

and the 'aids to reflection' (as Kant called them) that may legitimately be employed to give them imaginative life. Beer acknowledges without explanation (p. lii) that Coleridge invoked Kant's own concept of 'transcendental reflection', as elaborated in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, to provide a new solution for the problems raised in his treatise *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1794), which he was annotating at the time of writing *Aids*, but then returns to Coleridge's plan in 1820 for something 'less ambitious', an 'Assertion of Religion'. In the index are listed 'aids of the divine spirit', 'aids to reflection', 'aids to repentance and faith', 'aids . . . supernatural', 'aids . . . supplementary'—but none of the notes to these Kantian terms mentions Kant. This is regrettable; for once these references are acknowledged, Coleridge's subtle reinterpretation of Kant shows his own philosophical powers at their height.

Finally, this rich and taxing volume has been produced with remarkably few copy-editing and printing errors; on p. 564 'Edward Williams' is referred to as 'Edwards'; the index lists Lessing, Ephraim, for Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, whose name is given in full in the second of only two notes on Lessing (p. 345 n. 20). Both the editor and the publisher are to be congratulated on this fine volume, indispensable to Coleridge studies and to the permanent library of Romanticism.

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YOPIE PRINS. *Victorian Sappho*. Pp. xiv+280. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999. Cloth, £40; paper, £13.95.

There are certain things we think we know about Sappho: that she lived in the seventh century BC on the island of Lesbos, that she loved both women and men, and that she died for love, leaping off the Leucadian cliff. She was also the greatest lyric poet of antiquity, her name everywhere sung; Plato called her the tenth muse. Yet most of this knowledge comes from report and fabrication; little of it rests on textual evidence. In the Western canon she stands alongside Homer as a founding figure, he the masculine, epic poet of war and quest, she the feminine, lyric voice of love and suffering, but it is through absence and dispersal that she stakes her claim. In a convenient division of labour, the corpus of his work seems to stand solid at the head of an assembled tradition, where hers is dismembered, fragmented, offering itself to recurrent colonization and reconstruction, the body of work and the body of the woman constantly conflated into an autobiographical tract expressive 'of the very inexpressibility of the lyric impulse. As Yopie Prins says, 'if Homer was the Poet, Sappho was the Poetess, a name repeated over the centuries as the proper name for lyric poetry itself [and] an exemplary lyric figure precisely because of that legacy of fragmentation: the more the fragments are dispersed, the more we recollect Sappho as their point of origin.'

From Ovid and Catullus to Ronsard and Le Fevre, Sappho was collected and constructed according to the needs of the poets who invoked her name, but it was the nineteenth century, throughout Europe, which saw the birth of the modern idea of Sappho. The recovery of new fragments and the rise of classical philology coincided with a 'Romantic aesthetic of fragmentation' to produce a Sapphic renaissance. Joan DeJean, in *Fictions of Sappho, 1546–1937* (1989), has shown how this occurred in France; Yopie Prins studies the figure of Sappho in Victorian poetry, or, rather, she reconfigures the study of Victorian poetry through the figure of Sappho. In her double signature as Poetess and Lesbian, Sappho laid her mark on both Victorian feminism and the feminization of Victorian culture. Prins's main candidates to prove this are

Michael Field and Swinburne, but she also includes a chapter on the many Victorian women poets who ‘performed’ Sappho in their verse and in her image created their sentimental sorority. Even Queen Victoria, in an etching of 1841, reproduced here, seems to have fantasized about Sappho. Without her lyre, looking very like the young queen, this Sappho is about to plunge into a sea on which the sun is setting. It is easy to imagine the queen’s projection onto this figure of her own vertiginous position, but, as Prins warns us, to do so is to rehearse the fate of Sappho yet again, ‘an infinite regress of past and future representations of Sappho, whose fatal leap is never a single event, but the repetition of a moment that exceeds its own occasion’.

Prins’s clever, highly wrought and highly theorized book defers its exploration of Victorian Sappho by a preparatory reading of Sappho as ‘a form of riddling’. Her model for this is a fourth-century comedy by Antiphanes in which Sappho herself poses the riddle: ‘There is a female being that hides in her womb . . . unborn children, and although the children are voiceless, they call out across the waves of the sea . . . and people who are not present can hear them.’ The riddle’s answer, given by Sappho herself, is that the ‘female being is a letter that carries in itself the letters of the alphabet as infants. Although the letters are voiceless they can speak to people far away, to whomever they wish.’ The Sapphic body of writing is thus inextricably marked as feminine because it bespeaks its own contradiction, nowhere better illustrated than in fragment 31, famously admired by Longinus as the expression of a sublime lyric subject who neither lives nor dies but ‘seems to speak beyond the moment of death’. Prins uses a fine translation of fragment 31 by a modern poet, Anne Carson, to demonstrate the Sapphic contradiction which makes ‘lyric reading possible even while resisting it’. She then works around and backwards to show how the ‘broken tongue’ the lyric complains of is both the focal point for the fragment’s many previous translators and the signature of Sappho’s spectral afterlife. Discussion of translations of this fragment by Longinus and Renaissance and eighteenth-century writers lead to Henry Wharton’s *Sappho: Memoir, Text, Selected Renderings, and a Literal Translation* of 1885, the most popular English edition, and the seal of Victorian interest in the poet as well as her launch into twentieth-century obsession.

