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# "To talk in fancy with the speaking eye" : a vision of desire and death in Mary Robinson's Sappho and Phaon

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Robinson's....

May 2003

“To Talk in Fancy with the speaking eye”:

A Vision of Desire and Death in Mary Robinson’s *Sappho and Phaon*

by

Jennifer L. Black

A Thesis

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in

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### *Abstract*

The language of Mary Robinson's *Sappho and Phaon* (1796) reveals that the sonnet sequence imagines activity, but does not commit to making real this activity. Such an understanding of the work insists that the very existence of Robinson's poem is dependent on a discourse of (unachieved) desire. Unwilling to allow her fantasies of Phaon to exist unsatisfied, Sappho vows to either have "my Lover, or my Grave!" (XXX: 14). Sappho's insistence on "having" Phaon or her death is an attempt to break out of her fantasy and terminate her desire. Why doesn't Robinson let Sappho live and continue suffering from her desire? More significantly, why does Sappho believe that she must either have Phaon or kill her hope of requited love through death? Simply, why does Sappho have to die?

In this paper, "To Talk in Fancy with the speaking eye": A Vision of Desire and Death in Mary Robinson's *Sappho and Phaon*," I explore and analyze the ways eye imagery embodies Sappho's discourse of desire and how this discourse is one that both articulates (produces language) and becomes the content and energy for the sonnet sequence. I argue that Sappho has to die in order for the poem to live, or be "seen." If Sappho's desires were to be met, if the vision of Phaon materialized into reality there would be no purpose for the poem because then the very thing on which the poem is hinged would be unfounded—desire would cease, eradicating Sappho's discourse. Sappho's painful desire for Phaon is a channel through which Robinson makes her(self) poem visible. I suggest that by reinvesting meaning in the modes of eye imagery used in the poem, we can understand *Sappho and Phaon* as a medium for Mary Robinson to attain "visibility" in a literary world that situates female writers on the periphery.

Mary Robinson's 1796 sonnet sequence *Sappho and Phaon* is a poem driven by Sappho's production of language about her "hopeless passion" (IV:8) for "the blissful dream" (XX:6) of union with Phaon. Because this poem generates momentum through Sappho's fantastical desires for the unobtainable Phaon, Robinson's work is dependent on a discourse of unachieved desire. Yet, in the end, this discourse collapses on itself when Sappho, unwilling to allow her relationship with Phaon to be just fantasy, vows to either have "my Lover, or my Grave!" (XXX:14). Sappho's "having" either Phaon or her death is an attempt to break out of her fantasy and terminate the (discourse of) desire she has entered. This begs the curious question, "Why?" In spite of our knowledge that the historical Sappho committed suicide, why does Mary Robinson not choose to end the poem with Sappho's desire still in progress?

We come to know that Sappho has "plunged the green wave" (XL:14) of the Leucadia in the concluding sonnet of the sequence. For Sappho, suicide is a means to "calm rebellious Fancy's fev'rish dream" (XLIII:12), to extinguish her hope that her desires will be returned by Phaon. In this sense, Sappho's language of desire—her narration of unmatched desires is what essentially kills Sappho. She imagines and articulates a fantasy only to be destroyed by its sheer, inaccessible existence. Linda H. Peterson points out that Sappho's unreturned love also "results in a loss of poetic voice," (42) suggesting that Sappho is not only killed by her discourse of desire, but is also killed because she no longer is able to call on words to create poetry: Sappho says "Mute, on the ground my Lyre neglected lies" (IV:5). What is Robinson hoping to accomplish, or suggest by presenting a heroine subject to *only* two "endings": death or romantic love? Why is death, suicide, Sappho's only alternative to a life with Phaon?

Robinson's 1973 poem "Sight" offers one possible answer to this question.

