

roughly the same period and a few of the same authors. There, it was authors' considerations of philosophical and political problems that led to the forms of their writing. An author like George Eliot thus comes to think it extremely difficult to know how or when to act, when an action is autonomous and when its consequences are likely to be beneficial, and that contributes to the turn away from plot in the realist novel and the turn toward character. Form followed from content, in other words, and the genre was not nearly as determinative as it is here. In her turn to the verse-novel, then, Markovits seems to have changed her mind not merely about what to study but about how to study it. I hope she explains why.

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Ladies' Greek: Victorian Translations of Tragedy, by Yopie Prins; pp. xviii + 297. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017, \$75.00, \$29.95 paper.

Ladies' Greek: Victorian Translations of Tragedy is a stunning book: sparkingly innovative, deeply researched, and highly readable. Yopie Prins examines nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century English and American women translators of Greek tragedy (Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* and *Prometheus Bound*, Sophocles's *Electra*, Euripides's *Hippolytus* and *The Bacchae*), asking why women were drawn to the difficulties of studying the ancient Greek language despite significant educational and cultural obstacles. Translation, in this sense, is meant literally as well as loosely—"transcriptions, transliterations, transformations, and transpositions" (xiii)—and centers on a highly conceptual approach to the Greek language, as "women performed classical literacy," with all of its difficult gender, class, and educational contexts, "by writing through and around and between the letters of the Greek alphabet" (xiv). In a rich and engaging series of interlinked chapters, the analysis moves self-consciously but deftly between England and America, amateur translators and the rise of women's access to higher education in the Classics, and the strange suspension Prins identifies across multiple women translators between knowing and not knowing Greek (where Virginia Woolf's 1925 essay "On Not Knowing Greek" is pivotal). The argument hinges on the tension between the literality of the Greek letters and their performativity in multiple acts of translations (including, in this definition, many fascinating theatrical adaptations); indeed, Prins contends that women's encounters with Greek tragedy inherently involved a series of performative poses and actions of classical literacy in terms of interconnecting class, gender, and racial categories.

The book begins with Elizabeth Barrett Browning and, although the chapters move widely among well-known and lesser known English and American women translators (such as A. Mary F. Robinson, Virginia Woolf, Annie Adams Fields, Jane Harrison, Janet Case, Hilda Doolittle [H. D.], Anna Swanwick), Barrett Browning in many ways haunts the argument. The introduction begins with Barrett Browning as a thirteen-year-old, composing her "First Greek Ode May 4th, 1819 To Summer." Examining the manuscript version of that ode, Prins calls attention to the "strange alphabet" signified by the

handwriting, and to how the dead Greek language is reanimated, but with a productive uncertainty based on the very problem of translating a dead unspoken language into the world and vice versa (3). This is a problem to which this book repeatedly turns. Barrett Browning's fascination for Greek is traced through other examples from her juvenilia, and then in *Aurora Leigh* (1856), a work that embodies for Prins the "spell of Greek" in Barrett Browning's poetry but also the tension embodied by the woman writer as an amateur scholar of Greek, in contrast to nineteenth-century male classical scholars and philologists who viewed Greek as a language to master (7). The stakes are high for women writers translating Greek, not only because classical learning is a mark of acculturation and poetic acumen, but also because of the inherent difficulty of working in Greek. Prins emphasizes the "idea of Greek" for women writers as they fall under the "spell" of the literal Greek letters, and are captured by the strangeness and impossibility of knowing Greek; women translators of Greek performed this "not knowing" of Greek as they also paradoxically desired it (12). Prins articulates this tension in theoretical terms based in archival work, and she also discusses several specific historical contexts for women's encounters with Greek as a culture that she terms "Ladies' Greek": the professionalization of women writers; the rise of higher education institutions for women, and the place of performances of Greek tragedy in colleges for women; Hellenism as a language for homoeroticism and transgressive female desire; and the rise of women's transatlantic networks of translators and performers of Greek tragedy.

