in the Sapphic voice rather than the 'decomposing text' (p. 2) of Wharton and her other Victorian translators. To forge an alternative methodology, Prins draws on post-structuralist theories of lyric to argue that Sappho is an empty figure and a disembodied voice, whose poetic fragments always return mournfully to the scene of their deanimation. The very name Sappho, furthermore, is the site of fragmentation, and Prins structures her project by declining the name of Sappho:

Each chapter of *Victorian Sappho* proposes a variation on the name, demonstrating how it is variously declined: the declension of a noun and its deviation from origins, the improper bending of a proper name, a line of descent that is also a falling into decadence, the perpetual return of a name that is also a turning away from nomination. (p. 13)

Prins answers her question of 'what's in a name' of Sappho by addressing a paradigmatic fragment 31 in the initial chapter, followed by a reading of Michael Field's doubled signature, then Swinburne's rhythms, and finally the figure of the Victorian poetess.

*Victorian Sappho* is ambitiously broad in concept and design. Prins achieves a welcome self-reflexive pause in the flourishing field of Sappho studies and has much to say about the proliferation of the lyric voice in Victorian poetics. The structure of the book is deliberately circular and fluid, as the conclusion celebrates, and yet at times the radical praxis teeters on the brink of repetitiveness, just as the Victorian Sappho is shown to circulate around an empty mythological figure. A further difficulty is a surprising reluctance to theorize directly the issue of signature. Derrida's 'Signature, Event, Context' attracts minimal notice (on p. 15), and the work of De Man on the signature is by-passed. This lacuna is unfortunate, for although Prins rightly points out the dangerous attraction of constructing Sappho as a stable and whole origin, her own construction of the signature is at times curiously monolithic. In addition, while the study asserts repeatedly the fractured legacy of Sappho and her empty figure, it fails to account for the attraction fantasies a Sapphic persona held and continue to hold. Prins cites Tricia Lootens's comparison of the Victorian poetess as a fragile and hollow papier-mâché figure (p. 184), but the efficacy of aggressively insisting on an absent lyric voice in critique, and the reason for the fantasy of the figure as marble monument, are hanging

questions. Indeed, in Prins's hands, Sappho becomes, to adopt Barrett Browning's phrase, a 'dust of figures' which the critic can only stir up.

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*Dickens and Heredity: When Like Begets Like.* By GOLDIE MORGENTALER. Basingstoke: Macmillan; New York: St Martin's Press. 2000. xv + 221 pp. £42.50.

This highly accessible book effectively provides the missing link in terms of Dickens studies. Goldie Morgentaler convincingly and cogently opens up a hitherto largely unexplored area of Dickens scholarship and in the process, answers questions that have until now sat suspended in mid-air. There were many points in this book where I found myself nodding in agreement and grateful for Morgentaler's systematic and probing efforts to lift the veil of opacity that has hung over Dickens's understanding of and personal response to notions of heredity. Heredity, whether brought to the fore by its absence or central to the text (as in the *Oliver Twist* hidden identity plot), is such an important factor in the Dickens oeuvre that it seems astounding we have been without a full length study in this area for so long.

Little was known about the mechanics of heredity in the Victorian period. 'In fact', Morgentaler states, 'as late as the 1860s, the decade after Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, scientific knowledge about heredity remained vague and insubstantial. It was so vague that scientists were not even aware of what they needed to know, and the work of Gregor Mendel, who in that decade published his findings on the laws of heredity, was totally ignored' (p. 1). But as Morgentaler claims, 'it is not necessary to know how heredity works in order to appreciate that it does work, that children resemble their parents and that this resemblance is the outer manifestation of what is commonly called a "blood tie"' (p. ix). Dickens, like every other Victorian, may not have been aware of the laws governing heredity but his works provide examples of the ideas on heredity of his time. Before tracing these ideas, Morgentaler provides a succinct, informative, and fascinating overview of the scientific and cultural beliefs concerning hereditary transmission throughout history. Amongst the scientific theories, she points to preformation, blended heredity, and reproduction as being pertinent to Dickens's work, and, in the area of cultural beliefs, she highlights the models of heredity advanced by classical Greece and the ancient Hebrews. These two beliefs, while completely incompatible (as the Greeks were pantheistic and the Hebrews monotheistic), none the less find expression in Dickens's work because through 'fairy tales, legends, ballads, proverbs, superstitions, the heritage of Greek and Roman classical tradition, the teachings of the Bible, [and] the plays of Shakespeare' Dickens 'was heir to a long and influential history of cultural assumptions about the meaning and mechanics of hereditary transmission, without necessarily being conscious of the fact' (p. 23).

To show how these beliefs take shape in Dickens's work, Morgentaler first examines the novels in the Dickens canon that feature children as protagonists. Concerning *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, she underscores the strength of Dickens's faith in hereditary endowment as a force for the propagation of good. The virtuous natures of Oliver and Little Nell are largely due to an amalgam of inherited traits. In *Dombey and Son*, however, Morgentaler claims that Dickens's faith has become more muted. The ending of the novel may endorse heredity as a positive force in human life but the novel on the whole is concerned with the pernicious effects of clinging too strongly to notions of bloodline. In *David Copperfield* it is not simply heredity that determines the formation of self but also learned behaviour. And by *Great Expectations*, Morgentaler shows how Dickens completely eschews