Resigning the Needle for the Pen: A Study of Autobiographical Writings of British Women Before 1800

Cynthia Stodola Pomerleau

University of Pennsylvania

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Comments
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“RESIGNING THE NEEDLE FOR THE PEN”:
A STUDY OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS OF BRITISH WOMEN BEFORE 1800

Cynthia Stodola Pomerleau

A DISSERTATION

in

English

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of the University of Pennsylvania in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

1974
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INTRODUCTION

In 1974, I completed my doctoral dissertation on autobiographical writings of 17th and 18th century English women at the University of Pennsylvania. It was uncharted territory at the time, scholarly speaking, and for fifteen minutes I was probably the world’s expert on the topic. In fact, I was probably the only person in the world who had even read all these books. My dissertation sponsor, Maurice Johnson, certainly hadn’t.

I considered trying to find a publisher and revise it into a book, but I was deflected by the professional Darwinism of the seventies. Not much thought was being given to matching supply to demand at Penn or anywhere else, and the number of applicants for tenure-track positions greatly exceeded the number of positions available. There was one job opening in the Philadelphia area—a one-year part-time appointment at Haverford—and I didn’t get it. In order to have even a chance of obtaining a faculty appointment, I would have to commit to a commuter marriage. I probably wouldn’t have considered it anyway, but the fact that my younger daughter Aimée, then aged 3, was hospitalized for several weeks with a life-threatening illness during the time I went on the job market reinforced my decision not to pursue such a course. Instead, I took a job as the director of an oral history project on women physicians at the Medical College of Pennsylvania and subsequently developed an interest in scientific research, and my life turned in a different direction.

Nearly two decades later, the same daughter Aimée—by now a women’s studies major at the University of Michigan—told me a fellow student had found my dissertation on a supplementary reading list for one of her courses. “I didn’t know you’d done anything like that,” she said, and I realized that this chapter of my life was a total mystery to her and her sister. Moreover, the only way anyone could possibly read my dissertation, short of going to the University of Pennsylvania library, would be via the microfilm version. It struck me that if I word-processed the text, it could be made much more readily accessible to the casual reader and distributed to the few who might be seriously interested in a friendlier format. You are holding the results in your hand. Except for correction of a few obvious typos, the text has not been revised or updated. I have moved on, and undoubtedly modern scholarship has gone far beyond where I left this topic in 1974. But I offer it for what it’s worth to anyone who may find it interesting or useful.

This “reissue” is dedicated to my two daughters, Julie and Aimée Pomerleau, who were unbeknownst to them the inspiration for this project. Thanks are due to Char Olson and Jennifer Richardson for a word-processing job that proved much larger and more difficult than any of us had anticipated. I also wish to thank my friend Abby Stewart and my cousin-in-law Alan Wald for their kind words reassuring me about the value of the undertaking. Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to Ovide Pomerleau, who may be the only husband who’s ever been called upon to be supportive through the same doctoral dissertation twice.

Cynthia S. Pomerleau, Ph.D.
Ann Arbor, Michigan
December, 1996
I. AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND THE “HISTORY” OF WOMEN

Mary Wollstonecraft marks, for many historians and propagandists, the beginning not only of the history of English feminism but of the history _qua_ history of the English woman. John Langdon-Davies, as early as 1927, wrote in _A Short History of Women_ that the

history of women from the dim beginnings until the ends of the eighteenth century shows no absolute progress whatever: at times there are modifications, even amelioration’s of their social status, but as a whole women did not benefit, except at second hand, by all the progress, material and otherwise, the world has experienced. For women the Middle Ages, if not ancient history, lasted far longer than they did for society as a whole, and for them the date which corresponds in importance to that of the discovery of America, the capture of Constantinople, or the Reformation, is 1774 [sic; actually 1792]: and the event is the publication of the _Vindication of the Rights of Women_.

Elizabeth Gould Davis, in _The First Sex_, a fascinating attempt to create a usable past for women, calls her “the Tom Paine of her sex, with the one great difference that Paine’s book on _The Rights of Man_ helped to free a colony of Englishmen in the New World who were already far freer than their sisters had been for a thousand years.”

The idea that the common man and the conditions in which he lived might be valid subjects of historical inquiry is recent; that the history of the common woman (that is to say, virtually all women) might not be identical with that of her menfolk is even more recent. Histories which attempt to single out the significant contributions of women must either rest content with long hiatuses or fill in the gaps with much mediocrity. This sort of history, while sometimes presented by male writers (ranging from Boccaccio to George Ballard) more as a curiosity than as serious history, has the advantage of giving women a sense of their heritage and of their genuine if somewhat marginal and second-hand participation in Western culture.

An alternative lies in acknowledging, to use the words of Margaret George (drawing on Simone de Beauvoir), that “the only history of women, in short, may be pre-history,” and taking a more sociological approach to the subject. This is what Virginia Woolf had in mind when she said of the Elizabethan woman,

She left no plays or poems by which we can judge her. What one wants, I thought—and why does not some brilliant student at Newnham or Girton supply it?—is a mass of information; at what age did she marry; how many children had she as a rule; what was her house like; had she a room to

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herself; did she do the cooking; would she be likely to have a servant? All these facts lie somewhere, presumably, in parish registers and account books; the life of the average Elizabethan woman must be scattered about somewhere, could one collect it and make a book of it. 

An example of such snippet-gathering is Doris Mary Stenton’s *English Woman in History*, which gives a good feeling for how women in general must have lived during various periods in history. The documents themselves and their authors tend to lose their integrity and individuality, however, when they are merely culled for evidence to support a general picture.

Given the peculiar ahistorical nature of women’s situation through the course of history, what can the literary historian say about the period leading up to the explosive outburst of Mary Wollstonecraft? We know, of course, that movements such as English feminism do not generally materialize out of nothing. Indeed, the usual way of things, once an historical pattern has been discerned, is to discover a host of precursors, so that by now we are not surprised to find Pope labeled a Romantic poet or the Renaissance pushed back into the twelfth century. Certainly an interesting way to start answering the question of what was happening to English women in the period immediately preceding Mary Wollstonecraft would be to look at such earlier and milder feminist apologists as Mary Astel, who wrote in 1706:

> In the first place, Boys have much Time and Pains, Care and Cost bestowed on their education, Girls have little or none. The former are early initiated in the Sciences, are made acquainted with Antient and Modern Discoveries, they Study Books and Men, have all imaginable encouragement; not only Fame, a dry reward now-a-days, But also Title, Authority, Power, and Riches themselves which purchase all things, are the reward of their improvement. The latter are restricted, frown’d upon, beat, not for but from the Muses; Laughter and Ridicule that never-failing Scare-Crow is set up to drive them from the Tree of Knowledge. But if in spite of all difficulties Nature prevails, and they can’t be kept so ignorant as their masters would have them, they are stared upon as Monsters, Censur’d, Envyd and every way discouraged, or at the best they have the Fate the Proverb assigns them: *Virtue is praised and starved*.

But such an insight into the cultural factors involved in the creation and perpetuation of the “feminine sensibility” is rare. For the most part the voices of isolated intellectuals and visionaries like Mary Astell were either ignored or rejected, by women as well as men. More typical is the opinion of Mrs. Evelyn:

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Women were not borne to reade authors, and censure the learned, to compare lives and judge of virtues, to give rules of morality, and sacrifice to the Muses. We are willing to acknowledge all time borrowed from daily duties misspent; the care of children’s education, observing a husband’s commands, assisting the sick, relieving the poore, and being serviceable to our friends, are of sufficient weight to employ the most improved capacities amongst us. If sometimes it happens by accident that one of a thousand aspires a little higher, her fate commonly exposes her to wonder, but adds little to esteeme. The distaffe will defend our quarrels as well as the sword, and the needle is as instructive as the penne. A heroine is a kind of prodigy: the influence of a blazing starre is not more dangerous, or more avoyded. Though I have lived under the rooafe of the learned, and in the neighborhood of science, it has had no other effect on a temper like mine, but that of admiration.\footnote{Ibid., p. 142.}

Her reference to the needle and pen as unequal competitors for the allegiance of women can be found repeatedly in contemporary writings.

It seems to me, then, that a more fruitful approach than listening for voices crying out in the wilderness would be to attempt a kind of history of consciousness. In this study I have chosen to examine autobiographies written before 1800 on the premise that here if anywhere, in writings where an assessment of the author’s life as an organic whole is the explicit intention, is a logical place to start looking for the changes in self-awareness which might foreshadow modern feminism. (In fact, it is probably not coincidental that the era immediately preceding the feminist movement should also be the one in which the modern autobiography began to take shape, as both developments presuppose a certain level of self-awareness and sense of individual worth.) By examining these works within their historical, sociological, and literary contents, I intend to assess the attitudes of women towards their own lives and to discuss the changes which took place in these attitudes over the course of the period. Isolating a single but significant genre and exploring it in depth seems to me to combine, for the person interested in the literary aspects of changes in feminine consciousness, the advantages of a \emph{De Claribus Mulieribus} sort of study and a more sociological approach. It allows us to consider individual works as literary wholes without forcing us to ignore the historical setting from which they emerged. It also renders a teleological bias less likely, since we must take what we find rather than seeking out harbingers of what, with hindsight, we know came later. Treating Mary Wollstonecraft as the culmination of a growing wave of female dissatisfaction would be less than faithful to the truth, since changes in women’s awareness of their own situation as well as in the situation itself have tended to be retrogressive rather than progressive.

The question of exactly what constitutes an autobiography is a difficult one. Most modern readers have a rough intuition of what it is, but a rough intuition will not help us to classify borderline cases. No early author conveniently scrawled the word “Autobiography” across the flyleaf of her book; the word itself was only coined by Southey in 1809. (Early works so labeled were of course assigned that title at a later date,
usually because the author gave none of her own.) In general I have used the definition worked out by Roy Pascal in the first chapter of _Design and Truth in Autobiography_ and summarized by Dean Ebner in _Autobiography in Seventeenth-Century England_: “a self-written, prose account which attempts the recollection of the major portion of one’s past life and which focuses upon the inner thoughts or domestic or external activities of the individual.” Ebner goes on to add that:

This definition insists that works which may be so classified involve a distinctive attitude on the part of the author, a special mode of presentation. An autobiography does not, like a diary or a journal (which is really only a diary written at more extended intervals), record a series of moments with a minimal amount of selection and coherency. It attempts, rather--usually toward the end of life--a long-range assessment of past experiences, a shaping of the past, as it were, into a coherent pattern with stages and with self-consistency of character. It superimposes upon the welter of remembered facts, in other words, the unity and order of a present mental outlook. . . .

Letters and devotional writings also provide a wealth of self-documentary material, but I have omitted them because, like diaries and journals, they do not attempt to depict a life as a coherent and integrated whole, guided by a consistent self. Admittedly even these distinctions can break down, especially in the eighteenth century when writing becomes more self-conscious and novelistic, as in the case of Fanny Burney’s diaries (which I have not included) and Mary Delany’s epistolary autobiography (which I have). Since women have left little in the way of political or military memoirs, they present fewer problems of classification in such areas than their male counterparts.

It may seem desirable to ask before going too much further whether the woman’s autobiography exists as a distinguishable subset of the genre of autobiography. Indeed, Anna Robeson Burr goes to elaborate pains to reject such a distinction and to assert that “there is no sex to the autobiographer; on this field the writer stands or falls by the performance itself.” Granted. Yet on another level it hardly seems necessary to defend the old assumption that there is a “feminine sensibility” which characterizes women and which can be detected in their writing about themselves. Surely it is reasonable to expect that the social experience of women—erratically educated, their interests and achievements identified with those of their male connections (even the gifted Mary Sidney has been immortalized as “Sidney’s sister, Pembroke’s mother”)--would produce an outlook qualitatively different from that of a man. Moreover, it would be surprising of women, told so frequently, if seldom so eloquently, that man was “For contemplation...and valor form’d. / For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,” had

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10 Ibid.
12 From an epitaph on her often attributed to Ben Jonson.
not to some extent internalized the notion that their virtues, capabilities, and mode of apprehension were other than (and ultimately inferior to) those of a man. When Lady Winchilsea wrote of Lady Pakington that the latter

Of each Sex the two best Gifts enjoy’d
The skill to write, the modesty to hide

the sentiment is as commonplace as the implications of the dichotomy are chilling. We know from each of her writings that Anne Kingsmill, Lady Winchelsea had a certain degree of feminist awareness and resented male slurs on her achievements; but it did not seriously occur to her or her contemporaries that “thinking like a man” might not mean much of anything and might not be such a compliment even if it did. Dorothy Osborne, who wrote some of the most beautiful, sensitive, and natural letters in the language, would never have dreamed of undertaking anything more ambitious in the literary line; of Margaret Cavendish she wrote: “Sure the poor woman is a little distracted, she could never be so ridiculous as to venture at writing books, and in verse too.” Indeed, Mary Wollstonecraft worried less about the physical and legal restraints upon women, onerous though they were, than about the shackles of the mind, the slave mentality produced by the doctrine of female inferiority: “Why do [men] expect virtue from a slave, from a being whom the constitution of civil society has rendered weak, if not vicious?”

In practice, there is a difference between men’s and women’s autobiographies which can be perceived fairly readily and, with care, specified to some degree of accuracy. Actually, the question itself turns out to be a sort of pseudo-question. The fact is, taking into account the totality of their life-experiences, their attitudes toward themselves and their relations with men and each other, women had more in common with other women of whatever class than they had with men even of their own class. To a large extent this statement remains true today, but it was even more applicable during the period we are considering. Hence, women’s autobiographies as a topic is so little in need of justification per se that if, by some miracle we found no difference at all, we would be bound as serious scholars to ask why against all probability there should be none.

But while it is my claim, which I intend to support in this study, that women’s autobiographies can be distinguished from those of their male counterparts, I do not in any way mean to imply that there is necessarily such a thing as The Feminine Sensibility, monolithic and unchanging. On the contrary, it is apparent to even a casual reader that there is a great change in tone and orientation over the course of the period. The seventeenth century autobiographies tend to be straightforward and unaffected accounts of either domestic or religious devotion; the eighteenth century autobiographies are a much more varied lot, influenced a great deal by the novel and its techniques and evincing a more independent attitude towards self, work, and audience. As with many abstractions, I suspect it will be judged preferable upon closer inspection to use the plural and to discriminate among “feminine sensibilities.”

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14 Quoted in Reynolds, op. cit., p. 316.
15 Ibid., p. 51.
By now it is surely clear that I believe it is possible to consider women's autobiographies as a class, and that a study of these works will yield insights into the development of the feminine consciousness during the era which preceded the surfacing of English feminism. I should like to add what is probably clear: that although there are perhaps no major masterpieces among the works to be considered here, many of them are of sufficient literary merit to make them well worth studying for their own sakes. Virginia Woolf, in *A Room of One's Own*, commented to the effect that the wonder is not that there were no female Shakespeares but that there was even a male one. Similarly, it is hardly surprising that there were no female Gibbons; most of the male autobiographers, writing with many advantages and far fewer restrictions, also fell short of these high standards. We should rather be grateful that so many truly creditable performances have come down to us; and let us remember by the way that there were no male Margaret Cavendishes or Anne Halketts. The remainder of this study will be devoted to a thorough investigation of women's autobiographies before 1800, both as indices of the feminine consciousness and as literary productions. In chapters II through VI, I shall survey the autobiographical writings of women of the period and suggest some of the reasons why women, at this point in history, should have made a significant contribution to an emerging genre (as they had not, in the past, done with other literary genres). In chapter VII, I shall delineate the distinguishing characteristics of women's autobiography more specifically and speculate upon the possible relation between changes in the state of women's consciousness as revealed in their autobiographies and the beginnings of English feminism.

17 Woolf, op. cit., passim.
II. AUTOBIOGRAPHIES BEFORE 1700

Autobiography in the general form that we know it today is a relatively recent development. Even in antiquity, to be sure, it is possible to find isolated passages of autobiographical material in works of history or poetry. But as a distinct literary genre, representing an attempt to fulfill the author’s conscious and primary intention of recounting and assessing his life to date, autobiography before the seventeenth century is practically non-existent. The examples which have come down to us are few and far between and most certainly aberrant. The Confessions of St. Augustine is the classic instance, and no study of early autobiography of English women would be complete without a mention of the remarkable Book of Margery Kempe, written around 1436; but like the Confessions this document is something of a sport, and the circumstances of its composition are sufficiently problematical to cast doubt on its classification as an autobiography. For the most part, then, we can accept Wayne Shumaker’s generalization:

Before 1600, autobiographies of the modern type are nearly impossible to find; after 1600, they follow one another at decreasing intervals, until at last, around 1800, their authors seem to be writing in a tradition instead of feeling their way into a new literary genre.

While the definition and implications of the Renaissance are still much debated, it is generally accepted that the rise of autobiography was associated with the increases in historical sense and self-consciousness which took place during the period. And because the winds of change which swept from Italy northward through Europe took a while to blow across the channel, the appearance of autobiography in England, like other literary forms, came relatively late. What Ebner terms “the first indisputable autobiography written in England” was produced by Thomas Whythorne in 1576, but in all, only a score or so autobiographies have come down to us which were penned in England before around the middle of the seventeenth century. After 1640 there was a sharp increase in the number of British autobiographies; some of this increase can be attributed to the incipient formation of a tradition of religious autobiography in the various Protestant sects.

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It should come as a surprise to no one that although women probably comprised more than half the population, their autobiographies make up roughly ten percent of the total produced in the seventeenth century. As might also be expected, seventeenth century autobiographies by men exhibit more variety than those of their female counterparts; military memoirs, political memoirs, accounts of a religious calling, family histories, boasting self-exposés—all these can be found among the production of men. Men of course had more educational opportunities than women and access to a wider range of experience; though self-revelation was in general thought of as inappropriate and requiring some justification, the men who undertook it were at least not subject to a prejudice against members of their sex writing at all. The male autobiographers also represent a broader spectrum socially, ranging from peers (such as Lord Herbert) to ploughmen or at least their sons (such as Edward Barlow), from divines (such as Richard Baxter) to charlatans, mountebanks, and impostors (such as William Fuller).

What is noteworthy about the productions of women, whatever their numerical and other limitations, is that they are by no means anemic imitations of those of men; on the contrary, in many respects they seem more modern, more subjective, more given to self-scrutiny, more like what we have come to know as autobiography. Furthermore, writings by women are among the early examples of the form. Two of the most remarkable autobiographical works of the century were written by women before 1660 (Anna Trapnel and Margaret Cavendish). Indeed, autobiography must share with the novel the distinction of being one of the first literary genres which women actively participated in shaping (if the word “shaping” can be used to describe the creation of a form many of whose early examples went long unpublished). Heretofore even the most gifted female intellects worked within forms already perfected and refined by male artists.

1. The Authors

Before attempting a more specific analysis of the feminine contribution to the genre of autobiography, I think it would be useful to look at the works individually, especially as most of them are not widely known, even to scholars of the period, and some are not generally available. I shall quote generously in order to convey the distinctive flavor of each work. In my opinion, several of these works deserve modern editing, both for their intrinsic merit and in order to make them more accessible to people interested in identifying and publicizing the role which women have played in Western culture; I hope I shall have made a small contribution towards rescuing their authors from

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6 “In 1800 it was estimated that there were 450,000 women and but 375,000 men in London.” Jay Barrett Botsford, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century: As Influenced from Oversea* (New York: Macmillan, 1924), p. 280.

7 Calculated from the bibliography in Delany, op. cit.

8 We must, of course, keep this fact in perspective. The only way we can distinguish pioneering works from literary dead ends is by what ultimately comes to be popularly accepted as the norm. The reticent record of a distinguished public career has its own dignity; but—partly because women have become a larger part of the reading and writing public and thus have played a larger role in the formation of literary taste—a more personal, confessional tone has come to be the hallmark of autobiographical excellence.
oblivion. I shall discuss them in approximately the order in which they were written, although in some cases that date is rather difficult to ascertain.

a. Lady Lucy Knatchbull

An early and unique autobiography is that of Lady Lucy Knatchbull (1584-1629), a devout Catholic nun who helped to found a convent at Ghent in the early part of the seventeenth century. It is incorporated into Sir Tobie Matthew’s Life of Lady Lucy Knatchbull, an early specimen of biography; Sir Tobie was Lady Lucy’s spiritual director, and the narrative is evidently addressed to him.

From Sir Tobie we learn that Lady Lucy was the daughter of a prominent Catholic family; she was a high-spirited young woman, and her early religious devotions were perfunctory. We hear nothing of this period of her life from Lady Lucy herself. Her account of “her own whole Life” (p. 27) begins at the age of seventeen, when she first receives a call to the religious life:

When I arrived at the age of seventeen years or thereabouts, I grew, through the great mercy of God (by occasion of the vanity of the world, and the danger of death), to cast mine eyes in upon myself. And as I was taking a view of the dangerous condition wherein I stood, I conceived a great desire to begin in good earnest to serve Almighty God, upon whom I had so seldom thought to any good purpose till then. The happiness of a Religious Life was after this very often represented to my mind, but with unspeakable affliction to me. For all my thoughts at those years were chiefly running after advancement and a kind of honest liberty, which I loved as my life and which yet, if I had held on a worldly course, I do now verily fear might perhaps have brought me by degrees to eternal misery. I did often, in those days shut the ear of my Soul against Almighty God; but it pleased him to continue to call upon me so loud that I could not choose but hear him. In so much as that, between the desire that my Soul had to embrace his divine Vocation and the extreme repugnance which Sense found in it, my heart was, as it were, even torn in pieces. Notwithstanding, I humbly thank our good Lord (and I ought never to cease, to thank him for it), after three years’ struggling, I broke (through the strength he gave me) the chain in which my affections held me as strongly as with so many fetters, and in despite of all my ill inclinations I took (because I believed it to be the will of God) a firm resolution to be Religious; though I could not then see how it was possible but that I should suffer all the days of my life intolerably by it. After this resolution, which I made some half a year before my coming over, my thoughts were very quiet, and I conceived great hope that God would give me as much comfort as was necessary for the doing of him faithful service; and more than that I desired not, for it was his holy will that I adored. (pp. 27-28)

The propriety of this beginning can be understood when we consider that, as she later suggests, her spiritual birth is of more consequence to her than her physical birth:

I received the holy Habit of Religion in Christmas, upon the Feast of St. Thomas of Canterbury, and it was a day of exceeding comfort to me. Methought I felt myself then begin to be happy. This holy time of the Nativity of our dear Lord fell very fit for my purpose; because I desired to be born to new grace, and in conformity to this Blessed Babe to become a Child, and in all things to follow what should be ordained me by holy Religion, which I took to be my Mother. (p. 33)

During this period the English Catholic Church was not a vigorous institution, and it was not unusual for the Catholic young women to pursue their callings abroad. Lady Lucy originally went to a convent in Brussels, where she quickly became involved in convent politics: she was associated with an abortive attempt, apparently fostered by the Jesuits, to leave and begin a new monastery. The enterprise faltered, she apparently came to feel she had been manipulated, and she decided to return humbly to her original house:

. . . I passed some days in extreme affliction, especially three or four, in which I do not remember that I was able to give myself any one thought of comfort. After a while, when I was a little come to myself, a great friend of mine and I, who often conferred together, began to think what we were best to do; and having considered how all things stood, and earnestly commended the matter to Almighty God, we gave each other our promise to return to the Monastery from whence we came, without disputing what Superiors (whom we knew we had already disgusted) would or could do to us; for we were resolved for the love of God to suffer all. And with this resolution, so soon as we could, we parted from Louvain without acquainting any creature with our pretext, and so went to the Monastery. Whereby Father Baldwin's means, we were, upon the Nativity of our Blessed Lady, received, with promise both on their parts and ours that all former unkindnesses should be forgotten.

I was glad (being entered again) to see myself amongst the Religious; and yet my heart did ache with apprehension of I knew not what. But having passed a day or two, my fears grew to an end, and I could pray, read, sing, sweep, wash dishes or whatsoever else, and all with pleasure. . . . (p. 32)

Her happiness is short-lived, however, for shortly after receiving “the holy Habit of Religion” (p. 33), she suffers a painful loss of faith which she describes vividly:

I fell soon after Easter into extreme darkness of mind, and the observances of holy Religion grew tedious to me; I saw myself fail so fast that I began to despair of ever being able to get virtue in any reasonable
degree. For so much as concerned Sin, I would to God I committed no more now than I did then; and yet, I knew not how, but by little and little I fell into so deep a melancholy that I gave myself for almost lost, both to this world and that to come. I began to doubt in divers things, concerning Faith, if not in all: I hope they were not absolute doubts (for that were horrible Sin) but my understanding was obscured, my judgment suspended, and I knew not what to think. Divers times, when I went to Pray, it came to my mind with deep affliction, Is there a God, to hear me? and then, as being seized on by a world of fears, I should think after this manner, If there be a God, he is cruel to me. But then instantly (taking myself in the manner) I would reply, O, Jesus, yes, there is a God; sure there is a God; and yet how shall I be sure? Is it possible that the greatest part of the world should not know him, or at least not rightly serve him? Then reflecting as it were, at the very end of my wits, I should think, Lord what shall I do; I know not what to think; I desire to think; I desire to know the truth; but who shall resolve me? It seemeth to me yet, that every power of my Soul was tormented. I hated to live, and yet did extremely fear to die. Comfort I had none, neither from heaven nor Earth, and methought that whencesoever I was alone there was still a Devil behind me, ready to lay hold on me. I was careful to conceal what I felt from any creature except only Father Anthony Hoskins, whom I saw to be very sensible of me. He gave me Relics, which he said had power against the Devil; and bade me be devout to Blessed Father Ignatius, which I promised him I would be. I was for the most part, whilst I was with him very quiet, and hoped that all had been past; but oftentimes, I was no sooner out of his sight but I thought that I should have gone mad; and once did half believe myself to be so. It was near five months, from the time that I fell into this Conflict, that I was thoroughly free: but the extremity of it, as I remember, lasted not above six weeks or two months. This which I have said did humble my Soul exceedingly, and brought her down upon her knees, She saw it was nothing that she could do of herself; but it was God that must do all that is good in her. (pp. 33-35)

Most of the narrative is taken up with her spiritual experiences. She offers the following analysis of her weaknesses:

My soul was yet weak and idle, and fell easily into such defects as ill custom led her to: as, to talk too much and of unnecessary and idle things; to excuse myself, though I were in fault; to take delight to be esteemed wise; to be, even with anxiety, careful to content those persons whom I loved, and to grieve impatiently when I saw or knew them to be troubled; to be inwardly angry against such things as seemed to me to be against reason, and to shun, as near as I could without note, those creatures and those occasions which in nature I did not like. Against these things, and I know not how many more, I was to fight, and my soul did struggle to
be at liberty. But methought it fared with me as with a Horse or some such Beast that is fallen into the mire, who the more it plunges the faster it sticks, unless some reasonable creature come to help it. This I made to be my case; and to the end that it might please our most merciful Lord to favour me herein I made the Spiritual Exercise, in which one of the Meditations which I had was of Resignation. (p. 29)

She is subject to swoons and visions. At one point she sees Jesus as a boy of twelve (p. 41); at another she sees his foot in great detail: “The instep and middle part where the nail had pierced was very beautiful and had a kind of Splendour, yet not so but that it appeared to be perfect flesh, and it was made a little big; the other part of the Foot was, as it were, shadowed (but not hid), so that I could not so well discern it: (p. 45). Her devotion is so intense that at times her feeling of union with God is actually a physical sensation:

When I had received the holy Communion, and was returned into the Place in which I was to Pray, methought I found my Soul, as it were, casting herself into the Arms of our Lord; and he, having regard to her, seemed in the same instant to draw into himself the affections of my whole heart. I know not how to say this was nor did I understand what passed in this time, so that I cannot give it well to be understood; but with this I became all faint and, as coming out of a most delightful trance, knew not what to do, but as it were to seek to die, by engulfing myself into that Sea of goodness. It comes to my mind that I may make a comparison between our Lord’s drawing my affections into him and the Sun’s drawing of Vapours from the earth; and the eye of my understanding did discern something in that manner; or rather a Beam of Motes to pass from me to our Lord. With this my Soul began to be wise; for now she was made soberly drunk, and in an instant turned from those follies in which she had taken unlawful delight. I did now often tell our Lord that I loved him . . . (p. 42)

Resemblances to the writing of St. Teresa are striking and not coincidental; Lady Lucy refers to the saint in her narrative and was clearly familiar with her work.

