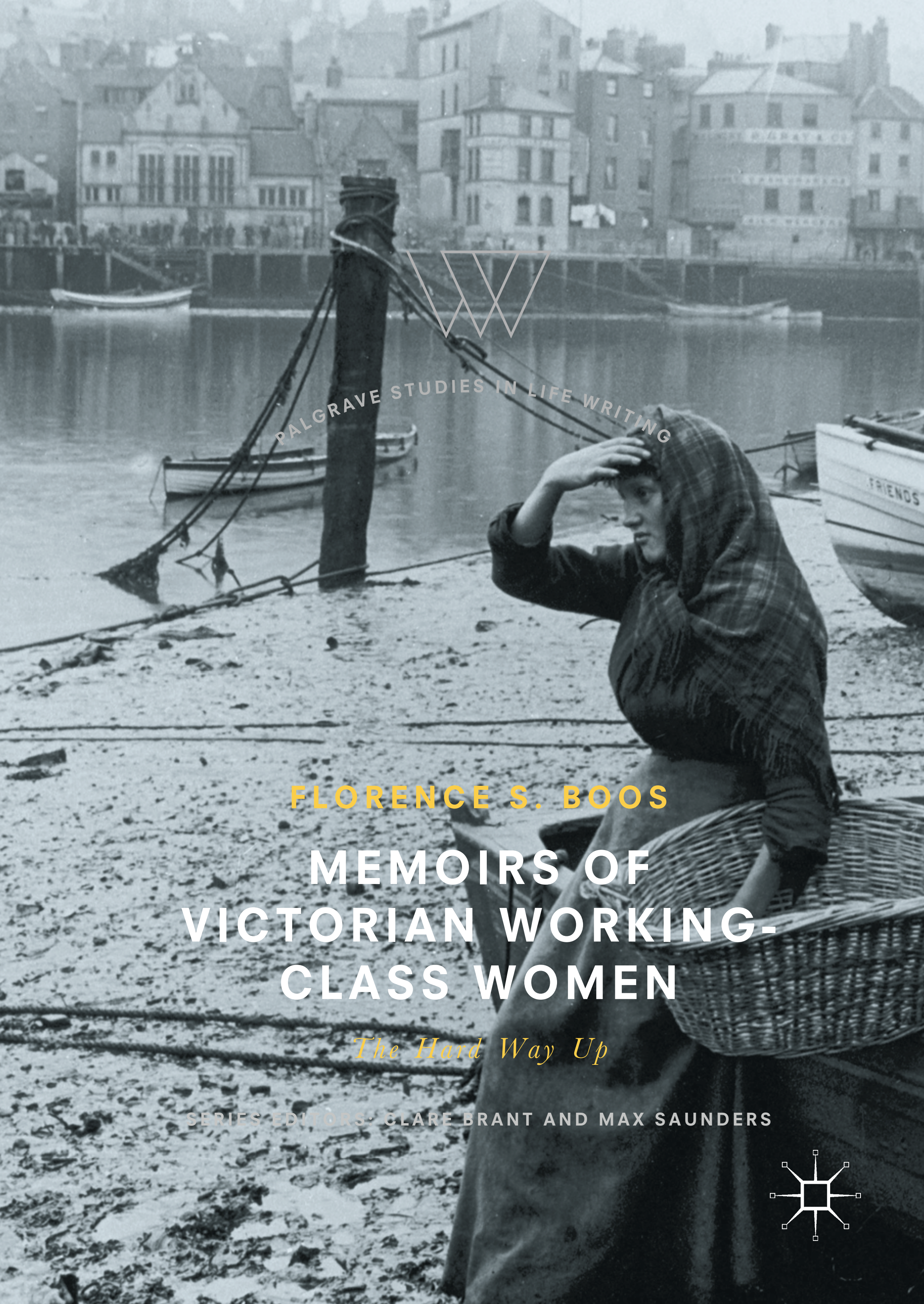

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MEMOIRS OF VICTORIAN WORKING-CLASS WOMEN

The Hard Way Up

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Florence S. Boos

Memoirs of Victorian Working-Class Women

The Hard Way Up

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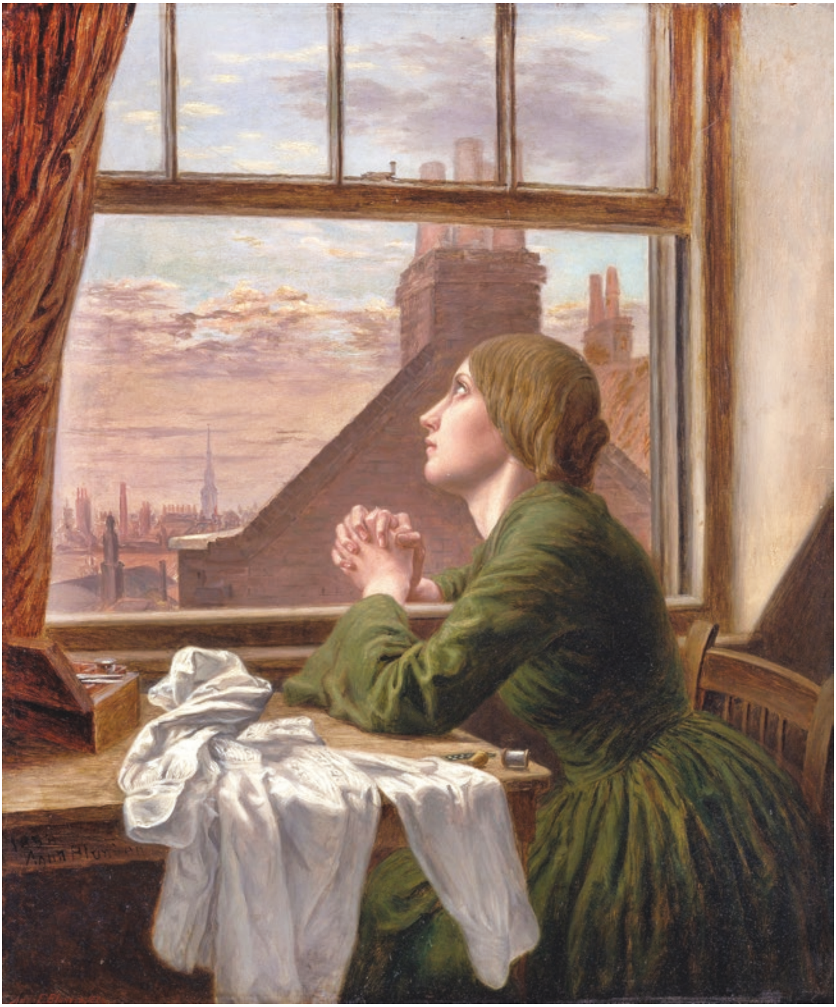

