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A Crown Of Violets



Synopsis

* Finalist for the Headmistress Press Charlotte Mew Prize Renée Vivien (née Pauline Mary Tarn, 1877-1909) was an English expatriate who made her home in Paris during the Belle Époque. In 1903, Vivien's collection of translations and adaptations from the Ancient Greek poetry of Sappho became one of the first works of modern European lesbian literature to be published by a lesbian writer under her real name. This courageous act was the death-sentence of her literary career. Parisian critics who had praised the mysterious R. Vivien as a young man of poetic genius began to snub at first and then simply ignore the newly un-closeted woman poet. Even in the face of ridicule and disrespect, Vivien continued to write and publish poetry, short stories, translations, plays, epigrams, and a novel based on her real-life romances with Natalie Clifford Barney and the Baroness Hélène van Zuylen van Nyevelt van Haar (née Rothschild). Vivien's poetry is now available in English translation by Samantha Pious: *A Crown of Violets* (Headmistress Press, 2015). I think it's very rare to encounter a new lesbian poet through translation and I am very excited to support this collection in its positive obsession and literary innovation alike. If it is that we are encouraged to each become the lover of Renée Vivien through her work, then this translator has succeeded in making the poet's wishes as transparent as an invitation can be: "The nave has been adorned to welcome you aright." Meg Day, Judge of the Charlotte Mew Prize This is an invaluable collection that brings Renée Vivien to life for English-speaking readers. Immigrant and sexual adventurer, Vivien wrote poetry strewn with broken harps and beautiful corpses. Pious's delicate but fearless translations draw out the bruised passions and troubadour rhythms that make Vivien essential reading for anyone interested in lesbian literature, fin-de-siècle poetics, or the agonies of sensual love. Kate Thomas, author of *Postal Pleasures: Sex, Scandal and Victorian Letters*

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is an excellent, valuable volume of poetry. Pious's translations of Vivien's poems are lucid, graceful, arresting, and accessible. This text is ideal for university teaching, particularly for those whose courses touch on issues of gender, desire, woman writers, and queer history. Its affordability is an extra bonus. I will be teaching three poems from this volume alongside Sappho's poems of same-sex desire later this semester, and I am looking forward to introducing my students to this understudied poet.

I first read these poems in the lesbian journal *Adrienne*, and was thrilled to find them collected in a volume of poetry. What a fantastic book, and many thanks to translator Samantha Pious for her masterful translations.

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