Robinson's poem asserts that reason allows us to see "th' omnipotence of God" (116, 3) and is an "expansive source of intellectual bliss" (120, 161). The poem contests that one without reason is "for ever mournful, and for ever drear!" (117, 25) and questions "How can the soul its energies sustain,/ When REASON'S crystal gates are clos'd in night,/ And cold Oblivion hovers o'er the mind" (118, 89-91). It is imagination that blocks reason:

The longing for SOMETHING yet unknown,  
Whose pow'r he feels, diffusing its warm touch  
O'er ev'ry sensate nerve! That POW'R which marks  
The varying seasons in various forms,  
That tells him there is YET a sense untry'd,  
Ungratified, yet fraught with heavenly bliss,  
Distracts beyond the certitude of pain,  
Chills the expanding source of mental joy,  
And deadens all the faculties of man! (118, 76-86)

Also threatened is an imagination comparable to Sappho's, one infected with a fantasy, "a shadow of a waking dream" (117, 37) which knows

no change;  
Nor light from darkness! nor the human form,  
The image of perfection infinite!  
To fashion various phantoms of the brain,  
By each amus'd, and yet by each deceiv'd!  
To roll the aching eye, alas! In vain,  
And still to find a melancholy blank of  
Of years, and months, and days, and ling'ring hours.  
All dark alike, eternally obscure!  
To such a wretch! Whose brightest hours of bliss  
Is but the shadow of a waking dream,  
The sleep of DEATH (117, 26-37).

Here the speaker pities the “wretch” who is blind to reason and trapped in a never-ending fantasy, “a shadow of a waking dream.” A person bound to her imagination and subsequent emotions, or “phantoms of the brain,” secures for herself a life of darkness characterized by deceptive amusements. According to “Sight,” only reason is truth, the “transcendal gift” (116, 11). Fantasy, on the other hand, is a “darken’d brain” (119, 15).

In Sonnet XLIII, with “pensive eyes” Sappho reflects on the rock before she perishes, hoping death will provide her escape from “love’s dread control” (XLIII: 13) and return “Reason’s placid beam” (XLIII:10) to her “shrinking brain” (XXXVI: 9). She acknowledges that her ability to reason has been overthrown with “endless rapture” (XXXVII:12). Her longing for Phaon—“That SOMETHING yet unknown”—has blocked her “sight,” her ability to look beyond the vision of her fantasy and celebrate “the fount of SCIENCE,” (121, 165) or marvel at “The outstretch’d OCEAN, and the LANDSCAPE wide” (121, 168).

Interestingly, “Sight” provides a very lucid and solid critique of Robinson’s position on reason and fancy. Sight, or seeing, is clearly about one’s capacity to reason while imagination and fantasy is about something very different, something blinding, obtrusive, distracting. In contrast, the relationship between reason and fancy in *Sappho and Phaon* is problematic in that the line of demarcation between the two is often blurry. For example, prior to her suicide Sappho describes herself as a victim to “Fancy’s feverish dream” (XLIII 12), registering reason and fancy in alignment with their position in “Sight.” However, Sonnet XI complicates this tidy analysis. Reason is the “vaunted” or boastful “sovereign of the mind” (XI 1) whose strength is that of a weak ruler, a

sovereign unable to “tame” and “bind” the passions of the soul (3-4). Moreover, “sighs of love” have the ability to “dim thy boastful flame” (6). *Sappho and Phaon*, written three years after “Sight,” appears to alternate between a reason that is “placid,” and tranquil and one that is “pompous” and inadequate at the same time. Likewise, fancy is at moments represented as a victimizer, a sign of repression, and at other moments in the poem its powers are great enough to overthrow reason. In spite of this discrepancy, “Sight” provides a valuable and useful way of reading why Sappho must die; for Robinson, a life without reason, or “sight,” is equivalent to death.

Sappho lacks both reason and sight. Sappho’s refusal to abandon her fantasy of Phaon strips her of capacity to reason. Again, in reference to “Sight,” a mind void of reason is analogous to death, a “sleeping death.” Sappho’s limiting resolution—life with Phaon or death—locks her into the suicide act because concluding the fantasy and existing without Phaon (and with reason) is not an option. In addition, as a discourse of desire mandates, Sappho will never “see” the absent Phaon’s “human form.” Her “brightest hours of bliss” are reduced to the “shadow of a waking dream”—the vision that gives him corporality and realness. Suicide is the only way Sappho can break out her “Sad, unillum’d, disconsolate, and lost!” condition (118, 75).