“For Only One Short Hour.” Anna Blunden, 1854. Courtesy of the Yale Center for British Art

In Memoriam William Boos

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I owe most to William Boos (1943–2014), who for almost five decades shared a commitment to the lives of those "forgot by e'en tradition's garrulous tongue." My husband accompanied me on many research trips to Britain for this and other projects, and his unerring ear for awkward prose has saved me from many flaws. My chief regret is that he cannot read this book, to which he contributed so much, and which is dedicated to his memory.

Iowa City, Iowa/Gibsons, British Columbia Florence S. Boos

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Memoirs of Victorian Working-Class Women

In recent years a number of scholars and critics have turned their attention to the study of nineteenth-century working-class poetry and autobiography as expressions of the culture of its period.[1] David Vincent's 1982 *Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom*, for example, interpreted working men's autobiographies as works of witness, reflection, and self-definition, but noted with regret that fewer than five percent of the works he had found were written by women.[2] Vincent, John Burnett, and David Mayall observed in the introduction to their comprehensive bibliography, *The Autobiography of the Working Class, 1790–1940*, that "[t]he most obvious

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[1] Linda Peterson, *Traditions of Women's Autobiography*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001; Mary Jane Corbett, *Representing Femininity: Middle-Class Subjectivity in Victorian and Edwardian Women's Autobiographies,* New York: Oxford University Press, 1992; Anne Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; Michael Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009; Emma Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn: A People's History of the Industrial Revolution*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.

[2] Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Working Class Autobiography.* London: Methuen, 1982. See also Nan Hackett, *XIX Century British Working-Class Autobiographies: An Annotated Bibliography.* New York: AMS Press, 1985, 22, and Regenia Gagnier, "Working-Class Autobiography, Subjectivity and Value," Chap. 4 of *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832–1920,* New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. Burnett, Vincent and Mayall, eds., *The Autobiography of the Working Class: An Annotated Critical Bibliography.* New York: New York University Press, 1984–89, 3 vols., vol. 1, rightly observe that "No other form of source material will bring historians as close to the meaning the past had for those who made it and were made by it," xxi.

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distortion in the body of autobiographies is the small number written by women. Of the main group, just seventy, less than one in ten, record the lives of daughters, wives and mothers from their own point of view. Few of these were actually published in the nineteenth century, and over half of this meager collection [is] still in manuscript" (Fig. 1.1).[3]

More recently, Jane Rendall has uncovered fifteen more examples of women's memoirs in "'A Short Account of My Unprofitable Life': Autobiographies of Working Class Women in Britain c. 1775–1845," and Barbara Kanner identified a dozen more for the first time in her annotated bibliography of women autobiographical writers,[4] so the ratio was presumably somewhat better than has previously been assumed. Uncertainties of attribution and identification have made it difficult to estimate how many more such autobiographies may be found, but those we have are poignant testimonies to the situation of women in working-class culture. To borrow a phrase from Jane Carlyle, "they too [were] there."[5]

Although the relative proportions of members of each social class varied by region and decade,[6] it seems generally agreed that at least eighty percent of the Victorian population fit this description at any given time.

---

[3] Burnett, Vincent, and Mayall, eds., *The Autobiography of the Working Class: An Annotated Critical Bibliography,* vol. 1, xviii. I am not certain what this "main group" is, since the bibliography includes more than 2000 items, but their point stands. Their claim that "there was a rough equality of opportunity in such schooling as was available to the working class during the nineteenth century" (xviii) is undercut by the statistics Vincent himself provides in *The Rise of Mass Literacy*, as discussed in Chap. 2, "Women and the Education Acts," and by the evidence of the histories and autobiographies of the period of the differential nature of the "education" (weighted toward sewing, religion, manners, etc.) provided to girls until the passage of the 1870 Education Acts.

[4] Rendall, "'A Short Account of My Unprofitable Life,'" *Women's Lives/ Women's Times*, ed. Trev Broughton and Linda Anderson, Albany: SUNY Press, 1997, 33. See also S. Barbara Kanner, *Women in English Social History 1800–1914: A Guide to Research*. Vol. 3, *Autobiographical Writers*, New York: Garland, 1987; and D. H. Edwards, *One Hundred Modern Scottish Poets*, Brechin: Edwards, 1880ff, 16 vols.