This document is important not only as a very early example of English autobiography, but also as a rare glimpse into the spiritual life of a Catholic woman and into some aspects of convent routine. For its existence in the vernacular we have probably to thank her sex; a comparable account by a male Catholic would doubtless have been written in Latin.

b. Lady Anne Clifford

Another very early work is that of Lady Anne Clifford, better known as a patron of John Donne. The Lives of Lady Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset, Pembroke and
Montgomery (1590-1676) and of her Parents. Summarized by Herself is in the tradition of family history, and as such, it is a somewhat unlikely production for a seventeenth century woman. But Anne Clifford took her responsibilities as a matriarch seriously; indeed, she spent her later years in a massive restoration of the family estate, the castle of Skipton—although, as she tells us, it is only because of the fortuitous failure of all the collateral male lines in her family that this responsibility devolved upon her:

My father, for the love he bore to his brother, and the advancement of the heirs male of his house, by his last will and other conveyances which he had formerly sealed, did leave to his brother Francis, who succeeded him in the Earldom of Cumberland, and to the heirs male of his body, all his castles, lands and honors, with a proviso that they should all return to me, his only daughter and heir, if the heirs male failed; which they afterwards did. . . (pp. 36-37)

But it was a responsibility which she accepted with spirit and one which she clearly enjoyed—even to the extent of engaging in or fending off a long series of lawsuits, including one instituted by her uncle in an attempt to gain control of her land. She also took pride in her charitable works, such as an almshouse “which had been almost two years a-building, so as I now put into it twelve poor women, eleven of them being widdoes, and the twelfth a maimed maid, and a Mother, a deceased minister’s widdow” (p. 62).

The details of her life, especially as they form a part of the annals of her family, are a source of fascination to her; how often do we learn from an autobiographer when and where she was conceived?

I was, through the mercifull providence of God, begotten by my valiant father, and conceived with child by my worthy mother, the first day of May in 1589 in the Lord Wharton’s house in Channell Row in Westminster, hard by the river of Thames, as Psalm 139. Yet I was not born till the 30th day of January following, when my blessed mother brought me forth in one of my father’s chief houses called Skipton Castle in Craven, Eccles. 3; for she came down into the North from London with her two sons, being great with child with me, my father then being in great peril at sea in one of his voyages. For both a little before he begat me and a little after, it was ten thousand to one but that he had been cast away on the seas by tempests and contrary winds; yet it pleased God to preserve him, so as he lived to see my birth, and a good while after, for I was fifteen years and nine months old when he died. (p. 33)

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She also gives us something that we do not find again in women’s autobiography until the eighteenth century—an extended description of her physical appearance, though again, explicitly within the context of her family’s history:

    I was very happy in my first constitution both in mind and body, both for internal and external endowments, for never was there child more equally resembling both father and mother than myself. The color of mine eyes were black like my father, and the form and aspect of them was quick and lively like my mother’s; the hair of my head was brown and very thick, and so long that it reached to the calf of my legs when I stood upright, with a peak of hair on my forehead, and a dimple in my chin, like my father, full cheeks and round face like my mother, and an exquisite shape of body resembling my father. But now time and age hath long since ended all those beauties, which are to be compared to the grass of the field. . . . For now when I caused those memorables of myself to be written I have passed the 63rd year of my age. And, though I say it, the perfections of my mind were much above those of my body; I had a strong and copious memory, a sound judgment and a discerning spirit, and so much of a strong imagination in me, as that many times even my dreams and apprehensions before hand proved to be true. . . . (pp. 34-35)

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this autobiography is the ambiguous picture she gives of her life with her two husbands:

    I must confess with unexpressible thankfullness, that though through the goodness of Almighty God and the mercies of my Savior Christ Jesus, Redeemer of the World, I was born a happy creature in mind, body, and fortune, and that those two lords of mine, to whom I was afterwards by the Divine providence married, were in there several kinds worthy noblemen as any then were in this kingdom; yet was it my misfortune to have contradictions and crosses with them both; with my first lord about the desire he had to make me sell my rights in the lands of my antient inheritance for mony, which I never did, nor never would consent unto, insomuch as this matter was the cause of a long contention betwixt us, as also for his profuseness in consuming his estate, and some other extravagancies of his; and with my second Lord, because my youngest daughter, the Lady Isabella Sackvill, would not be brought to marry one of his younger sons, and that I would not relinquish my interest I had in 5000 pounds, being part of her portion, out of my lands in crowen. Nor did there want diverse malicious illwillers to blow and foment the coals of dissention betwist us. . . . Insomuch as a wise man that knew the insides of my fortune would after say that I lived in both these lords’ great familys as the river of Roan or Rodamus runs through the lake of Geneva, without mingling any part of its streams with that lake; for I gave myself wholly to retiredness, as much as I could, in both these great families, and
made good books and virtuous thoughts my companions, which can never
discern affliction, nor be daunted when it unjustly happens. And by a
happy genius I overcame all these troubles. . . . (pp. 39-40)

Dean Ebner associates the obvious tug-of-war between the realities of her marriages and
the interpretation she desires to impose upon them with an Anglican tradition of
autobiography—a tradition which eschewed the psychological penetration and
consciousness of sin that is manifested in the conversion psychology of sectarian
autobiography and which, drawing on hagiography, characterizes people as the epitome
of virtue. She had some difficulty, Ebner concludes, in portraying the Earl of Dorset as a
saint:

Lady Clifford and the Earl had been quarreling nearly a lifetime over the
financial control of her estate. Yet such was the determination of
Anglican autobiographers to enshrine the heroic side of human nature that
when Lady Clifford came finally to summarize the Earl’s character she
ignored his greed and rendered him not only wise but patriotic and
generous.\footnote{Ebner, op. cit., p. 80.}

Ebner’s point may be valid, but I think a more pressing reason for the tension is the fact
that Anne Clifford saw herself not simply as marrying a man but as allying herself with a
family, and even more importantly as maintaining the dignity of her own family. The
petty or not so petty marital squabbles were, in a sense, trivial or even irrelevant. For the
whole tradition of which she is a part—a tradition according to which she sees herself as
“greatly born and matched” (p. 35)—is still a live and meaningful one to her. It is only
later, in other times and other classes, that we will uncover a sense of alienation which
destroys this long perspective on individual troubles. Nevertheless, we sense Anne
Clifford’s relief when, having done her duty by society, she is permitted “a private
retiredness, which I could never do till after the death of my two husbands” (p. 36).

It is not surprising that the Civil Wars were a cause of a great deal of disruption in
her life. At one point she tells us that she “continued to lye in my own chamber without
removing, six years and nine months, which was the longest time that ever I continued to
lye in one house in all my life, the Civill Wars being then very hot in England, so that I
may well say that was then as it were a place of refuge for me to hide myself in, till those
troubles were overpassed” (p. 51). She found her estates, she informs us, in “extream
disorder” (p. 56) because the Civil Wars prevented her access to them. When the Castle
of Skyperton is almost restored, she cannot move in “partly by reason of the small and
unwholesomenes of the new walls, and partly by reason of the garrison of foot-soldiers
which was put in there about the 4th of August under the command of Ensign Robert
Fenner, for securing thereof, by reason of the troubles now in England” (p. 87). At this
period, let us remember, she is no longer young; yet she is tough and pursues her plans
with remarkable tenacity.
This work is for the most part a rather tedious account of births, deaths, and lawsuits--basically family history--but the occasional nuggets in which shines a picture of a masterful woman, with a strong sense of her position in society, are well worth mining.

Anna Trapnel was an inspired preacher who was, to quote William York Tindall, “gifted with the accomplishments of prophecy and song, which she combined in continual performance of her own melodious compositions.”12 She was subject to public trances and visions, and in addition to her autobiographical writings published poems and devotional works. She was claimed by the Baptists, Fifth Monarchy Men, and Quakers; possibly as Luella M. Wright speculates, she belonged to all in turn.13 Her A Legacy for Saints,14 in any case, seems unlike the typical Quaker autobiography in both style and content; its emphasis on “free grace” would seem to ally it with the Baptists. It is a striking work and an early one—it was published in 1654, twelve years before Bunyan’s Grace Abounding, and was written in about 1646.

This work is rather formless and in fact was probably not intended as a coherent whole. The first twenty pages describe Anna Trapnel’s conversion and the experiences leading up to it, the next twenty or so provide a record of her spiritual experiences during a severe illness, and the last three seem to be an unfinished religious tract. Her style is characterized by a rapturous mysticism and spiritual intensity which pervade the whole work. Her childhood is charged with guilt over even minor transgressions, as is usual in such accounts:

First; When a child, then the Lord awed my Spirit, and for the least trespass, my heart was smitten, and though my godly mother did not see me offend, that she might reprove me, which she was ready to do, being tender of the honour of her beloved Saviour, even for the least secret sin, that the world calls a trifle; though I thought it nothing yet still the all-seeing [eye] watched my ways, and he called to me, though I knew him not, yet he kept me, and his banner over me was love; and though my nature was as corrupt as any, a child of wrath as well as others, and forward to do evil, and backward to that which is good, yet still I was under the awaking of Jehovah. (p. 1)

Her description of her sufferings, however, comes to take on an urgency which is quite terrifying:

yet now it seized upon my spirit, that surely I was not in the Covenant, and if I were, I should know it; and I still cried out, oh my God, I am undone; my spirit is filled with horror, and the terrors of the Law exceedingly oppressed me, and I ran from Minister to Minister, from Sermon to Sermon, but I could find no rest. . . . I apprehended Divine displeasure against me, leaving me in a seared condition, given me over to blindness of mind, and hardness of heart for ever; when I was hindered from hearing a Sermon which I desired to hear, I have concluded that I might have received Christ in that Sermon, which being shut out from, I was shut out from Christ. . . . I was strongly tempted to destroy myself, which had not divine power prevented, I had been a murderer of my own life, and of their lives that I loved most intirely; I have been waked in the night by the devill for this very purpose, and directed where to have the knife, and what knife I should take. . . . (pp. 2-3)

Her subsequent spiritual illumination, as she tells us, is an exciting and liberating experience:

I could speak much concerning the time of my sorrow, of my terrors and perplexities, and sore plunges, I could make a large rehearsal, I could tell you of the sad apprehensions I had of my eternal condition, which I have but as it were given you a little hint of, my condition in the time of my bonds, but my desire now is rather to tell you of my freedom, unto which I hasten; though I know that these mourning experiences may be of great use to the sorrowful and troubled spirit, that lyeth languishing for want of the light of assurance, which God doth see good for a time to conceal from his beloveds, that he hath loved with an eternall love, which in time he draweth with free grace enough, an ocean, to swallow up, not my sins only, but many more, a fountain open for all manner of sins, be they never so great; poor souls! you cannot out-sin mercy, your sins are finite, but grace is infinite; do not think that any sin can shut thee out of divine love, if it could, it would have shut me out, for certain I am, that no heart could be more desperately wicked than mine, no ones sins could be of a more scarlet dye than mine, strong unbelief, continually departing from the living God, as full of heart hypocrisie as I could hold; Oh let sinners admire free grace with me, that hath freed me from as stony, as seared, benummed, sensless a condition, as any could be in....(pp. 6-7)

Her conversion is described at a high emotional pitch:

... when this sermon before mentioned upon that 8. of the Romans was almost ended, I said, Lord I have the Spirit, in this confused manner as I found a witness within me that I had the spirit in those particulars that were declared, but my spirit strongly run out to the Lord for a clear manifestation of his love in Christ, and suddenly my soul was filled with
joy unspeakable, and full of glory in believing, the spirit witnessing in that word, Christ is thy wel-beloved, and thou are his; my soul was now full of joy as it could hold, now I saw all my sins laid upon Jesus Christ, and when he was sacrificed, all my sins were sacrificed with him; Oh what triumphing and songs of Hallelujah were in my spirit, I knew not where I was, nor how to get out of the place where I sat, I apprehended nothing but a clothing of glory over my whole man; I never beheld Saints as I did then, I saw their faces like the face of Angels; Oh what Angelicall creatures did they appear before me, full of shining brightness! Oh what a heart inflamed now was mine, filled with the flame of Divine love! there appeared now no smoak, but a clear flame, nothing now before me but chристal appearances: oh how my soul was enamoured with Christ! Earth was now gone, and heaven come; the unclean spirit dispossessed, the pure spirit now possest, taking my soul from the dunghill, and setting it upon the throne, my naturall food I tasted not till now, it was bitter to my taste, but oh now, every bit of bread I eat, how sweet it was to my taste! Christ sweetned every creature to me, oh how sweet was the feasts of love, that my soul was made partaker in every creature! oh what a rebound doth Divine love make in the soul. . . . (p. 9)

Not surprisingly, perhaps, she is subject to visions:

In the night before sleep has seized upon me, a bright light shined round my head visible, and in the midst of that light stood one all in white, in the likeness of a creature all covered with brightness, my outward man at this sight was stricken very weak, and all in a sweat, but I received much joy, and was bid by the inward speaking of the spirit not to fear, for I had seen an Angell; surely it was a very glorious vision, such a perfume was left in my spirits all that night, and my strength of body given me as soon as this vision was ended, and I was full of triumphing in the Lord, who killeth and maketh alive; oh how sweet are true visions! (p. 14)

She also experiences auditory hallucinations:

. . . the work I had was this, Christ is thine, and thou are his; it followed me where ever I went; sometimes as I have been going along the streets, I have looked behind me, thinking I heard some locall voice, a voice without me, but sure it was because I was unacquainted with the voice of the Spirit speaking in, or to the soul; I oft-times turned back when I have been going along the streets, to see who it was that spake. . . . (p. 7)

and even olfactory (cf. the vision of an angel, quoted above):
... my body grew weaker and weaker, and the sent of dead souls turned out of the grave was still in my nostrils, and my body like unto a clod of earth, and pain working up to my heart. . . . (p. 40)

At one point Anna Trapnel falls into a trance (p. 41). Despite these ecstasies, however, she is also capable of acute perceptions:

I am persuaded that bare Professors are the greatest Papists in the world; spirituall idolatry is the worst; and my experience teacheth me that one may be a great worshipper of Idols, and yet never bow down to a picture. . . . (p. 4)

More than most autobiographers of this period, she seems to be conscious of the possibilities of language. Consider the following almost metaphysical passage:

... even when the heart and strength fails, nay, tho there be not any feeling of the movings, and actings, and flowings of the Spirit, though the beams are claspt and in the body of the Sun, it is not the beams that are my center, but the Son it self. . . . (p. 43)

The sun/son pun is conventional enough, to be sure, but the submerged suggestion of pregnancy is less so. Although some of her metaphors and analogies are rather far-fetched, many are quite effective:

... I was now as a cripple, when his crutches are taken from him he falls. (p. 3)

And:

And many that were inlightned in the doctrine of free grace, took a great deal of pains with me, persuading me to hear those Ministers that taught most upon the doctrine of free grace, but I could not relish that doctrine, it was such a cold, lean, poor discovery, I thought; I being under the flashes of hell, I delighted in the thunderings of the Law, and they pleased me best that preached upon the law, and that prest legall qualifications, which I strove to come up to. (p. 4)

One of the most interesting facts about this interesting writer is how very little she appears to think of herself as a woman, and to identify herself with the traditional feminine stereotypes. Indeed, there is a disembodied quality about her; even when describing her illness, her insistence upon the spiritual aspects of the experience is remarkable. Anna Trapnel’s ability to free herself from the limitations of the traditional role definitions, to think of herself and others as “souls,” is clearly a source of strength in her writing; here is no apology, no self-effacement, no subordination of herself to a man. The work as a whole is quite unlike anything else produced by a woman in this period.
Margaret Lucas Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1625-74), was one of the most extraordinary women of her age. Her “True Relation of My Birth and Breeding” is certainly one of the most remarkable autobiographical documents to be produced in the seventeenth century, by either a man or a woman. Its importance lies not only in its extended if humorless and slightly ingenuous attempts at self-analysis—virtually unique outside the highly stylized spiritual autobiographies—but also in the fact that it was intended for publication and indeed was published as early as 1656. The “True Relation” comprises some twenty-eight printed pages and is the last piece in a volume entitled Nature’s Pictures Drawn by Fancy’s Pencil to the Life; the duchess describes its contents on the title page as follows:

In this volume there are several feigned stories of natural descriptions, as comical, tragical, and tragi-comical, poetical, romancical, philosophical, and historical, both in prose and verse, some all verse, some all prose, some mixt, partly prose and partly verse. Also there are some morals, and some dialogues; and a true story at the latter end, wherein there is no feignings. (p. 149)

Margaret Lucas was born in 1625, the eighth and youngest child in a happy and accomplished family. Her father died when she was an infant, and the family was raised carefully and thoughtfully by her mother. She entered the queen’s court as a maid of honour at the age of eighteen and accompanied the queen into exile in Europe. There she made a love match with William Cavendish, Marquis (later Duke) of Newcastle, some thirty-two years her senior, and married him at the age of twenty. She had no children; this circumstance, added to her preternatural bashfulness, probably encouraged her to turn inward and then to commit her “conceptions,” as she called them, to paper. “Malice cannot hinder me from Writing, wherein consists my chiefest delight and greatest pastime,” she proclaims in the preface to a volume of plays, “nor from printing what I write, since I regard not so much the present as future ages, for which I intend all my Books.”

Because almost alone among women of her class she both wrote and published, and did not hesitate to enter upon what was usually regarded as male territory, she was forced to come explicitly to grips with the difficult question of “woman’s place.” Though it was an issue which seems to have vexed her little in practice, she never achieved a consistent theoretical position. In her Dedication of Philosophical and Physical Opinions “To the Two Most Famous Universities of England,” she bemoans the neglect of women’s education:

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lest in time we should grow irrational as idiots, by the dejectedness of our spirits, through the careless neglects and despisements of the masculine sex to the female, thinking it impossible we should have either learning or understanding, wit or judgment, as if we had not rational souls as well as men, and we out of a custom of dejectedness think it so too, which makes us quit all industry towards profitable knowledge, being employed only in low and petty employments which take away not only our abilities towards arts, but higher capacities in speculations, so as we are become like worms that only live in the full earth of ignorance, winding ourselves sometimes out of the help of some refreshing rain of good education, which seldom is given us, for we are kept like birds in cages, to hop up and down in our houses, not suffered to fly abroad to see the several changes of Fortune, and the various humours ordained and created by nature, and wanting the experience of nature, we must needs want the understanding and knowledge, and so consequently prudence and invention of men. Thus by an opinion, which I hope is but an erroneous one in men, we are shut out of all power and authority, by reason we are never employed either in civil or martial affairs, our counsels are despised and laughed at, the best of our actions are trodden down with scorn by the overweening conceit men have of themselves, and through a despisement of us."17

And several of her plays, orations, and letters fantasize armies of women, academies of women, etc. Yet she took refuge in the "modesty of her sex,"18 chastised women severely for their foibles, and advocated that women content themselves with exerting their power indirectly, for

not only Wives and Mistresses have prevalent power with Men, but Mothers, Daughters, Sisters, Aunts, Cousins, nay Maid-Servants have many times a persuasive power with their Masters, and a Landlady with her Lodger, or a she-Hostess with her he-Guest; yet men will not believe this, and 'tis the better for us, for by that we govern as it were by an insensible power, so as men perceive not how they are Led, Guided and Rul'd by the Feminine Sex.19

She was sufficiently exercised by criticism of her unwomanly occupations to offer a rather touching justification in one of the prefaces to her first book:

Be not too severe in your censures, for first, I have no children to employ my care and attendance on. Next, my Lord’s estate being taken away in

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17 Quoted in Firth, op. cit., p. 209.
19 Quoted in Perry, op. cit., p. 240.
those times when I writ this book, I had nothing for huswifery or thrifty
industry to employ myself in, having no stock to work on. 20

Margaret Cavendish’s output was prodigious, both in the number and in the
variety of her productions. The earliest extant is a fascinating series of letters to her
fiancé which has yet to be published in its entirety. Her first published work was Poems
and Fancies (1653); thereafter follow several volumes of philosophical speculation and
opinion (1653, 1655, 1664, 1666, 1668); the volume of stories which includes her
autobiography (1656); two volumes of plays (1662, 1668), none of which was ever
performed; a book of orations (1662); CCXI Sociable Letters (1664), a farrago of
opinions which Henry Ten Eyck Perry credits with “dimly, gropingly, but surely
foreshadow[ing] the later letter-novels”; 21 The Blazing World (1666), a fantastical
combination of utopia/philosophical voyage/science fiction in which the narrator’s soul
leaves her body to engage in interplanetary travel; and a splendid biography of her
husband (1667), for which she is chiefly remembered today.

She shares with many great confessionalists a preoccupation with her own
singularity. In her autobiography, she says

. . . I took great delight in attiring, fine dressing, and fashions especially
such fashions as I did invent myself, not taking that pleasure in such
fashions as was invented by others. Also I did dislike any should follow
my fashions, for I always took delight in a singularity, even in
accoutrements of habits. (p. 175)

This love of peculiar attires confirmed by Pepys, who remarked that “all the town talk is
nowadays of her extravagances, with her velvet cap, her hair about her ears, many black
patches because of pimples about her mouth, naked-necked, without anything about it,
and a black just-au-corps”; 22 and by Evelyn, who wrote of “the extraordinary fanciful
habit, garb, and discourse of the Duchess.” 23 She boasts particularly of her own
originality, stating that she could not “afford boardroom to other people’s ideas lest the
legitimate offspring of her own brain should be crowded out.” This affectation renders
most of her physical and philosophical opinions worthless; in her treatise “On the Motion
of the Bodie,” for example, she unblushingly confides:

I am to be pardoned, if I have not names and tearms that the
Anatomists have or use; or if I have mistaken some parts in the body, or
misplaced any: for truly I never read of Anatomie, nor never saw any man
opened, much less dissected, which for my better understanding I would
have done; but I found that neither the caurage of nature, nor the modesty
of my sex would permit me. 24

20 Quoted in Firth, op. cit., pp. xxx-xxxii.
21 Perry, op. cit., p. 251.
22 Quoted in Firth, op. cit., p. 175.
23 Quoted in Firth, ibid.
24 Quoted in Reynolds, op. cit., p. 49.
Likewise, dispensing with the dramatic laws she so scorned might have had a salutary effect on her plays, but some of those plays lack even the basic artistic unity provided by having her characters acquainted with one another.

