

of texts of all sorts. If we are to create works of reference which allow modern researchers easy access to the voices of social reformers and journalists, the well-meaning and the prejudiced, surely we are then obliged to create an equivalent repository of pauper scripts. In some respects this process is already well advanced. Working-class autobiography, for instance, is now an established source for social historians. But until we assume that the decisions and actions of the poor themselves are important agents of change, and that they help to fundamentally shape the course of social transformation, until we allow the poor greater agency, the urgency with which historians search out evidence for those actions and decisions will be necessarily muted.

This collection of documents provides a wonderful account of one side of the equation. And while the price will no doubt put off many private purchasers, it deserves a prominent place in public and university libraries everywhere. I am certain it will form the basis for innumerable undergraduate dissertations in the years to come, and will be the starting point for many more extensive academic and popular treatments of the period. It is also to be hoped that it will allow historians to go beyond the middle-class narratives it contains, to the wide variety of pauper scripts currently mouldering in the archives. The appealing stereotypes this collection includes should not be allowed to stand in for the very real people they purport to describe. Having read this collection with interest and delight, I will look forward to Marriott and Matsumura's next set of documents, which I hope will include the more intractable pauper scripts which certainly exist, but which are too frequently ignored.

Sapphic Refractions *by Margaret Reynolds*

YOPIE PRINS, *Victorian Sappho*, Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 1999, 279 pages; ISBN: 0-691-05919-5.

In Britain at the end of the twentieth century Greek was supposed to have been a dead letter. Schools interred their textbooks along with the Latin primers. At Universities the study of 'Greats' dwindled to courses called 'Greek and Roman civilization'. Declensions were forgotten and Classics declined.

In fact, it hasn't happened like that. College classes in beginners' Latin and Greek are full to bursting, Classics departments are being resuscitated, reception theory has never been such a vital area in Classics, in Modern Languages, or in English, and the old authors are all coming back to life.

This revival is partly due to the efforts of scholars who galvanized the Classics. For ancient Greece there were books like Kenneth Dover's saucy but serious *Greek Homosexuality* (Duckworth, London, 1978), or, more recently James Davidson's

Courtesans and Fishcakes: The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens (Harper Collins, London, 1997). Then books like Richard Jenkyns's *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1980) or Frank M. Turner's *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1981) turned the telescope on a past looking at another past, each image refracted though the distorting mirrors of social and cultural inheritance. And it is 'heritage' that is the key here; not just our own, but the one we started with – or the one we imagine, imagined as the point of origin. And what the scholars have been undertaking systematically is reflected in a wider millennial need to deal with the past, to understand the past, or more precisely, to fantasize about the past – for that is often what it is – to make up stories about our relation to the past.

One of the figures recently recalled to life is Sappho. Or Sapho, or Saffo, or Psappho. Actually she is a ghost that has never quite been laid, but she materializes more at some times than others, and this last return probably began with Susan Gubar's tantalizing essay in *Signs* 10 (Autumn 1984; pp. 43–62) called 'Sapphistries'. (A great title. But it wasn't hers; she'd borrowed it from an S-M dyke, Pat Califia, and the loan suggests how generously Sappho spreads herself.) After Gubar's brisk survey of twentieth-century women writers who'd been influenced by the Classical poet, came Joan DeJean's monumental study of the reception in the French tradition, *Fictions of Sappho: 1546–1937* (Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1989), and suddenly she was everywhere. Several new translations or editions were published, there were chapters and articles and books addressing (to a greater or lesser degree) the reception of Sappho, including Ellen Greene's edited volume *Re-Reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996) and Ruth Vanita's *Sappho and the Virgin Mary: Same-Sex Love and the English Literary Imagination* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1996). Then in the last four years no less than five major studies of the Classical Sappho have appeared: Margaret Williamson's *Sappho's Immortal Daughters* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995); Page DuBois's *Sappho is Burning*, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1995); Jane McIntosh Snyder's *Lesbian Desire in the Lyrics of Sappho* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1997); Lyn Hatherly Wilson's *Sappho's Sweet Bitter Songs: Configurations of Female and Male in Ancient Greek Lyric* (Routledge, London and New York, 1996); and another edited volume from Ellen Greene, *Reading Sappho* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996). Yopie Prins's book is part of this manifestation. It won't be the last visitation, but I'm willing to bet that it will prove a rare sighting.

Victorian Sappho is a remarkable work. There are four chapters: on Wharton's influential 1885 edition *Sappho: Memoir, Text, Selected Renderings and A Literal Translation*; on Michael Field (the aunt and niece couple, Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper who wrote collaboratively under this pseudonym from the 1890s); on Swinburne's poetry and prose; and on a group of women poets ranging across the whole century from Mary Robinson (1758–1800) to Catherine Amy Dawson (1865–1934). Here we have an esoteric selection of texts, none – with the possible exception of Swinburne – on conventional English courses or readily available to students (or even some scholars), none considered 'major authors', and all dealt with in the wrong order, for Prins's chronology works backwards, or sideways, or at a strange diagonal. It is perverse, but as Prins's project is to take another way, then I doubt that she will mind the description.