[5] *"I Too Am Here": Selections from the Letters of Jane Welsh Carlyle*, with an introduction and notes by Alan and Mary MacQueen Simpson, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

[6] James A. Banks, *Prosperity and Parenthood: A Study of Family Planning in Victorian England*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954; Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1996.

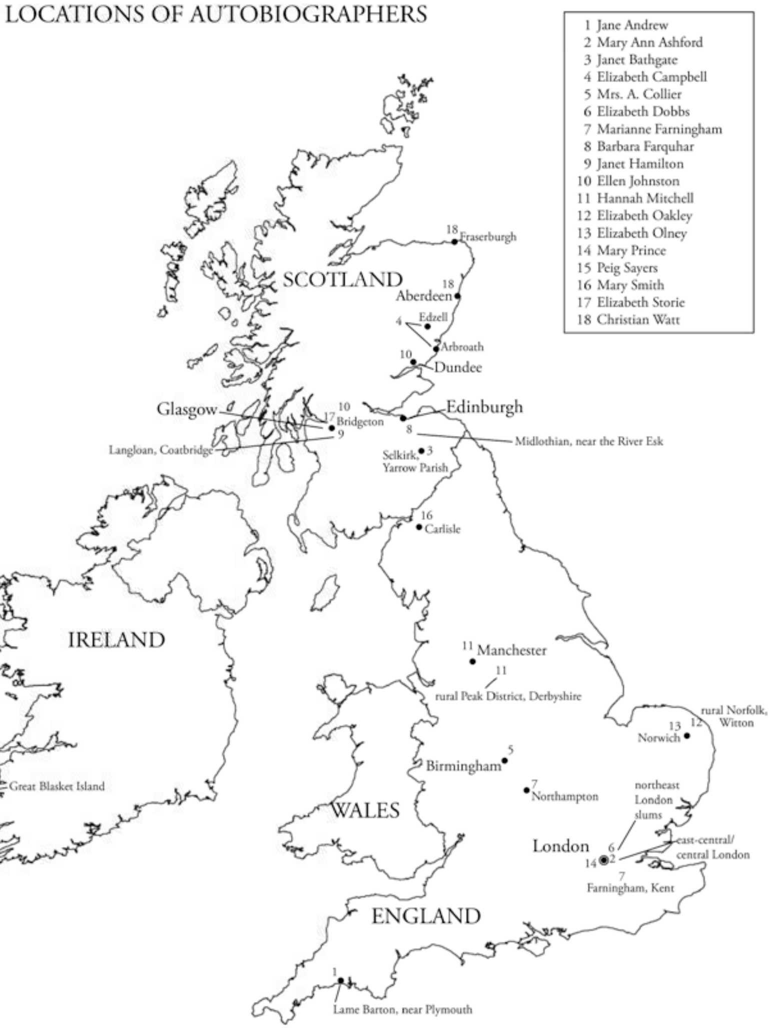
LOCATIONS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHERS
1 Jane Andrew
2 Mary Ann Ashford
3 Janet Bathgate
4 Elizabeth Campbell
5 Mrs. A. Collier
6 Elizabeth Dobbs
7 Marianne Farningham
8 Barbara Farquhar
9 Janet Hamilton
10 Ellen Johnston
11 Hannah Mitchell
12 Elizabeth Oakley
13 Elizabeth Olney
14 Mary Prince
15 Peig Sayers
16 Mary Smith
17 Elizabeth Storie
18 Christian Watt
SCOTLAND
18 Fraserburgh
18 Aberdeen
4 Edzell
Arbroath
10 Dundee
Glasgow
10 Bridgeton
17
9
Langloan, Coatbridge
Edinburgh
8
Midlothian, near the River Esk
Selkirk, Yarrow Parish 3
16 Carlisle
IRELAND
15 Great Blasket Island
11 Manchester
11 rural Peak District, Derbyshire
13 Norwich
12 rural Norfolk, Witton
5 Birmingham
7 Northampton
northeast London slums
WALES
London
6
14 2
east-central/ central London
7 Farningham, Kent
ENGLAND
1 Lame Barton, near Plymouth

Fig. 1.1 Locations of autobiographers, Kalmia Strong

Moreover, in defining the term "working-class" rather broadly, I will follow the example of Burnett, Vincent, and Mayall, whose *Autobiography* cast a relatively wide net which included those who remained poor throughout their lives, *déclassé(e)s* who suffered "severe and dramatic downturn[s] in their fortunes," and "Horatio Alger" figures who "climbed resolutely into the middle-class through the acquisition of wealth, privilege and power."[7] One might consider some of the memoirists in this volume *déclassées*, but none of them was ever wealthy, privileged, or powerful, though Mary Smith, perhaps the most prosperous, became a largely self-taught poet and teacher who managed to found her own school and save enough to make a number of generous bequests in her will.[8]

The working-class women who appear in this volume were daughters of farmers, factory workers, manual laborers, and, on occasion, artisans or tradesmen. Elizabeth Oakley, Elizabeth Campbell, and Jane Andrew, for example, were the daughters of farmers, Barbara Farquhar of a gardener, and Christian Watt's parents gutted and sold fish. Marianne Farningham, mentioned briefly in Chap. 2, was the daughter of a postmaster, Elizabeth Dobbs's father was a farrier (one who shoes horses' feet), and Ellen Johnston's father was a stone mason and her stepfather a factory weaver (power loom tenter). Janet Hamilton and Mary Smith were the daughters of shoemakers, in Smith's case of the proprietor of a boot and shoe shop. Although Ashford's parents had inherited a pub, they lost it through mismanagement and left her an orphan without resources.