It is possible to look at the reason for Sappho’s death from yet another angle. I believe that romantic union with Phaon, although it would keep Sappho alive, from a Lacanian perspective, would kill the poem. If Sappho’s desires were to be met, if the vision of Phaon materialized there would be no purpose for the poem because then the very thing on which the poem is hinged would be unfounded—desire would cease,

eradicating Sappho's discourse. Understanding *Sappho and Phaon* as a production of language rather than one of action explains why it is not necessary for Robinson's readers to "see" interaction between Phaon and Sappho. It also justifies why the narrator of the concluding sonnet simply tells the reader that Sappho has perished instead of actualizing the act of death. In effect, what *is* important is that what is seen is the poem itself. Sappho's desire and death for Phaon is the medium through which Robinson makes her poem "visible."

The degree to which "visibility" is an important theme to Robinson and her work is manifested through the abundant use of eye imagery in *Sappho and Phaon*. Throughout her prophetic, soliloquy-like sonnets, Sappho's emotions manifest and display her desire for Phaon, and Sappho frequently locates the "eyes" as a vehicle to embody this desire. In this way, "eye" imagery is one dominant way in which Sappho's desire is both articulated and maintained. This appears to be accomplished on three distinct levels: performance of the eye/I, performance of emotion, and performance of vision. Robinson consistently identifies Sappho's fluctuating disposition by coupling emotive adjectives with "eyes." For example, in Sonnet XXI, suspect that Phaon will not return her love, the poetess transfers her feelings of loss onto memories of her "dying parents" and "brother's frailties" (XXI:10-11). Sappho laments how her life has been nothing but "One blank sorrow" (8) and epitomizes this tragic sorrow in her "weary eyes:" "Phaon! if soon these weary eyes shall close,/ Oh! must that task, that mournful task, be thine?" (13-14). Similarly, imagining "When in the gloomy mansion of the dead,/ This with'ring heart, this faded form shall sleep" (XXXVII:1-2), Sappho foresees that her

“fond eyes, at length shall cease to weep” (3) for “that bliss, which Phaon did not share” (14). As these two examples suggest, Sappho’s eyes serve as sites where emotion is expressed and in effect, the eyes “perform” emotion, thus the “performance of the eye.” Accordingly, the “performance of the eye” can be reassigned as the “performance of I,” suggesting Sappho registers and recognizes her emotional states, casting herself in the role of the “weary I” or the “fond I.”

We come to interpret Sappho’s emotional conditions of “weariness” and “fondness” as signifiers within her discourse of desire. In spite of the fact that both examples foster emotional responses to Phaon’s rejection rather than acceptance of her, they do anticipate a future interaction with him. Because these emotions estimate, or imagine a moment in time yet to come, Sappho’s desire to achieve the unfulfilled reality of her fantasy of/with Phaon continues to (a)rouse her and enables the progression of her poem.

Interestingly, Robinson also couples Phaon’s eyes with emotive adjectives. After Phaon forsakes Sappho and “To Aetna’s scorching sand my Phaon flies” (XXIII:1), Sappho broods over the notion of whether “other charms attractive” (2) could sway Phaon to “fix thy fickle eyes” (4) on another woman. While “fickle” may carry less of an emotional charge than that of “weary” or “fond,” the erratic and unpredictable attributes associated with fickleness can be linked with elements of reaction and sentiment. Reason suggests definiteness, clarity and precision. In this way, fickle is in opposition with reason and its signifiers. To be fickle is to be indecisive, unpredictable and vacillating. By invoking Phaon’s “fickle eyes,” Sappho attempts to achieve her unfulfilled fantasy of

Phaon by asserting his corporality, as well as through the imagined performance of his eyes. In essence, Phaon's eyes become sites of performance whereby his fickleness is expressed and Sappho imagines Phaon's inconstant desire in terms of his eyes.

Extending Jerome McGann's argument that Phaon "is represented as forsaking Sappho for lesser lovers" (McGann 108) and "sexual wanderings" (111), I argue that on some level Sappho also claims to fathom Phaon as the "fickle I."