As Prins points out, although questions about Sappho’s sexuality have always been raised, her association with lesbian identity is a Victorian phenomenon, a late Victorian phenomenon in particular, one might add. Prins’s second chapter focuses on just such an association at work in Michael Field’s *Long Ago*, published in 1889. ‘Michael Field’ was the writing name of Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, aunt and niece, who lived together as a married couple, readily accepted and esteemed by literary London. *Long Ago* is a volume of Sapphic imitations which uses Greek epigraphs (from Wharton) for its English lyrics. A masculine name ‘hiding’ their (joint) female authorship further complicates the identities of who speaks to whom. In this performative ‘field’ is a poetic practice which emphasizes both its own intertextuality and the contradictions and indeterminacies of desire.

For Swinburne, whose ‘Anactoria’ (1866) alerted the Victorians to the interpretative dangers of a Sapphic obsession, the mutilated body of Sapphic writing makes her the sublime writer above all others, ‘simultaneously dismembered and remembered, in a complex mediation between corpse and corpus’. The tortured (flagellated) nature of the fragments and their potentially transgressive sexuality became in Swinburne’s poetry, Prins argues, not so much male homosexual practice imagined through lesbian coupling, as ‘an embodiment of the rhythm of eros itself, a scattering movement too diffuse to be contained within any single body’. Of course, for Swinburne, the great

rhythmist, the Sapphic measure—never quite able to be performed in English—was also the longed-for discipline sublimely withheld:

Ah, ah, thy beauty! like a beast it bites,  
Stings like an adder, like an arrow smites.  
Ah sweet, and sweet again, and seven times sweet  
The paces and the pauses of thy feet.

(‘Anactoria’, ll. 115–18)

Prins’s book is sometimes overburdened with its own cleverness, and sometimes it overstates its case. But among its many virtues of erudition (an excellent knowledge of Greek, for instance) and sophistication of approach, it has the supreme virtue of passion for its subject. The book’s epitaph cannot resist a last farewell to Sappho in four Victorian translations of fragment 55, placed alongside Prins’s own translation of this ‘deadly text’:

Dead you will lie there and no memory of you  
Shall there be and no desire for you in time to come; for you have no share  
In the roses of Piera, but unseen even in the house of Hades  
You shall flit among the fading corpses, flown away.

There is no ‘I’ in this poem; like ‘you’, ‘I’ has been changed into ‘anonymous multiplicity . . . a perpetual displacement’ which allows both the Victorian translators (Cory, Arnold, Symonds, and, tellingly, Anon.) and Prins herself to appear as poets in the name of Sappho and, also in her name, to be consigned to fragmentation and forgetfulness.

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DEBORAH VLOCK. *Dickens, Novel Reading, and the Victorian Popular Theatre.*

Pp. xii+226 (Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture 19). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. £35.

As her title *Dickens, Novel Reading, and the Victorian Popular Theatre* suggests, Deborah Vlock’s area of study is wide and her ambitions are considerable. Her declared aim in this book is ‘a recovery of Victorian novels, particularly the novels of Dickens; a situation of these novels in their original contexts, and a reconstruction of the conditions in which they were initially conceived’ (p. 9). She sets out to challenge and qualify the Foucauldian construction of nineteenth-century European history, with its evolution from spectacular, public discourse to the privatized, domesticated culture of the Industrial Revolution. Counter to critical emphasis on the individual, secluded, and contemplative nature of novel-reading, Vlock looks to recall the theatrical aspects of the Victorian novel: the public readings, dramatic adaptations of novels, the proliferation of theatrical stereotypes, and, above all, the competing, Bakhtinian dialogue of voices which would have sounded in the nineteenth-century reader’s head. The interaction between Dickens’s fiction and the stage was considerable, encompassing not only the theatrical Crummles family in *Nicholas Nickleby*, and the author’s public readings, but also innumerable stage adaptations of his novels, some of which constructed their own endings to his works even before their serialization was complete. Vlock seeks to recover what she terms his ‘“imaginary text”—the actual Dickens experience, overdetermined, centred not so much in any one narrative or genre but in the theatre of assumptions circulating among the London public’ (p. 11).