Jane Rendall has remarked that the autobiographers she examined "were at different times employed in whatever task came to hand,"[9] and this might serve as a concise criterion for admission into the working-class "net" mentioned earlier. Mary Prince was a slave. Christian Watt, Mary Smith, Mary Prince, Elizabeth Oakley, Elizabeth Campbell, Mary

---

[7] Their definition begins: "Our aim was to include those who for some period of their lives could be described as working class, whether defined in terms of their relationship with the means of production, their educational experiences and cultural ties, by self-ascription, or by any combination of these factors" (xxxi).

[8] For example, the subject of Mary Ashford's *Life of a Licensed Victualler's Daughter* clearly fell into this category. Her autobiography might more accurately have been entitled *A Servant's Life*.

[9] Rendall, "'A Short Account of My Unprofitable Life,'" 34. "The most common occupation was service, at different levels, followed by keeping a shop and hawking goods across the country, needlework and dressmaking, spinning, weaving, and teaching." All of these occupations are represented in the memoirists discussed in this book, if one counts Watt's travels through the countryside to market her fish as "hawking goods."

Ashford, Janet Bathgate and Elizabeth Dobbs (pseudonym for Martha Grimes) worked as servants. Janet Hamilton was a tambourer, Ellen Johnston a factory worker, and Elizabeth Storie a seamstress. Oakley helped in the fields; Watt was a sometime servant, preparer and seller of fish, and asylum cook's assistant and laundrywoman; Campbell was a servant, shepherd, factory worker, and itinerant poet; Smith was a shop minder, servant, school assistant, and teacher before she became a headmistress; and Dobbs was at various times a servant, charwoman, shoe mender, street singer, and boarding-house keeper.

Absence of formal education was a class marker for men and women alike, but it weighed most heavily on women. All of this volume's autobiographers had left school by the time they were twelve, and their meager schooling ranged from less than a year's instruction in sewing up to more advanced training in comportment and memorization of biblical passages until the age of twelve. Much of their "education," in short, was narrowly focused on religion and domestic skills, a straightjacket which many of them remembered sadly and bitterly in their later memoirs.

A distinction has sometimes been made between "autobiographies," interpreted as searching accounts of the trajectories of their authors' lives, and "memoirs," construed as briefer descriptions of their experiences in a particular period.[10] Here I will apply the word "autobiography" more loosely to all working-class women's extended life narratives, many of which were written for family members and truncated by circumstances, though Christian Watt, Mary Smith, Janet Hamilton, and others wove social and political commentary into their narratives as well. Hamilton, for example, wrote historical anecdotes for her local paper, Watt's diary was a mass of unpublished penciled sheaves whose recollections were not always in sequential order, Elizabeth Campbell and Ellen Johnston appended brief accounts of their lives to a volume of collected poems, and Janet Bathgate's memories took the form of third-person reconstructed dramatic sketches.

Moreover, some working-class women's autobiographies were essentially edited works. Elizabeth Dobbs served as charwoman to a journalist, who transcribed her oral remarks, presumably with some refashioning. *The Autobiography of Rose Allen* is another allegedly hybrid narrative of a servant's life, recounting her grievances in what seems her own voice, but in fact authored by a middle-class reformer; and the title of *The History of Mary Prince* marked its authenticity for an audience which might otherwise have disregarded the transcribed oral testimony of a former slave.

---

[10] Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960, "[A]utobiography must always include, as a decisive element, … the meaning an event acquires when viewed in the perspective of a whole life" (17). As Gagnier notes, "Cartesian subjectivity was not assumed by most working-class writers and as a consequence autobiography often meant something different from emplotted self-sufficiency" (*Subjectivities,* 148).

In her *Traditions of Women's Autobiography*, Linda Peterson has characterized nineteenth-century *middle*-class womens' "auto/biograph[ies as] … a hybrid genre [which] drew on many genres of life writing—biography, diary, family history, domestic memoir, *Bildungsroman, Kunstleroman*, as well as classic spiritual autobiography."[11] Valerie Sanders has further suggested that women "rejected canonical formal patterning" to focus on "the unpredictable sequence of events which mirrored the randomness of their own real lives."[12] If anything, these remarks apply with even greater force to Victorian working-class women's memoirs of disrupted lives, mediated by middle-class patrons, and recalled in travail rather than tranquility.

Narrative Trajectory

Regenia Gagnier has observed that "[a]s represented by the canon, bourgeois … literary value … consist[ed in] belief in creativity, autonomy, and individual freedom; self-reflection as problem-solving, especially in writing; and a progressive narrative of self, especially in relation to family and material well-being,"[13] criteria which were alien to or denied many working-class writers. Theorists of women's autobiography have also argued that the patterns of women's lives and memoirs differed noticeably from those of their male counterparts, most markedly in women's greater preoccupation with the existence and rupture of social ties.[14] Working-class men often tried to discern larger patterns in the random circumstances of their lives, but many of their sisters—with the marked exception of Mary Smith, whose *Autobiography* resembled in many ways the autobiographies of her fellow reformers Harriet Martineau and John Stuart Mill—settled for introspection, moments of insight, and brief flashes of reconciliation with their fates.

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[11] Peterson, Preface, x.

[12] Valerie Sanders, *The Private Lives of Victorian Women: Autobiography in Nineteenth-Century England*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989, 9.

[13] Gagnier, *Subjectivities*, 169.

[14] E.g., Shari Benstock, *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, London: Routlege, 1988; Estelle Jelinek, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography from Antiquity to the Present,* Bsoston: Twayne, 1986; Sidonie Smith and Julie Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998; Julia Swindells, ed., *The Uses of Autobiography*, New York: Taylor and Francis, 1995.