Such personal and literary extravagance not surprisingly earned her a great deal of attention and a wide range of reactions. She was the subject of much adulation--some genuine, some undoubtedly flattery elicited by her title and her husband’s position as a patron of the arts (“our English Maecenas,” Gerard Langbaine called him in his *Account of the Dramatick Poets*, 1691).25 Two years after her death, an entire volume of *Letters and Poems, in Honour of the incomparable Princess Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle*, was brought out. Two centuries later Charles Lamb was to characterize her, with affection and respect, as “a dear friend of mine, of the last century but one--the thrice noble, chaste and virtuous--but again, somewhat fantastical and original-brained, generous Margaret Newcastle.”26 But not everyone was so sympathetic with Mad Madge of Newcastle: Dorothy Osborne believed her to be “a little distracted,”27 and Mrs. Evelyn evaluates her thus:

I was surprised to find so much extravancy and vanity in any person not confined within four walls. Her habit particular, fantastical, not unbecoming a good shape, which truly she may boast of. Her face discovers the facility of her sex, in being yet persuaded it deserves the esteem years forbid, by the infinite care she takes to place her curls and patches. Her mein surpasses the imagination of poets, or the descriptions of a romance heroine’s greatness: her gracious bows, seasonable nods, courteous stretching out of her hands, twinkling of her eyes, and various gestures of approbation, show what may be expected from her discourse, which is airy, empty, whimsical and rambling as her books, aiming at science difficulties, high notions, terminating commonly in nonsense, oaths, and obscenity.28

Pope later enshrined her in *The Dunciad*:

Here swells the shelf with Ogilby the great;  
There, stamp’d with arms, Newcastle shines complete. . . .29

and the disdainful Horace Walpole patronized:

What a picture of foolish nobility was this stately poetic couple, retired to their own little domain, and intoxicating one another with

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25 Quoted in Perry, op. cit., p. 85.  
26 Quoted in Reynolds, op. cit., p. 52.  
27 Quoted in Reynolds, ibid., p. 51.  
28 Quoted in Reynolds, ibid., pp. 51-52.  
circumstantial flattery, on what was of consequence to no mortal but
themselves.\textsuperscript{30}

Sir Walter Scott, in \textit{Peveril of the Peak}, has Charles II say, “her Grace is an entire raree-
show in her own person—a universal masquerade—indeed a sort of private Bedlam
hospital.”\textsuperscript{31}

But the duchess was clearly not mad in any functional sense of the word. She ran
her household successfully, managed the duke’s affairs more prudently than he did
himself, and was loved and admired by her husband, who offered this tribute on their
tombstone, composed after her death but before his:

\begin{quote}
Here lies the Loyall Duke of Newcastle, and his Dutches, his
second wife, by whom he had noe issue: her name was Margarett Lucas,
youngest sister to the Lord Lucas of Colchester, a noble familie; for all the
Brothers were Valiant, and all the Sisters virtuous. This Dutches was a
wise, wittie, and learned lady, which her many Bookes do well testifie; she
was a most Virtuous and Loveing and carefull wife, and was with her Lord
all the time of his banishment and miseries, and when he came home,
ever parted from him in his solitary retirements.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

Certainly it is accurate to say that she was eccentric, and that she grew more so over the
course of the years. But while her posture of originality in her scientific writings may be
even more ludicrous to us than it was to many of her contemporaries, we must at least
remember that the inductive methods of experimental science were not quite so firmly
established then as they are now. And the personality which emerges from her writings is
a charming and engaging one. The very weaknesses and idiosyncrasy which mar her
philosophical writings become almost a merit in her autobiography. It is a rambling
affair, with little attention to form or chronology. But her absorption in her own
peculiarity leads her to several passages of self-analysis which are quite remarkable when
considered alongside of the autobiographical productions of her contemporaries:

\begin{quote}
... I am naturally bashful, not that I am ashamed of my mind or body, my
birth or breeding, my actions or fortunes, for my bashfulness is my nature,
not for any crime, and though I have strived and reasoned with myself, yet
that which is inbred I find is difficult to root out. But I do not find that my
bashfulness is concerned with the qualities of the persons, but the number;
for were I to enter amongst a company of Lazaruses, I should be as much
out of countenance as if they were all Caesars or Alexanders, Cleopatras or
Queen Didos. Neither do I find my bashfulness riseth so often in blushes,
as contracts my spirits to a chill paleness. But the best of it is, most
commonly it soon vanisheth away, and many times before it can be
perceived; and the more foolish or unworthy I conceive the company to be,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{30} Quoted in Perry, op. cit., p. 207.
\textsuperscript{31} Quoted in Reynolds, op. cit., p. 51.
\textsuperscript{32} Quoted in Firth, op. cit., p. 32
the worse I am, and best remedy I ever found was, is to persuade myself that all those persons I meet are wise and virtuous. The reason I take to be is, that the wise and virtuous censure least, excuse most, praise best, esteem rightly, judge justly, behave themselves civilly, demean themselves respectfully, and speak modestly when bold, rude, uncivil both in words and actions, forgetting or not well understanding themselves or the company they are with. And though I never met such sorts of ill-bred creatures, yet naturally I have such an aversion to such kind of people, as I am afraid to meet them, as children are afraid of spirits, or those that are afraid to see or meet devils; which makes me think this natural defect in me, if it be a defect, is rather a fear than a bashfulness, but whatsoever it is, I find it troublesome, for it hath many times obstructed the passage of my speech, and perturbed my natural actions, forcing a constrainedness or unusual motions. However, since it is rather a fear of others than a bashful distrust of myself, I despair of a perfect cure, unless nature as well as human governments could be civilized and brought into a methodical order ruling the words and actions with a supreme power of reason, and the authority of discretion: but a rude nature is worse than a brute nature by so much more as man is better than beast, but those that are of civil natures and gentle dispositions are as much nearer to celestial creatures, as those that are of rude or cruel are to devils. (pp. 168-69)

Such precision in defining mental or emotional states is rare in this period. Here is another example:

As for my humour, I was from my childhood given to contemplation, being more taken or delighted with thoughts than in conversation with a society, insomuch as I would walk two or three hours, and never rest, in a musing, considering, contemplating manner, reasoning with myself of everything my senses did present. But when I was in the company of my natural friends, I was very attentive of what they said or did; but for strangers I regarded not much what they said, but many times I did observe their actions whereupon my reason as judge, and my thoughts as accusers, or excusers, or approvers and commenders, did plead, or appeal to accuse, or complain thereto. Also I never took delight in closets or cabinets of toys, but in the variety of fine clothes, and such toys as only were to adorn my person. . . . As to my disposition, it is more inclining to be melancholy than merry, but not crabbed or peevishly melancholy, but soft, melting, solitary, and contemplating melancholy. And I am apt to weep rather than laugh, not that I do often either of them. Also I am tender natured, for it troubles my conscience to kill a fly, and the groans of a dying beast strike my soul. Also where I place a particular affection, I love extraordinarily and constantly, yet not fondly, but soberly and observingly, not to hang about them as a trouble, but to wait upon them as a servant: but this affection will take no root, but where I think or find merit, and have leave
both from divine and moral laws. Yet I find this passion so troublesome,
as it is the only torment of my life, for fear any evil misfortune or accident,
or sickness, or death, should come unto them, insomuch as I am never
freely at rest. Likewise I am grateful, for I never received a courtesy— but I
am impatient and troubled until I can return it. Also I am chaste, both by
nature, and education, insomuch as I do abhor an unchaste thought.
Likewise, I am seldom angry, as my servants may witness for me, for I
rather choose to suffer some inconveniences than disturb my thoughts,
which makes me wink many times at their faults; but when I am angry, I
am very angry, but yet it is soon over, and I am easily pacified, if it be not
such an injury as may create a hate. Neither am I apt to be exceptions or
jealous, but if I have the least symptom of this passion, I declare it to those
it concerns, for I never let it lie smothering in my breast to breed a
malignant disease in the mind, which might break out into extravagant
passions, or railing speeches, or indiscreet actions: but I examine
moderately, reason soberly, and plead gently in my own behalf, through a
desire to keep those affections I had, or at least thought to have. And truly
I am so vain, as to be so self-conceited, or so naturally partial, to think my
friends have as much reason to love me as another, since none can love
more sincerely than I, and it were an injustice to prefer a fainter affection,
or to esteem the body more than the mind. Likewise I am neither spiteful,
envious nor malicious. I repine not at the gifts that Nature or Fortune
bestows upon others, yet I am a great emulator; for, though I wish none
worse than they are, yet it is lawful for me to wish myself the best, and to
do my honest endeavour thereunto. For I think it no crime to wish myself
the exactest of nature’s works, my thread of life the longest, my chain of
destiny the strongest, my mind the peaceablest, my life the pleasantest, my
death the easiest, and the greatest saint in heaven; also highest on fortune’s
wheel and to hold the wheel from turning, if I can. And if it be
commendable to wish for another’s good, it were a sin not to wish my
own; for as envy is a vice, so emulation is a virtue, but emulation is in the
way to ambition, or indeed it is a noble ambition. But I fear my ambition
inclines to vain-glory, for I am very ambitious; yet ’tis neither for beauty,
wit, titles, wealth, or power, but as they are steps to raise me to Fame’s
tower, which is to live by remembrance in after-ages. . . . Also in some
cases I am naturally a coward, and in other cases very valiant. As for
example, if any of my nearest friends were in danger I should never
consider my life in striving to help them, though I were sure to do them no
good, and would willingly, nay cheerfully, resign my life for their sakes:
likewise I should not spare my life, if honour bids me die. But in a danger
where my friends, or my honour is not concerned, or engaged, but only my
life to be unprofitably lost, I am the veriest coward in nature, as upon the
sea, or any dangerous places, or of thieves, or fie, or the like. Nay the
shooting of a gun, although but a pot-gun, will make me start, and stop my
hearing, much less have I courage to discharge one; or if a sword should be held against me, although but in jest, I am afraid. . . . (pp. 174-77)

She also gives insight into her writing habits and creative processes:

. . . when I am writing any sad feigned stories, or serious humours, or melancholy passions, I am forced many times to express them with the tongue before I can write them with the pen, by reason those thoughts that are sad, serious, and melancholy are apt to contract, and to draw too much back, which oppression doth as it were overpower or smother the conception in the brain. But when some of those thoughts are sent out in words, they give the rest more liberty to place themselves in a more methodical order, marching more regularly with my pen on the ground of white paper; but my letters seem rather as a ragged rout than a well-armed body, for the brain being quicker in creating than the hand in writing or the memory in retaining, many fancies are lost, by reason they oftentimes outrun the pen, where I, to keep speed in the race, write so fast as I stay not so long as to write my letters plain, insomuch as some have taken my handwriting for some strange character, and being accustomed to do so, I cannot now write very plain, when I strive to write my best; indeed, my ordinary handwriting is so bad as few can read it, so as to write it fair for the press; but however, that little wit I have, it delights me to scribble it out, and disperse it about. For I being addicted from my childhood to contemplation rather than conversation, to solitariness rather than society, to melancholy rather than mirth, to write with the pen than to work with a needle, passing my time with harmless fancies, their company being pleasing, their conversation innocent (in which I take such pleasure as I neglect my health, for it is as great a grief to leave their society as a joy to be in their company), my only trouble is, lest my brain should grow barren, or that the root of my fancies should become insipid, withering into a dull stupidity for want of maturing subjects to write on. . . . Yet I must say this in the behalf of my thoughts, that I never found them idle; for if the senses bring no work in, they will work of themselves, like silkworms that spins out of their own bowels. . . . (pp. 172-73)

She ends her account with a delightful apology which is perfectly characteristic:

But I hope my readers will not think me vain for writing my life, since there have been many that have done the like, as Caesar, Ovid, and many more, both men and women, and I know no reason I may not do it as well as they: but I verily believe some censuring readers will scornfully say, why hath this Lady writ her own life? since none cares to know whose daughter she was or whose wife she is, or how she was bred, or what fortunes she had, or how she lived or what humour of disposition she was of. I answer that it is true, that 'tis to no purpose to the readers, but it is to
the authoress, because I write it for my own sake, not theirs. Neither did I intend this piece to delight, but to divulge; not to please the fancy, but to tell the truth, lest after-ages should mistake, in not knowing I was the daughter to one Master Lucas of St. Johns, near Colchester, in Essex, second wife to the Lord Marquis of Newcastle; for my Lord having had two wives, I might easily have been mistaken, especially if I should die and my Lord marry again. (p. 178)

In 1886 it was possible for Firth, editor of The Life of William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, to write of Margaret Cavendish that "she has been unduly praised and unjustly depreciated." Today, nearly ninety years later, perhaps it would be fair to add that she has been unduly neglected. Yet no one interested in the history of the novel, of biography and autobiography, or of women can afford to be ignorant of her work. Surely the time has come to take a fresh look at the life and writings of this exceptional woman.

e. Lucy Hutchinson

Like Margaret Cavendish, Lucy Apsley Hutchinson (1620-71) has left us a Life of her husband which contains autobiographical elements. Like Margaret Cavendish, too, she began her own autobiography, but unlike the publicity-loving duchess she left her brief account unfinished.

Mrs. Hutchinson was a learned and thoughtful woman, and her autobiography is in many respects a curious document. Her style is perhaps the least idiosyncratic—that is to say, the most literary—of the female autobiographers we are considering here; Stauffer describes it as "Latinized, with long circumstantial periods after the manner of Clarendon." She begins with a ringing paean to God, which she transmutes into her justification for writing her own life:

The Almighty Author of all beings, in his various providences, whereby he conducts the lives of men from the cradle to the tomb, exercises no less wisdom and goodness than he manifests power and greatness, in their creation, but such is the stupidity of blind mortals, that instead of employing their studies in these admirable books of providence, wherein God daily exhibits to us glorious characters of his love, kindness, wisdom, and justice, they ungratefully regard them not, and call the most wonderful operations of the great God the common accidents of human life, especially if they be such as are usual, and exercised towards them in ages wherein they are not very capable of observation, and whereon they seldom employ any reflection, for in things great and extraordinary, some, perhaps, will take notice of God’s working, who either forget or believe

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33 Firth, ibid., p. xxx.
not that he takes as well a care and account of their smallest concernsments, 
even the hairs of their heads.

Finding myself in some kind guilty of this general neglect, I 
thought it might be a means to stir up my thankfulness for things past, and 
to encourage my faith in the future, if I recollected as much as I have heard 
or can remember of the passages of my youth, and the general and 
particular providences exercised to me, both in the entrance and progress 
of my life.

Mrs. Hutchinson goes on the thank God for his special providence to her in the auspicious 
time and place in which she came into the world, and in the stock from which she came. 
This leads rather surprisillgly to an overview of English history and discussion of the 
favored geographical situation of England. She proceeds to elaborate upon her fortune in 
coming from a good family and describes the lives of her parents and various other 
relations. She finally describes her birth and education, betrayillg an intelligent 
perception of the combined role which innate merit and environmental advantages played 
in her accomplishments:

My mother, while she was with child of me, dreamed that she was walking 
in the garden with my father, and that a star came down into her hand, with 
other circumstances, which, though I have often heard, I minded not 

enough to remember perfectly; only my father told her, her dream signified 
she should have a daughter of some extraordinary eminency; which things, 
like such vain prophecies, wrought as far as it could its own 
accomplishment; for my father and mother fancying me then beautiful, and 
more than ordinarily apprehensive, applied all their cares, and spared no 
cost to improve me in my education, which procured nle the admiration of 
those that flattered nlY parents. By the time 
I 
was four years old I read 
English perfectly, and having a great memory, I was carried to sermons; 
and while I was very young could remember and repeat them exactly, and 
being caressed, the love of praise tickled me, and made me attend more 
heedfully. When I was about seven years of age, I remember I had at one 
time eight tutors in several qualities, languages, music, dancing, writing, 
and needlework; but my genius was quite averse from all but my book, and 
that I was so eager of, that my mother thinking it prejudiced my health, 
would moderate me in it; yet this rather animated me than kept me back, 
and every moment I could steal from my play I would employ in any book 
I could find, when my own were locked up from me. After dinner and 
supper I still had an hour allowed me to play, and then I would steal into 
some hole or other to read. My father would have me learn Latin, and I 
was so apt that I outstripped my brothers who were at school, although my 
father’s chaplain, that was my tutor, was a pitiful dull fellow. (pp. 16-17)
Her common-sense—actually, Puritanical—attitude toward superstition can be contrasted with Anne Fanshawe’s credulousness, as we shall see shortly. But for a Puritan Mrs. Hutchinson is refreshingly nonjudgmental about her youthful temperament and foibles, and in fact treats them with a tolerant, self-deprecating humor which is quite attractive:

As for music and dancing, I profited very little in them, and would never practice my lute or harpsichords but when my masters were with me; and for my needle I absolutely hated it. Play among other children I despised, and when I was forced to entertain such as came to visit me, I tired them with more grave instructions than their mothers, and plucked all their babies to pieces, and kept the children in such awe, that they were glad when I entertained myself with elder company. . . . (pp. 17-18)

The circumstances under which her narrative breaks off are rather peculiar. She begins an account of herself as a young woman:

I thought it no sin to learn or hear witty songs and amorous sonnets or poems, and twenty things of that kind, wherein I was so apt that I became the confidant in all the loves that were managed among my mother’s young women; and there was none of them but had many lovers, and some particular friends beloved above the rest. Among these I have . . . (p. 18)

At this point several leaves have been torn from the manuscript, presumably by the author, followed by this fragment:

Five years after me my mother had a daughter that she nursed at her own breast, and was infinitely fond of above all the rest; and I being of too serious a temper was not so pleasing to my . . . (p.18)

Delany speculates that “the memories of her youth created too much pain and guilt for her to be able to continue.” He goes on to comment that “Her learning and her biographical talents qualified her to write an important autobiography; but her insights into what the composition of such a superior work demanded of its author may have made her unwilling to undertake it.”36 She may also have had simply a failure of nerve, a pious revulsion against the temerity of writing a secular, self-centered work—something which even a man would find it necessary to justify; no doubt she realized that in telling tales of “many lovers, and some particular friends beloved above the rest,” she was wandering from her original intent to glorify god, “to stir up my thankfulness for things past, and to encourage my faith for the future.”

Her Memoirs of Col. Hutchinson is not a double-portrait of a couple in the same sense that Anne Fanshawe’s work is; this volume alone would hardly entitle her to the label “autobiographer,” any more than Margaret Cavendish’s biography of the duke would. Indeed, she maintains a sharp distinction between the memorialist and the wife by

36 Delany, op. cit., p. 166.
referring to the latter in the third person. When she describes “Mrs. Hutchinson’s” visits to her husband in prison, an affecting scene is created but there is nothing comparable to Anne Fanshawe’s description of the feeling of the rain going through her clothes as she stands at the barred window outside the prison in which Sir Richard Fanshawe is being held. The device of the third person lends an illusion of impartial authority to the narrator’s praises of Col. Hutchinson (which permeate the entire account) by separating her from the presumed bias of “Mrs. Hutchinson.” The most intensely autobiographical passage of the work deals with the couple’s courtship. She describes how he, when visiting her sister, chances to see her books:

One day when he was there, looking upon an odd by-shelf in her sister’s closet, he found a few Latin books; asking whose they were, he was told they were her elder sister’s; whereupon, inquiring more after her, he began first to be sorry she was gone, before he had seen her. . . . Then he grew to love to hear mention of her, and the other gentlewomen who had been her companions used to talk much to him of her, telling him how reserved and studious she was, and other things which they esteemed no advantage. But it so much inflamed Mr. Hutchinson’s desire of seeing her, that he began to wonder at himself, that his heart, which had ever entertained so much indifference for the most excellent of womankind should have such strong impulses towards a stranger he never saw. . . . (p. 57)

Even through this recital, however, she focuses mainly on her husband’s viewpoint and only indirectly on her own; the central purpose of the passage is to praise him for preferring intellectual to physical qualities in a marriage partner. After she brings the courting couple through their marriage, she abandons the subject with an odd combination of reluctance and fear of the impropriety of mixing genres, resulting in a kind of tension between the narrator and Mrs. Hutchinson:

I shall pass by all the little amorous relations, which, if I would take the pains to relate, would make a true history of a more handsome management of love than the best romances describe; but these are to be forgotten as the vanities of youth, not worthy of mention among the greater transactions of his life. (pp. 62-63)

Perhaps more articulately than any other female author of this period, Mrs. Hutchinson sums up the traditional ideology regarding the proper relationship between man and woman:

There is this only to be recorded, that never was there a passion more ardent and less idolatrous; he loved her better than his life, with inexpressible tenderness and kindness, had a most high obliging esteem of her, yet still considered honour, religion, and duty above her, nor ever suffered the intrusion of such a dotage as should blind him from marking her imperfections; these he looked upon with such an indulgent eye as did
not abate his love and esteem of her, while it augmented his care to blot out all those spots which might make her appear less worthy of that respect he paid her; and thus indeed he soon made her more equal to him than he found her; for she was a very faithful mirror, reflecting truly, though but dimly, his own glories upon him, so long as he was present; but she, that was nothing before his inspection gave her a fair figure, when he was removed, was only filled with a dark mist, and never could again take in any delightful object, nor return any shining representation. The greatest excellency she had was the power of apprehending and the virtue of loving his; so as his shadow she waited on him everywhere, till he was taken into that region of light which admits of none, and then she vanished into nothing. It was not her face he loved, her honour and her virtue were his mistresses; and these (like Pygmalion's) images of his own making, for he polished and gave form to what he found with all the roughness of the quarry about it; but meeting with a compliant subject for his own wise government, he found as much satisfaction as he gave, and never had occasion to number his marriage among his infelicities. (p. 63)

It is impossible to doubt the sincerity of this statement. Though sensing and exercising her own powers, she clearly accepts the notion that she can have no conception of herself apart from her husband (though the existence of the document in which she states so proves otherwise) Because this attitude is inherently anomalous, it is a tenuous one. At this point in history it is possible for women such as Margaret Cavendish, Lucy Hutchinson, and Anne Fanshawe to sustain it, but as we shall see it becomes more and more difficult to achieve as we proceed into the eighteenth century.

Lucy Hutchinson is comparatively well known, and deservedly so, for her works have both historical and literary importance. It is surely a matter of regret that the autobiographical impulse was not strong enough to carry her through the completion of her own life.

f. Anne Fanshawe

It is possible to believe of Anne Harrison Fanshawe (1625-80) that had her life been less eventful, she might never have felt called upon to take pen in hand. As the wife of a royalist who spent his life in the service of the monarchy, however, she found sufficient material for an extremely attractive book-length autobiography. Her Memoirs were addressed to her son and were not published until 1829.

Paul Delany, in dismissing this work as "quite orthodox in conception," fails I think to give the author credit for her achievement of an extended double-portrait of a man and his wife, shown both as individuals and in relationship to one another. It is perhaps a feat which only a woman, strong-minded but accepting subordination and convinced that her destiny was determined by her husband's, could accomplish in that

38 Delany, op. cit., p. 162.
To look for comparable accounts by men is to appreciate the difference. However much a man might love his wife, the attachment was essentially a matter of personal emotion, not having in addition the whole force of culture and tradition to define it. Thus, though Richard Baxter has left us both an autobiography and a touching biography of his wife which can leave us with no doubt about the depth of his feeling for her, the two accounts are separate. Sir Kenelm Digby’s fictionalized account of his courtship is essentially the story of a physical passion hung as it were with the trappings of romance. Anne Fanshawe, by contrast, presents herself not merely as a woman who happens to be in love but as a being whose devotion to her husband is an integral part of her perception of herself:

Now you will expect that I should say something that may remain of us jointly, which I will do though it makes my eyes gush with tears, and cuts me to the soul to remember, and in part express the joys I was blessed with in him. Glory be to God, we never had but one mind throughout our lives. Our souls were wrapped up in each other’s; our aims and designs one, our loves one, and our resentments one. We so studied one the other, that we knew each other’s mind by our looks. Whatever was real happiness, God gave it me in him; but to commend my better half, which I want sufficient expression for, methinks is to commend myself, and so may bear a censure; but, might it be permitted, I could dwell eternally on his praise most justly; but thus without offence I do, and so you [addressed to her son] may imitate him in his patience, his prudence, his chastity, his charity, his generosity, his perfect resignation to God’s will, and praise God for him as long as you live here, and with him hereafter in the kingdom of Heaven. Amen. (p. 36)

The content of this passage may sound like Donne when he writes, “Our two soules therefore, which are one . . .”, but they are not really like; if the vehicle is similar, the tenor is not. For the poet, spiritual oneness is to some extent a metaphor, or substitute, for physical union; it is more exalted than mere coupling and for that reason is an achievement to be celebrated. For Anne Fanshawe, spiritual oneness is the state of true marriage; as such it is a rare gift, a testimonial to her husband’s exceptional virtue, and a blessing for which to be grateful.

After her opening moralistic address to her son, she begins with an account of her own and her husband’s ancestors and then proceeds to a brief description of her childhood:

Now it is necessary to say something of my mother’s education of me, which was with all the advantages that time afforded, both for working all sorts of fine works with my needle, and learning French, singing, lute, the virginals and dancing, and notwithstanding I learned as well as most did, yet was I wild to that degree, that the hours of my

beloved recreation took up too much of my time, for I loved riding in the first place, running, and all active pastimes; in short, I was that which we graver people call a hoyting girl; but to be just to myself, I never did mischief to myself or people, nor one immodest word or action in my life, though skipping and activity was my delight, but upon my mother’s death, I then began to reflect, and, as an offering to her memory, I flung away those little childlinesses that had formerly possessed me, and, by my father’s command, took upon me charge of his house and family, which I so ordered by my excellent mother’s example as found acceptance in his sight. (p. 55)

She carried her account through her marriage, then states: “Here stay till I have told you your father’s life until I married him” (p. 59). After she brings him, too, to the altar, she launches into an account of their adventures during the Civil Wars:

Now we appear on the stage, to act what part God designed us; and as faith is the evidence of things not seen, so we, upon so righteous a cause, cheerfully resolved to suffer what that would drive us to, which affliction were neither few nor small, as you will find. (p. 63)

This interesting and unusual formal organization produces, obliquely, the impression that their marriage was the culmination of all the foregoing history, and that only together was it possible for them to take up their proper roles in the difficult times that were to follow. Her strength and value she finds in being her husband’s wife:

And now I thought myself a perfect queen, and my husband so glorious a crown, that I valued myself to be called by his name than born a princess, for I knew him very wise and very good, and his soul doted on me. . . . (p. 67)

This sort of thing is very fine in its way, the highest success which a system predicated on the subordination of one half of the human race to the other half can achieve.

Anne Fanshawe’s account is enlivened by numerous anecdotes such as the following:

There was, during my stay in this town, a Portugal merchant jealous of his mistress favouring an Englishman, whom he entertained with much kindness, hiding his suspicion. One evening he invited him to see a country-house and eat a collation, which he did; after which the merchant, with three or four more of his friends, for a rarity showed him a cave hard by the house, which went in at a very narrow hole, but within was very capacious, in the side of a high mountain. It was so dark that they carried a torch. Says one to the Englishman, ‘Did you ever know where bats dwell?’ he replied no; ‘Then here, Sir,’ say they, ‘you shall see them;’ then, holding up the light to the roof, they saw millions hanging by
... their legs. So soon as they had done, they, frightening the birds, made them all fly about him, and putting out the light ran away, and left the Englishman there to get out as well as he could, which was not until the next morning. (p. 148)

Some have supernatural overtones, as for example this incident:

From hence we went to the Lady Honor O’Brien’s. . . . There we stayed three nights. The first of which I was surprised by being laid in a chamber, when, about one o’clock, I heard a voice that wakened me. I drew the curtain, and, in the casement of the window, I saw, by the light of the moon, a woman leaning into the window, through the casement, in white, with red hair and pale and ghastly complexion: she spoke loud, and in a tone I had never heard, thrice, ‘A horse;’ and then, with a sign more like the wind than breath she vanished, and to me her body looked more like a thick cloud than substance. I was so much frightened, that my hair stood on end, and my night clothes fell off. I pulled and pinched your father, who never woke during the disorder I was in; but at last was much surprised to see me in this fright, and more so when I related the story and showed him the window opened. Neither of us slept any more that night, but he entertained me with telling me how much more these apparitions were usual in this country [Ireland] then in England; and we concluded the cause to be the great superstition of the Irish, and the want of that knowing faith, which should defend them from the power of the Devil, which he exercises among them very much. About five o’clock the lady of the house came to see us, saying she had not been in bed all night, because a cousin O’Brien of her’s, whose ancestors had owned that house, had desired her to stay with him in his chamber, and that he died at two o’clock, and she said, ‘I wish you to have had no disturbance, for ’tis the custom of the place, that when any of the family are dying, the shape of a woman appears in the window every night till they be dead. This woman was many ages ago got with child by the owner of this place, who murdered her in his garden, and flung her into the river under the window, but truly I thought not of it when I lodged you here, it being the best room in the house.’ We made little reply to her speech, but disposed ourselves to be gone suddenly. (pp. 91-93)

Others offer revealing glimpses of her contemporaries:

Here I will show you something of Sir Edward Hyde’s nature: he being surprised with this news, and suspecting that my husband might come to a greater power than himself, both because of his parts and integrity, and because himself had been sometimes absent in the Spanish Embassy, he with all the humility possible, and earnest passion, begged my husband to remember the King often of him to his advantage as
occasion should serve, and to procure leave that he might wait on the King, promising, with all the oaths that he could express to cause belief, that he would make it his business all the days of his life to serve your father’s interest in what condition soever he should be in: thus they parted, with your father’s promise to service him in what he was capable of, upon which account many letters passed between them.

Her husband served for several years as Charles II’s ambassador to the courts of Spain and Portugal, and that section of her account is filled with the lavish descriptions of foreign splendor which are typical of contemporary travelers’ memoirs; an example is her description of the Alcazar:

We lay in the King’s palace, which was very royally furnished on purpose for our reception, and all our treatment during our stay. We were lodged in a silver bedstead, quilt curtains, valences, and counterpane of crimson damask, embroidered richly with flowers of gold. The tables of precious stones, and the looking-glasses bordered with the same; the chairs the same as the bed, and the floor covered with rich Persia carpets, and a great brasero of silver, filled full of delicate flowers, which was replenished every day as long as we stayed. The hangings were of tapestry full of gold. . . . In this palace, the chief room of my husband’s quarters was a gallery, wherein were three pairs of Indian cabinets of Japan, the biggest and beautifullest that ever I did see in my life: it was furnished with rich tapestry hangings, rich looking-glasses, Persia carpets, and cloth of tissue and underneath the ground, with many large gardens, terraces, walks, fish-ponds, and statues, many large courts and fountains, all of which were as well dressed for our reception as art or money could make them. (pp. 179-81)

Her narrative is also punctuated, with a frequency and matter-of-factness that are unnerving, by the births and deaths of most of her twenty children over the course of twenty-three years of marriage.