This is not, however, a straightforward feminist recovery project. The book eschews biographical approaches to its selective literary history of translators, preferring instead to work within singular as well as plural understandings of "Ladies' Greek" to trace the "pain and pleasure of learning Greek" as a "primal scene of falling in love with the language," as the woman writer represents or embodies the strange literal Greek letters (242). While Prins acknowledges recent criticism that uncovers nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century women's participation in Greek literature, she retains the sense of women's amateur status to insist on the doubleness of freedom and constraint that "Ladies' Greek" as a cultural practice offered women. The most striking and moving aspect of this doubled reading of Greek, for this particular reader, appears in the section on Cassandra's untranslatable phrase "otototo" in Woolf's *Agamemnon* notebook and then in performances of the tragedy at Cambridge University in 1900 and 1921. Cassandra's cry represents the impossibility as well as allure of Greek for Woolf, Prins argues, and also the practice of translation as a transposition of its strangeness as a dead language, rather than a revival of a dead language into the present. Every chapter offers women's encounters with Greek tragedy in terms of dramatic performances of the erotic attachment to, and strange displacement from, Greek letters and literature, whether metaphorical performances or actual staged theatrical adaptations. The book's surprising but persuasive approach is to read nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century women translators of Greek tragedy forward and backward through Woolf, with Barrett Browning as the precursor whose early encounter with Greek implicitly seems to shadow her successors. The concluding series of critical axioms, in the manifesto "How to Read Ladies' Greek," acknowledges the diverse archives of women's encounters with Greek letters as it also synthesizes the argument into a reader-centric criticism that holds in productive tension cultural, historical, and theoretical approaches. *Ladies' Greek* not only offers a profoundly

exciting new account of nineteenth- and twentieth-century women translators of Greek tragedy, but it also offers a major new intervention in Victorian studies in its complex and compelling combination of archival discovery, historicist reading, and a theoretical paradigm that returns again and again to the primal scene of falling in love with dead letters.

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The Pre-Raphaelites and Orientalism: Language and Cognition in Remediations of the East, by Eleonora Sasso; pp. x + 222. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018, £75.00, \$110.00.

Among the varieties of exoticism practiced by the Pre-Raphaelites, the classical and medieval recreations of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and company remain the most familiar, well-represented in recent scholarship. In this respect, Eleonora Sasso's *The Pre-Raphaelites and Orientalism: Language and Cognition in Remediations of the East* happily brings light to an underappreciated facet of their writing and art. Her study treats the aesthetic consequences of the Pre-Raphaelites' fascination with the *Arabian Nights* (c. 1706 to c. 1721)—a childhood favorite of many nineteenth-century authors—in order to position them as interpreters of the East for Victorian culture. The book comprises a brief introduction and four chapters, covering painting, poetry, and prose from the Rossettis to Ford Madox Ford (whose inclusion represents one of the book's better impulses). The central question Sasso poses is straightforward and compelling enough: how do the Pre-Raphaelites adapt the *Arabian Nights*? The answers are somewhat less satisfying, the book's salutary investigation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's (PRB) Orientalism hobbled both by a paucity of scholarly engagement and by the foibles of method.

The Pre-Raphaelites and Orientalism is principally a study of intertextuality. It considers the ways in which images, themes, tropes, and topoi from the *Arabian Nights*—"its mystic aura, criminal underworld, and feminine sensuality"—find themselves transformed in the crucible of Pre-Raphaelite art (2). The Pre-Raphaelites, Sasso suggests, found in the *Arabian Nights* an entire grammar of the imagination with which to erect their own dream-worlds of sensual pleasure or political critique. One goal of this study is recuperative (or perhaps prophylactic): she argues that Pre-Raphaelite Orientalism does not, pace Edward Said, deepen and harden "the impenetrable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority" (2). She instead sees Pre-Raphaelite art as a "blended space," bringing together elements of East and West in order to produce new cognitive, aesthetic, and even political possibilities (4). On this fine distinction rests the book's contribution to discussions of nineteenth-century Orientalism. Thus, in chapter 1, Sasso paints D. G. Rossetti as "almost a precursor of cultural studies," committed to the celebration of diversity and the critique of British imperialism (13). The politics, it should be said, remain largely implicit in Sasso's readings. Rossetti's commitment to diversity emerges in the way he gives play to competing modes of representation (both Oriental and Western) within the blended spaces of his poems and paintings, maintaining rather than collapsing the differences among them.