Such resignation and reconciliation waived the narrative beginnings, middles, and endings deeply embedded in our approach to Victorian fiction and to literature in general, but it was consistent with models of consciousness later developed by French sociologists and philosophers of the "everyday," such as Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau.[15] In her preface to *The Story of an African Farm*, Olive Schreiner meditates on this distinction:

> Human life may be painted according to two methods. There is the stage method. According to that each character is duly marshaled at first, and ticketed. … when the curtain falls, all will stand before it bowing. There is a sense of satisfaction in this, and of completeness. But there is another method—the method of the life we all lead. Here nothing can be prophesied. There is a strange coming and going of feet. Men appear, act and re-act upon each other, and pass away. When the crisis comes the man who would fit it does not return. When the curtain calls, no one is ready. When the footlights are brightest they are blown out; and what the name of the play is, no one knows. … Life may be painted according to either method; but the methods are different. The canons of criticism that bear upon the one cut cruelly upon the other.[16]

Working-class women's memoirs reflected such exigencies in their authors' daily lives—a loss of control in the form of thwarted aspirations, heavy childbearing, and the "strait gate" of limited opportunities for print.

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[15] Henri Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, London: Verso, 2002; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Stephen Rendall, University of California Press, 1984. See also the discussion in Gagnier, *Subjectivities*, 144–148, 161.

[16] Schreiner, *The Story of An African Farm*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1883.

Yet they also exhibited a variety of narrative voices and styles which ranged from dryly factual to polemical, from spare to florid and dramatic, and from "standard" English to pithy dialect and colloquial speech. Decades-old emotions were relived if not laid to rest, as in the account of the lonely fate of Elizabeth Oakley's brother, the violent deaths of Elizabeth Campbell's sons, and the drowning of Christian Watt's son and husband. In these the writer's pain and desire to reach out into the void of death or disruption lingered on in the act of narration.

Moreover, these records often transcended more elaborate notions of "style." Elizabeth Campbell's brief remarks on her childhood possess a poetry and dignity which make them memorable, and would be hindered by a circumstantial narrative of her life. Janet Hamilton's recollections were pithy, satiric, dignified, and capable of controlled anger. Elizabeth Dobbs's colorful and opinionated speech revealed a natural dramatic flair and Janet Bathgate's gift for storytelling served her well in attracting and entertaining her young charges. All these memoirists rose to eloquence at certain points, when their language quickened with the urgent desire to express a formative incident or central truth.

Editorial Mediation and Working-Class Readers

Perhaps even more than their more comfortably situated sisters, working-class memoirists felt an obligation not to harm or offend living friends or relatives who would likely read their remarks. They were also much more acutely dependent on the good graces of editors, printers, and others who might help them launch a subscription for a projected volume or otherwise convey their work into print. With the notable exception of Eliza Cook, in fact, most working-class editors of reformist periodicals and newspapers were men, and working-class women's prose reminiscences such as "An Autumn Evening"—a meditation by factory worker "Marie" during a walk in the countryside—were quite rare.[17] Partial exceptions to this pattern of exclusion included Janet Hamilton, a gifted poet and temperance advocate who published reminiscences in her local *Airdre Advertiser* and Mary Smith, who placed her essays on local political issues in several northern newspapers. Not until the twentieth century did Ethel Carnie find a more visible periodical audience for her personal and political reflections in Robert Blatchford's *The Woman Worker* for 1909 and 1910.

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[17] *People's and Howitt's Journal*, vol. 1/6, 1849, 176–77.

A second category of memoirs consisted of brief autobiographical prefaces to volumes of poetry, often accompanied by frontispiece images of the authors. Elizabeth Campbell, Ellen Johnston, and "The Rustic Maiden" Jane Stevenson sketched their lives for such volumes. "The Rustic Maiden" could not afford a picture, however, and in a painful allegory of the uncertainties of preservation, a gross printing error left only a single page of her recollections. A third group encompassed memoirs by poor women which were written and printed to advance a cause. The most striking case was that of *The History of Mary Prince* (1831), alluded to above, an oral narrative transcribed by Susannah Strickland and edited by Thomas Pringle, the activist secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society. *The History*'s vivid account of the physical and psychological abuse suffered by a former slave incited successful lawsuits for defamation from Prince's former "owners" against Pringle and the Society, but is nonetheless credited with helping the cause of abolition to prevail in the Emancipation Act of 1833.

Jane Rendall has observed that "the commonest informing principle" which structured women's memoirs in the period from 1775 to 1845 was that of the spiritual autobiography.[18] In part this concentration may have resulted from the fact that religious groups were willing to sponsor persuasive accounts of poor women's conversion experiences. This genre had begun to wane by mid-century, but works with titles such as *A Bible-Woman's Story: Being the Autobiography of Mrs. Collier of Birmingham*, edited by Eliza Nightingale; *Recorded Mercies, Being the Autobiography of Jane Andrew … Compiled by Her Younger Daughter*; or *The Pearl of Days or, The Advantages of the Sabbath to the Working Classes, by a Labourer's Daughter. With a Sketch of the Author's Life, by Herself, and a Preface by an American Clergyman* continued to flourish (see Chap. 5). The floridity of the last title suggests that such memoirs may have been rather extensively edited and "improved," and often their narratives conveyed little or nothing of the authors' prior lives and non-religious experiences.

A very different cause-driven memoir was *The Autobiography of Eizabeth Storie, A Native of Glasgow, Who Was Subjected to Much Injustice at the Hands of Some Members of the Medical, Legal, and Clerical*

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[18] Rendall, "'A Short Account of My Unprofitable Life,'" 35.