Anne Fanshawe, in her understated way, shows great skill in depicting scenes of domestic drama. Perhaps better than any other of our writers of the period, she gives us not only a clear idea of the roles which husbands and wives were expected to fill, and the politics of seventeenth century marriage, but also a sense for the details of ordinary human interaction through utterances, gestures, and acts:

My Lady Rivers, a brave woman, and one that had suffered many thousand pounds loss for the King, and whom I had a great reverence for, and she a kindness for me as a kinswoman,—in discourse she tacitly commended the knowledge of state affairs, and that some women were very happy in a good understanding thereof, as my Lady Aubigny, Lady Isabel Thynne, and divers others, and yet none was at first more capable than I; that in the night she knew there came a post from Paris from the Queen, and that she
would be extremely glad to hear what the Queen commanded the King in order to his affairs; saying, if I would ask my husband privately, he would tell me what he found in the packet, and I might tell her. I that was young and innocent, and to that day had never in my mouth what news, began to think there was more in inquiring into public affairs than I thought of, and that it being a fashionable thing would make me more beloved of my husband, if that had been possible, than I was. When my husband returned home from Council, after welcoming him, as his custom ever was he went with this handful of papers into his study for an hour or more; I followed him; he turned hastily, and said, ‘What wouldst thou have, my life?’ I told him, I heard the Prince had received a packet from the Queen, and I guessed it was that in his hand and I desired to know what was in it; he smilingly replied, ‘My love, I will immediately come to thee, pray thee go, for I am very busy.’ When he come out of his closet I revived my suit; he kissed, and talked of other things. At supper I would eat nothing; he as usual sat by me, and drank often to me, which was his custom, and was full of discourse to the company that was at the table. Going to bed I asked again, and said I could not believe he loved me if he refused to tell me all he knew; but he answered nothing, but stopped my mouth with kisses. So we went to bed, I cried, and he went to sleep. Next morning early, as his custom was, he called to rise, but began to discourse with me first, to which I made no reply; he rose, came on the other side of the bed and kissed me, and drew the curtains softly and went to Court. When he came home to dinner, he presently came to me as was usual, and when I had him by the hand, I said, ‘Thou dost not care to see me troubled;’ to which he taking me in his arms, answered, ‘My dearest soul, nothing upon earth can afflict me like that, and when you asked me of my business, it was wholly out of my power to satisfy thee, for my life and fortune shall be thine, and every thought of my heart in which the trust I am in may not be revealed, but my honour is my own, which I cannot preserve if I communicate the Prince’s affairs; and pray thee with this answer rest satisfied.’ So great was his reason and goodness, that upon consideration it made my folly appear to me so vile, that from that day until the day of his death I never thought fit to ask him any business but what he communicated freely to me in order to his estate or family. (pp. 67-70)

Another striking feature of this autobiography are the two prayers which interrupt her narrative--one following the birth of the son to whom the piece is addressed and the other following her husband’s death. As Dean Ebner remarks of the former, “The occasion of this prayer is specific and highly personal, yet its phraseology and rhythms, far from attempting to convey a sense of spontaneity, approximate the formality of the Anglican Book of Common Prayers.” The prayers occur at moments of extreme happiness and extreme sorrow, and by rescuing these occasions from the realm of

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40 Ebner, op. cit., p. 82
sentimentality by the formalizing effect of prayer, she succeeds in communicating the overweening ineffability of her emotion more effectively perhaps than an attempt at direct expression might have done.

Though Anne Fanshawe’s account breaks off in mid-sentence we can hardly feel that much is lost, for the energy of her narrative seems largely to dissipate itself after the death of her husband and her departure from Spain.

g. Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick

Mary Boyle Rich, Countess of Warwick (1625-78) came from a family of autobiographers: both her father, Richard Boyle, Lord Cork, and her brother, the scientist Robert Boyle, wrote their lives. Some Specialities in the Life of M. Warwicke is not an especially attractive work, but the format is interesting. The thirty-eight printed pages are divided more or less in half by her conversion to the Puritan faith, but this document is by no means the typical conversion narrative. The beginning of the book is devoted to her courtship, frowned on by her father; and though she deplores her willfulness she makes no claim to having suffered at the time; when threatened with her father’s wrath if she fails to renounce Charles Rich, she affirms:

I made this resolute, but ill and horribly disobedient answer, that I did acknowledge a very great and particular kindness for Mr. Rich, and desired them, with my humble duty to my father, to assure him that I would not marry him without his consent, but that I was resolved not to marry any other person in the world; and that I hoped my father would be pleased to consent to my having Mr. Rich, to whom, I was sure, he could have no other objection, but that he was a younger brother; for he was descended from a very great and honourable family, and was in the opinion of all (as well as mine) a very deserving person, and I desired my father would be pleased to consider, I only should suffer by the smallness of his fortune, which I very contentedly chose to do, and should judge myself to be much more happy with his small one, than with the greatest without him. (p. 13)

Though from her later vantage point she cannot condone her youthful behavior, she refuses to deny it or even entirely to condemn it (she perfunctorily labels it “ill and horribly disobedient,” to be sure, but devotes much more space to a rational exposition of her position).

Her father’s objections to her suitor arose from the fact that he had other plans for his daughter:

My father and his had, some years before, concluded a match between myself and Mr. Hambletone, if we liked when we saw one another, and that I was of years of consent; and now he being returned out of France,

was by my father's command to come to my father's, where he received from him a very kind and obliging welcome, looking upon him as his son-in-law, and designing suddenly that we should be married, and gave him leave to make his address, with a command to me to receive him as one designed to be my husband. Mr. Hambletone (possibly to obey his father), did design gaining me by a very handsome address, which he made to me, and if he did not to a very high degree dissemble, I was not displeasing to him, for he professed a great passion for me. (pp. 2-3)

Mary Boyle was not deeply introspective; she seems often to have been puzzled by her own feelings and passions. Yet something in her strongly resisted being bartered:

... my aversion for him was extraordinary, though I could give my father no satisfactory account why it was so. (p. 3)

When, later, she becomes infatuated with Charles Rich, her emotions once again seem mysterious to her:

... by his more than ordinary humble behaviour to me, he did insensibly steal away my heart, and got a greater possession of it than I knew he had.
...

Thus we lived for some considerable time, my duty and my reason having frequent combats within me with my passion, which at last was always victorious, though my fear of my father's displeasure frighted me from directly owning it to Mr. Rich. (pp. 7-8)

Finally her father is brought to consent to the marriage. But despite her disapproval of her own disobedience, she takes evident satisfaction in the way events justified her choice, for Mr. Hambletone loses his fortune and Charles Rich, upon the death of his older brother, comes into one. She also believes her choice was a good one from another point of view:

Here let me admire at the goodness of God, that by His good providence to me, when I by my marriage thought of nothing but having a person for whom I had a great passion, and never sought God in it, but by marrying my husband flatly disobeyed His command, which was given me in His sacred oracles, of obeying my father; yet was pleased by His unmerited goodness to me to bring me, by my marriage, into a noble and, which is much more, a religious family. ... (pp. 14-15)

The death of her daughter, and illness of her son, and the preaching of the chaplain of the Warwick household combine to persuade her of the vanity of her worldly life. Despite her earlier resolve to resist Puritanism, she is converted, an event which radically changes her life:
. . . I was so much changed to myself that I hardly knew myself, and could say with that converted person, “I am not I.” (p. 24)

The rest of the volume is devoted by and large to pious recollections, mostly dealing with the deaths of those around her; here, for example, is her description of her husband’s death:

In the year 1673 it pleased God by death to take from me my dear Lord, who died at his house at Lees, upon Bartholomew day, for whose loss I was more afflicted than ever before for anything in my fore-past life; for though my son’s death had almost sunk me, and my grief for him was so great that I thought it almost impossible to be more sensibly afflicted, yet I found I now was so; and though God had given me many years to provide for our separation by seeing my poor husband almost daily dying (for God had been pleased for about twenty years to afflict him with the gout more constantly and painfully than almost any person the doctors said they had ever seen), yet I still flattered myself with hopes of his life, though he had for many years quite lost the use of his limbs, and never put his feet to the ground, nor was able to feed himself, nor turn in his bed but by the help of his servants; and by those constant pains he was so weakened and wasted that he was like a mere skeleton, and at last fell into most dangerous convulsion fits and died of the fourth. The seeing him in them was so very terrible to me, that after his death I fell into very ill fits; but by God’s blessing I at last lost them again. I had this comfort that nothing I could think was good for either his soul or body was neglected; and I had much inward peace, to consider that I had been a constant nurse to him, and had never neglected night or day my attendance upon him when he needed it. . . . (pp. 33-34)

Interspersed among these reflections, slightly incongruously, are some discussion of her financial dealings and her successful arrangements for her nieces’ marriages.

Throughout this narrative Mary Rich evinces an independent streak which appears to be a matter of temperament rather than ideology. Her conversion to Puritanism reinforces her self-sufficiency by removing her primary commitment from social relationships to God. When, towards the end of her narrative, she is forced to play the businesswoman, she is ready though not eager for the challenge:

. . . I met in the trust my dear Lord had imposed upon me as his executrix, in the sale of lands for raising portions and payment of debts, by reason of Mr. Jesop’s death, who was one of the trustees, with a great many stops and troubles in my business, which, having not been formerly versed in things of law, I found very uneasy and troublesome to me; but yet the great desire I had to see my Lord’s will fulfilled, made me go through my disturbing business with some patience and diligence; and God was so
merciful unto me, as He did, beyond my expectation, raise my some faithful, knowing, and affectionate friends, to let me see my dear Lord’s will fulfilled; and though there was a great many several persons I had to deal with, yet I satisfied them all so well, as I never had anything between them and me passed what was determined by going to law, but all that was in dispute between us, was always agreed on between ourselves in a kind and friendly way; for which O Lord, I bless thee. (p. 37)

The personality that emerges from this narrative is a rather cold and severe one, who tells of her sorrows rather than making us feel them. Nor is the author successful in communicating the quality of her religious experience; her manner of commending God for the most scarifying events (God cannot lose) cannot appeal to anyone who does not already share her religious convictions. But Mary Rich’s independent spirit and her vivid picture of the social mores surrounding courtship and marriage make this a valuable document nevertheless.

h. Anne Halkett

The Autobiography42 of Anne Murray Halkett (1622-99), written in 1678, stands out among women’s autobiographies of the seventeenth century as an unusual and surprising production. It is longer than most--107 printed pages (it is incomplete, breaking off in mid-sentence); certainly it is the most extended example of a work primarily secular in content and orientation which does not subordinate the life of the central figure to that of her husband. Anne Halkett, without apology, concentrates her attention upon her own adventures both as a young woman being courted and as a Royalist activist; her three suitors, even the one she eventually married, play supporting roles in her narrative.

Her childhood was evidently a happy one, and though she was careful to observe the proprieties of industry and piety, she did not share the guilt-ridden existence of some of her Puritanical peers:

What my childish actions were I thinke I need not give accountt of here, for I hope none will thinke they could bee either vicious or scandalous. And from that time till the year 1644 I may truly say all my converse was so inocentt that my owne hart cannott challenge mee with any imodesty, either in thought or behavier, or an act of disobedience to my mother, to whom I was so observant that as long as shee lived I do nott remember that I made a visit to ye neerest neibour or wentt anywhere withoutt her liberty. And so scrupulous I was of giving any occation to speake of mee, as I know they did of others, that though I loved well to see plays and to walke in the Spring Garden sometimes (before itt grew something scandalous by yce abuse of some), yett I cannott remember 3

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times that ever I wentt with any man besides my brothers; and if I did, my sisters or others better than my selfe was with mee. (p. 3)

Eventually, however, she becomes more independent:

In the yeare 1644 I confese I was guilty of an act of disobedience, for I gave way to ye adrese of a person whom my mother, att the first time that ever hee had occation to bee conversantt wth mee, had absolutely discharged mee ever to allow of. . . . (p. 3)

Let it be noted that Anne Halkett is twenty-two years old at this time; and her disobedience only extends to assuring her suitor that she will marry no other man while he remains unmarried (which state, in her absence, he does not long maintain); she firmly rejects all his entreaties that she run off with him. This disobedience leads her to devise a naive little stratagem for obeying the letter of the law while violating the spirit:

Was ever creature so unfortunate and putt to such a sad dificulty, wither to make Mr. H. forsworne if hee see mee nott, or if I doe see him my mother will be foreswome if shee doth nott expose mee to the utmost rigour has anger can invent! In the midst of this dispute with myselfe that I should doe, my hand beeing still upon my eyes, itt presently came in my mind that if I blindfolded my eyes that would secure mee from seeing him, and so I did not transgrese against my mother, and hee might that way satisfy himselfe by speaking with mee. (p. 12)

After the dissolution of her engagement to Thomas Howard, she becomes deeply involved in a convoluted relationship with Colonel Joseph Barnfield. Colonel Barnfield, an officer in the Royalist army, was apparently a political intriguer and charming scoundrel. Under his influence and that of her brother, she became a committed royalist activist; some of her adventures will be related in another section. She also fell deeply in love with him, and finally consented in an engagement despite persistent rumors that his wife was still living. This equivocal situation plagued her for years, until Sir James Halkett (whom she later married) finally presented her with incontrovertible evidence that Mrs. Barnfield was living. Even after this revelation, Colonel Barnfield seemed bent upon dismissing the technicality of his preexisting marriage; he descended upon her uninvited and inquired if she was yet married to Halkett. The instinct for self-preservation which had already carried her intact through many difficult circumstances in the past led her to invent a ruse reminiscent of the one she had used years earlier to mislead her mother:

I asked why hee inquired. Hee said because if I was nott, hee would then propose something that hee thought might be both for his advantage and mine; but if I were, hee would wish me joy, butt never trouble mee more. I said nothing a little while, for I hated lying, and I saw there might bee
some inconvenience to tell the truth, and (Lord pardon the equivocation!) I sayd I am (outt aloud, and secretttly said nott).  (p. 99)

As Margaret Bottrall implies in comparing this production to *Sense and Sensibility*, and as Paul Delany implies in describing it as a “curious narrative, which reads like a blend of Richardson and Sir Walter Scott,” Anne Halkett sustains a high level of interest in her story by her use of techniques which might be termed “novelistic.” She is masterly in her re-creation of scenes which occurred several decades before, and the dialogue is extremely lively--though more to the point and remembered in greater detail than might in all strictness be expected. Clearly the incidents and adventures have been selected and arranged to keep the reader’s attention. She does not burden us with long passages of introspection and analysis; but she is very sensitive to the emotional implications of human acts, and a strong sense of her character emerges from the action. We come away with a clear impression of a woman who, while not self-righteous or hyper-pious, cherisls a conviction of her own innate rectitude, and who, while capable of being swayed by her emotions, attempts to conduct her life in accordance with her principles, her religion, and her rational faculties. Her writing exhibits a strong feeling for chronology; she maintains suspense by reserving the truth about Colonel Bamfield’s marriage until that moment in her life when she herself becomes certain of it. This is indeed artistry of a high order, however unconsciously it may have been exerted.

What prompted this outburst of self-expression is difficult to say, since it was apparently intended neither for publication nor for her own posterity. It is hard to resist speculating that she is a precocious example of a new breed of woman, liberated from a protected monotony and from traditional connections and definitions by political and social events, and inculcated, like many of her male contemporaries, with a growing consciousness of secular individuality and conviction of its importance. I shall discuss these factors in more detail later; at this point, it is sufficient to observe that for overall narrative and dramatic skill and emotional sensitivity, Anne Halkett’s autobiography is perhaps the finest account to be produced by a woman during the period under consideration. It certainly compares favorably with any autobiography of a contemporary male author. While Anne Halkett and Margaret Cavendish were very different personalities, with highly divergent life histories and ambitions, they shared two very crucial attitudes: each saw herself not simply as an extension of her husband or her God, but as an independently functioning individual; and each took an unabashed interest in her own individuality.

*i. Alice Curwen*

*A Relation of the Labour, Travail and Suffering of that Faithful Servant of the Lord, Alice Curwen* is a work which is only marginally an autobiography; it is a brief description of her travels on behalf of her Quaker faith, which is brought together with a

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44 Delany, op. cit., p. 162.
number of letters which she and her husband wrote to or received from various others, mostly Quakers. It was dictated on her deathbed in 1679. The document runs to some fifty-three pages, but only the first seven are actual narrative. They tell nothing of her childhood or her conversion, but deal mainly with her travels in America:

In the year 1660. I hearing of the great Tribulation that the Servants of the Lord did suffer in Boston in New England, of cruel Whippings, of Bonds and Imprisonments, yea to the laying down of their natural Lives; four Friends being Hanged there for their Testimony to God’s blessed weighty Truth, against a Wicked Generation, which remains there until this day; I, at the hearing of their Patient Sufferings, my heart was broken, and my Spirit deeply affected with Admiration of the Goodness of the Lord, who bears up the Spirits of them that truly fear him, and are willing to give up all that is near and dear, to follow the Lamb whithersoever he leads; and my Spirit was comforted in the blessed invisible Power: but it was said in the Secret of my Heart, That I should travail in the Nation, and see that Bloody Town of Boston; at which my heart was exceedingly broken, and I cryed unto the Lord with many Tears, and said, O Lord, what shall become of my little Children, and of my poor Husband? (he being then in Prison for Tythe). (p. 2)

It is several years before she actually gets underway:

. . . the Lord appeared, and it was said secretly, that If I did go I should feel my Reward from the Lord in my own Bosom: then I having this Testimony sealed in my Heart, I laboured with my Husband day and night to know his Mind, because it was much with me, that we were to Travail together; but he did not yet see it to be required of him at that time, but gave me Liberty in Obedience to the Invisible Power, though the thing was hard, because it shewed me at first, that we should Travail together; but the Lord made me willing to leave all (that was near and dear to me) and I went on my Journey towards London, and after some time had with Friends there, I made Preparation to go to Sea, and having got my Bed and Clothes on board the Ship, it pleased the Lord (in whom was and is my Trust) to send my Husband to go along with me: and so we took shipping together, and were thirteen weeks in our Passage from London to Road-Island belonging to New-England; and I can truly say, I did not know what I might do; for all there were in an Uproar, Killing, and Burning, and Murdering, and great Distress was upon the Peoples Minds. (p. 3)

Her descriptions of the places she visits are minimal; they are seen merely as a backdrop for the Friends meetings which she incessantly attends:

. . . we came to Sittuate, and Dukesberry, and to Sandwich, and did visit Friends all along in several places until we came to Road-Island; and after
a little time spent with Friends there, it was with us to go into the West part of New-England, to Shelter-Island and Long-Island, Oyster-Bay, Westchester and Eastchester, and to Gravesend, and a Place there called Jamaco, and Matunicook, and New-York, and some part of New-Jersey, so far as Friends did inhabit to our Knowledge, and we were there: in this time of our Passage thither we were several times put on Shore, the Wind not being with us, where we had good Service for the Lord and for his Truth, where there were no Friends, upon the main Land, at a place called New-London, and Seabrook, and Milford. . . (p. 5)

Frequently we wish that she had enlarged on various incidents, but her style is so abstractly pious that we get little feeling for what actually happened:

So we travailed through the Woods and Places where the devouring Indians had made great Desolation in many Places, but the Lord preserved us. (p. 4)

When Alice Curwen is taken to a whipping-post for violating an ordinance forbidding attendance at Friends’ meetings, we learn only that

. . . the Presence of the Lord was manifested there, which gave us Dominion over all their Cruelty, and we could not but Magnifie the Name of the Lord, and declare of his Wonderful Work at that time, at which the heathen were astonished, and shook their head. (p. 5)

Such abstraction is typical of the Quaker style at its least evocative; it stands in sharp contrast with what might be called the Baptist style of Bunyan or Trapnel, where the spiritual and the material both take on a vivid, concrete reality, the material becoming almost another mode of the spiritual.

**j. Mary Penington**

_A Brief Account of My Exercises from my Childhood_,46 by Mary Proude Penington (c. 1621-82), is cast in the form of a record of her search for truth and inner peace and her eventual conversion to the Quaker faith, which she brings up to date a couple of times over the course of her life, followed by an epistle to her grandson describing her life with his grandfather and shadowing forth his virtues for the boy to emulate. It is short (thirty-nine printed pages) and shares many features with the typical Quaker autobiography; as Delany points out, however, the author “died before the Quaker autobiography had settled into a rigid convention, and her conversion narrative has a freshness and intensity rarely found in the later journals.”47 Another thing which distinguishes her from the usual Quaker autobiographer is her aristocratic background.

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47 Delany, op. cit., p. 166.
Her pre-Quaker life is one of unsatisfied seeking after religious truth and guilt over many excesses and vanities, as foolish mirth, carding, dancing and singing. I frequented musick meetings, and made vain visits where there was jovial eatings and drinkings to satisfy the extravagant appetite. I delighted in what would please the vain mind, and with curiosities, and that which was to satisfy the lust of the eye, the pride of life, and the lusts of the flesh; and frequenting places of pleasure, where vain persons resorted to show themselves and to see others in the like excess of folly in apparel; in riding about from place to place, and in the airy mind. But in the midst of all this my heart was constantly sad and pained beyond expression. (p. 7)

This is what we have come to expect in Quaker autobiography. There is, however, a subtlety in her description which somehow conveys the sense of unique personal suffering; an example is her extended agonizing over prayer:

one day after we came from the public place of worship, this forementioned maid servant, read one of Preston's sermons--the text, “pray continually”--in which sermon much was spoken of prayer, and amongst other things, of the excellency of prayer; this was said of it, that it distinguished a saint from the world, for, that in many things, the world and hypocrites could imitate a saint, but in this they could not. This thing wrought much in my mind all the time she read it, and it was in me, that I knew not prayer; for what I used for prayer, an ungodly man might do, which was to read out of a book, and this could not be the prayer he meant, that distinguished a saint from a wicked one. My mind was deeply exercised in this, and as soon as she had done reading, and all was gone out of the chamber, I shut to the door, and in great distress of mind, flung myself on the bed and oppressedly cried out aloud, Lord, what is prayer? (p. 2)

Her style is an understated one. Domestic events form the true backbone of her narrative; external political events take on significance only as they affect her personally:

One day, by accident, going through the city, from a country house; I could not pass through the crowd, (it being a day wherein the Lord Mayor was sworn,) but was forced to go into a house till it was over; I being burthened with the vanity of their show, said to a professor that stood by me, “what benefit have we by all this bloodshed, and Charles’s being kept out of the nation?” He answered, none, that he knew of, saving the enjoyment of their religion. To which I replied, that is a benefit to you who have a religion, to be protected in the exercise of it, but it is none to me. (p. 8)
Even Christ as he appears in her dreams, as Delany notes, is portrayed in “domestic and lifelike” terms:

I stood at a great distance, at the lower end of that great hall, and Christ at the upper end; whom I saw in the appearance of a fresh lovely youth, clad in grey cloth (at which time I had not heard of a Quaker or their habit) very plain and neat, he was of a sweet, affable, courteous carriage, and embraced several poor old simple people, whose appearance was very contemptible and mean, without wisdom or beauty. (p. 9)

But her greatest successes are her portraits of her husbands, especially her first, Sir William Springett; her touching description of his deathbed scene will be quoted in a later chapter. Her admiration of him shines through, even when we cannot entirely share her unqualified approval:

There was a parliament man who was also a deputy lieutenant of the county, a great stirer in the parliament cause and his wife a zealous Puritan. This man was assisting to him and his companion in this searching of Popish houses, and destroying their pictures and trumpery. Thy grand-father going one day to their house to visit them, as he passed through the hall he spied several superstitious pictures, as on the crucifixion of Christ, his resurrection, and such like, very large pictures that were of great ornament to the hall, and were removed out of their parlour to manifest a neglect of them, but he looked upon it as a very unequal thing, to destroy such things in the Popish, and leave them in their opposers; he drew out his sword and cut them all out of their frames, and spoiled them upon the sword’s point, and went into the parlour with them. The woman of the house being there, he said to her what a shame it is, that thy husband should be so zealous a prosecutor of the Papists, and spare such things in his own house; but, saith he, I have acted impartial judgment, and have destroyed them here. (p. 36)

Her second husband, too, is individualized; more than most religious autobiographies, Mary Penington depicts her marriage as an act of her own will, not merely a response to a divine hint:

In this condition that I mentioned of my wearied seeking and not finding, I married my dear husband Isaac Penington. My love was drawn to him because I found he saw the deceit of all notions, and lay as one that refused to be comforted by any appearance of religion, until he came to his temple who is truth and no lie. All things that had the appearance of religion were very manifest to him, so that he was sick and weary of all that appeared, and in this my heart cleft to him, and a desire was in me to

48 Ibid.
be serviceable to him in this his desolate condition, for he was alone and miserable in this world; and I gave up much to be a companion to him in this his suffering. (p. 10)

In this passage the ethic of usefulness to others with which women were (and are) so thoroughly imbued is manifest; her own “seeking and not finding” are subordinated to the similar suffering of her husband, “serviceable” being the operative word.

As can be seen from the passages quoted, Mary Penington’s ability to portray human beings in interaction exceeds that of most autobiographers of her period, especially within a religious context; her strength of character and inquiring mind enable her to engage in relationships which are subtle and highly individualized, and to portray them effectively. This book stands as an attractive example of its type.

**k. Elizabeth Andrews**

Elizabeth Andrews (c. 1628-1718), an impoverished Quaker, wrote a very brief and selective account of her life (about five printed pages). It is essentially a series of anecdotes, vividly and sparingly told, describing various persecutions which she suffered as a Quaker. The autobiography ends around 1688 and was presumably composed shortly thereafter; however, it may have been written much later.

