

which will certainly be of interest to all those who teach Camus's work.

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Victorian Sappho. By Yopie Prins. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. xiii + 279pp. \$55.00 (cloth); \$17.95 (paper).

The name a prestige and a literary-historical prestidigitation, the life a speculation: Sappho is like Shakespeare, without the plays (but with a few supremely powerful lyrics and scraps). Yopie Prins sums up the always new Sappho thusly: "Out of her 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" (3). At the cusp of the twenty-first century Sappho has metamorphosed again, and receives the *perge puella* (you go, girl) of the times: "Straight outta Lesbos, the Original Lesbian. Great poetry about love and sex. Not all classics are boring" (from a catalog blurb). While the Sappho of our age will get her monograph eventually, Prins has written a theoretically sophisticated and definitive study of the Victorian version, including a wide range of examples from paintings and the graphic arts. What is most pleasing, perhaps, is the invigorating style, formed of a fluid blend of deconstructive attention to text, wide and thoughtful engagement with feminist criticism, and the unusual combination of a good grasp of Victoriana with a classical scholar's abilities with the Greek language.

First, two passages:

In the first chapter, I place a single text within the context of a single book: after reading [Sappho's] fragment 31 in theoretical terms. I show how this logic of lyric reading is writ large in Wharton's 1885 edition of Sappho. The second chapter places this influential Victorian text within the context of its reception toward the end of the 19th century, by showing how its textual logic is reworked in the Sapphic lyrics of Michael Field. The third chapter ranges more freely over four decades to show how Swinburne is read as one famously scandalous Victorian incarnation of Sappho. The fourth chapter spans the entire range of Queen Victoria, in order to present a long succession of women who write within the conventions of 19th-century sentimental lyric. (18)

So far, I have been declining the name of Sappho in each chapter by embedding my reading of a Sapphic fragment within an argument about Victorian poetics. Fragment 31 was the crux of chapter 1, where I demonstrated how the recurring break in Sappho's broken tongue calls into question the assumption of lyric voice. In the second chapter, fragment 2 was my point of departure for reading a "lesbian" topography in the lyrics of Michael Field. And in chapter 3, I suggested an allegorical reading of rhythm in fragment 130 that gives form to Swinburne's Sapphic sublime. Expanding the scope of my argument in the present chapter, I want to show how a theory of lyric reading in which Sappho is continually declined also delineates a logic played out in literary history. (174)

It seems to me as if more and more scholarly monographs have added to their arguments summaries (possibly suggested by anxious editors) that reflect the old Army pedagogical creed: "first you tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em, then you tell 'em, then you tell 'em what you told 'em." The first chorus occurs in the introduction, and the concise declaration from the last chapter preempts the reviewer's task of tidy summary.

This last chapter, "P.S. Sappho," will interest many readers, and, as Prins notes, could just as well have opened the book. The early Victorian "poetesses" write Sappho as postscript, and the dilemmas caused by this and by the construction of female poetry in this era have prompted some of our better recent criticism—I'm thinking of works by Armstrong, Leighton, Lootens, et al. Prins fully engages with their work, questioning "the progressive politics of feminist criticism, insofar as it has created a genealogy of women poets whose progress towards authorial voice and female authorship" proceeds in a teleological manner (176). Beginning with Mary Robinson's work of 1796, *Sappho and Phaon*, Prins recursively eddies among the almost endless "English Sapphos" to examine the meaning of the repeated representations (verbal and visual) of the archetypal female poet's act of self-silencing in her celebrated leap. Prins concludes by suggesting ways in which the female modernists' reclamations of Sappho recall not the Greek but the Victorian. The argument, as in the rest of the book, is suggestive and written with bravura.

But the chapter does have some problems, most relating to uncertainties in dealing with complexities of the historical and cultural context, and in examining writers for whom there are no standard scholarly editions or biographies. Too many citations in the discussion of L.