If the "performance of the eye" is the "eyes" performing emotion, then the "performance of emotion" is the site that invokes/provokes emotion in the receptor of the gaze. In other words, the gaze (eyes) induces the subject to perform emotion. For example, Sappho, in Sonnet V, is mystified by the power Phaon's (imagined) gaze has over her ability to reason: "How fades each nobler passion from his gaze!/ E'en Fame, that cherishes the Poet's lays,/ That fame, ill-fated Sappho loved so well" (2-4). Despite Sappho's seeming wariness that her "nobler passions," or reason, have faded, she is enraptured with the state of bliss and pleasure that his "gaze" renders upon her.

Likewise, when Phaon awakes—an action in which "eyes" literally open—in Sonnet XV, Sappho is euphoric and exclaims that to "die, beneath the luster of his eyes!" (4) would rally within her happiness. While the remainder of the poem neither depicts Phaon's actual gaze on Sappho, nor contains an interaction between Sappho and Phaon, Sappho's sense of happiness at the thought of Phaon's eyes fixed on her is demonstrated in Sappho's prophetic account of how her preparations for Phaon's arrival will result "In songs of triumph, to proclaim him mine!"(13-14). Sappho imagines that being held in Phaon's imagined gaze, having her gaze/desire returned will lead her to produce "songs

of triumph,” yet it is the absence of his gaze, her desiring of it that becomes the content and energy for the sonnet sequence.

It is the “speaking eye,” however, that most directly answers the question of Sappho’s death. I argue that the “speaking eye,” is the mouth—the site where vision becomes equal to speech, where language is produced, where a “vision” is performed through language. Language, or the performance of words, give “vision” through articulation of what is desired, perceived, questioned, etc. Through language the object of one’s gaze becomes narratable. Because the gaze becomes narratable, the object within it becomes desired, rendering the discourse of the narrative (about the object) always as one of desire. For example, in her description of the characteristics of love, Sappho questions what it is to love. She ponders, “Is it to pour th’ involuntary sigh,/ To dream of bliss, and wake new pangs to prove; /to talk in fancy, with the speaking eye” (VI:9-11). Within this verse, Sappho suggests love’s hypnotic quality moves her to articulate the blissful dreams and thoughts that engage her imagination (“to talk in fancy with the speaking eye”). Sappho’s verbalization via the “speaking eye,” or her mouth assigns a quality of vision to the designs of her imagination and simultaneously creates and recreates her fantasy of Phaon.

In another sonnet, also preoccupied with the characteristics, or fascinations, of love, Sappho explains: “When, on its banks he watch’d the speaking eye,/ And one sweet smile o’erpaid an age of fears!” (XXVIII:13-14). Presumably the “he” is Phaon, and Sappho, with her “speaking eye,” “Recalls the scenes of past and happier years” (12). Not only does Sappho articulate the fantasy of a past interaction with Phaon, but she imagines

Phaon replies to her with “one sweet smile,” suggesting that Sappho’s speaking eye is answered through the silent articulation of Phaon’s “speaking eye,” his smile. Sappho’s fantasy and desire for a “real” Phaon is envisaged and solidified in her vision of his smile and its power to relieve “an age of fears” (14). Although Sappho creates a rather slippery reality in this sonnet, suggesting that a time existed when they, together, knew “happier years,” Sappho’s vision of Phaon’s smile, achieved through Phaon’s “speaking eye” performs a vision of what could possibly be restored in the future for the two. In addition, might this interaction, or exchange of “speaking eyes” be an emblematic meeting of their mouths?—a symbolic kiss? Such a vision seemingly positions Sappho and Phaon as equally desirous of each other. Yet, such a reciprocal reality would relieve Sappho of her poetic narration, consequently sending the poem to a halt because desire only exists for the one that is unobtainable. Instead, the vision the “speaking eye” produces/performs is the stimulus or motivation for Sappho to continue assigning “ev’ry thought to fond desire” (XXV:3).

The whole of *Sappho and Phaon* can be read in terms of the “speaking eye”—as an articulation of imagination and fantasy. In this way, the “speaking eye” is understood in terms of the “speaking I.” Because fantasy is both always the “passion of imagining” and the “passion of making,” the “speaking eye/I” relationship offers an explanation as to how these two passions are accomplished. Where the mouth is the location of making speech, the self, or the “I,” is the site where fantasy is imagined. When language is assigned to fantasy what results is always a discourse of desire for an unobtainable “thing.” Therefore, understanding the poem in terms of the “speaking I” makes clear that

what is essential to the function of the poem is NOT wish fulfillment but the potential attached to the hallucinations, imaginings and fantasies of fulfillment. Achievement of Sappho's wish would fail the poem because these things operate and subsist outside of a discourse of desire.