Professions (Chap. 3). Storie was a poor seamstress who could not have afforded to publish her book, an attack on the medical and legal establishments which had wronged her through malpractice, corruption, and exclusion, but sympathetic doctors, lawyers, and fellow church members helped her publish the history of her struggle, circulated by subscription.

Other examples of editorial "mediation" were more heedless and/or narrow-minded. Ellen Johnston expunged the account of her unwed motherhood from the second edition of her "Autobiography," presumably at the advice of the "kind friends" whom she thanked for their suggestions.[19] The publisher George Coward slashed Mary Smith's *Autobiography* to half its original size, and George Gilfillan edited Elizabeth Campbell's earlier poems of social criticism out of *Songs of My Pilgrimage*, though he did not censor her brief "life." More benignly, poor women's families and descendants also preserved, and in some cases published, their foremothers' works. Janet Bathgate's lively recollections, for example, were originally intended for her nieces. Elizabeth Oakley's descendants preserved her memoirs for private reading before they were issued a century later, and several generations of Christian Watt's descendants retained her diaries, written in pencil in a mental institution, until a distinguished collateral descendant finally edited them for publication.[20]

In "Domestic Spaces, Readerly Acts: Reading(,) Gender, and Class in Working-Class Autobiography,"[21] Kelly J. Mays compared the pride aspiring working-class men brought to their studies with the thinly disguised contempt studious women endured when they neglected their household tasks.[22] A striking example of this belittlement was recorded by Oakley's descendants:

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[19] Johnston, *Autobiography, Poems and Songs*, Glasgow: W. Love, 2nd ed. 1869.

[20] Watt, Christian. *The Christian Watt Papers*, edited with an introduction by David Fraser. Edinburgh: Paul Harris, 1983. As of 1983, these were in the possession of Christian Watt's granddaughter. Though David Fraser does not mention her name, this was likely Christian Watt Marshall, daughter of Watt's son James Sims. See Chap. 5, fn. 20.

[21] Mays, "Domestic Spaces, Readerly Acts," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 80.4 (2008), 343–368.

[22] "The organization of family life, of school, and of the institutions and movements that made up the plebeian public sphere simply made it easier for men and women to envision, justify, and support the individual readerly efforts of boys and men as facets of, and contributions to, mutual improvement and the collective pursuit of respectability and rights." Mays, "Domestic Spaces," 359.

> It is … said by the family that the reason Elizabeth's autobiography ended so abruptly was because of her eldest son John. He often used to see her writing her life story and derided her efforts. "Oh mother" he said, "who ever will want to read about your poor boring life" and so, ground down by this, she stopped … and we are the losers.[23]

Ironically, the narrative he had derided recorded, among other things, Oakley's delight in John's birth ("I thought he was the prettiest baby I had ever seen. Never was there such beautiful eyes as my boy had. I thought all the world of him," 139) and her pride in his boyhood qualities, as well as her difficult but ultimately successful struggles to keep him and his siblings fed and clothed.

Yet there were exceptions to this pattern of disparagement. Janet Hamilton recalled that her husband transcribed the poems she had composed in her head but could not write down on paper, carried home armfuls of books for her from a modest local lending library, and traveled further afield to find other volumes the library did not have. Many years later, her son James transcribed poems she dictated to him after she became blind and edited her collected works after her death. And a young medical student and lawyer at the Royal Cornhill [Mental] Hospital in Aberdeen, impressed by the intelligence of one of the recovering patients who worked in the asylum, encouraged Christian Watt to use what free time she had to write an account of her life, beginning a project which stretched over several years.

Broader Patterns

In a chapter of *Subjectivities*, her study of British autobiographies from 1820–1920, Regenia Gagnier remarked: "Given that many working-class examples provide alternative models for autobiography, there is no reason (except perhaps Bourdieu's 'taste,' which amounts to class hegemony) to take middle-class autobiography as constitutive of autobiography as such" (151). Accordingly she suggested that working-class autobiographies most often assumed several alternative patterns: personal memoirs, sensational confessions, political and polemical vindications, conversion and gallows narratives, and accounts centering on self-analysis and self-examination.[24] The present volume's memoirs fit these categories only obliquely. They include several conversion narratives, most notably by "Mrs. Collier", Jane Andrews, and Elizabeth Oakley (though Oakley's conversion is only one among many incidents in her account), as well as narratives of personal or political vindication by Mary Prince, Elizabeth Storie, Mary Smith, and, to some degree, Ellen Johnston and Christian Watt. Janet Hamilton's "Sketches of Village Life and Character" were commemorative personal accounts, but they also offered her assessments of the political changes she had witnessed over time and a critique of the biases of middle- and upper-class historians. Only Dobbs's semi-fictionalized memoir could in any sense be considered "sensational."[25]

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[23] "The Autobiography of Elizabeth Oakley (1831–1900)," ed. R. Wilson, in *A Miscellany*. Norwich: Norfolk Historical Society, 1991, 148.

In "'A Short Account of My Unprofitable Life,'" Jane Rendall listed some additional frames of reference for her selection of women's autobiographies, in her case from 1775 to 1845. Among these were "the spiritual autobiography, the repentance narrative, the world of oral story, the petition, the genre of romantic fiction, the language of middle-class womanhood, and the life-cycle of the family economy" (35). Among the texts in this volume, Prince and Dobbs represent "the world of oral story", Storie and Prince provide alternate forms of "the petition," and Oakley and Campbell offer tales of "life-cycle(s) of the family economy," and, as mentioned, *A Bible-Woman's Story* and *Recorded Mercies* represent forms of "spiritual autobiography."