E. L. come from the excerpts of contextual material in the new (and splendid) Broadview edition; for safety's sake I'd prefer to see them from the (complete) originals. Prins argues for a relationship between Hemans's "The Last Song of Sappho" (1834) and Norton's "The Picture of Sappho," which she dates 1840—but knowing the first publication was in the *New Monthly* in 1837 would strengthen her argument. In another place she quotes "another reviewer in *A New Spirit of the Age*" on Norton's poems (220), and one is puzzled as to why she doesn't name R. H. Horne, who wrote the chapter on Norton and Barrett in that book, until one sees the quotation is cited from a secondary work. (Nor is it from *A New Spirit*—there's a mistake somewhere.) While the chapter's arguments are not impaired, these are details that the best scholarly editing should catch.

The first chapter is a brilliant exposition of "Sappho's Broken Tongue," and examines the Greek text of fragment 31 (the one preserved in Longinus, and often presumed to show the emergence of the lyric subject in poetry). Prins then reads the train of "translations" that continually remake that voice within the context of "sublime transport" (40). The Englishing of Sappho's most famous poem has, as Prins notes, been traced frequently; it rarely has been done so well, however, and to such purpose. She concludes by bringing the reader to the influential late-century edition of H. T. Wharton, which functions as a cento of Sapphic translation and an authorization to regard Sappho's text in palimpsestic light: "Rather than reading the texts of Sappho to produce the figure of a woman . . . the figure of Sappho is now read to produce a disfigured textual fragment" (72). Prins next demonstrates how Wharton's edition (which was reissued with revisions a number of times) directly influenced the poetry of "Michael Field" (Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper).

Field's poetry "complicates generic assumptions about the lyric as the solitary utterance of a single speaker" (74), and Prins adds extra complications through her deconstruction of the "lyric voice" in Sappho, Field's model and ideal, and by her shrewd explication of Wharton, a figure some might overlook as a mere compiler. Bradley and Cooper are, of course, of great interest to historians of lesbian literature, and Prins's reading of "Michael Field's Sappho as an exploration of lesbian writing that is not predicated on the assumption of sexual identity or lyric voice but nevertheless puts those terms in play" (79) will be a salutary corrective to any who might forget the ambiguities of poetry in the solidarities of identity. She takes issue, for instance, with Angela Leighton, who "assumes that their authorship is defined by lesbian identity rather than complicating the claim to such an identity—as if the lesbian signature exists prior to writing rather than being pro-

duced by it" (104). Prins's chapter may well be a landmark in the young field of "Michael Field" studies; "Swinburne's Sapphic Sublime" (chapter 3) challenges a larger body of received thought.

Prins notices how Swinburne's Sappho "derives from fragment 130, which dramatizes the effects of eros on a body that trembles in violent contradiction, at the moment of coming apart" (113), a dissolution centered around the Greek epithet for Eros, "loosener of limbs." The textual and material loosening of language and body leads into a fascinating discussion of the connections between metrical repetitions and Swinburne's compulsions, originating in a sort of Sapphic "scene of instruction" (121). Prins ranges widely—from "Anactoria" to Swinburne's use of the Sapphic stanza, the novel *Lesbia Brandon*, the physical appearance of Swinburne's manuscripts, and even a Beerbohm caricature—to show how an intertextual relation with Sappho threads through Swinburne's life, work, and reception. The chapter concludes by examining how Swinburne's image and reputation were shaped after his death—by critics and poets from Housman to McGann—by Swinburne's own involvement with the myth of the Sapphic sublime. While the argument is complex, Prins's chapter on Swinburne and her deep understanding not only of the Sapphic fragments in Greek but also of their history of reception and translation gives us a new and convincing understanding of Swinburne's eccentric metrical practices. This chapter alone could have made an excellent monograph.

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Dislocations of Desire: Gender, Identity, and Strategy in La Regenta. By Alison Sinclair. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998. 229 pp. \$27.50.

Sinclair clearly explains her approach to this book in the introduction. Here she states that the readers of *La Regenta* are thrust into a blurry world between dream and reality as they read of the "apparently peaceful town and its characters in their siesta." This (or any state of) somnolence is appealing to us and we are unable to resist it. Accordingly, our reading experience of *La Regenta* moves back and forth between dream and reality and suffers all the uncertainties and shifting boundaries which the characters experience. The surface of the book's plot, Sinclair explains, is distinct from its depth, and the reader soon finds that under the thin veil of peaceful sleep lies a troubling, disturbing reality. This backdrop serves as a springboard from which Sinclair explores various theoretical conceptualizations of self that derive from the field of psychoanalysis (Freud and Lacan).