Reflecting on Sappho's death as means to make *Sappho and Phaon* "visible" suggests that Robinson, like many other female writers of the Romantic period, understood she was working in a literary world where cultural conditions "work against Englishwomen who aspire to authorship" (Peterson 41). Marlon Ross explains, "Even though the female is herself a writer, she is seen as creative in a different sense, in a way that can be felt as less threatening to the male poet" (Ross 30). So while Robinson and her contemporaries were deemed "writers" by the masculine literary regime, their creativity, poetry and messages were viewed as less potent, less powerful, less urgent. *Sappho and Phaon* can then be seen as maneuver on Robinson's part to operate within these limiting borders and position herself as a "visible" contributor to the "production of language" in the Romantic period.

Common to the majority of the criticism that exists today on Mary Robinson is the discussion of her "disparate poetic identities: among them, the Della Cruscan Laura Maria, the tragic Sappho, the seductive Oberon, the acerbic Tabitha Bramble, and finally, the late Mrs. Robinson" (Pascoe, *Selected Poems* 22). Robinson's assorted identities function as an attempt to ameliorate her personal reputation as a "fallen woman" (Pascoe, 20), as well as establish herself as an artist. Judith Pascoe classifies Robinson as a "celebrity poet," who participated in the literary columns of the newspapers, particularly

*The Morning Post*, “to reinvent herself, to substitute for her old notoriety a new, distinguished status as a literary figure” (Pascoe, “Literary Marketplace, 260). Pascoe acknowledges that Robinson’s “creation of multiple selves can be read as an attempt to rescue some stable and constitutive self from public display and commodity status” (262). But she also aligns Robinson’s method of presentation of self as “no less ‘authentic’ than Wordsworth’s opposite mode of presentation, the institution of authorial voice so stable that the poet is conflated with the narrator of the poem” (263-264). What is significant about Pascoe’s analysis is that it underscores, or reinforces the notion that Robinson is able to imagine herself as an established literary figure, defying oppressive culture and gender constraints through performance. In thinking about the nature of performance, it (performance) is arguably non-existent without the presence of an onlooker, an audience, a viewer. The role of “performer” positions Mary Robinson in the viewer’s eye; that she wanted to be “seen” as an artist and “visible” in the literary sphere is an understatement. In the same way that Sappho must die in order for the poem to be “seen,” or exist, so too must Robinson die over and over with every role she performs in order to become revitalized, “visible” amongst her revered literary male contemporaries. Robinson’s adroit declaration that she “has ventured to compose...specimens of that species of sonnet writing...termed by the most classical writers, *the legitimate sonnet*,” in her *Preface to Sappho and Phaon* (Robinson 144) attests to her desire to become as “visible” and respected as the classical writers.

Thinking in these terms suggests that in the same way her performance is a means to visibility, so too is Robinson’s “objectification of highly-charged emotional events”

(Labbe 101), like Sappho's suicide, an effort to establish visibility among her readership. Similar to *Sappho and Phaon*, much of Robinson's poetry embraces love as a primary theme. These romances, however, reject an ending of blissful union between lovers and instead construct endings as Jacqueline Labbe argues, "wherein death, not love, is the resolution; where poetry itself sabotages the romantic relationship... Romantic love, in its very failure, figures and emblemizes its own emptiness" (98-99).

Robinson's disavowal of romantic resolution in the form of a tragedy, like Sappho's suicide, was disruptive to late eighteenth century notions of love and romance. Labbe explains, "In the late 1790's, the novelistic romance relies on true love to enable its lot; fed by sensibility, the girl-gets-boy as boy-slays-villain" (99). Perhaps Robinson's focus on disintegrating love in her work is a response to her own failing romances, but to attribute this theme only to autobiography is an insult to Robinson and her craft. Instead, Robinson corrupts the romance genre to agitate, or excite the emotions of her audience. Phaon's eyes move Sappho to perform emotion similar to the way Robinson's tributes to tragic love excite a emotion in her readers. Is it unreasonable to suggest that Robinson wants to write poetry also capable of such effects to bring her literary self in view? Cleverly, Robinson adheres to the form of the *legitimate sonnet* to ascertain herself as credible but then, within the form of the poem, dismantles conventions of romance and love to become both "visible" *and* memorable—visible in the literary world and memorable in the minds of readers whom she moves to emotion.