She gives the following account of her family and early childhood:

I was born in the County of Salop at a place called Cound Lane End, within five miles of Shrewsbury. My parents were honest people and of good report. My father’s name was John Farmer. He was a man come of a substantial family near where we lived. He was called by many “honest John Farmer.” He was a man of strict life and was called a Puritan, and after that a Roundhead. He brought us up very strictly, not suffering us to speak vain words nor go among other children to play, but would say: “Go to your books, and learn to fear the Lord.” I, from my childhood, had a desire after the Lord; when I was sent to School, I have gone under a lecture and prayed to the Lord to keep me from sinning against Him. (pp. 3-4)

In 1653 she became a Quaker, converted, as she tells us, by reading “a book of the trial of George Fox and James Naylor at Lancaster” (p. 4). The following anecdote is typical in its naiveté and its scriptural defense of her position:

Another time the Lord Newport caused a great feast to be made at my Father’s house of his own cost, and Invited most of the Great men of the County to the feast, and spake to my Father that I might wait on him at the Table, which I did, doing all things which I ought, but not bowing (or

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Curchying). He observed me a while, and then said to me: “Why do not you make me a Curchy when you give me the Glass?” My answer was: “Before I knew how to do better, I did, which is well known to all that are here.” Then said he to me: “Betty, if you will make me a Curchy, as I am a Gentleman, and before all these Gentlemen I will give you Twenty Pounds.” I answered: “If I might have all Eyton Hall to do it, yet I durst not do it, for all Honour belongeth to God: and the angel which revealed the Revelations to John (when John would have bowed to him) said: ‘See thou do it not, for I am thy fellow servant of thy Brethren the Prophets. Worship god!’” Then says he: “Why do you not speak to People when you meet them as you were wont to do?” I answered: “It is written in the Scriptures: ‘Go thy way; if thou meet any man salute him not; and if any man salute thee answer him not again’”. . . . After this manner he discoursed with me all that afternoon. How many great gifts did he proffer me to submit to his will, but the Lord preserved me by his mighty power and made me stand boldly for the Truth in that publick house. (pp. 4-5)

Her failure to perceive the true ugliness of the behavior of Lord Newport is perhaps a good index of the level of consciousness of the average country woman (and of her class consciousness, or lack of it, as well).

The personal events in her life are noted in passing, as if their function were largely to serve as temporal landmarks. “I was afterwards married to a very honest Man, a Friend of Truth, a Mercer by trade, living at Holt in Denbighshire,” she writes (p. 5), but two sentences later we find her mysteriously a widow. It is the incidents giving her an opportunity to stand up for her faith whichloom large in her life, expanding to fill a seemingly disproportionate amount of her autobiography. These actions radiate from a spiritual center which we never see directly, but rather at one remove. Her detailed lists of the worth of confiscated goods and amounts of fines lend a kind of worldly reality to her sufferings; we get a sense not of rarefied spirituality but of a dogged faithfulness which produces real-world consequences, economic problems which must be dealt with on a day-to-day basis.

Her feelings, her doubts, her sense of who she is, can only be inferred; there is no attempt at introspection or evaluation. Nor is there any summing-up or cadence at the end: Elizabeth Andrews’ account closes rather anticlimatically with a list of the important Quakers she has entertained.

I. Joan Vokins

Joan Vokins (d. 1690) was a pious, busy, and missionary-minded Quaker. When she died some of her friends gathered together a collection of letters from her and testimonials about her and published them in 1691 under the title *God’s Mighty Power Magnified; as manifested and revealed in his faithful handmaid Joan Vokins*. Included in this volume is “Some Account given forth by Joan Vokins of the great Goodness and

Mercy of the Lord towards her, and of the wonderful works that he hath done for her; conduction to his Glory and her great Joy and Comfort: Written with her own Hand (a few Months before her decease) as followeth,” which, along with two additional “further testimonies,” runs to about thirty-three pages.

Her childhood, according to her account, shows the typical Quaker pattern of guilt and dissatisfaction over even small worldly pleasures:

Something of the tender dealing of the Lord with me ever since my Childhood, for (blessed be his Name) he preserved me from many Evils that Youth is often ensnared with; and by his Light (that I then had no acquaintance with) shewed me the vanity and vain Customs of the World when I was very young, and all along my youth his Good Spirit did still strive with me to preserve me from Sin and Evil: And if I had at any time, through persuasion of others, gone to that they called Recreation, I should be so condemned for passing away my precious time, that I could have no peace, so that I could take no delight in their Pastime, but was still condemned. (pp. 15-16)

Her search for inner peace finally leads her to embrace the Quaker faith:

... Faithfulness is required to the Talent received, for which we must give an account; and then what can stand us instead, if we have not an increase? This was my concern for many years, and I could not take comfort in Husband or Children, House, or Land, or any visibles, for want of the Marriage Union with the Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the Souls of those that cannot be satisfied in them; but are weary of the burden of them, as I was; and God by his Spirit shewed me, he abhorred my self-righteousness; and let me see that in him was Righteousness, Life and Power; and then I was sensible that he is the Light of the World, that enlightens every one that comes into the World; and that it was striving with me from my Youth, which was before ever I heard the name Quaker; and then I did believe that there was a People or Church over whom Christ Jesus was Head, though I could yet not find them, nor be a Member of them; yet long sought after it sorrowfully, with many strong and fervent cries and desires: But the Lord in his own due time answered my weary soul, and made known more and more of the Way of his Truth and People, and at length sent some of his Messengers, as Instruments in his Hand, for my Encouragement and Confirmation: Then was I, and many desolate ones, right glad. . . . (pp. 18-19)

In this passage Joan Vokins makes explicit what is implicit in many religious autobiographies. The invidious comparison between her life with her husband and her union with God suggests part of the function of religion in her life: it allowed her to find by turning inward the meaning, mystery, exaltation, and ceremony that were lacking
outwardly; in effect, she could admit that she was not satisfied with her domestic lot without actually rebelling against it.\footnote{I do not suggest that men were not subject to dissatisfaction; I am only trying to show the particular form which it took for women.}

The weak sense of chronology during her description of her early years and conversion helps to convey the wavering and indecision which she experienced. Her nautical metaphors in describing her spiritual tribulations during this early part of her life effectively foreshadow the actual experiences which she will later encounter traveling on behalf of her faith:

But then I could not watch or wait, but was as a Ship without Anchor among the merciless Waves; but Praises unto the Lord for ever, he caused the Living Hope to spring that is anchored in trying Times. And I was, even as Israel, compassed round on every Hand; great was the strait I was then in, much hardship, the Sea before, and the Enemy presenting so much impossibility, that his proud Waves of Temptations, Buffetings, and false Accusations had almost sunk me under: Oh then did I cry unto the God of Mercy and tender Compassion, that I might but stand still and behold his Salvation; and he did arise and rebuke the Enemy, and made way for me to travel on in my Heavenly Progress. . . . (p. 20)

Since, as she tells us, this passage was actually written while she was aboard a ship, it provides an interesting insight into the double focus of the autobiographer: from her present situation she draws the metaphor which allows her to give shape and meaning to past experience.

After her conversion, she feels a strong call to travel, which she resists:

Oh, how long did his tender Spirit strive with me before I gave up to go to Sea? How did his long Patience wait and suffer? Surely it’s worthy to be remembered, for he might have cut me off in a disobedient Condition: . . . the Dark Reasoner was very busie. . . . (p. 25)

Finally she succumbs, and in telling of her surrender unwittingly hits upon what is perhaps the spiritual source of the greatest weakness in the Quaker style:

. . . precious is the feeling of the Life of Jesus to the awakened and illuminated Soul, and that made the roaring Sea, and dry Land, and lonesome Wilderness all one to me by Night and by Day. . . . (p. 26)

If all experiences are reduced to a single Experience, and all differences are absorbed into oneness, the resulting descriptions of these experiences have a large potential for monotony. Unless the author compensates with mysticism or a unique and radiant inner life, she or he may bore the reader with colorless lists of places visited. Let it be said that Joan Vokins is not the worst offender in this respect; on some occasions, as we have seen, she achieves a fairly lively descriptive style.
Her adventures in Long Island, Rhode Island, Boston, and the Barbadoes are interesting enough, not least because of the naive satisfaction she took from the active role she played in them. In the following episode she displays the self-righteous attitude which often marks Quaker zealots (and indeed, the zealots of any sect):

... the People told me they did not dare to have a Meeting, yet I published Truth in the Streets, and they confessed to it; and so I left Truth honorable amongst them, and then came aboard the Vessel, where I last took my Passage, and sailed to the other Vessel, that I had suffered in, and called for the Owner and cleared my Conscience to him, and told him the Hand of the Lord was against him, and warned him to Repent, else he should suddenly feel the stroke of it to be heavy upon him; and inasmuch as his Heart [sic] had been too much set on that Bark, he should shortly see that the Lord would destroy it, and accordingly his Vessel was split on a Rock in a little time after. (p. 41)

As we frequently find among Quaker women, Joan Vokins does not take refuge in her sex as an excuse to evade responsibility. Unlike Alice Curwen, she embarks on her difficult and dangerous journeys unaccompanied by her husband, trusting in God to provide her with suitable female traveling companions. The issue of women’s preaching is raised—and dealt with firmly:

I told the Priest that he was not of the Primitive Faith and Church of Christ, testified of in Scripture. ... [H]e said I should not have spoken in the Church; and I asked him what Church that was? for I had spoken in the true Church many times among God’s People, and they did not hinder me; and he said Paul spoke against a Woman’s speaking in the Church: I asked him what Woman that was, and what Church that was they she should not speak in? and he did not answer me, but went away; and a Woman Friend that was with me took hold of him, and said, My Friend, answer the Woman’s question ... but the Priest put off his hat to us and busied away, and afterwards endeavoured to send me to Prison. ... (p. 45)

It is incidents such as this one which lend color to this otherwise run-of-the-mill Quaker autobiography.

m. Margaret Fell Fox

A Relation of Margaret Fell is about fourteen pages long and is a straightforward narrative of the events and difficulties which befell its author as a Quaker, with hardly any attempt at psychological exploration. It was written in 1690 by Margaret Askew Fell Fox (1614-1702), best known as an important figure in early Quaker history (her work included organizing groups of Quaker women) and as the wife of George Fox,

a founder of Quakerism. Unlike most Quaker autobiographies, this work tells us practically nothing of her childhood and pre-conversion doubts.

Her first husband was Justice Fell, an eminent Swarthmore judge. The story of her conversion and his reaction to it is reminiscent of the story of Esther:

Then in the Year 1652, it pleas’d the Lord in his Infinite Mercy and Goodness to send George Fox into our Country, who declar’d unto us the Eternal Truth, as it is in Jesus; and by the Word and Power of the Eternal God, turn’d many from Darkness unto Light, and from the Power of Satan unto God; And when I and my Children, and a great part of our Servants were so convinc’d and converted unto God at which time my Husband was not at Home, being gone to London. When he came Home, and found us the most part of the Family chang’d from our former Principle and Perswasion which he left us in, when he went from Home, he was much surpriz’d at our suddain change: For some envious People of our Neighbours, went and met him upon the Sands, as he was coming Home and Inform’d him, that we had entertain’d such Men as had taken us off from going to Church, which he was very much concern’d at; so that when he came Home, he seem’d much troubled. And it so happen’d, that Richard Farnsworth, and some other Friends (that came into our Parts a little time after G. Fox) were then at our House when my Husband came Home; and they Discours’d with him, and did perswade him to be still, and weigh things, before he did any thing hastily, and his Spirit was something calmed.

At Night, G. Fox spoke powerfully and convincingly, that the witness of God in his Conscience answer’d that he spake Truth; and he was then so far convinc’d in his Mind that it was Truth, that he willingly let us have a Meeting in his House at the next first Day after. . . . And he became a kind Friend to Friends, and to the practicers of Truth upon every occasion, as he had opportunity. For he being a Magistrate, was Instrumental to keep off much Persecution in this Country, and in other Places where he had any Power. (pp. 2-3)

After her husband’s death she spends considerable time in London, working with Friends there and in particular talking frequently with King Charles in an effort to persuade him to lighten the persecution of Quakers. Eventually she is imprisoned for refusing to take an oath; her narrative of these events is crisply factual and gives us little idea of the feelings she must have harbored:

. . . they passed Sentence of Praemunire upon me, which was, That I should be out of the King’s Protection, and forfeit all my Estate, Real and Personal, to the King, and Imprisonment during Life. But the great God of Heaven and Earth supported my Spirit under this severe Sentence, that I was not terrified; but gave this Answer to Judge Turner, who gave the
Sentence, Although I am out of the King’s Protection, yet I am not out of the Protection of the Almighty God; so there I remained in Prison Twenty months, before I could get so much Favour of the Sheriff, as to go to my own House; which then I did for a little time, and returned to Prison again. And when I had been a Prisoner about Four Years, I was set at Liberty by an Order from the King and Council in 1668. (p. 8)

Margaret Fell’s marriage with George Fox is described with equal matter-of-factness; indeed, there is little indication that she actually participated in the decision:

And then it was Eleven Years after my former Husband’s Decease; and G. Fox being then returned from visiting Friends in Ireland. At Bristol he declared his Intentions of Marriage with me; and there was also our Marriage solemnized, in a publick Meeting of many Friends, who were our Witnesses. (p. 8)

Her account ends with a letter which she sent to the Women’s Meeting in London, which serves as both history and testimonial (hence a fitting conclusion for her narrative); it is a very conventional example of the Quaker epistolary style. The autobiography is of interest because of the historical importance of its author but is not a significant contribution to the history of autobiography.

n. Anonymous Relative of Cromwell

The anonymous account of a woman (1654-1702?) who was supposedly related to Oliver Cromwell has never been published; the eighteenth century transcriber comments that “I hardly think it worth transcribing, and probably may be tired before I get halfway” (p. 411). It is primarily a journal, but it opens with four pages of autobiography which are apparently intended to recount her life up to the time when the author begins her journal; since the first entry is dated June 22, 1690, we may conclude that the autobiographical portion was written around that time; the author probably died around 1702, when she is ill and the journal is discontinued. The journal, except for whatever value it has as an illustration of Nonconformist spiritual processes, bears out the transcriber’s evaluation; the author thanks God repeatedly for various great deliverances, but we usually get no more inking of what actually happened to her than that she was “under a Soare Trial” (p. 416), “under a great Indisposition of Body” (p. 416), or going “through one of the greatest Trials I ever met with in my whole Life” (p. 420).

The autobiographical portion, however, is of somewhat greater interest. She begins with a brief description of her childhood, the first ten years of which were spent with her grandmother. After her grandmother’s death she is placed with her aunt,

where I continewed, as I remember, about the space of 2 years; & Part of this 2 yeares (in which time my Mother dyed) I continewed without any

Sense of God, notwithstanding my strickt Education, & my Aunt’s good Exampel, & daily Admonition to me: but God, who is rich in Grace, to the villlest of Sinners, was pleased, in a marvilous Manner, to extend his Grace & Compassion to me, & to cause me to Know there was a God. (p. 412)

She goes on to describe her conversion experience, which has an appealing homeliness about it:

One Mr. Marshall, a Minister, & a holy & good Man, was used to perform Duty in the Famile, & I attended at Prayer Time, with the Rest, but without al Sense & Apprehension of God, & wondered within myselfe what they prayed two, becaus there was nothing visabel, therefor used on Purpos to cary Apels & Nutts to eat at the Time of Prayer, & often have done so undiscovered: but one Time the cracking the Shel of a Nutt so disturbed Mr. Marshall, that he took Notis of it: but not Knowing who had done it,--whether my Cosens or me, (thof thay were examined) I past this Time without Discovere to Man, but not without being discovered by the Lord, to whom the Secrets of al Herts are known: & thof I remained as I did before, as to my Soul-State, yet I was much troubled, or rather ashamed of it, & thereupon resolved to do so no more; nor never durst after. (pp. 412-13)

Her conversion is clearly the crucial experience of her life, since it is upon this event that she lavishes the most loving detail. Later she is sent to school in London, where

The Sparkes that were Kindled before, were almost extinguished had not God, who was rich in Mercy to me vile Sinner, awakened me by that Soare, but just Stroake, the taking to himselfe, by Death, my Grandfather, & my deare & everhonoured Father, within a weeke one of another. . . . (p. 413)

Her description of her four years of marriage is brief:

Shortly after, it pleased the Lord to provide a Husband for me, in every respect a Blessing: & I desire to be truly humbled, that I did not live to the Glory of God, in the Injoyment of that Mersy as I should; in the Time we lived Together God was pleased to give us 3 Daughters & a Son; the eldest & youngest yet are living. . . . But that I might not settel on my Leess[?], God took to himself my deare Husband within 4 yeares after we were married: a sad but righteous stroak. . . . yea, good was the Word of the Lord, as to this; it being, as I hoap, a sanctified Affliction. . . . (p. 414)

The anonymous woman goes on to describe the distress which the encounter of an acquaintance with the devil caused her:
And whether this were a Temptation I know not; but I lay for some Time under such dreadful Aprehensions, as if I had been in an Agone, & to my Aprehension, so holden down, as if tied with a Courd, but at the Time crying earnestly to God for Help, & strugling with God in Prayer; & at last, this comfortabel Words were, as itt were, rung in mine Ears, as before, Therefore with Joy shal yea draw Water out of the Wells of Salvation: & almost immediately I was evidently released, & unbound, & my Hart in such a Frame as I never felt before, nor since. . . . (p. 415)

The autobiographical portion then draws to a close. On the whole it is not a remarkable document, but the first page or two are worthy of attention.

o. Barbara Blaugdone

An Account of the Travels, Sufferings and Persecutions of Barbara Blaugdone, published in 1691, is a fairly typical and undistinguished example of Quaker autobiography. It is brief—thirty-four small printed pages—and breaks no new ground. It is unintrospective except for the conventional Quaker experience conventionally described. Consider, for example, her record of her pre-conversion life:

In my Youth and Tender Years, I feared the Lord, and was afraid to offend him; and was zealous and diligent in the Profession I was in, and sought the Lord earnestly, although I knew not where to find him, until I was directed by Friends that came from the North, John Audland and John Camm by Name, whose Behavior and Deportments were such, that it preached before ever they opened their Mouths; and it was then revealed to me, That they had the Everlasting Gospel to Preach in this City: And when they did open their Mouths, I was made to bless God that I had lived to hear the Everlasting Gospel preached; and they directed my Mind unto the Light of Christ therein to wait, which I was diligent to do, and found the Vertue of it; and as the Evil was made manifest, I departed from it, and willingly took up the Cross, and yielded Obedience unto it, in plainness of Speech and my Habit. . . . (pp. 5-6)

This is all we hear of her youth. Compared with the much more individualized youthful sufferings of, say, an Anna Trappnel or a Mary Penington, Barbara Blaugdone’s seem impersonal and insipid. In assigning credit to God for her fortitude, she is equally conventional, echoing the pious platitudes of many other Quaker autobiographies:

And I can speak it to the glory of God, he never moved me to anything, but that he gave me Power to perform it, and made it effectual, although I past through much Exercise in the performance of it. (p. 8)

The real interest in this account lies in her descriptions of her travels. Barbara Blaugdone was a woman of action rather than of profound emotion or abstruse thought, and most of her account is devoted to the various adventures she encounters as she roams around the countryside bearing testimony. The result is a series of disconnected anecdotes, briefly told but lively and entertaining. She is stabbed in the belly by a hostile “Rude Man” (p 10), whipped by a beadle, and shipwrecked. The following adventure is a typical one:

... they brought me before the Mayor for speaking in a private meeting, and he discoursed much with me, and had a sense of what I said unto him, and received it; and at last he set open two Doors, one right against the other, and said, *He would give me my choice which I would go for that? Whether I would go to Prison again or go home?* And I told him, that I should choose Liberty rather than Bond. So I went homeward, and then he took his Horse and come and followed me, for there was some tenderness in him; and he would have had me Rid behind him, but I found that when any Body which I knew did meet us, then he would draw back and lag behind, and as soon as they were gone he would come up to me again; so therefore I would not ride behind him, but he rode three of four Miles with me, and discoursed me all the way; and when we parted, I was made to kneel down and pray for him, in which time he was very serious; and afterward he grew very solid and sober, and in a little time he died. . . . (pp. 18-19)

Later in Ireland, she is attacked by an angry butcher:

And I was made to speak in a Market-place, and there was a Butcher swore he would cleave my Head in twain; and had his cleaver up ready to do it, but their came a Woman behind him and caught back his Arms, and staid them till the Souldiers came and rescued me. (p. 27)

Barbara Blaugdone is a good example of the independence and self-reliance which characterize Quaker women and which are on the whole, I think, the most attractive feature of their autobiographies; indeed, she is even careful to assure us at the end, that she paid for all her travels out of her own purse.

**p. Elizabeth Stirrige**

*Strength in Weakness Manifest: in the Life, Various Trials, and Christian Testimony, of that faithful Servant and Handmaid of the Lord, Elizabeth Stirrige,* written in 1692, is a book-length account and thus one of the longer of the Quaker autobiographies produced by women in the seventeenth century. Elizabeth Tayler

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Stirredge (1634-1706) was not a profoundly introspective woman, but she was sufficiently self-aware to maintain a happy balance between internal and external events. She had the racked and fearful childhood which frequently appears in such works:

In the first place, I was born at Thornbury in Gloucestershire, of honest parents; my father’s name was William Tayler; my father and mother were people fearing God, and very zealous in their day; and my father, being one of those called Puritans, prophesied of friends many years before they came; He said “There was a day coming, wherein truth will gloriously break forth, more glorious than ever since the apostles days; but said, I shall not live to see it;” he died in the faith of it seven years before they came; whose honest and chaste life is often in my remembrance, and his fervent and zealous prayers amongst his family, are not forgotten by me. My parents brought me up after a very strict manner, so that I can truly say, I was much a stranger unto the world, and its ways.

In my tender years I was one of a sad heart, and much concerned and surprised with inward fear, what would become of me when I should die: and when my lot was to be near any that would talk rudely, or swear, or be overcome with strong drink, I dreaded to pass by them; and when I did hear it thunder, Oh! the dread and terror that would fall upon me; I would get to the privatest place that I could, to mourn in secret, thinking the Lord would render vengeance upon the heads of the wicked. When I saw the flashes of lightning, Oh! thought I, whither shall I go to hide myself from the wrath of the dreadful and terrible God? Thus was I possessed with my soul’s concern, before I was ten years of age; I was so filled with fears and doubts, that I could take no delight in any thing of this world. (pp. 2-3)

She gives a vivid description of the strangeness and aloneness she felt in her distress. Another unusual feature of this narrative is her ability to portray herself and others as human beings involved in realistic interactions:

And under this exercise I grew very sad, insomuch that my mother feared I was going into a consumption, and greatly feared my death; and would say unto me, “Canst thou take delight in nothing? I would have thee walk forth into the fields with the young people, for recreation, and delight thyself in something.” And to please her, I have sometimes, when we were out of our employment, gone forth with sober young people; but I found no comfort in that. Then I fell into a custom of reading the scriptures, and to be alone in private, reading and crying, because I knew not that heavenly power and spirit to have dominion in me, that was in them that gave forth the scriptures; and nothing else but the substance would give me true satisfaction, therefore the scriptures was but a book sealed unto me.
Then did I fall down upon my knees to pray unto the Lord, with my heart full of sorrow, and the tears running down my face, and could not utter one word; which seemed very strange unto me, and set me to thinking, that there was none like me. (pp. 5-6)

Later, as a Quaker, she (like Margaret Fell) feels herself called to testify to King Charles, though she resists believing that so humble a person as she should be chosen for such a task. She reveals first her intellectual reasons for her doubts:

I could not believe that ever the Lord would require such a service of me, that was so weak and contemptible, so unfit and unlikely, my understanding but shallow, and my capacity but mean, and very low and dejected in my own eyes; and looking so much at my insufficiency, made me strive so much against it; crying oftentimes within myself, ‘Surely this is something to ensnare me, for the Lord does not require such things of me; seeing there are so many wise and good men that are more honourable, and fitter for such service than I; Oh Lord! remove it far from me, and require any thing else of me, that I can better perform.’ (p. 26)

Notice that even her Quaker faith is not enough to eradicate her deeply rooted sense that a man would be better suited to the task. She then presents another aspect of her reluctance to go, giving the reader a feeling for the impact which such a journey would have on her life--the real-world obstacles which must have faced many women:

knowing myself to be of such a weak capacity, I did not think that the Lord would make choice of such a contemptible instrument as I, to leave my habitation, and tender children, that were young and tender, to go to King Charles, which was an hundred miles from my habitation, and with such a plain testimony as the Lord did require of me. . . . (p. 27)

Of course she goes--one cannot help wondering what the merry monarch must have made of these pious, insistent Quaker women appearing before him--and speaks as follows:

This is unto thee, Oh King! hear what the Lord hath committed unto my charge concerning thee: As thou hast been the cause of making many desolate, so will the Lord lay thee desolate; and as many as have been the cause of the persecuting, and the shedding of the blood of my dear children, in the day when I call all to an account, I will plead with them, saith the Lord; therefore hear and fear the Lord God of heaven and earth, for of his righteous judgments all shall be made partakers, from the king that sitteth upon the throne, to the beggar upon the dunghill.’ (p. 28)
She feels blessed and satisfied with Charles' reply: “I thank you, good woman.” Clearly the conviction that she has done what was required of her is more important than the quality of the results.

Elizabeth Stirredge was the wife of a shop-keeper, and her account, even more than that of Elizabeth Andrews, successfully conveys a sense of the quotidian realities of life for the average Quaker. She evidently suffered a great deal at the instigation of the Anglican clergy; the following incident is an example:

In the aforesaid year, 1670, when they began their work, the priest’s son of our town was one of the informers, and his curate was another. The priest’s son bought him a new sword, and swore, he would bathe it in our blood; and said, it was no more sin to kill a Quaker, than it was to kill a louse. Thus they began their dreadful work, which is too tedious to run through the particulars: but they first nailed up our meetinghouse doors, and set a guard before it; and it being one a day that the petty-sessions was kept in that town of Kainsham, four miles from Bristol, there being several justices there, they sent the bailiff and other officers, attended with a great company of rabble, who came in great rage with clubs, and other weapons; but the Lord was good and gracious unto us, and gave us strength according to the day, and opened my mouth in a testimony, for the encouragement of friends, and in praise to God, for counting us worthy to suffer for his name and truth’s sake. And after me, another woman, to the encouraging of friends and the power of the Lord was so livingly felt amongst us, that our enemies fell, that they could hardly speak to ask our names. But at length we were fined 20 £. a piece. But when meeting ended, we came away rejoicing. And indeed there was great cause for it; for the power of God was over all, to our great comfort. (pp. 43-45)

Later another priest, when he was unable to incite his neighbors to take action against the Quakers as they gathered for a burial, sent for “John Hellier, with more of his confederates, who was the great persecutor at Bristol” (p. 91), who gathered at the priest’s house:

after they had fed to the full, and drank in abundance, they brought with them faggots of wood from the priest’s, with a hatchet, and great axe, and commanded the people to aid and assist them. So they mustered up their forces as they came along; and the people seeing what posture they were in, cried out, ‘What are you going to do?’ ‘Blow up the house, and burn the Quakers,’ said they; then down they threw their wood at the meeting-house door, and cried out, ‘Set fire on them, blow up the house.’ Then the people cried out, ‘It will burn our houses that are near; and you will not be so wicked to burn the people, will you?’ Then they came in, in a violent manner, and laid hands on the children, threatening to burn them; bringing some of them out, they said, ‘We will make them a warning, to all others, and make them repent that ever they were Quakers’ bastards.’
Then they laid hands on us, hauling and dragging us along, beating some with a cane, and hewing off the legs of the forms, and taking other forms by the two ends, and so threw the Friends backwards that sat thereon; often calling to our neighbors to aid and assist them. Some of them replied, ‘We cannot work on the sabbath-day.’ So they continued the work until they had wearied themselves; then bringing us all out into the street amongst many people, I said unto them, ‘Where is your teacher?’ ‘What is that to you?’ some replied, ‘you shall be sure to suffer, if the rest do not.’ ‘But where is your teacher?’ I said again: ‘Let him come and see the fruit of his labour; this is his flock, and this is your sabbath-day’s work, let him come and behold the fruits of his labour, and see if he will be ashamed of it.’ Then they forced us in again, and John Hellier caused his man to make our mittimus, and himself committed us to Ivilchester jail, where we were so cruelly used, as is after related. (pp. 91-93)

This incident ends in Elizabeth Stirredge’s being sent to prison, and she gives us a striking picture of the facts of seventeenth century country prison life:

Our keeper Giles Bale, and his wife, put us in the common jail, with three felons, that were condemned to be hanged, and would not afford us straw to lie upon, though we would have paid for it; they locked us up, and carried away the key with them, they living some distance from the prison, thereby to prevent the under-keeper from shewing us any favour: And the head-keeper’s wife said, ‘There let them be like a company of rogues and whores together; if I had a worse place, I would put them therein.’