In addition, several narratives of working-class Victorian women offer modest counterparts of the male self-help narrative, in which the writer recounts her long struggles to attain a meaningful vocation and/or relative security. The narratives by Hamilton, Johnston, Campbell, Bathgate, and Smith, all poets, recounted ways in which their writers attained various degrees of occupational security and respect, corroborating Gagnier's claim that "working-class subjects were able to fashion functional identities in writing their lives to the degree that they shared a participatory discursive engagement with others ….”[26]

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[24] Gagnier, *Subjectivities,* 151.

[25] An example of a "commemorative story" may be Elizabeth Cadwaladyr Davis's *The Autobiography of Elizabeth Davis, a Balaclava Nurse*, Daughter of Dafydd Cadwaladyr, ed. by Jane Williams (Ysgafell), but many of her adventures seem unlikely. I have also omitted Mary Seacole's 1857 *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*, because, as the widow of a prosperous man and a tradeswoman, she was only in limited senses "working class," though at the time of writing her "adventures" she was suffering financial distress.

In her annotated bibliography of *Nineteenth Century Working-Class Autobiographies*, Nan Hackett traced the development of *male* working-class autobiographies through three phases[27]: an early period from 1800 to 1848, characterized by a heavily documented and class-oriented political emphasis, a middle period from 1848 to 1880, in which memoirs emphasized mutual aid and moral welfare, and a third period from 1880 to 1900, in which political activists appealed for action, and more personal memoirists ceased to concern themselves with conforming to middle-class morality. No size fits all, but somewhat parallel trajectories might be traced in the writings considered in this volume. Storie and Prince (1833 and 1859) reflected Hackett's early stage of documentation and polemical emphasis; Hamilton, whose books appeared between 1863 and 1885, embodied the middle stage of appeal to mutual aid and moral welfare; and Smith's *Autobiography*, published in 1892, recounted the life of an ardent political activist. Yet other memoirs fall somewhat outside this pattern: the sensibility of Johnston's 1867 *Autobiography* is class-identified as well as individualistic, and, although published relatively late, in 1894, Bathgate's *Aunt Janet's Legacy* appealed strongly to ideals of mutual aid and moral welfare.

Maternity, Sexuality, and Politics

In more concrete demographic terms, the memoirs of working-class women offer striking evidence of the effects of the period's high birth rate and infant mortality. Hamilton bore ten children, Campbell eight, Watt ten, Ashford six, and Oakley had borne five before becoming invalided. The semi-fictionalized Dobbs alluded to five children in her account, but the woman who most likely formed the original for her story, Martha Grimes, was a mother of eight. Campbell's four sons all predeceased her, and her poem "Summer Night" poignantly expressed her grief as she stood before her family's graves. Watt and Ashford each lost two children, and one of Dobbs's children was disabled and another died from lack of proper medical care. Brutal treatment seems to have left Prince unable to bear children, but it may be unsurprising that several of this volume's other memoirists were widowed or never married, among them Storie, Smith, and Bathgate, thus permitting somewhat more leisure for writing.

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[26] Gagnier, *Subjectivities*, 167.

[27] Hackett, *XIX Century British Working-Class Autobiographies: An Annotated Bibliography.*

Of course, children also had to be "reared," sheltered, and sometimes endured. Oakley, Watt, Dobbs, and Ashford referred to their constant struggles to provide for their offspring. Hamilton grieved when two of her sons took to drink.[28] Campbell found the subject of her life after marriage too painful to address in detail, but narrated the violent deaths of two of her sons and alluded to "sorrows so many and so deep that I never could tell them."[29]

Kelly J. Mays has observed that working-class married women's obligations to carry out their tasks in one- or two-room homes throughout a twenty-four-hour day left them little privacy and almost no leisure.[30] Working-class men were well aware that middle-class males had educations they were denied, and many working-class women likewise observed that their brothers had educational opportunities from which they were barred.[31] Janet Hamilton's pleas in her essays for the education of women carried a radical charge, and Mary Smith devoted many years of her life to initiating and teaching adult education classes for poor women in Carlisle.

In her study of nineteenth-century British working-class memoirs, Nan Hackett noted that many working-class male autobiographers seldom mentioned their spouses and children.[32] In a few cases this was true for women as well, in part because their memoirs centered on more general matters such as local history, but at least some of them remembered with pleasure their courtships and early married life. Elizabeth Oakley, for example, described her first attraction to the shy man whom she eventually married:

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[28] Her "Phases of Girlhood" describes with regret the need for "Maggie" to help "poor weary mother" with the cares of a large family. Janet Hamilton, *Poems, Sketches, and Essays*. Glasgow: James Maclehose, 1885.

[29] Elizabeth Duncan Campbell, *Songs of My Pilgrimage*. Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot; printed by John Leng and Co., Dundee Advertiser Office, 1875, xvii.

[30] Mays, "Domestic Spaces," 352.

[31] Mays, "Domestic Spaces," 346, 352–56.

[32] Nan Hackett, *XIX Century British Working-Class Autobiographies*, 22.