Through her alternating personae and ruffling of the romance genre, it is apparent that Robinson saw her poetry as a production of language designed to achieve a particular

vision. Like Sappho, Robinson had “passion for imagining” poetry and a “passion for making” it. In effect, Robinson is Sappho’s speaking eye/I; she imagines a new way to present Sapphic material through her astute writing. In contrast to Peterson’s claim that “Robinson’s sonnet...adds to Sapphic myth what male poets never added: the possibility that erotic love might stifle poetic production,” it is the unrequited love theme that makes language possible. Like other nineteenth-century redactions of this ode, most notably Swinburne’s “Ode to Anactoria,” unrequited love becomes the means and occasion for the triumph of poetry” (Peterson 43). Jerome McGann also notes Robinson’s treatment of Sappho as one departing from male, Sapphic tradition:

The startling form adopted by Robinson for her retelling of Sappho’s story suggests the exact opposite of what Ovid wants to imitate when he has Sappho discuss her abandonment of the sapphic for the elegiac measure, (‘since I am more apt with lyric measures’, line 6). In Robinson, the Italian sonnet—a sign of the presence of a firmly self-conscious artistic intelligence—argues that Sappho’s poetical genius must be seen to persist even during the period of her silence and apparent derangement. Ovid’s elegiacs misrepresent Sappho and her love for Phaon (McGann 103).

Furthermore, McGann notes, “The meaning of all this is patent. Robinson is the avatar of Sappho, and through her ‘POESY’ the benighted condition of ‘man’ will get redeemed. In literal terms, [Robinson] proposes a new standard of ‘POESY’ to be re-imagined through a female, a specifically Sapphic, perspective” (McGann 114). Both Peterson and McGann argue Robinson envisioned a Sappho that “suggests the exact opposite of what Ovid wants to intimate,” suggesting Robinson’s Sappho on some level exists outside of traditional, male versions of Sapphic history (103). As a woman, and as a female writer, Robinson is not unfamiliar with living on the periphery. And as this paper has insisted,

Robinson's vision is one that mobilizes her from the periphery to mainstream literary culture, while establishing her individuality within that mainstream. Then why does Robinson create a marginalized or "alternative" Sappho and how does it serve her purposes?

To answer this question one can revert to Wordsworth's answer to his three famous questions about the function of the poet: "What is meant by the word Poet? What is a poet? To whom does he address himself?" Wordsworth's answer: "a man speaking to other men" (Wordsworth 324). (To claim that Wordsworth's attention to gender is distracting to this discussion of a female poet is certainly to minimize the issue of gender and poetry. However, such a discussion is not applicable here.) Paul Michael Privateer discusses Wordsworth's crucial concept of speaking, claiming, "In romanticism, poetic writing is the poet who speaks:"

The power of speaking is also evident in its discursive formations, that is, in how it presumably combines an actual presence with its counterpart, an author with a persona, and in how it unites three individuals—a creator, a speaker, and a reader—who presumably share the freedom of creating and conferring meaning. Wordsworth's emphasis on "speaking" indicates that individuality has two related ideological contexts: it is constituted by a continuous exchange of verbally transmissible signs and codes, and it has the ontological status of a voice that resonates discursively. Given these contexts, individuality is understood as something that can be textualized in terms of voice; it is poetic "being there" modeled after a material "being" which writing can presumably deliver into being through language (Privateer 1).

Robinson's Sappho is interpreted as a fervent, resounding declaration of her own "speaking," or poetic individuality, independence and vision. Resourceful in her abstraction of a celebrated literary figure and poet, Robinson does more than simply align herself with Sappho the "idolized Muse," or "the ENGLISH SAPPHO" (Peterson 41).