And truly that was a most dismal place, where we had neither stock nor any resting-place to lean against, but the black stone wall, covered with soot, and the damp cold ground to lie upon. But before we lay down, three of our friends, that were prisoners in the room adjoining to that we were in, put through the grates in unto us four dust, or chaff, pillows and two blankets, and a little straw, whereon we lay down, like a flock of sheep in a pen, in that very cold winter, that we never had the like since I had a remembrance. . . . (pp. 96-97)

There follows a lively account of her trial, with considerable dialogue.
Like other Quaker women, Elizabeth Stirredge was attacked for preaching. She dismisses this charge as a Satanic misinterpretation of a mystery:

But now to come to what is most before me; that all may understand how the enemy works in a mystery, and under a fair pretence to betray the precious life, and from the simplicity of the gospel, which is foolishness to the wisdom of the world.
In this troublesome time, it came in my heart to visit friends in Wiltshire, where I heard much of J. S. his going on. He had much reflected upon several women for bearing their testimony against that spirit; and I met with two good women that had been upon the service of truth, and had a good testimony. He grieved them, bidding them go home about their business, and wash their dishes, and not go about to preach. And said, that Paul did absolutely forbid women to preach; and sent them crying home. (pp. 52-53)

The man’s tactic of bolstering his theological argument with an attempt to burden the women with feelings of guilt for “neglecting” their domestic duties is another of the difficulties with which women active outside their homes had to contend; the resistance of many women to this pressure suggests the power of a religious commitment is motivating them to overcome such difficulties.

q. Alice Thornton

The Autobiography of Alice Wandesford Thornton (1626/27-1706/07) is a long and in some respects a difficult work, but it is a rewarding one. It is written in three manuscript volumes, evidently over a long period of time (it was started shortly after her husband’s death in 1668, or perhaps even earlier; a reference to her son’s death indicates that she was still writing some time after 1692). Unfortunately, the work was drastically edited in preparation for publication, the editor contending that the repetitions are so considerable, that it has been found necessary not only to make omissions, but to transpose passages here and there, to preserve to a certain extent the chronological sequence of events. Everything, however, has been inserted that is of any interest and value. . . . (p. xv)

Hence, what must be the dense, retrogressive quality of the work has been lost, and in places it reads almost like a journal. Parts of the work are rather tedious, being given over to family quarrels and detailed financial transactions; for, as the editor points out, the book was written at least in part to clear the author from the slander of a former friend and from the reproach of improvidence which was leveled at her after her husband died greatly indebted. Nevertheless, the work on the whole is a fascinating account of the life of a happy, well-to-do child, later the wife of a country gentleman, in the mid-seventeenth century.

The autobiography is much more devoutly religious in tone than we have come to expect from a woman of upper-class Anglican extraction. It is divided into innumerable sections with titles like “A Preservation in the Small-Pox, 1631” and “My Mother’s preservation from the Irish rebellion, Oct. 23d, 1641: a thanksgiving for our great

deliveration,” and punctuated with formal prayers which probably derive, as Ebner suggests, from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. 57

Despite her religious orientation however, Alice Thornton gives us a more intimate and individualized self-portrait than we generally find in Quaker or Baptist autobiographies. Her childhood was a happy one; her family went to Ireland in 1632, where she received

. . . the best education that kingdom could afford, hauing the advantage of societie in the sweet and chaste company of the Earle of Strafford’s daughter, the most virtuous Lady Anne, and the Lady Arbella Wentworth, learning those qualities with them which my father ordered, namlie,—the French language, to write and speake the same; singing; danceing; plaieing on the lute and theorboe; learning such other accomplishments of working silkes, gummework, sweetmeats, and other suitable huswifery, as, by my mother’s vertuous provision and cairole, she brought me up in what was fitt for her qualitie and my father’s childe. But above all things, I accounted it my cheifest happinesse wherein I was trained in those pieous, holy, and religious instructions, examples, admonitions, teachings, reproofoes, and godly education, tending to the welfare and eternall happinesse and salvation of my poore soule, which I receaved from both my honoured father and mother, with the examples of theire chaste and sober, wise and prudent conversations in all things of this world. For which things, and infinitly more opportunitys of good to my well-beeing than I can expresse, I render my uttmost capacity, etc. . . . I humbly acknowledge my faithfull thankes and gratitude to my deare and honoured parents for theire love, cairole, affection, and sedulity over me from my birth till this present, and for theire good performances towards my education in all things. (pp. 8-9)

Her descriptions of the accidents and illnesses that befall her, far from casting a pall over her narrative, give us realistic glimpses of the life of a child:

. . . the ladies ussing the costome to swing by the armes for recreation, and being good to exercize the body of children in growing, it was ordered by my Lady Straford they should doe it moderately, and found good in it, soe that they used to swing each other gently to the purpose. They would make me, beeing a young girle, doe the same with them; and did soe, and could hold very well by the armes as they did, and had never gott noe hurt by it, I blesse God, but found it did me good. But att this time, very unfortunately, some of the young ladies bid one of the pages (calld Don de Lan), a French boy, that he should swing me, being stronger than they, and they weary with play. But I cryed out, desireing them not to bid him, but could not gett off soe soone from him, and deliver my selfe from danger,

57 Ebner, op. cit., p. 84.
before he had came to me. He immediately pushed me soe violently from him with all his force, as I was swinging by my armes, that I was not able to hold my hands on the swing, soe that he throwed me downe upon the chamber bords. I fell downe upon my face, fell to the ground, and light with such a violent force with all my weight on my chin-bone uppward, that both the chin-bone and chapp-bones was almost brok in sunder, and putt the bone out of its place, and did raise a great lumpe as bigg as an egge under my chin and throte. . . . (pp. 10-11)

Alice Thornton repeatedly expresses great unwillingness to leave the happiness of her single state:

I was exceedingly satisfied in that happy and free condition, wherein I enjoyed my time with delight abundantly in the service of my God, and the obedience I owed to such an excellent parent, in whose enjoyment I accounted my days spent with great content and comfort; the only fears which possessed me was least I should be deprived of that great blessing I had in her life. Nor could I, without much reluctance, draw my thoughts to the change of my single life, knowing to much of the cares of this world sufficiently without the addition of such incident to the married estate. As to the fortune left by my father, it was fair, and more than competent, so that I needed not fear (by God’s blessing) to have bin troublesome to my freinds, but to be rather in a condition to assist them if need had required. (p. 75)

Nowhere in the autobiographies of seventeenth century women do we find a clearer statement of the primarily financial basis of marriage and of the genuine reluctance, if not aversion, which women often felt towards relinquishing the single state. This feeling is understandable, for even disregarding the fact that wife-beating was legal and practiced during this period, the usual lot of married women was a sorrowful and painful one. The agonies and infections commonly attendant upon childbirth were considerable, and the tragically high infant mortality rate frequently rendered the whole process futile. Alice Wandesford had frequently witnessed such difficulties, including the excruciating death of her sister, a month in the process, following the birth and death of her sister’s sixteenth child. Indeed, her beloved mother’s deathbed wish for her was primarily for strength to endure affliction:

As to my owne private consernes, she petitioned God that I might finde comfort in my husband’s family, and be rewarded with the same blessing that God had bin graciously pleased to give me in my children (as she was pleased to say I had bin to her); and that I might be strengthened by His grace to endure those afflictions with patience which I must find in this world after her death; and that I might have hope in God’s mercy that He would lay no more on me then He woud enable me to undergoe; and that they were signes of His love to me; and that I must not grieve too much for
her losse . . . for He could make up her losse in a greater comfort by giving me a son. . . . (p. 111)

She consents to marry William Thornton, after lengthy financial negotiations between him and her mother; she is stricken on her wedding day, which she takes as an ill omen and which we can hardly fail to interpret as a reflection of her attitude:

That very day on which I was married, having been in health and strength for many years before, I fell suddenly so ill and sick after two a’clock in the afternoon, that I thought, and all that saw me did believe, it would have been my last night, being surprised with a violent pain in my head and stomach, causing a great vomiting and sickness at my heart, which lasted eight hours before I had any intermission. . . . I looked upon this first business of my new condition to be a little discouragement, although God was able to turn all things for the best, and to my good, that I might not build too much hopes of happiness in things of this world, nor in the comforts of a loving husband, whom God had given me, but sett my desires more upon the love of my Lord and God. (pp. 83-84)

Her presentiment was borne out, for only three of her ten children survived, and most of her deliveries were attended by great pain and followed by severe illness which often lasted several months. After seventeen years of marriage (a satisfactory union, evidently, although she tells us that her husband was often afflicted with bouts of melancholy), he died leaving her to cope with a great many debts; she never criticizes him, though.

More than any other autobiography of the period, Alice Thornton’s gives a detailed picture of a woman’s life with and devotion to her children. We know she loves them not only because she tells us so but because she devotes so much space to their words and actions. She is virtually unique in presenting her children as differentiated individuals, as in the following passage:

After dinner, we were in my chamber at my aunt Norton’s house, St. Nickolas, and my deare Katy was plaing under the table with her sister, (beeing about three yrs old, but a very brave, stronge childe, and full of mettle, beeing much stronger than her poore sister Naly, she never haveing had either ricketts nor convolition fitts to keepe her downe, but allwaies continued very healtfull and strong, and full of trickes, and indeed apt to fall into dangers,) as she was plaing with pinnes, and putting them into her mouth, her sister see her, and cried out for feare she should doe herselfe hurt. But she would not be counseled with her, and at last she got a pin crosse her throate, at which her sister cryed out that she had got a pin in her throte. By God’s pleasure I was just neare her, and catcht her up in my armes, and putt my finger immedeiatly into her throate, and the pin was cross, and I had much to do to gett it out, but, with all the fores I had, it pleased God to strengthen me to do it. I got beyond the pin, and soe got it
out of her throate, but in a great deal of danger; her life was well nigh gon, and she was as blacke as could be, and the blood sett in her face with it. Soe nigh to death by this accident was this my poore childe, for it had stoped her breath. (pp. 129-30)

She also gives us intimate glimpses of her own personality as in this story of a chick she adopted as a pet, which later injured her by pecking her eye:

There was a poore little creature, harmlesse in itselfe, and without any gall or mallice to doe hurt, a little young chicken not above fourteen daies old, which had bin exposed, and picked out of the hen’s nest that hatched it, and by her was turned out from amongst the flocke she had newly hatched, being about nine in number. All which she broked, and made much of, but this poore chick she had turned out of the nest in a morning when the maide came to see if she was hatched; and finding this poore chicken cast out of the nest on the ground and for dead and cold; but the maide tooke it up and putt it under the hen, to have recruted it by warmth. Butt the hen was soe wilde and mad att it, that she would not lett it be with her or come neare her, but picked it and bitt it, and scratched it out with her feete twice or thrice when the maide put it in soe that she saw noe hopes of the hen to nurse it up as the rest, so she tooke it up and putt it in to me, and tould me all this story with great indignation against the unnaturalnesse of its mother. But I, pittiing this forlorne creature in that case, could not withold my caire, to see if I could any way save the life of it, and carried it to the fire, rapped it in woole, and gott some cordial waters and opned its bill and putt a drop by little and little, and then it gasped and came to life within an hauer, giving it warme milke, till it was recovered and become a fine peart chicken. (pp. 272-73)

Alice Thornton does not tell us directly, as Margaret Cavendish does, about the function which writing plays in her life, but the occasional pictures she presents of herself engaged in writing suggest that the book is part of the way in which she defines herself. Such books are clearly important and represent for her a link with the past. Both her own book and one which her father wrote for one of her brothers operate almost as characters in her story--disappearing, reappearing, affecting the course of events.

It is strange that this book is neglected by Delany and patronized by Ebner in their recent books on seventeenth century autobiography, for it is quite successful in presenting a living, thinking, feeling human being, which is after all what autobiography is all about.

r. Alice Hayes

Alice Hayes lived from 1659-1720, and it is possible that her work and that of Marion Fairly Veitch, which follows, were actually written in the early eighteenth
A Legacy or A Widow’s Mite is a fairly typical Quaker autobiography and shares most of the virtues and shortcomings of that form. It is brief (fifty-two pages) and not highly literate, but it has some interesting features. Her conversion to the Quaker faith, as usual and conventional, is the focal point of her life as depicted in her autobiography. Before that time she describes her life as one of perpetual uneasiness; even simple small pleasures were disquieted by a conviction of sin:

The Lord in mercy remembered me, and looked upon my affliction in that day, though I was not yet come to the knowledge of the truth; and he followed me in those days with his reproofs in my conscience for the sins of my youth; which were dancing, singing, telling idle stories, and some other pastimes, into which youth are too liable to run. And not being reproved by my parents, nor by the priest, I went on in the same, grieving the just principle of God in myself; not yet knowing what it was that reproved me in secret for these things; though, through the Lord’s great mercy and goodness to me, I was addicted to no worse evils in all my life.

After her conversion, she is subjected to a series of trials; for instance, her husband threatens to leave her:

Soon after I received the TRUTH, I met with other sorts of enemies, that the old adversary raised; but for ever blessed by the God of my life, that gave me power and dominion over my inward enemies, and delivered me also from the outward ones.

Now my going to meeting being known, both in my family and neighborhood, some wicked instruments did the devil raise up, to set my husband against me. My dear husband, that was so tender and loving to me all our days till now, grew very unkind, and his loved turned to hatred and contempt. This was it seemed good to the Lord so to suffer it, “to try me, whether I loved any thing better than himself.” Sometimes when I went to dress myself to go to meeting, my husband would take away my clothes; but that I valued not, and would go with such as I had, so that he soon left off that; and many other trials I met with from him, which I think not proper here to mention. But one very seriously spoke to me after this manner: “Now I am come to a resolution in my own mind what to do; if you do not leave off going to the Quakers, I will sell all that I have, and pay every one their own, and go and leave you.” This came close to my very life; and then also came the saying of Jesus into my mind: “He that loveth anything better than me, is not worthy of me.” Then I was brought to the very proof, whether I loved Christ Jesus best, or my husband; for now one of the two must have the pre-eminence in my heart. Now was the time come indeed, for the full proof of my love to God, “whether I could

58 Alice Hayes, A Legacy or A Widow’s Mite: Left by Alice Hayes (London: Darton & Harvey, 1836).
Page numbers cited refer to this edition.
leave father and mother, brothers and sisters, yea, and a husband that I had loved best of all, for Christ and the gospel’s sake.” This was a trial none can tell, but those that experience the same; for those relations are very near; and without an invisible support, the soul cannot be upheld under such trials; but they whose hearts are true to God, being sanctified and made clean by the washing of regeneration, are enabled to deny themselves not of the unlawful things only, but also of the dearest lawful things, for Christ’s sake and the gospel’s.

My husband waiting for my answer to what he proposed, (after some time of weighing the thing in my spirit,) I said, with a true concern upon my heart, after this manner: “Well, husband, if it must be so, I cannot help it;” giving him to understand, that I could not let go that interest I had in God, through faith in his Son, who was come to save me from my sins, by refraining, in compliance with him, from going to worship God amongst that People, whom God so visibly and so fully satisfied me he owned, and among whom I had felt and witnessed his presence. Everlasting praises be given to his name, because when hopes had been raised in me, that through faith in the Son of God, my sins would be pardoned for his name’s sake, I could not let go this interest in my Saviour, for the love of a husband, though nothing else in this world was so dear to me. Many a sore exercise the Lord suffered him to inflict me, which were as wormwood and gall to me, for the time they lasted. I received them as from the Lord’s hand in kindness, to try how constant I would be in my dependence upon him alone, when all in this world, that were near and dear to me, were turned against me: yea, father and mother, brothers and sisters; but nothing came so near me as my husband. (pp. 18-21)

In the end her husband, having had his bluff called, gives over his threats, and in fact eventually embraces the Quaker faith himself. But the erotic component of her religious devotion recurs, interestingly, in metaphorical terms:

I bless God in my very heart that he has counted me worthy to suffer from his name-sake; and of a truth I can say, “He never suffered any exercise, but he assisted me with power and patience to go through it;” and his word have I witnessed to be fulfilled: a husband he hath been to me, and a father to my fatherless children. (pp. 32-33)

She also feels called upon to bear witness in some rather flamboyant ways, as when she disrupts an Anglican service:

Then I stood up, and said to the priest, “Neighbour Berrow, I have a question to ask thee, and I do desire thee and this assembly to hear me;” but he would not, and hastened out, without hearing what I had to say.
Seeing him go so hastily away, I applied myself to the people, and said: “John Berrow came to me and said, that the Quakers would tell me that I must deny the man Christ Jesus, that died without the gates of Jerusalem and that I must believe only in a Christ that was within me. And I bore this testimony to all present at that assembly, saying, “We do own the scriptures; and do say, and believe, that there is no other name given under heaven, whereby any can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ, that died without the gates of Jerusalem, and was buried, and rose again the third day, and now sitteth at the right hand of God, glorified with the same glory which he had with the Father before the world began.” Then I stopped, and Francis Stamper stood up, and would have said something to the people, by way of advice; but one of the churchwardens with some others, came and compelled us both to go out. But I stepped upon one of the seats, and acquainted the people, that we should have a meeting that evening at our meeting-house, where all that were so inclined might come; and blessed be God, a large and good meeting it was, where the glorious presence of the Most High was with us, and amongst us. And good service for his God had that faithful servant, Francis Stamper, that evening; as also at many other times here, and in these parts, where a great openness was among the people, and many were convinced. (pp. 29-30)

Before God, and God only, does she abase herself:

God’s care over his children and people is the same in every age. I am a witness of it, a poor worm, an unprofitable servant; for if I have obeyed his command, it is but what was, and is, my reasonable duty: and the scriptures are verified, where it is said: “His eye is over the righteous, and his ear is open to their cry;” for he is God and Father of mercies, and delights to meet with his own to do them good. (pp. 44-45)

The autobiographical impulse finally breaks down altogether, and she ends with a testimonial sermon added several years after the writing of the greater part of the life.

s. Marion Veitch

Mrs. Marion Fairly Veitch, wife of a Scottish covenanter in the seventeenth century, has left an autobiographical account running to some sixty printed pages.59 It apparently circulated in manuscript among her acquaintances but was never intended for publication; except for the zeal and piety of The Committee of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland for the Publication of the Works of Scottish Reformers and Divines, we may safely assume it would never have seen print. It is vague and repetitive, and irritating in its limited vocabulary; it compares unfavorably with her husband’s much

more lively, extended, and concrete account of the same events. Its primary interest, except perhaps to the most devout of Presbyterians, lies in its tendentious (and conventional) spiritual vocabulary, which neatly turns the normal worldly system of values on its head. Thus, what we would call logic or common sense translates to “carnal reason,” actual events are “outward dispensations” (as opposed to the Lord’s true intentions), doubts are misbelief and an ill heart.” “Sense, reason, and misbelief their language was,” she states (p. 47), “that they [her sons] were killed. But faith, love, and hope they told me, He had delivered and would deliver them, and those that wait upon him, should not be ashamed.” Sense and reason, here, are clearly opposed to the spiritual virtues.

Once in a while she captures the reader’s imagination with an evocative description or anecdote, which conveys a feeling for what her life must have been like. An example is the story of her husband’s call to the kirk at Peebles:

... it was my desire to him [God], that he might make it appear in his providence remarkable to me, that I might know his mind where to dwell. I cannot but observe how wonderfully he answered me. A friend of mine living thirty miles off the place where I lived, wrote my husband a letter desiring him to come and see her, for she was in a very sad case. He was unwilling to go, but I urged him sore to go; upon which he took horse, and riding all night, when he came near Peebles, being wearied, he asked a herdman on the way, Who kept an inn at Peebles? He directed him to Provost Muir’s, and when he came and sat down, and had refreshed himself a little, he and some other strangers began to discourse about Teviotdale. The Provost hearing, asked if he knew one Mr. William Veitch that lived there? He said he knew him. He speired if he was at home? and he said No, he was not at home. My husband asked at him what he would do with him? He told him, they had a mind to call him for their minister, and they had hired a man, and written a letter, and the man was going to his house with it, to desire him to come and preach to them on the Sabbath-day. My husband told them that they needed not to trouble themselves, for they would not get him at home, nor yet to be their minister, as he thought, for he had several calls in his own country. The Provost not knowing him all this time, but after some more discourse, he asked at my husband if he was the man they were seeking? He told them he was the man, which made them both to wonder at that piece of providence. He took horse, and rode ten miles further west, to see my friend, but they engaged him to come back that way to preach to them, which he did. (pp. 37-38)

But this passage is virtually unique. The real events in Mrs. Veitch’s story are all interior, but her descriptions are stylized, and we miss the interplay with outside events which makes introspection come alive. She opens her account as follows:
It pleased God, of his great goodness, early to incline my heart to seek him, and bless him that I was born in a land where the gospel was at that time purely and powerfully preached, as also, that I was born of godly parents and well educated. But above all things, I bless him that he made me see, that nothing but the righteousness of Christ could save me from the wrath of God. (p. 1)

This is all we hear of her childhood. Her material takes the form of a dialogue in which her doubts and concerns are answered by appropriate Biblical passages. Her account of her marriage is typical in its impersonality and remoteness from all but God.

Some years after, when providence seemed to call me to change my lot, because many suitors came, it was often my earnest supplication to the Lord, that I might be matched in him, and for his glory, which graciously he was pleased to grant me. Yet in this business I met with difficulties; several of my friends dissuading me from it by diverse reasons, and this among others, that it was an ill time, and I might be brought to straits in the world, which bred much trouble to my spirit, and put me many a time to seek His mind in it. At length He set home that word, “Our fathers trusted in thee, and thou didst deliver them” (Psal. xxi. 4); and, “They trusted in thee and were not confounded,” (v. 5). Upon this I was inclined to trust Him, both for spirituals and temporals; and these promises were remarkably made good to me in all the various places of my sojourning in diverse kingdoms, which I mention to the commendation of his faithfulness. (p. 2)

If she has any sensuous or aesthetic appreciation of the world, or any common human feeling, she does not betray them in her autobiography. Her second son’s name is Samuel, we learn in the last few pages; the rest of her many children remain nameless. Her concern for the lives of her two eldest sons seems to rest primarily on her feeling that if they live long enough, they will eventually see the light and become ministers; she had dedicated them to the service of God, but their own inclinations seem rather different.

Her soul is like a theatre in which a great drama is enacted; more real than the human beings in her life are her faith, her doubts, her fears, who debate like characters in a miracle play: “Fear and misbelief said he [her son] would die . . .” (p. 49). Or again, “When I began to consider the sad case of Peebles, sense and reason, those two bold creatures, were like to quarrel with God” (p. 50). Her rather astonishing closing words perhaps provide us with the best index to her attitude toward her life:

I can say from experience, They that sow in tears, shall reap in joy. I had more pleasure in praying for the accomplishment of the promises, than ever I had in possession: he made me know, his promise could neither die nor drown. (p. 60)
2. Patterns in Women’s Autobiography before 1700

Most of the autobiographies written by women before 1700 fall into one of two general and overlapping categories: they are accounts of either domestic or religious devotion. The women in both camps tend to accept most of the conventional expectations for women; except for Lady Lucy Knatchbull and Anna Trapnel, all are married.

The autobiographies which evince the most secular outlook on life are in general those written by upper-class women, mostly but not exclusively of the Anglican religion. These autobiographies tend to be more interesting, more highly differentiated, and, one might say, more original—perhaps because such works tended to remain unpublished and therefore had less potential for solidifying into a convention. The authors were not, on the whole, restless women; or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that in the aftermath of the troubled period of the English Civil Wars, torn by various uncertainties and representing a felt break with the past, these women tended to adhere to traditional values and, insofar as circumstances permitted, to the traditional life patterns. They cheerfully accepted their husbands’ values and opinions as their own and aligned their fates with those of their husbands; their marriage was a central fact in their lives. Only one, Margaret Cavendish, had anything remotely resembling what we would call a career, a circumstance which she herself ascribes to her childlessness.

