Ladies' Greek: Victorian Translations of Tragedy
by Yopie Prins; pp. 312.
Princeton UP, 2017. $75.09 cloth.

H OW DID "the delight of learning a dead language [become] a mark of
womanly character" (xi)? Yopie Prins asks in the preface to *Ladies' Greek*,
winner of the 2018 NAVSA Book Prize. The question marks the distinct turn
that classical reception studies has taken in the two decades since Prins's
Victorian Sappho (Princeton, 1999) helped to break ground for inquiries into the
relationship between Victorian writers and ancient Greek literature. In the
twenty years between Prins's books, a number of scholars have drawn atten-
tion to the challenges facing Victorian women who wished to learn ancient
languages and their exclusion from the educational and social institutions
that provided and legitimized such knowledge. What has become increas-
ingly clear from these explorations is the strength of women's creativity and
perseverance in acquiring and exercising such knowledge, despite—and
perhaps because of—social and personal obstacles to classical learning. *Ladies'
Greek* directs itself to this phenomenon and argues not only that women were
uniquely suited to the study of ancient Greek but that they were essential
to the translation and transmission, in particular, of Greek tragedy in the
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on both sides of the Atlantic. "Why,"
Prins asks, "did women in Victorian England and America desire to learn
ancient Greek, and how did they turn it into a language of and for desire"
(xi)? Her answers to these questions not only explore the history of women's
classical education and practice but, more broadly, offer important insight
into the nature of desire itself.

One genius of Prins's book is its organizational structure. While previ-
ous studies of Victorian women and the classical tradition have tended to
arrange their chapters around individual authors, Prins devotes each of her
five chapters to the study of a specific figure from Greek tragedy and the
various translations and interpretations of that figure. One benefit of this
ambitious framework is that it de-emphasizes the representative figura-
tion of each author under scrutiny. Instead, Prins's discussions preserve the
individuality of each experience while simultaneously tracing the common
threads that bound together the trans-Atlantic phenomenon of ladies' Greek.
Classical reception, Prins argues, "is better understood through converg-
ing and diverging enactments, demonstrating different possibilities for the
performance of Ladies' Greek, at different moments and in different places
on both sides of the Atlantic" (34). While keenly aware that the attrac-
tion to and practice of ancient Greek was not only a prerogative of white
women of privilege but a way of idealizing privileged white culture, Prins
carefully draws attention to the diversity of women's experiences within
this collective endeavour. Thus, while she spends considerable time discuss-
ing the Greek practices of more canonical figures such as Elizabeth Barrett

Browning, Virginia Woolf, Janet Case, and Jane Harrison, she also notes Anna Julia Cooper's efforts to improve classical education for African-American women and draws attention to lesser-known women writers such as Sara Coleridge, whose fascinating translation notebook suggests that the challenge of translation "produces a way of knowing Greek that did not make it simply the object of knowledge, but rather made it possible to think about the very question of knowability, what could be known and what would remain unknown" (11).

Virginia Woolf famously expounded upon the essential unknowability of ancient Greek in her oft-cited essay "On Not Knowing Greek," and Prins is certainly not the only scholar to argue that it was this unknowability that attracted women to what she calls the "interlingual space" (37) created by and through translation. However, Prins fleshes out women's efforts to both conquer and sustain this unknowability—and thus perpetuate desire itself—through her exploration of the different modes of translation that women found, not only stylistically through their verbal translations and adaptations but through theatre and dance: "Not only were women translating tragedy in miscellaneous notebooks, letters, journals, and other writing, for personal edification and for literary publication, but they were translating these texts into performance as another way to dramatize their passion for Greek letters; the act of reading Greek tragedy on the page was transferred to, and also transformed by, the experience of enacting it on stage" (116). As Prins notes, women re-enactments of Greek tragedy served partly to compensate for their often faltering performance in formal tests such as the first part of the Tripos Examinations, which focused on linguistic skills. In her words, "their performance was especially for the benefit of the dons, to prove that women were able to perform at the highest level of classical education, if not at the highest level of academic examination" (129). For the women Prins discusses, translation meant far more than linguistic fidelity and grammatical precision. Part of her argument is that women's translation of Greek tragedy—on both page and stage—was also a performance of their experiences of knowledge. Her discussion of Cassandra in chapter 1, for example, emphasizes women's identification with Cassandra's estrangement from language as "a character that enacts the strangeness of its own speaking" (48). In her discussion of Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, Prins focuses on women's interpretations of Io and argues that "women were bound to translate the play as a performance of subjection as well as mastery, making it a complex reiteration of nineteenth-century gender politics" (59). And Hippolytus—the focus of chapter 4—allows women translators/adapters such as Agnes Mary Frances Robinson "to discover the passion of her own literary and erotic identifications" (162).

The organizational focus on the convergence and divergence of women's interests in ancient Greek also allows Prins to make a transatlantic move that has been challenging for previous scholars, given the very different contexts

of the two countries. The fluidity of her transatlantic crossing is most apparent in her chapter on Electra, which studies two performances of *Electra* in Greek at Girton and Smith Colleges. Prins is able to trace the cross-currents of influence between Greek reception in England and in America while making careful note of the differences in cultural context and object. While the Smith College production was very much inspired by and modelled after the Girton one, Prins notes the emphasis of the American production on the collective body of performers and thus on the institution producing the class of graduating women who staged the performance. These subtle but important differences in British and American reception and dissemination of Greek tragedy are further explored in her discussion of the latter's greater freedom to imagine ancient texts (104) and the essential role played by female scholars such as Edith Hamilton in "mediating between the professionalization and popularization of classics" (110).

In the preface to *Ladies' Greek*, Prins identifies her own place in the lineage of female classical scholars and translators about which she writes: "Learning ancient Greek was my rite of passage into an academic career" (xv). This sensitivity to and personal connection with the legacy of women's classical education guide her unerringly in her exploration. At the end of the reading, it is hard to imagine that the Greeks could ever not have belonged to women or that they were ever anything but essential to women's sense of belonging to themselves.

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Seeming Human: Artificial Intelligence and Victorian Realist Character
by Megan Ward; pp. 216.
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WHAT DOES the work of Anthony Trollope and Alan Turing have in common? More than you might think, according to Megan Ward's innovative new book, *Seeming Human*. It is an original and playful account of the ways in which we can see mid-twentieth-century forms of artificial intelligence as both "afterlives of and theories for realist character" (99). Ward emphasizes that critics have read the history of the realist novel largely through its use of formal techniques of interiority, privileging free indirect discourse and interior monologue. She argues that while we are comfortable with acknowledging realism's self-reflexivity, we are less comfortable admitting the fictionality, or the "*non-human-ness*," of fictional characters (2). Since characters are words on a page that are meant to seem human, Ward argues