

Harriette Andreadis. *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics, 1550-1714*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. xiii + 254 pp. + 9 illus. \$17.00 Paper. Review by MADHAVI MENON, ITHACA COLLEGE.

In a book that claims to be about erotic ellipses, *Sappho in Early Modern England* is also dependent on one: its evident debt to Foucauldian theory goes both unnamed and unpaid. In general, scholars of Renaissance sexuality draw on Foucault's theories for two major ideas: first, an emphasis on extraliterary discourse, and second, the historical division of sexual acts and identities between the pre-modern and the modern eras. Even as *Sappho in Early Modern England* is in alignment with both these ideas (Andreadis repeatedly stresses, for instance, that she seeks to problematize the kind of theory that "attributes to an earlier era the relatively recent notion of 'lesbian' identity and assumes its transhistorical presence" [20]), its bibliographic ellipsis sets up a paradigm in which literary predecessors, though invoked, remain unnamed. This "unnaming" provides the methodology for *Sappho in Early Modern England*. And, as Andreadis argues, it also provided early modern women writers with a discursive mode in which to write Sapphic poetry without invoking the taint of Sapphic sexuality.

Such production is necessarily caught in a double bind. Andreadis begins by outlining this dilemma in relation to Sappho. Considered both sexually transgressive and poetically talented, Sappho emblemizes both a highly praised female writer and a woman with shameful sexual secrets. *Sappho in Early Modern England* traces the way in which early modern women writers negotiated a relation to Sappho that was, given the nature of Sappho's cultural position, necessarily doubled, or twinned. To claim the mantle of Sappho's literary genius brought with it the whiff of Sappho's sexual proclivities, and this dilemma informs all the theoretical and historical pressure that *Sappho in Early Modern England* brings to bear on its subjects. Regardless of whether or not the women examined in this book "really" had sexual dealings with other women, Andreadis argues doggedly for their *literary* erotics,

and represents a wide range of writers from Sappho to Katherine Philips to Aphra Behn to Delarivier Manley to Anne Killigrew and Queen Anne. As this selection makes clear, Andreadis deals with both well-known and lesser-known figures, and her project aims to tie them together in what her first chapter tantalizingly calls an “erotics of unnam[ing].” This erotics provides the book’s goal of “locat[ing] and . . . describ[ing] the historical movement toward the silencing that took place as knowledge of transgressive sexuality between women became widespread throughout an increasingly literate and urbanized English society in which print culture was ever more rapidly being disseminated” (24). This is the working paradigm of Andreadis’s book, and it is a brilliant one. *Sappho in Early Modern England* is an analysis, not of speech, but of silence, not of the printed word, but of the ellipses in which erotic *frisson* takes place. The lack of historical “evidence” that has resulted in the erasure of early modern female sexuality in the past is here exhumed, both from the archive and from the text, with astonishing critical perspicuity. It’s not as if there is no “evidence,” Andreadis seems to be saying, it’s just that you didn’t know where to look.

And there’s certainly plenty to see in this book. After outlining the considerable consequences of the Sapphic double-bind to the early modern woman writer, Andreadis moves on in her next chapter to examine the way in which Katherine Philips treads this thorny path. Philips’s “way out,” in stark opposition to a writer like Aphra Behn, is to sublimate eroticism into the acceptable discourse of intense friendship, thus providing what Andreadis calls “a respectable alternative to the specter of unnatural vice” (98). But this specter continues to haunt even its evasions, as the next chapter on “Doubling Discourses in an Erotics of Female Friendship” makes abundantly clear. In other words (and this is Foucault’s point too) the production of writing points not to a freedom from repression, but rather to the *creation* of repression: “to name may be to inhibit and to constrain” (15). The writers examined in this chapter—Anne Killigrew and Jane Barker, among others—“were loath to see themselves . . . in ways considered trans-

gressive [and so] developed more acceptable discursive strategies to contain or to deflect desires that might otherwise have threatened to overwhelm them" (101). This chapter deals with the necessity of the "erotic ellipsis" and begins with a brilliant analysis of the word "ellipsis," which is sometimes defined as "[a]n omission of words needful fully to express the sense" (101). An ellipsis is by definition both linguistically present and absent: it necessarily engenders a double discourse. This doubling carries over into the book's conclusion on the "Configurations of Desire," in which Andreadis examines the Ovidian myth of Calisto and Jupiter, famous for featuring both heterosexual rape and female same-sex desire. Tracing its representational history in art and in court masques, Andreadis comments on Queen Anne (who played Calisto as a young princess of eleven) and on her court, with its (in)famous emphasis on strong literary and political women. John Crowne's court masque of *Calisto*, Andreadis argues, is eerily representative of Anne's court itself, which "might be said to mediate obliquely between contemporary discourses of overt and covert transgressiveness" (176).

The mediation of discursive desire is, finally, what *Sappho in Early Modern England* is "about." Andreadis argues for an inverse relationship between the knowledge of sexual transgression and their literary expression; the more widely circulated discourse of tribadism and sapphism, she suggests, only ensured an elliptical inhibition of literary statement. But despite this immense, and immensely timely, project, the book seems strangely content to cast its ideas in the shadow of similar conclusions about gay "male" sexuality in the Renaissance. In other words, *Sappho in Early Modern England* goes well beyond Foucault, but insists on (silently) echoing his voice. This erotic ellipsis, while providing a brilliant and scholarly paradigm within which to read early modern sexuality, also provides us with a shadow opening onto an entirely *new* mode of inquiry. Like the texts that Andreadis examines, this area of inquiry participates in a doubled discourse: while delineating between early modern and modern sexualities, it also suggests a historical continuity rather than a rupture between the two. Even

as “Sappho was . . . being used in early modern England as an Ovidian example of tribadism in literary discourse” (39), Andreadis notes also that “Sappho’s iconic status in modern discourse . . . can be a witty way of saying ‘lesbian’: for example, during the summer of 2000, a three-week retrospective of lesbian cult films being shown in New York City was entitled ‘Sapp-o-Rama’” (185 n.2). In this account of female same-sex erotics, Sappho in early modern England bears a constitutive, if not seamless, relationship to Sappho in the here and now. Even as her *literary* persona is all but extinguished in its modern invocation, Sappho becomes one of those ellipses that form the content of this book: like Foucault, she functions as a code word that largely fulfills its function by suggesting an intertextual community. This suggestion of historical continuity, though not the goal of *Sappho in Early Modern England*, is nonetheless made possible by its brilliant analyses, which are not only historically grounded and astute, but also intellectually rigorous and timely. As a sign of our times, *Sappho* is also a sign *for* our times, and achieves this dual distinction by continually doubling in on itself.

Deborah Aldrich-Watson, ed. *The Verse Miscellany of Constance Aston Fowler: A Diplomatic Edition*. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies and Renaissance English Text Society, 2000. lxii + 206pp. + 2 illus. \$40.00. Review by ADAM SMYTH, UNIVERSITY OF READING.

Deborah Aldrich-Watson’s rendering of the verse miscellany of Constance Aston Fowler (Huntington Manuscript 904) provides the first printed edition of this significant manuscript—a manuscript containing many poems which have not appeared before, in any other context. Aldrich-Watson’s book is thus an important contribution to the process of bringing previously cloistered texts, particularly those by women, to a broader readership. That process of making texts public owes much to the work of the Renaissance English Text Society.