The autobiographies dominated by their authors’ religious experiences account, predictably, for the majority of the autobiographies, though a less thumping majority than one might expect. Among these the Quakers predominate; indeed, about half of all the autobiographies written by women before 1700 which have come down to us are Quaker. (Whether this large number actually reflects the proportion written by Quakers is an unanswerable question, since they tended to be published and hence were less likely to have been destroyed or lost in an attic.) Because the Quakers were committed to sexual equality in some aspects of life, Quaker policy did not discourage women from either preaching or writing, as long as the subject was religion. These women were restless and independent. Many of them traveled extensively, on proselytizing missions to the New World and elsewhere, often by themselves. Moreover, writing an autobiography was for a Quaker an act of religious devotion and a testimonial; since all were equal in the eyes of God, even (or especially) the life of an ordinary person was considered edifying to others. Thus these accounts were frequently published, and because a kind of standardized conversion experience was either imposed or evoked by the Quaker commitment, they very quickly settled into certain conventional forms. To read one is to be impressed by the refinement of introspection at so early a date; to read several is to realize that they might almost be said to be written according to a formula. For these reasons, the works of women are less easily distinguished from those of their male counterparts, and possibly less true in some respects to their experience as women, than the works of women whose point of view was more secular. To an extent, however, it is clear that religious zeal provides a socially acceptable anodyne to dissatisfaction or boredom with the domesticity which is traditionally supposed to be fulfilling to women, a way for a woman to channel her feeling that something is wrong or missing without attacking the basic structure of her life or undermining the role assigned to her as a woman.
Looking over these works in chronological order makes it clear that they fall into a general pattern. The autobiographies which are primarily secular in orientation, which focus on the private experience of a woman outside the context of religion or upon her relationship with her husband, and which are written by women of the privileged classes, are clustered in the period before the mid-1680’s; the autobiography of Alice Thornton is perhaps a partial exception, but a great deal of her work was evidently written in this period. Most of the religious works, Quaker and otherwise, were produced after this period. Whatever made it possible for women to write the former type of autobiography seems to have lost its force and was superseded by a new element. The secular strain is submerged for a time, and when it reappears in the eighteenth century, we shall find that it has altered and, to some extent, incorporated the independent and self-reliant outlook, as well as the willingness to publish, of the authors of the sectarian religious autobiographies.
III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: BEFORE 1700

In some ways it is interesting that there should be any specimens of autobiography of women before 1700, since most early autobiographies were of the res gestae type, accounts of the lives of men who had made important contributions in the area of politics or religion. The idea that just anyone’s life might be worth recording was not commonly held; the only justification for portraying the life of a person who was not illustrious was to make it somehow an exemplum. Donald A. Stauffer, in The Art of Biography in Eighteenth Century England, writes as follows:

Before the eighteenth century in England, the prevailing ideas of a hierarchy in Church and State had determined the main course of biography. The lives of ecclesiastical and temporal princes were worthy of record; the lives of their subjects were not. The annals of the Third Estate had been short and simple. Piety, patriotism and family pride produced biographies; when the life of a person humbly born was set forth in print, almost invariably that person was a cleric, and the motive back of the biography was not to present an individual but to present a typical example for the edification of Christian communicants. . . . The breath of égalité and fraternité had not yet blown over England, and there was little speculation in the actual churchyards of the seventeenth century over the village Hampdens, the guiltless Cromwell’s, and the mute Miltons that might possibly rest beneath the stones.¹

This statement applies by extension to autobiography as well. Paul Delany, in British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century, supports Stauffer’s contention that the secular autobiography was even more anomalous than the religious:

In the seventeenth century it was relatively easy to write about one’s relationship with God: the pulpit offered a supply of commonly-accepted images and suggested an appropriate tone, while a long tradition of devotional literature--descending from the Old Testament, and becoming directly imitable with the Pauline epistles and Augustine’s Confessions--made spiritual self-analysis respectable and showed even the most ignorant ‘mechanicks’ how to go about it. But for one mainly preoccupied with secular life the situation was different. Englishmen were still uncertain of the meaning and value of life in the everyday world of getting and spending, and the philosophical justification of ‘life for its own sake’ had not yet been clearly formulated and defended against clerical opposition.²

Since the professions were closed to them and since they were educated from birth to expect to play supportive and nurturing roles in life, most women had no alternative to “life for its own sake,” or perhaps for a man’s sake. Moreover, the flurry of intellectual activity among Renaissance women had so exhausted itself that, to quote Myra Reynolds in *The Learned Lady in England, 1650-1760*, “The first half of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth seem even more than a hundred years apart in tone and temper.”

Yet suddenly, starting around the middle of the century, several women wrote autobiographies, some of high quality, which have come down to us. More than that: some of them ventured into territory as yet uncharted by comparable male writers. Wayne Shumaker, in *English Autobiography: Its Emergence, Materials, and Form*, states that among early autobiographies “the only ‘true’ histories of the mind and emotions with a nonreligious emphasis were those of the Duchess of Newcastle and Lady Halkett.”

Stauffer, in *English Biography Before 1700*, comments on the rarity of extended self-character sketches such as that of Margaret Cavendish. And Joyce M. Horner, in her work on “The English Women Novelists,” refers to Margaret Cavendish’s “True Relation” as “the first work of its kind to be published in England.”

How can we account for what seems to be the especial willingness of women (at least a few women) at this point in history to assert the importance of their own subjective experience? Questions of this sort are notoriously reductive and difficult to answer. Why things happen when and as they do is often a matter of speculation and perhaps incapable of definitive solution. Nevertheless, I think an investigation of the background against which women’s autobiography began to take shape may help us to understand the phenomenon itself and the particular form which it took. In this chapter I shall discuss some of the ideas and events which seem to have created a propitious climate for the rise of women’s autobiography in Great Britain. The larger questions of the rise of autobiography in general, of what caused people to develop this genre at this particular time, has to some extent been dealt with by various scholars; still there is considerable room for good research on the subject. I shall restrict my attention here, however to factors which I take to have had a particular effect upon women, especially English women. Such an investigation has not been undertaken previously, to my knowledge, and if my conclusions are not exhaustive they are at least suggestive.

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1. The Political Climate

Probably the most striking and most peculiarly English of the factors affecting the rise of autobiography was the Civil War. Paul Delany comments as follows:

The Civil War especially, like no previous national upheaval, made a powerful impression on the imaginations of virtually everyone who had sufficient education to understand the ideological issues over which the war was fought. In addition to the numerous military or political memoirs which were based directly on their author’s labours for Crown or Parliament, the war had the indirect effect of bringing to many autobiographers a heightened awareness of their particular convictions and predispositions. . . . Awareness of the internal tensions of England’s social structure undoubtedly contributed to the development of a more sophisticated sense of history during the seventeenth century. This deeper understanding of historical forces, through the insight it offered into the origins and significance of personal actions and allegiances, was an important factor in the rise of autobiography.8

Perhaps even more unsettling than the ideological split was the sense of uprootedness caused by the breakdown of the underlying political stability heretofore maintained by the more or less orderly succession of monarchs. Indeed, Abraham Cowley, in his charming sketch “Of My Self,” makes explicit use of this metaphor:

With these Affections of Mind, and my Heart wholly set upon Letters, I went to the University, but was soon torn thence by that violent publick Storm which would suffer nothing to stand where it did, but rooted up every Plant, even from the Princely Cedars to me, the Hyssop.9

Such rhetoric was not limited to the Royalists. Thomas Case, addressing Parliament in 1641, used the same metaphor to describe the Parliamentarians’ program:

Reformation must be universal . . . Reform all places, all persons and callings. Reform the benches of judgment, the inferior magistrates . . . Reform the universities, reform the cities, reform the countries, reform inferior schools of learning. Reform the Sabbath, reform the ordinances, the worship of God . . . You have more work to do than I can speak . . . Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.10

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8 Delany, op. cit., pp. 10-11.
Author after author communicates a sense of the world turned topsy-turvy. Sir John Reresby, for example, opens his account of his travels thus:

I left England in that unhappy time when honesty was reputed a crime, religion superstition, loyalty treason; when subjects were governors, servants masters, and no gentleman assured of any thing he possessed; the least jealousy of disaffection to the late erected commonwealth being offence sufficient to endanger the forfeiture of his estates, the only laws in force being those of the sword.\textsuperscript{11}

The following incident, recorded by Thomas Raymond in his \textit{Autobiography}, reveals the depth of feeling on both sides:

Soone after our most gratious King Charles the first was by hellish miscreants sonnes of Belial put to death, it was my chance to be in London at sermon in St. Mary Alder-Maryes Church, it being death then for any man and especially ministers to speake in vindication of that good King. The preacher fell to aggravate the great synnes whereof wee were guilty and haveing instanced in severall greate and crying ones, “Nay,” said he, “wee have put to death our king, our most gracious and good king”--at which he made a little pause (the people amazed and gazing aboute expecting the preacher should be pulled out of the pulpitt) but he added--“the Lord Jesus Christ by our sinnes and transgressions.”\textsuperscript{12}

Women, of course, wrote no military or political memoirs; they were neither soldiers nor politicians. They were not interrupted in their studies at the university; no woman in England received a university degree until the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the lives of many women who wrote autobiographies in this period were greatly altered from their expected courses. They too shared the sense of uprootedness. Alice Thornton wrote:

As all the world stood amaiser att our unheard follies and confusions, when the best frame of government was puled downe and destroyed, soe was their great combinations against us of all sides by our enimies, to have rooted out our name and nation.\textsuperscript{13}

The husbands of Margaret Cavendish, Lucy Hutchinson, Anne Fanshawe and Mary Rich were all directly involved in the wars. Some wives were proud and supportive, others,

like Mary Rich, "much averse to his engaging in the wars"\textsuperscript{14}; yet none was allotted the domestic tranquillity her grandmother might have enjoyed. Families were dispersed and patrimonies seized. Margaret Cavendish’s autobiography is larded with heart-rending passages describing the disruption of family life:

... for the most part they [her brothers and sisters] met every day feasting each other like Job’s children. But this unnatural war came like a whirlwind, which felled down their houses, where some in the wars were crushed to death, as my youngest brother Sir Charles Lucas, and my brother Sir Thomas Lucas.\textsuperscript{15}

And again:

... though my Lord hath lost his estate, and banished out of his country for his loyalty to his King and country, yet neither despised poverty, nor pinching necessity could make him break the bonds of friendship or weaken his loyal duty to his King or country.

But not only the family I am linked to is ruined, but the family from which I spring, by these unhappy wars.\textsuperscript{16}

Normal lines of communication among friends and relatives were cut off, Margaret Cavendish, after starting to describe her brothers’ recreation, writes:

But sometime after this war began, I knew not how they lived, for though most of them were in Oxford, wherein the King was, yet after the Queen went from Oxford, and so out of England, I was parted from them.\textsuperscript{17}

And, as is tragically normal in civil wars, bonds of family and friendship were strained or torn asunder. According to Lawrence Stone, “one in every seven peerage families was fragmented by the war”\textsuperscript{18}—that is, had members on both sides. Margaret Cavendish’s dispassionate list of her sisters’ husbands conceals the fact that two supported the king while the third took up arms for the Parliament.\textsuperscript{19} Mary Rich relates the following incident:

And now when I came to Lees, whatt was believed of the rising in Essex proved true, and being headed by my Lord Goreing and Sir Charles

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 163.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 161.
\textsuperscript{18} Stone, op. cit., p. 144.
\textsuperscript{19} Cavendish, op. cit., p. 160.
Lucas, they came to Lees for arms that were there, and brought thousands with them; but my Lord Goreing being one of my best friends, I was upon that account used so well that, bating some arms they took, there was not anything touched, and they stayed but only a dinnering time with me, and so marched on to Colchester.\textsuperscript{20}

Alice Thornton speaks poignantly of the prevailing atmosphere of distrust and uncertainty:

\begin{quote}
In this distraction each man looked uppon other straingly, none knowing whom to trust, or how to be secured from the raige, rapine, and destruction from the soldiery, in whose sole power was both the civill and ecclesiasticke sword since the year 1648.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

If the breakdown of the patterns according to which women had been taught to define themselves led to an inchoate reassessment of that definition, it is also true that the upheavals of the civil wars caused many women to be exposed to a broader range of experience than heretofore and perhaps even resulted in lives more decisively differentiated from one another. It also served to divide their own lives into clearly discernible stages or phases, offering more possibilities for the sense of change and development which underlies autobiography. Margaret Cavendish and Anne Fanshawe both spent extended periods abroad. At one period Sir Richard Fanshawe was confined to London and forbidden to go beyond five miles of the city limits, so his family spent a stretch of time in the metropolis. Some of these experiences evoked qualities not ordinarily called upon. Anne Halkett’s remarkable story includes a detailed account of how she facilitated the escape of the Duke of York by disguising him as a young gentlewoman:

\begin{quote}
When I gave the measure to my tailor to inquire how much mohaire would serve to make a petticoate and wastcoate to a young gentlewoman of that bignese and stature, hee considered itt a long time, and said hee had made many gowns and suites, butt hee had never made any to such a person in his life. I thought hee was in the right; but his meaning was, hee had never seeene any woman of so low a stature have so big a wast; however hee made itt as exactly fitt as if hee had taken the measure himself. . . .
\end{quote}

\textbf{... after his Highnesd had suped, hee imeadiately called to goe to y\textsuperscript{e} play, and wentt downe the privy staieres into the garden, and opened the gate that goes to the parke, treble locking all the doores behind him. And att the garden gate C. B. [Colonel Bamford] waited for his Highnese, and putting on a cloke and periwig huried him away to the parke gate, where a coach waited y\textsuperscript{i} caried them to y\textsuperscript{e} watter side, and, taking the boate that was apointed for that service, they rowed to the staires next the bridge,}

\textsuperscript{21} Thornton, loc. cit.
where I and Miriam waited in a private howse hard by that C. B. had prepared for dressing his Highnese, where all things were in a readinesse. Butt I had many feares for C. B. had desired mee, if they came nott there precisely at ten a’clocke, to shift for my selfe, for then I might conclude they were discovered, and so my stay there could do noe good, but prejudice my selfe. Yett this did nott make me leave the house, though ten a’clocke did strike, and hee that was intrusted offten wentt to the landing place and saw noe boate comming was much discouraged, and asked mee what I would doe. I told him I came there with a resolution to serve his Highs, and I was fully determined nott to leave that place till I was outt of hopes of doing what I came there for, and would take my hazard. Hee left mee to goe againe to yᵉ watter side, and while I was fortifying my selfe against what might arive to mee, I heard a great noise of many as I thought comming up staires, wᵉ I expected to be soldiers to take mee, but it was a pleasing disappointmtt, for yᵉ first that come in was yᵉ Duke, who with much joy I took in my armes and gave God thankes for his safe arrivall. His Highnese called “Quickely quickely dress me;” and, plittng of his cloaths, I dressed him in the wemen’s habitt that was prepared, wᵉ fitted his Highnese very well and was very pretty in itt. After hee had eaten something I made ready while I was idle lest his Highnese should be hungry, and having sentt for a Woodstreet cake (wᵉ I Knew hee loved) to take in the barge, with as much hast as could bee His Highnese wentt crosse the bridge to yᵉ staires where the barge lay, C. B. leading him; and immediatly the boatemen plied the oare so well that they were soone outt of sight, having both wind and tide with yᵐ.²²

Later she confronts an unruly mob of English soldiers:

The Army comming now towards Fyvie, some scattering soldiers came in there who had noe officer butt one they made amongst themselves, and called him Major. When they came into the howse they were very rude, beating all the men came in there way, and frightening the weemen, and threatening to pistoll who ever did nott give what they called for. My Lady Dunfermeline, beeing then great with child, was much disordered with feare of their insolence, and with teares in her eyes desired me to goe and speake to them, to see if I could prevaille with them as beeing their countrywoman, butt (says shee,) I know nott well how to desire itt, because I heare say they are informed there is an English woman in the howse, and if they get her tlley will be worse to her than any. “Madam, (said I,) if my going to them can doe your Laˢ service, I will take my hazard, and had gone to them before, butt that I thought itt nott fitt for mee in your Laˢ howse to take upon mee to say any thing to them till I had your Laⁿ command for itt.” Then calling my woman I wentt down where

they were, and being instructed which was the major (as they called him),
who ordered ye rest as hee pleased (and I beleeve gott that authority by
humouring them in all they desired), I made my adrese first to him,
beleeving if I prevailed with him the rest were soone gained. As soone as I
came amongst them, the first question they asked mee was if I were the
English whore that came to meet the King, and all sett their pistolls just
against mee. (I had armed my selfe before by seeking assistance from Him
who only could protect mee from there fury, and I did so much rely upon
itt that I had nott the least feare, tho naturally I am the greatest coward
living.) I told them I owned my selfe to bee an English woman and to
honor the King, butt for the name they gave me I abhorred itt; butt my
coming to them was nott to dispute for my selfe, butt to tell them I was
sorry to heare that any of the English nation, who was generally esteemed
the most civill people in the world, should give so much occasion to be
thought barbarously rude, as they had done since there comming into the
howse, where they found none to resist them, but by the contrary whatever
they called for, either to themselves or horses, was ordered by my Lady to
bee given them. . . . They heard mee with much patience; and att last
flinging downe there pistolls upon the table, the major gave mee his
promise that neither hee nor any with him should give the least disturbance
to the meanest in the family, only desired meatt and drinke and what was
nesesary that they called for. . . .

Mary Rich courageously continues her journey to the country, despite her husband’s
warning that the fighting has rendered her passage unsafe:

When I was met by him he told me he feared it might not be safe for me to
go on; and some other Parliament-men that were in the coach with him,
absolutely advised me to return and not to hazard myself. Though I found
in myself a loathness to deny going with my husband (having never before
left him hardly, when I could conveniently be with him), yet my desire to
go to be quiet at Lees prevailed so much with me, as I desired by husband
to leave me to my selfe, which he did, and I then told him I would go on, for
I was very confident there was no danger for me, and so parted from him,
not without wondering much at myself when I had done so. . . .

This act of self-assertion is a significant one for her, and she comes to see the country
almost as a symbol of purity and piety; she feels it must have been “a good providence of
God” which enabled her to take such a step. Anne Fanshawe, ill and pregnant, is set
ashore with her husband after having been robbed by mutinous sailors. Later, she joins
her husband on deck during an attack by a Turkish galley:

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23 Ibid., pp. 67-69.
25 Ibid.
... my husband bade us be sure to keep in the cabin, and the women not to appear, which would make the Turks think that we were a man-of-war, but if they saw women they would take us for merchants and board us. He went upon the deck, and took a gun and bandoliers, and sword, and, with the rest of the ship’s company, stood upon deck expecting the arrival of the Turkish man-of-war. This beast, the Captain, had locked me up in the cabin; I knocked and called long to no purpose, until, at length, the cabin boy came and opened the door; I, all in tears, desired him to be so good as to give me his blue thrum cap he wore, and his tarred coate, which he did, and I gave him half a crown, and putting them on and flinging away my night clothes, I crept up softly and stood upon the deck by my husband’s side, as free from sickness and fear as, I confess, from discretion; but it was the effect of that passion, which I could never master.

By this time the two vessels were engaged in parley, and so well satisfied with speech and sight of each other’s forces, that the Turks’ man-of-war tacked about, and we continued our course. But when your father saw it convenient to retreat, looking upon me, he blessed himself, and snatched me up in his arms, saying, ‘Good God, that love can make this change!’ and though he seemingly chid me, he would laugh at it as often as he remembered that voyage.26

When her application for a passport is refused, she cleverly deceives the passport office and secures passage to Paris in compliance with her husband’s wishes:

I could not go without a pass, and to that purpose I went to my cousin Henry Nevill, one of the High Court of Justice, where he was then sitting in Whitehall. I told him my husband had sent for me and his son, to place him there, and that he desired his kindness to help me to a pass: he went in to the then master’s and returned to me, saying, ‘that by a trick my husband had got his liberty, but for me and his children, upon no conditions we should not stir.’ . . . . I was ready to go, if I had a pass, the next tide, and might be there before they could suspect I was gone: these thoughts put this invention in my head.

At Wallingford House, the office was kept where they gave passes: thither I went in as plain a way and speech as I could devise, leaving my maid at the gate, who was a much finer gentlewoman than myself. With as ill mien and tone as I could express, I told a fellow I found in the Office that I desired a pass for Paris, to go to my husband. ‘Woman, what is your husband, and your name?’ ‘Sir,’ said I, with many courtesies, ‘he is a young merchant, and my name is Ann Harrison.’ ‘Well,’ said he, ‘it will cost you a crown:’—said I, ‘That is a great sum for me, but pray put in a

man, my maid, and three children. All which he immediately did, telling me a malignant would give him five pounds for such a pass.

I thanked him kindly, and so went immediately to my lodgings; and with my pen I made the great H of Harrison, two ff, and the rrs, an n, and the i, an s, and the s, an h, and the o, an a, and the n, a w, so completely, that none could find out the change. With all speed I hired a barge, and that night at six o’clock I went to Gravesend, and from thence by coach to Dover, where, upon my arrival, the searchers came and demanded my pass, which they were to keep for their discharge. When they had read it, they said, ‘Madam, you may go when you please;’ but says one, ‘I little thought they would give a pass to so great a malignant, especially in so troublesome a time as this.’

Though their claims to cowardice are so frequent as to appear almost a conventional pose, part of the feminine image which society demanded that they project, there can be no question that these women are beginning to experience themselves as independent agents and to take pride in their acts of bravery and their coolness under stress. When real crises impose and real action is required, these women rise to the occasion without fainting or swooning. And with broadened experience comes broadened awareness of matters outside the family circle. Lucy Hutchinson, for example, not only displays an astute if partisan knowledge of political affairs, she in part defines her own identity in terms of her political heritage.

More difficult to articulate precisely is the jarring effect which the civil wars had upon established values. Values sanctioned by tradition could no longer be assumed; their validity depended upon the willingness and the ability of the individual to assert them successfully. One could not define himself--or herself--by ties which no longer existed or depended for their existence upon personal acts of the will. That is not to say that there was a sudden collapse of all which Englishmen had held dear. On the contrary, familial and especially marital bonds still represented for women the principal locus of their own identities. But the winds of change are starting to blow. Many of our autobiographers insist that their marriages were acts of choice. Mary Rich, indeed, quite blatantly defied her father in selecting her husband, though he finally capitulated and though she came to repent her willfulness. Most of the others are more assiduous in courting parental approval; but again and again we come across declarations of desire or intent to remain single, followed by a meeting with the one man who could make her swerve from this plan--the implication being that had not love fatefully intervened, no consideration of finance or expedience could have induced her to marry. She is in effect the mistress of her own fate: she has made her own marriage though she might not have done so.

Withal, the reader senses a deep strain of disillusion, latent but beginning to rise to consciousness. Thus Margaret Cavendish, in her Memoirs of her husband:

27 Ibid., pp. 124-246.
I have observed, that those that meddle least in wars, whether civil or foreign, are not only most safe and free from danger, but most secure from losses; and though heroic persons esteem fame before life, yet many there are, that think the wisest way is to be a spectator, rather than an actor, unless they be necessitated to it; for it is better, say they, to sit on the stool of quiet, than in the chair of troublesome business.  

Here is no common cynicism, but rather a deep-seated ambivalence about the old ideas of heroism. From here it is but a short step to the notion that honor is not a matter of soldiers sacrificing all for king and country but rather something which can occur within the inner recesses of any individual, male or female.

Faced with such a disordered world, the act of writing may itself represent an attempt, heretofore unnecessary, to reassert the old values. The civil war was for these women, in effect, what Frank Kermode has called a kairos, a crisis, an event which organizes time and forces a reinterpretation of the past. The women who wrote secular autobiographies in this period tended to be representatives of the older order; but because of the civil war they were precipitated out of the old prelapsarian chronicity of life into a world which charged their lives and actions with a new significance. The old values could no longer be taken for granted (One thinks of the change which the political environment wrought in Marvell’s poetry). And so women who had not heretofore felt called upon to write found, both within and without themselves, in the need to affirm threatened values, subject matter for autobiography. Anne Fanshawe, addressing her son, describes

The most remarkable actions and accidents of your family. . . . I would not have you be a stranger to it; because, by the example, you may imitate what is applicable to your condition in the world, and endeavour to avoid those misfortunes we have passed through, if God pleases.

We have noted that the autobiographies by women who accepted the traditional values and defined their role in accordance with them were largely written between the 1650’s and the 1680’s. It is tempting to speculate that the accession of King James in 1685 and subsequent bloodless revolution in 1688 settled once and for all that the re-establishment of the old values was tenuous and humanly rather than divinely ordained. Puritanism had by now been absorbed into the fabric of English life; the new climate was more hospitable to expressions of religious diversity, and the remainder of the century saw a preponderance of works expressing sectarian religious values.

2. The Religious Climate

28 Cavendish, op. cit., pp. 146-47.
30 Fanshawe, op. cit., p. 31.
As far as women were concerned, the growing influence of Puritanical thinking upon English life can only be described as a double-edged sword. Doctrinally, it was by and large a step backward, since it represented a reversion to the Old Testament misogyny so lovingly refined by St. Paul—Paul who said:

3 But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. . . .

7 For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man.

8 For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man.

9 Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.31

and again:

11 Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.

12 But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

13 For Adam was first formed, then Eve.

14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.32

The godhead itself was masculinized, stripped of the Virgin and saints who stood ready to intercede for women.

The Puritans to be sure had no monopoly on antifeminism; it is intrinsic to the whole Judeo-Christian tradition, and the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the Anglican faith hardly proclaim an enlightened attitude towards women. Even so orthodox (and happily married) a divine as Richard Hooker, in his Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Policy, practically the definitive statement of moderate Anglicanism, endorsed the custom of the bride’s father giving her away in marriage because

. . . it putteth women in mind of a duty whereunto the very imbecility of their nature and sex doth bind them, namely to be always directed, guided and ordered by others. . . .33

And John Donne, after writing the libidinous poetry of his youth, sermonized in his older graver days on the necessity for female subordination, even suggesting self-deception if necessary:

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31 I Cor. 11, 3; 7-9.
32 I Tim. 2, 11-14.
If she think her self more than a Helper, she is not so much. . . . I know there are . . . some of the weaker sexe, stronger in fortune, and in counsell too, than they to whom God hath given them; but yet let them not impute that in the eye nor ear of the world, nor repeat it to their own hearts, with such a dignifying of themselves, as exceeds the quality of a Helper.  

I have chosen these quotations for the eminence of their authors, but scores of examples from equally orthodox prelates, many more rancorous than these, could be adduced. Nor can these men be identified as woman-haters beyond the rest of their sex; they are merely parroting the conventional opinions of their age.

But Puritanism tended to place even greater emphasis on the teachings of Paul and to dwell upon woman’s responsibility for the Fall (and all subsequent masculine falls), upon the need for female subordination, and upon the unsuitability of women as rulers. In 1558, John Knox issued his *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, in which he declaimed against “this monstreferose empire of woman, (which amongst all enormities that this day do abound upon the face of the hole earth, is most detestable and damnable).”  

Thus history treats us to the spectacle of Mary, Princess of Orange, daughter of James II, refusing to accept the throne until her husband, William of Orange, is permitted to share the throne equally but with precedence over her. The Puritans exalted marriage, but their conception of marriage included no idea of an equal partnership. All these Puritanical tendencies are superbly illustrated in the writings of Milton. Katharine M. Rogers, in *The Troublesome Helpmate*, comments of Milton that “While he extolled marriage in the loftiest terms, he insisted with unnecessary emphasis and obvious satisfaction on the wife’s inferiority and subjection to her husband.”

In *Paradise Lost*, the perfection of Adam and Eve’s marriage before the fall is inextricably bound to Eve’s subordination. It has been pointed out that the Marriage Hymn stands in explicit contrast to the idea of courtly love, in which the woman is exalted and set above the man; indeed, Satan in the guise of a serpent assumes the posture of a courtly lover when he is trying to seduce Eve by persuading her to aspire to a dominant position.

Despite the regressive, antifeminist bias which Puritanism carried over from Catholicism and refined (a bias which found its most repugnant expression in the brutal witch-hunts which resulted in the violent deaths of thousands of innocent women in the seventeenth century), Puritanism in some of its aspects did have a liberating influence, in most cases unintended, upon the lives of women. The anomaly of the position of women, indeed, lies at the heart of Puritanism, for, as the Marxist historian Christopher Hill observes,

in this world of male economic dominance, the small Puritan voice still whispered that women have souls, that salvation is a matter of direct

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36 Rogers, op. cit., p. 151.  
personal relationship to God. Women should by co-operation with the divine purpose be as capable as men of receiving the grace that makes free, even if their attainment of this freedom would shatter the standards taken over by patriarchal society from an earlier age.\(^{38}\)

Thus, the priesthood of all believers permitted women, in theory, to rely on themselves rather than upon the mediation of husbands or male priests to secure their salvation. The splintering tendencies of left-wing Protestantism, too, must have lifted some of the oppressive weight of the old Anglo-Catholic traditions and at least made it possible to question their sanctity, however little this was actually done in this period. Moreover, the Puritan insistence on a single standard of morality tended to undermine the ideology of subordination. And the Puritan emphasis on education and the use of the vernacular had as a side effect the making of literary expression increasingly accessible to women. According to Lawrence Stone:

> One of the most striking characteristics of English Puritans was their belief in the value of education as a weapon against the three great evils of Ignorance, Prophaneness and Idleness. . . . [I]t was puritan thinkers who proposed schemes for universal elementary education.\(^{39}\)

During the prolonged educational depression which began in the second half of the seventeenth century, there was still a rise of education in the Dissenting Academies.\(^{40}\) Women, directly or more often indirectly, were among the beneficiaries of this interest in education.