Robinson, herself, is a “SPEAKING I”—a poet who speaks and articulates vision through language. Robinson’s *Sappho and Phaon* reiterates and rejoices in a body of poetry that produces a language able to re-write and re-en “vision” Sapphic history.

In her observations about fantasy and desire in “Passing the Time,” L.O. Aranye Fradenburg asserts, “The desire for predictability is also a structure of enjoyment, as passionate and potentially destructive as any other. If there is a swerve between the wish and its fulfillment, which perhaps is nothing other than ‘probability,’ it’s this swerve that indicates the *place of history* in the process of invention” (Fradenburg 5). Robinson’s strategy to work outside Sapphic tradition, writing/speaking in the legitimate sonnet—a classical art form that operates on concepts of romance and unrequited love and desire—rather than Ovid’s epistolary form is a major way Robinson creates this “swerve” between Sappho’s wish and its fulfillment. Writing in a form that lives and breathes a discourse of desire, Robinson places herself and Sappho in “Sapphic history” through Sappho’s death. At the same time, Sappho’s death places Robinson in literary history, bringing vision to fruition.

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**Courses Taught**

**Lehigh University**

***Composition and Literature***

English 1: "The Good Life" (Fall 2001); "Icons, Other, and Popular Spaces" (Fall 2002)

English 2: "A Paradox of the Heart:" Understanding Deviance in Contemporary Society  
(Spring 2002, 2003)

**Publications**

"In Response to Black History Month Symposium." *Marquis Magazine*. Lafayette College, 1998.

"An Imitation." *Marquis Magazine*. Lafayette College, 1999.

"The Camera Man." *Marquis Magazine*. Lafayette College, 1999.

"The Hungry Pray-er." *Marquis Magazine*. Lafayette College, 1999.

"The 5 Cent Day." *Marquis Magazine*. Lafayette College, 1999.

"Paper Cut." *Marquis Magazine*. Lafayette College, 1999.

**Presentations**

"To talk in fancy with the speaking eye": A Vision of Desire and Death in Mary Robinson's *Sappho and Phaon*." *The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century British Women Writers Conference*, Fort Worth, Texas, March 2003.

**Honors and Awards**

Teaching Fellowship, Lehigh University (2001-2005)

Francis A. March Fellow, Lafayette College (2001-2002 academic year)

Gilbert Prize in English Award, Lafayette College, Spring 1999

Dean's List, Lafayette College, Fall 1996 through Spring 1999

**Related Experience**

Graduate Student Council Representative, Lehigh University, 2001-2002 (academic year)

Resident Advisor, Lafayette College, Fall 1996-Spring 1998

**References**

Beth Dolan, Assistant Professor of English, Lehigh University

Jack Truten, Assistant Professor of English, Lafayette College

Carolynn Van Dyke, Professor of English, Lafayette College

## **Work Experience**

### **Competitive Response Manager, Unisys Corporation, Malvern, Pennsylvania (April 2000-July 2001)**

Created and maintained the “Competitive Corner Web site”—a web site which aimed to keep the sales force abreast of Unisys competitors and their products.  
Interfaced with key marketing managers to coordinate and write Unisys responses to competitors’ activities.

### **Web Account Manager, Unisys Corporation, Blue Bell, Pennsylvania (January 1999-April 2000)**

Managed and maintained various internal and external Unisys web sites.  
Wrote and edited content for these websites.  
Interfaced with internal clients to explore ways to improve the effectiveness of the websites.

### **Engel Publishing Partners, West Trenton, New Jersey (Summer 1998)**

Researched and compiled information for CD ROM Directory of pharmaceutical companies.  
Utilized press releases, annual reports, and the Worldwide Web to obtain and compile pertinent information.

### **Externship with author Rebecca Price Janney, Horsham, Pennsylvania (January 1998)**

Assisted Ms. Janney with research and editing.

### **Supervisor, Guest Relations Department, Sesame Place, Langhorne, Pennsylvania (Summer 1996, 1997)**

Served as a liaison between Administration, Assistant managers, and line employees.  
Trained employees to extend quality service to park guests.  
Handled unsatisfied guests and resolved their problems through leadership and initiative.

**END OF  
TITLE**