By focusing on texts which are not canonical Prins actually places her subject in the historical mainstream; these now 'forgotten' texts are the very ones that were read by the nineteenth-century audience. By looking at those texts through the filter of another text which was, on the one hand, enshrined within the establishment because it was Greek and supported the Hellenic ideal, and which was, on the other hand, outside the public order because it was lyric poetry, and a woman's poetry at that, Prins is able to marshal large arguments about the functions of nineteenth-century attitudes to poetry, education and sexual politics. By working through the nineteenth century in the wrong order, Prins is able to show how wrong our orders are. She makes here a crucial point about cultural transmission, about how it is not necessarily clearly delineated, let alone progressive in its nature, but often seemingly haphazard, because it is related to aspirational or regulatory values. I know very well that it is hard to disentangle the strands that lace, or cut across, the presentation of an image, especially one as old and as defaced as Sappho. Others have struggled with this problem. Admirable as her work is, Joan DeJean ended up with three massive chapters, switching period and text and scene with dizzying speed. Prins has done a good job with this difficulty, but more than that, she has turned it into a virtue, because she radically re-thinks what reception studies are and how they can be tackled.

And it is the imaginative re-thinking that has gone into this book that makes it so very remarkable. Prins has done well by her subject – the readings of all of her texts, both the Greek and the nineteenth-century English, are thorough, considered, revealing. What is most remarkable, however, is that she has listened to her subject. Instead of imposing a shape on all this intractable material, she has let the material shape her. It is there in her handling of chronology and cultural transmission, but in other ways too Prins has moulded her technique to her subject.

A lot of Prins's critical analysis plays with words, but this is not an empty display. Sappho's reception is about words, about translation, being carried across from one language to another, from one place to another, from one time to another, and another and another. Sappho has no authentic text, no native language, no home. She doesn't even have a proper name – she is all soft slidey sibilants and fluffy fffs in Western translation – Sapho, Saffo, Sappho, and she has lost her popping, spitting, hard ppp's that were there in $\psi\alpha\pi\phi\alpha$ and are just about still there in modern Greek's Ppssappoppo. But then, on the other hand, she does have many improper names; Sappho the Sapphist, the lesbian Lesbian. 'Sappho' never means one thing. It may mean many things at once. And out of this difficulty too, Prins has made a strength. Hence the puns developed around the collaboration of the double act that was 'Michael Field', or around Swinburne's love for the 'punishment' of stringent Greek metre which is linked to his taste for flagellation.

Listening to her subject also means that Prins reads her subject. The first three chapters are framed by allusion to Sappho's own (?) fragments; to her 'broken tongue' in Fragment 31; to the Sapphic topos in Fragment 2; to the 'limb-loosening' of Fragment 130. Again, it's a strategy of speech that is telling. It is entirely appropriate that nothing here should come singly: there is Sappho (or rather, many Sapphos), there is Swinburne or Field or Wharton, there is Prins, layer on layer. The self-consciousness of this critic means that she is always questioning herself, as well as her material, and her material's material. It sounds pedantic. It's not. When you take a subject like Sappho, who has been subject to being taken many times before, then it's imperative to examine your own motives. When you write on a subject like

Sappho, inscribed with the graffiti of the centuries, then we need to be able to recognize your hand.

Victorian Sappho sounds like an oxymoron. It's a good joke, but it's not the oddity it might be. There were plenty of other Sapphos in the nineteenth century – many of them more popular and more central than Prins's selection would suggest, so the juxtaposition of Victoria with Sappho is not as queer as it might seem (though it is queer as well). Prins's book – as she knows well – is not the end of the story. But it is the beginning of another story. *Victorian Sappho* will be important to reception studies, to comparative literature, to Classicists, to Victorianists. More importantly, it will be important for the critical book, because it suggests a whole new way of thinking and writing, one where a larger shape can be dictated by the character of the matter, and where the smaller figure of linguistic play can be true to the body of the text. In an Epilogue which reads (plays with? teases at? sets up?) Sappho's Fragment 55 'Dead you shall lie there.' Prins says that the Fragment 'substitutes forgetting for remembering'. This rings true for Fragment 55, but it is also true for the function of criticism, which replaces a text with the story of a text, forgets the author to remember the critic, or forgets the substance by remembering the surface. Sappho's long critical story is one where she has been remembered forgotten, and forgotten remembered. Yopie Prins – brilliantly – recognizes that.

White Folks

by James A. Miller

MATTHEW FRYE JACOBSON, *Whiteness of A Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Color*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1998, 338 pp; ISBN 0674951913, paper, \$16.95; ISBN 0674063716, cloth, \$29.95.

DANA D. NELSON, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men*, Duke University Press, Durham and London; 1998, 344 pp; ISBN 0822321491, paper, \$17.95

One of the most striking developments in the American academy during the past decade or so has been the emergence and rapid proliferation of 'whiteness studies', a field that takes as its point of departure the now widely accepted truism that 'race' is a social and historical construct and turns its gaze, therefore, upon the various ways that 'white' people have constructed themselves, or have been constructed over time. Titles abound: Alexander Saxton's *Rise and Fall of the White Republic*; David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*; Theodore Allen's *The Invention of the White Race*; Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White*; Karen Brodtkin's *How Jews Became White Folks*; Fred Pfeil's *White Guys*; Chris J. Cuomo and Kim Q. Hall's *Whiteness: Feminist*