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The thralldom in which women were held can be traced by the history of the practice of female infanticide. In Sparta, "all girls apparently were reared, from Plutarch reports that they were merely handed over immediately after birth to the care of the women" (p. 36). Bearing children to become warriors or the mothers of warriors was the most important function of Spartan women. In times of peace when the male population was not endangered by death on the battlefield, "an ecologically sound method of limiting population is the destruction of the reproducing members of the group, the females" (p. 46). In Hellas, "inscriptional evidence from the third and second centuries B.C. shows that. . .the one child family was commonest, that sons were preferred, and that seldom more than one daughter was reared" (p. 140). In Rome, the provisions of a law attributed to Romulus "require a father to raise all male children but only the first-born female." Pomeroy finds it plausible that female infanticide was well as the high mortality rate for women during the child-bearing years was responsible for the disproportion in the number of male and female adults. The author also notes that other discriminatory practices, such as the requirements that females survive on an inferior diet and that they start bearing children at an immature age, resulted in short life for those women who did survive infancy.

The ancient classical view of the institution of marriage offers a clue to the rebellion of the modern wife. According to ancient myth, it was during the reign of Cecrops, legendary first king of Athens, that the women outvoted the men in selecting Athena rather than Poseidon as patron deity for their city. Up until this this time, "sexual intercourse had been promiscuous and children did not know their fathers." The men were angered by the women's election victory, so "marriage was instituted by men as a punishment for women, simultaneous with the loss of women's political equality and sexual freedom" (p. 115). Marriage and subjugation go hand in hand.

Interestingly enough, prostitutes and lesbians seem to have fared better, comparatively speaking, in society of antiquity than they do today. But it is significant that the status of a male slave was superior to the status of a female of any rank.

Pomeroy is meticulous in her documentation and judicious in her judgments. Her book fills a heretofore yawning gap in the social history of women.

Sex and Marriage in Victorian Poetry by Wendell Stacy Johnson (Cornell University Press, 1975) 266 pp., indexed. Reviewed by Florence Boos, University of Iowa.

Why are the themes of sexuality and marriage often studied as they appear in the Victorian novel, but seldom in Victorian poetry? Interest in Victorian poetry has been low for several years, in part I suspect because most assume it ignores sex or buries it in prudery. Wendell Stacy Johnson's Sex and Marriage in Victorian Poetry is a concise, lively, and elegant refutation of this view; whoever reads it will benefit from his impressive ability to interpret serious debates embedded in poems long neglected by prejudice. Sympathetic to feminism, and aware of the manifold guises of condescension to women, Johnson analyzes the secular, sacred, mystical, and rationalistic attitudes which underlie particular sentiments about male dominance and female rebellion or submission in the poetry of the period. He traces variations in point of view at each end of the spectrum (Patmore, Meredith), comments on the changed sexual attitudes of twentieth-century poets, and finds several valid and interesting parallels with contemporary sexual debate. Johnson's last book, Hopkins and the Victorians, was the first serious study of Hopkins' kinship to his age; there as here he gives a close historical reading of the poetry, and sometimes suggests revisions in the history as he reads.

Johnson begins with a concise summary of sexual attitudes in the works of Meredith, Clough, Patmore, Rossetti, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Morris, Arnold, and Swinburne; despite their compression, these summaries show conscientious attention to seldom-noticed poems (e.g., by the later Meredith) and a subtle response to shifts in the poets' attitudes as they aged. Long studies follow of marriage and sexuality in Tennyson (75 pp.) and Browning (67 pp.), themes with which each poet was intensely preoccupied through his life. Johnson describes an early Tennyson who found marriage the only symbol for human progress and harmony within time (The Princess, In Memoriam), and an aging Tennyson who came more and more to deny the possibility of such progress, and believe in the war of Spirit/Man and Sense/Woman depicted in the Idylls. Browning's interest in the intricacies of male possessiveness and female rebellion, the difficulty of sexual and spiritual fidelity, and the roles of dominance and submission in romantic love are intelligently described. In both cases the poets' later work may have more to do with their most persistent preoccupations than many critics realize. One point of disagreement about The Princess: I think Johnson underemphasizes the extent to which Tennyson demands betrayal of female integrity as a price of social progress.

This is nevertheless an urbanely written, spritely consideration of sexuality, sexism, and marriage; the expanded analyses of Idylls and The Ring and the Book are so good that I wish the discussions of other poets had been expanded as well--perhaps of Rossetti, Arnold, or Swinburne. Johnson is not to blame for the poor representation of women poets among the major figures he considers; he discusses Elizabeth Barrett Browning perceptively (53-57), and it is an unhappy fact that the only other obvious candidate for mention would have been Christina Rossetti. Nevertheless in reading such a book I cannot help feel dissatisfaction with the limited contribution of women to this area of debate on their nature and role. A full history of the attitudes and achievements of minor Victorian women poets--Emily Brontë, Adelaide Proctor, Jean Ingelow, Mary Coleridge, Alice Meynell, Laetitia Landon, Michael Field--is necessary for a more thorough understanding of the nature of Victorian poetry and the attitudes of women themselves during the Victorian period.

FLORENCE HOWE AWARD POSITION PAPERS

The following is an excerpt from Susan Cornillon's letter of resignation as co-chairwoman of the Florence Howe Feminist Literary Criticism Essay Contest (printed with the writer's permission):

I am resigning, as you know, over the issue of, as you put it in your letter of August 15, 1975, "how many awards the Caucus would be obligated to make." You write that "A prize and an award necessarily mean that there is competition." I understand your feelings on this matter and understand that apparently enough members of the executive committee agree with you for my beliefs on this issue to have been over-ridden. I respect your and the committee's right to make a decision contrary to the one I would make; however, I cannot, without violating what I believe in, be instrumental in helping you put into effect your decision "that there would be one prize which would go to one person but that there could be any number of honorable mentions."

I do not believe that there should necessarily be only one first prize winner. I believe there should be a first prize category and an honorable mention category and that the number of women whose work meet the standards established for those two categories be named as either first prize winners or winners of honorable mention.