> I saw this young man that I had been so curious about and I thought in my own mind that he was the nicest looking young man I had ever seen for I could see at a glance that he had dark eyes and his hair was black and hanging in shining ringlets round his head. (137)

Janet Hamilton fondly wrote and told visitors about the circumstances of her wedding. She had married John Hamilton at age thirteen in a simple ceremony performed by a Glasgow minister, for which the couple had walked thirteen miles in each direction in a single day. Watt was however the only memoirist in this volume who looked back in print on her pleasure in marital sex: "Life had given me its last and final hidden secret, a moment poets have all written about" (68).[33]

Although women were largely excluded from male artisanry and radical politics, several of the volume's memoirists were nonetheless keenly interested in the progressive movements of their time. Hamilton, born in 1795 and with no access to formal education, was well aware that she had later benefited from the worker education movement and fervently supported it, and Mary Smith, influenced early in life by the speeches of abolitionist campaigners, was a lifelong radical, educational activist, and suffragist, who wrote and campaigned for these and other reformist causes. Christian Watt was a fervently egalitarian woman who throughout her life held firm if not entirely consistent populist views, and Ellen Johnston, although a temperamental individualist, wrote "O Come Awa', Jamie" and the scathing refrain of "The Last Sark" as a bitter attack on the deprivations faced by her class: "What care gentry if they're weel though a' the puir wad dee."[34] Whatever their other social and religious views, the memoirists in this volume all recognized and opposed social injustice when they saw it.

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[33] Watt, *The Christian Watt Papers*, 68.

[34] Her poems include verses on "The Working Man," "Lines on behalf of the Boatbuilders and Boilermakers of Great Britain and Ireland," and others on life in the factories where she worked. Her *Autobiography, Poems and Songs* is dedicated "To all men and women of every class, sect, and party, who by their skill, labour, science, art, literature, and poetry, promote the moral and social elevation of humanity."

VIOLENCE AND FAMILY CONFLICT

One of their shared perceptions was that violence, like charity, began at home. Mays observed that for many women autobiographers "the home [was] much more battle-front than safe haven,"[35] and Rendall notes of her sample that "[m]ost of the accounts of relationships between husbands and wives are shaped by a history of conflict."[36] Such conflict occurred in several guises—husband against wife, parents (usually but not always fathers) against children, employers against child servants, and, in the case of Mary Prince, the swingeing "discipline" of chattel slavery. The "Bible-Woman," for example, recalled the behavior of her deranged spouse:

> My troubles were now increasing, and my life was in jeopardy. One day my husband came home looking very strange, and walked directly into the cellar. … I crept softly down the steps, and saw him doing something to a pistol. I thought he was loading it, and rushed to him to snatch the pistol from his hand, but he held it with a firm grasp. After a long and severe struggle with him, I succeeded in gaining possession of it. … One night, when going to bed, I saw him take a razor out of his pocket, and put it under his pillow. I remained in the room, but not to sleep. The night was spent in prayer, and the Lord gave his angels charge over me. (36)[37]

Elizabeth Dobbs recalled her father's cruelty to her mother, described to her by an aunt. The two of them had entered a horse shed, and

> 'ee snatched [the reins], and afore she knowed where she was,'ee was a-weltin' 'er over the back, and 'im a big powerful feller as ever was. It took 'er so by supprise she never screamed. … Wi' that 'ee gives her one wizzin' blow, startin' the blood out through 'er thin sack, and was just a-raisin' the reins wi' a click through the h'air to give 'er another, wen she staggers and falls on the shed floor, in a pore little 'eap. (4)

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[35] Mays, "Domestic Spaces," 353.

[36] Rendall, "'A Short Account of My Unprofitable Life,'" 40.

[37] Mrs. Collier, *A Bible-Woman's Story: Being the Autobiography of Mrs. Collier of Birmingham*, ed. Eliza Nightingale. London: T. Woolmer, 1885, 36.

She also recounted her husband Dick's behavior a year after after they married[38]:

> "The Dook" 'ad been gittin' cruel to me. 'Ee give me many a blow. But 'ee was that artful 'ee never left bruises nor drawd blood, so I'ad nothin' to show 'ad I been inclined to arsk pertection.[39] But 'ee' d give me a 'ard shove, aginst a chair or the bed or table, wot was a strain to me muscles, or 'ee'd twist me 'and round. (174)

Such "chastisement" was legally condoned for many years, and crossed class boundaries.[40] A few days after she began her first employment as a servant at age twelve and a half, Elizabeth Green (Oakley) was startled when, after she had put the children to bed as instructed, her mistress entered her room and crept under her bed. Soon after the master followed and "found her crouching down to hide from him, and the wretch of a man that he was he knocked her about and abused her shameful" (122).

Nor was the abuse of husbands confined to their wives. Oakley recalled that her father, Samuel Green, demanded that his first son John go to sea, despite the latter's fear and reluctance, so that "he would not be burdened with him any longer." When John was drowned on his first voyage, she "was sent to the farm to tell my father the sad news, and … I remember to this day how careless and hardhearted he seemed about it" (125).[41] Her second brother, James, was a gentle and religiously inclined

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[38] As mentioned in Chap. 8, Richard Dobbs was likely Richard Goffin, whom Martha Grimes (Elizabeth Dobbs in the *Autobiography*) married 16 May 1880 in St. Martin's, Kentish Town.

[39] This 1900 *Autobiography* is the sole instance in which a memoirist mentions the possibility of police protection, perhaps indicating increased enforcement of laws protecting women from assault.

[40] Husbands were permitted to "chastise" their wives violently, leading to hundreds of cases of wife murder. In 1854 the Act for the Better Prevention of Aggravated Assaults Upon Women and Children (which permitted magistrates to judge such assault cases without sending them to a higher court) was passed, though often not enforced by judges sympathetic to the assailant. In 1878 the Matrimonial Causes Act permitted the granting of a separation order to women whose husbands had been convicted of aggravated assault. See Joan Perkin, *Victorian Women*, New York: New York University Press, 1995, 120–121, 130.

[41] "The Autobiography of Elizabeth Oakley," in *Miscellany*, 130.