The more radical left-wing sects spawned by Puritanism flirted much more openly with the idea of equality of the sexes. The one which had the most significant effect on women’s autobiography, and on autobiography in general, was of course the Quakers. One of the most provocative issues was the question of women preaching, on which Samuel Johnson so snidely commented a century later. The Friends’ creed declared explicitly:

> As we dare not encourage any ministry but that which we believe to spring from the influence of the Holy Spirit, so neither do we attempt to restrain this ministry to persons of any condition in life, or to the male sex alone; but as male and female are one in Christ, we hold it proper that such of the female sex as we believe to be endued with a right qualification for the ministry should exercise their gifts for the general edification of the Church.\(^{41}\)


\(^{40}\) Ibid., pp. 73-74.

\(^{41}\) Quoted in Reynolds, op. cit., p. 111.
The *locus classicus* for the injunction against women preaching was St. Paul, who was often cited in support of attacks on the practice. We have already noted the direct and spirited protest which women such as Elizabeth Stirredge and Joan Vokins made against this doctrine, for they rightly interpreted it as a threat ultimately to the freedom of women to speak out on religious issues, whether verbally or in writing. Thus, the Quaker position and policy provided a context for women speaking out; the strong strain of egalitarianism in the Quaker faith, combined with a young and vigorous tradition of religious autobiography (based on the premise that since all are children of God, everyone can profit from the experiences of even an ordinary person whose life has been touched by God), clearly was responsible for the outcropping of Quaker autobiographies by women and contributed to the independent spirit which pervades these works.

### 3. Philosophical Tendencies

What can we say in particular about the relation of new currents of philosophical thought to the rise of women’s autobiography? Most women’s knowledge of the actual opinions of specific philosophers was probably sketchier than that of men of their own social stratum, although Margaret Cavendish, to be sure, was acquainted with Hobbes and, after a manner of speaking, with Descartes (they had no common language). But various changes in the general philosophical climate could hardly fail to affect them. Although the meaning of these changes has of course been the subject of much discussion and some controversy, it is probably safe to state at least that there was a gradual shift of interest from scholastic to scientific habits of thought, from deductive to inductive modes of reasoning, from a heaven-centered, theological point of view to a more earth-centered, secular one. What was thought of as real had changed in its very definition from abstractions to concrete entities immediately available to sensory perception. These factors were undoubtedly implicated in the rise of autobiography in general and affected women more or less as they did men, though perhaps more indirectly in some respects.

If it is possible, however, to isolate any one outgrowth of these changes as having a particular relevance for women’s autobiography, it is probably the upsurge of interest in private life and a concomitant increase in the possibilities for privacy. Indeed, such an interest is for women, much more than for men, a precondition of autobiography, since most women had no other life than a private life. Bacon saw the accumulation of facts about the lives of men (he explicitly did not intend only essentially public personalities such as kings and princes) as a kind of data-collection, stating

> With regard to lives, we cannot but wonder that our own times have so little value for what they enjoy, as not more frequently to write the lives of eminent men.\(^{42}\)

Locke’s whole system of government was predicated upon the existence of a self independent of and preceding social and public institutions such as church, family, or public opinion.

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monarchy; so, with a different emphasis, was Hobbes'. The circumstances of women's existence had always demanded that their attention be devoted predominantly to the fact and concrete details of private domestic life; to have their sphere of influence elevated in importance from the inconsequential to the essential, from the ancillary to the central, must have been a liberating experience; if their lives did not change in and of themselves, they were at least developing anew a more honorific way of seeing and evaluating what they were doing. Empiricism invested the patterns of their lives with a new dignity.

The consequences of this burgeoning interest in private life were not entirely theoretical. Virginia Woolf wisely perceived the importance of "a room of one's own," and though women could hardly command the privacy and the extended uninterrupted periods of time that men could (remember, for example, Richard Fanshawe's returning home and retiring to his study with his papers as a matter of course), the very architecture of the houses was changing to permit and promote a greater degree of privacy than had heretofore been available. Ian Watt makes the following observations in The Rise of the Novel:

In the medieval period nearly all the life of the household went on in the common hall. Then gradually the private bedroom and separate dining quarters for masters and servants became current; by the eighteenth century the final refinements of domestic privacy had fully established themselves. There was much more emphasis than before on separate sleeping quarters for every member of the family, and even for the household servants; a separate fireplace in all the main rooms, so that everyone could be alone whenever they wished, became one of the details which the up-to-date housewife noted with approbation. . . .

Another characteristic feature of the Georgian house is the closet, or small private apartment usually adjoining the bedroom. Typically, it stores not china and preserves but books, a writing desk and a standish; it is an early version of the room of one's own which Virginia Woolf saw as the prime requisite of woman's emancipation. . . . 43

Watt is speaking of the eighteenth century, to be sure, but the process was a gradual one and was certainly well underway by the end of the seventeenth century, as is clear from the following words of Roger Hart:

The "hall house" was a traditional type of design . . . consisting of a central hall or chamber around which the smaller rooms and offices were placed. The hall was the heart of family life, dinners, entertainment, and servants' activities.

During the seventeenth century people began to demand smaller and warmer rooms, each designed for a particular purpose rather as in

modem houses. In large manorial homes, the family preferred to eat in privacy, away from the demands of dependants, servants, and others for whom the house was the pivot of local life.  

Perhaps this is a good place to observe that Watt’s general thesis, much debated when his book first appeared, has been subject to “serious reflections” (by Watt himself) and more recently to being “reconsidered” (by John Richetti). These second thoughts are probably justified with respect to the novel, which Watt seems too inclined to separate from prose fiction in general; but many of his sociological observations are valid in and of themselves and, interestingly enough, are perhaps more useful to the student of early autobiography, especially that of women, than to the student of the novel.

4. Literary Developments

The literary antecedents of these early autobiographical works cannot be specified with certainty. Undoubtedly there was some French influence. The marriage of Charles I to Henrietta Maria of France in 1625 increased cultural communication between the two countries, and of course the return of Charles II and his court in 1660 from exile in France greatly (and to some, notoriously) enhanced English interest in things French. The French had evolved a strong tradition of memoir-writing rather earlier than the English, and by the seventeenth century many of these works achieved a more intimate tone than generally characterized English autobiography. Whether any of the English women who wrote their lives had read any of the French productions in their original language we do not know; although Margaret Cavendish could not converse with Descartes in his own language, and her childhood education did not emphasize “prating of several languages,” several other autobiographers noted that they had been taught French as children. A more likely route of influence was through English translations, a large number of which were published, especially during the later half of the seventeenth century. One of the early examples to appear in English was the autobiography of Marguerite de Valois, first wife of Henry IV, translated by Robert Codrington in 1641; this captivating book shares many of the qualities we later find in English women’s autobiography—e.g., attention to domestic detail and a tendency to treat historical events mainly as ancillary occurrences in their own lives. In addition to the possible influence of specific works, we should bear in mind the female-oriented salon culture which flourished in France during this period; women were often encouraged and applauded for fictional efforts at intricate analysis of emotions, and such a propitious atmosphere for women’s literary development may have made itself felt on the other side of the channel.

The authors of two recent books on English autobiography in the seventeenth century allude to the possible relation between the early novel and early autobiography,

47 Cavendish, op. cit., p. 158.
although, as Ebner adds, a “thorough examination of the relationship between the early English novel and autobiography must still be written.”\textsuperscript{48} Undoubtedly there was a great deal of cross-fertilization between the two genres; Delany, in fact, sees the autobiographical writings of women as a possible direct link between the two forms:

In general, female autobiographies have a deeper revelation of sentiments, more subjectivity and more subtle self-analyses than one finds in comparable works by men. The sociological reasons for this difference are obvious, and have existed since antiquity; yet it is not until the seventeenth century that what we now call the ‘feminine sensibility’ enters the main stream of English literature--before then it was usually ignored by the male writers who dominated literary life, or obscured by a narrow and stereotyped anti-feminism. The expression of this sensibility in seventeenth-century autobiography deserves study both in its own right and for the light it may shed on the appearance of the novel soon after.\textsuperscript{49}

I have already discussed Anne Halkett’s use of “novelistic” techniques in her autobiography. And it is perhaps significant that Margaret Cavendish’s autobiography is the last of eleven pieces which she collected in a volume entitled \textit{Nature’s Pictures Drawn by Fancy’s Pencil to the Life}; the other ten are fictional works. It is interesting to speculate about what relationship she perceived or intended between the autobiography and the other stories. Fiction--continental fiction in translation, at least, was probably already embarked upon its task of educating its readers to certain habits of thought and to an acceptance of emotion and interpersonal relationships as appropriate matter for elaboration in prose; women, perhaps because the world of emotion and interpersonal relationships were the main if not only sphere in which they move, may have been particularly receptive to this influence. On the whole, however, I think we must be fairly circumspect in drawing conclusions about the effects which the novel may have had upon autobiography. At the time when the most introspective seventeenth century women’s autobiographies were being written--before Defoe, let us remember--English fiction had not reached the state which most theorists would dignify with the term “novel.” Richetti, writing on \textit{Popular Fiction before Richardson}, chooses 1700 as his \textit{terminus ab quo}. As Delany implies, the autobiography at this stage probably contributed more to the novel in the way of formal and narrative techniques than \textit{vice versa}. Later the relation between the two forms more clearly becomes a two-way affair; as we shall see when we come to examine autobiographies of women in the eighteenth century, the impact of the novel upon autobiography is quite striking.

Although many of the early autobiographies went unpublished, we cannot entirely discount the possibility that conventions were already beginning to develop within the form itself, and that some of the earlier works influenced later productions. In the case of Quaker and sectarian autobiographies, which were often printed either shortly after they were composed or shortly after the death of the author, there is no question that various conventions developed and in fact rapidly became quite rigid. The autodidactic intention,

\textsuperscript{48} Ebner, op. cit., p. 148.

\textsuperscript{49} Delany, op. cit., p. 5.
the centrality of the conversion experience, the quasi-Biblical, “incantatory” (to use Jackson I. Cope’s term\textsuperscript{50}) style have all been discussed at some length in various contexts by such scholars as Cope, Luella M. Wright,\textsuperscript{51} William York Tyndall\textsuperscript{52} and G. A. Starr.\textsuperscript{53} More difficult to assess is the contention of A. H. Upham that Lucy Hutchinson was directly influenced by the work of Margaret Cavendish.\textsuperscript{54} Most of his examples are taken from Hutchinson’s biography of her husband. Upham finds it “difficult to understand why Mr. C. H. Firth, concerning himself with both these biographies, and publishing scholarly editions of them in successive years, should have given no notice to these relation”\textsuperscript{55}--but this apparent failure should perhaps make us wary of agreeing too readily with Upham. Though Upham’s examples of parallel passages describing the authors’ husbands are, in the aggregate, fairly convincing (a few are not really very close at all), it may well be that both were drawing on the same tradition of character portrayal. In the seventeenth century, when historians began, as they had not done previously, to describe the recent past and current events, contemporary historiography emphasized the “character” as the locus of history. It is by no means uncommon to find, in these characters, descriptions of the subject’s wit, his demeanor, even, though less often, his physical appearance. And if both men were found by their wives to be of medium stature and well-proportioned, it may be because they really were of medium stature and because to be well-proportioned was important in the contemporary aesthetic. Likewise, in the autobiographies, the similarities in their descriptions of the education may stem from the fact that authors had similar experiences; and need we conclude that it is a case of influence if both claim to hate their needles? One might also make a case, though in less detail, for Margaret Cavendish’s having influenced Anne Fanshawe. Here, for example, are two passages cited by Upham (from Cavendish and Hutchinson respectively):

As for tutors, although we had for all sorts of virtues, as singing, dancing, playing on music, reading, writing, working, and the like, yet we were kept strictly thereto, they were rather for formality than benefit.\ldots \textsuperscript{56}

When I was about seven years of age, I remember I had at one time eight tutors in several qualities, languages, music, dancing, writing, and needlework; but my genius was quite averse from all but my book.\ldots \textsuperscript{57}

And here is one from Fanshawe:

\textsuperscript{54} A. H. Upham, “Lucy Hutchinson and the Duchess of Newcastle,” \textit{Anglia}, 36 (1912), 200-220.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., p. 218.
\textsuperscript{56} Cavendish, op. cit., pp. 157-58.
Now it is necessary to say something of my mother’s education of me, which was with all the advantages that time afforded, both for working all sorts of fine works with my needle, and learning French, singing, lute, the virginals and dancing, and notwithstanding I learned as well as most did, yet was I wild to that degree, that the hours of my beloved recreation took up too much of my time... 

Alice Thornton, we may recall, describes her education in similar terms. I do not, however, mean to dismiss Upham’s argument altogether, though I suspect he has overstated his case. Actually, Margaret Cavendish was quite notorious in her day, and she may well have established, to some extent, certain expectations for the kinds of material to be included in autobiography, as well as giving autobiography by upper-class women a kind of marginal respectability.

Perhaps in some ways the most pervasive literary development involved in the rise of women’s autobiography is the occurrence of certain changes in prose style, still not entirely understood or defined, which made the seventeenth century a transitional period between the various rhetorical excrescences of sixteenth century prose and the classic English prose style which was achieved in the eighteenth century. This is not to say that good prose ceased to be rhetorical, but there was an active effort to abandon the elaborately balanced style which was labeled “Ciceronian” and to cultivate a syntactically looser, asymmetrical, apparently more natural style which was thought to be “Senecan”--to portray, in the words of Morris Croll, “not a thought but a mind thinking.” Thomas Sprat’s *History of the Royal Society*, published in 1667, a kind of bellwether of the changes that were taking place, denounces “Tropes and Figures” and deplores “this vicious abundance of Phrase, this trick of Metaphors, this volubility of Tongue, which makes go great a noise in the World”; he applauds the Society’s resolution to reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style: to return back to the primitive purity, and shortness, when men deliver’d so many things, almost in an equal number of words. They have exacted from all their members, a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions, clear senses, a native easiness: bringing all things as near the mathematical plainness, as they can: and preferring the language of Artizans, Countrymen, and Merchants, before that, of Wits, or Scholars.

Clearly such a style was, by its very nature, well suited to the requirements of autobiography. As an example of its adaptability to the fine emotional or spiritual distinctions which autobiography tends to demand, let us look at a passage from the

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58 Fanshawe, op. cit., p. 55.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., p. 113.
anonymous autobiography of a relative of Cromwell's, part of which has been quoted already:

One Mr. Marshall, a Minister, & a holy & good Man, was used to perform Duty in the Famile, & I attended at Prayer Time, with the Rest, but without al Sense & Apprehension of God, & wondered within myselfe what they prayed two, becaus there was nothing visable, therefor used on Purpos to cary Apels & Nutts to eat at the Time of Prayer, & often have done so undiscovered: but one Time the cracking the Shel of a Nutt so disturbed Mr. Marshall, that he took Notis of it: but not Knowing who had done it,--whether my Cosens or me, (thof thay were examined) I past this Time without Discovere to Man, but not without being discovered by the Lord, to whom the Secrets of al Herts are known: & tho I remained as I did before, as to my Soul-State, yet I was much troubled, or rather ashamed of it, & thereupon resolved to do so no more; nor never durst after. (pp. 412-13)

The next evening at Prayer I did indevor to set mysefle in a more reverend Manner than formaly: & oh, Behold the goodness of God to me miserable sinner, (being without God in the World:) my Thoalts where as before: I was blind. I began now & see, & apprehend they prayed to an invisabel God, & with al found my Hart earnestly joyning with the Minister in Prayer, & that with great Ernestness; but yet I knew not Jesus Christ. . .

This passage is a good illustration of the Senecan style: syntactic connectives between the elements are either absent or are “used in such a way as to bind the members together in a characteristically loose and casual manner.” The style is flexible enough to carry us with the author through the small discrete steps of the process by which she comes first to believe that there is a God and then, gradually, to refine this perception to a belief in Christ. It reflects the increasing accuracy with which the author is able to pinpoint her spiritual progress (“I was much troubled, or rather ashamed of it”). The paradox of blindness to the invisible and subsequent ability to see the invisible is presented to us not as a foregone conclusion, as it might emerge in a balanced, Ciceronian sentence, but as a gradual unfolding which occurs within time. Such a style works well with a form whose subject defines itself as a function of time. Moreover, it was also more accessible to women. Even women who were well-educated by the standards of the times did not receive the kind of rigorous education which was likely to have initiated them very deeply into the mysteries of highly artificial prose styles. Rather their educations were diletantish, as is clear from the passages which I have just quoted from Cavendish, Hutchinson, and Fanshawe, and were evidently meant to provide them with accomplishments which would be adornments to husband and homes. Moreover, the new

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64 Croll, op. cit., p. 431.
style was more closely related to the subliterary forms open to women, particularly letters, whose purpose was generally to present “not a thought, but a mind thinking.” We cannot be sure how many of the women autobiographers consciously embraced the new style, but Margaret Cavendish, in the preface to her biography of her husband, is most explicit:

Thus I was forced by his Grace’s commands, to write this history in my own plain style, without elegant flourishings, or exquisite method, relying entirely upon truth, in the expressing whereof. I have been very circumspect; as knowing well, that his Grace’s actions have so much glory of their own, that they need borrow none from anybody’s industry.65

A couple of pages later she repeats:

Thus am I resolved to write, in a natural plain style, without Latin sentences, morel instructions, politic designs, feigned orations, or malicious exclamations, this short history. . . . 66

Lucy Hutchinson echoes the words of Sprat even more closely:

. . . I need not gild [her husband’s memory] with such flattering commendations as the fired preachers do equally give to the truly and titularly honourable. A naked undressed narrative, speaking the simple truth of him, will deck him with more substantial glory, than all the panegyrics the best pens could ever consecrate to the virtues of the best man. 67

Illiteracy is not the same as a Senecan prose style, of course, and the merit of the autobiographies of some of the less well educated women lies elsewhere than in their literacy; but the work of, say, Anne Fanshawe gives an indication of the kind of beauty which this style can achieve.

It is possible, though the suggestion may be heretical, that given all the other elements which generated a climate that encouraged at least a few women to write autobiographies, their very lack of a male education enabled women to move in directions which men did not. They were less tied to the old forms and less aware of the “reasons” why they shouldn’t be doing what they were doing. Moreover, because they received less outward intellectual stimulation, they were forced to turn inward to the personal and to the domestic drama for material to ponder. And finally, to quote Stauffer:

Ingenuousness in an autobiographer frequently serves the same purpose as the most sophisticated self-knowledge, and, as in Cellini or Pepys or Bunyan, the autobiographer stands revealed in spite of himself.68

65 Cavendish, op. cit., p. xxxix.
66 Ibid., p. xii.
67 Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 20.
68 Stauffer, Eighteenth Century, p. 258.
Women, being generally less sophisticated than men, were perhaps more likely to reap whatever benefits accrue from ingenuousness.

While there is much material which could probably be added to this list, I have touched upon those which I take to be the most significant factors involved in the rise of women’s autobiography in the seventeenth century. I should like now to turn my attention to the eighteenth century and to take a look at some of the changes which women’s autobiography underwent over the course of the century.
IV. EIGHTEENTH CENTURY AUTOBIOGRAPHIES: 1700-1750

In this chapter and the next, I shall look at autobiographies written by women during the eighteenth century. For the sake of convenience and precision in isolating new trends in autobiography, I have divided the century into two halves. Before proceeding with works written before 1750, however, I think it would be helpful to discuss some considerations and problems involved in the study of eighteenth century autobiography in general.

The eighteenth century was the era in which autobiography as a genre came into its own. To be sure, the classic age of autobiography still lay in the future; it was not until the nineteenth century that the enormous influence of Rousseau made itself felt and that authors such as Mill engaged in the kind of intricate and exquisitely conscious self-analysis that seems so lifelike and sophisticated to modern tastes—the very stuff of autobiography. But the groundwork for this development was firmly established in the eighteenth century. No longer were extravagant justifications of autobiographical activity required; the importance of the accumulation of data to the ultimate understanding of man, as of any other phenomenon, was by now generally accepted. The form was sufficiently common and conventionalized that an autobiographer need no longer be a pioneer or innovator. The public appetite for personal glimpses, and for scandal, seemed insatiable; and in the expanding economy of eighteenth-century England, a demand was bound to produce a supply. The genre had matured sufficiently to produce some specimens, such as Gibbon’s autobiography, which we can without a blush label great.

For women, as for men, secular autobiography became the order of the day—although works by men still outnumbered those of women. But nothing resembling Gibbon’s work was written by a woman; the circumstances which made possible such a work were distinctly male. As we shall see in this chapter and the next, the forces which impinged in women’s lives caused women’s autobiography to take a very different tack.

The popularity of autobiography in the eighteenth century raises a number of problems of classification. Self-revelation was endlessly fascinating and highly marketable. A sense of the propriety of reserve and reticence, which had been deeply ingrained in the culture, was being displaced by a more confessional habit of thought. As a result, autobiographical passages turn up in various more or less unlikely places, ranging from Sophia Hume’s Exhortation to the Inhabitants of North Carolina, a religious tract, to Mrs. Ann Cook’s Professed Cookery, a cookbook run amok. Most such productions yielded, if somewhat reluctantly, before the definition developed in chapter I.

A more difficult problem, however, is posed by the prevalence of fictional autobiography during this period. In some cases it is necessary to rely on guesswork and intuition to sort fiction from fact. Some examples are clearly romances which happen to be cast in first-person form; productions such as The Memoirs of Lady Harriot Butler and Memoirs of a Young Lady of Quality, a Platonist are full of deathbed marriages, deathbed confessions, interfering priests, lengthy retirements from society, and unlikely love intrigues related by characters who probably never existed. Other works reveal the influence of Defoe, whose striking successes were frequently imitated and adapted throughout the century. The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies, for example,
chronicles the career of a male impersonator who spent several years in the army searching for her husband, who awoke one morning to find that he had enlisted the night before in a burst of drunken enthusiasm. As John Campbell Major notes,

There seems to be no reason to doubt that Mother Ross [Mrs. Davies] was a real individual who served as a soldier, but that she dictated her own autobiography is more doubtful.¹

Indeed, the narrative has been attributed, and not implausibly, to Defoe himself. It is full of accounts of duels and battles, and such titillating scenes as the following:

I was in Gorkham, where my grief for my husband being drowned in the hopes of finding him, I indulged to the natural gaiety of my temper, and lived very merrily. In my frolics, to kill time, I made my addresses to a burgher’s daughter, who was young and pretty. As I had formerly had a great many fine things said to myself, I was at no loss in the amorous dialect; I ran over all the tender nonsense (which I look upon as the lover’s heavy cannon, as it does the greatest execution with the raw girls) employed on such attacks; I squeezed her hand whenever I could get an opportunity; sighed often when in her company, looked foolishly, and practised upon her all the ridiculous airs which I had often laughed at, when they were used as snares against myself.²

A later attempt to capitalize on Defoe’s popularity is *The Life, Voyages, and Surprising Adventures of Mary Jane Meadows*, the full title of which goes on to describe the heroine as “a Woman of uncommon Talents, Spirit and Resolution, who, after experiencing a Series of extraordinary Changes in Life, from the highest Splendour and Affluence, to the most abject Distress and Poverty; at last shipped herself to India, in the unfortunate Grosvenor, and was cast away on the dreary Coast of Africa; where, after travelling through vast Deserts and the Kingdom of Caffraria in the most imminent Danger, arrived on the Borders of the South Sea, where she was again cast away upon an uninhabited Island, and lived entirely by herself for several Years.” If the plot sounds familiar it is undoubtedly less than a coincidence. The frontispiece shows a fantastic picture of “Mary attacked by a Baboon at the door of her hut, on the uninhabited Island.”³ Still another type of ersatz autobiography is represented by the *Memoirs of Mrs. Laetitia Boothby*, which used to be catalogued as a pseudonymous work but is now taken to be a fictional production of its nineteenth century “editor,” William Clark Russell. Its narrator is a servant girl who mingle with the illustrious company that gathers at her master’s house and who is constantly overhearing choice remarks of Garrick, Johnson, the Thrales, and

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Soame Jenyns, and the like. Her picture of Johnson accords suspiciously with the nineteenth century view of him.

I have tried to weed out the fictional works, but there is sometimes cause for hesitation. Lady Vane’s memoirs, inserted in Peregrine Pickle, are generally taken to be her own; but it is hard to resist speculating about the possibility that Smollett himself had a hand in them. On the other hand, I have included fictionalized autobiography such as that of Mrs. Delany, who uses romance names for her characters, and the more extreme case of Mrs. Manley, who actually brings in a (possibly fictional) third person narrator to tell the story; for in both cases the motivating force is obviously a desire to record the author’s life with some degree of faithfulness, if not impartiality. These can be distinguished, I think, from the autobiographical novel, where the intent is basically fictional and the events in the author’s life serve as a source of material rather than as the primary subject of the work.4

One further problem, largely a technical one, is that of determining whether a given work was written within the limits of our arbitrarily chosen time period. It arises particularly in the case of certain Quaker writings. Many Quakers regularly made detailed memoranda of the past day, month, or year, and then at some point decided to combine these notes into a more coherent structure; thus, a summary of the author’s life preceding the period covered by the journal or memoranda is added to the work, and although the work as a whole proceeds into the nineteenth century, it is not always clear whether the autobiographical portion was added before or after 1800. Alternatively a pious editor or compiler may have drawn together many assorted papers, including autobiographical writings, journal entries, and letters, into a “memoir,” and it is not evident which portions antedate 1800, or whether, indeed, there was ever any strictly autobiographical intention on the part of the author. My policy has been to exclude such works, except in the instance of Mary Alexander, where the date of writing is clearly stated.5 This uncertainty makes it possible that the Quakers are slightly underrepresented in chapter V.

As in chapter II, works are discussed, insofar as possible, in the order in which they were written.

1. The Authors

a. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu

Lady Mary Pierrepont Wortley Montagu (1689-1762), one of the most formidable and fascinating women of the eighteenth century—friend and later bitter enemy of Pope, traveler, superb letter-writer, crusader for smallpox vaccination—has left an untitled

4 Roy Pascal, in Design and Truth in Autobiography (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 164, makes such a distinction: “the novel is complete in itself while the autobiography always reaches forward to the man writing.”

5 Works in this category include the writings of Martha Routh, Ruth Follows, Sarah Stevenson, and Jane Pearson; all are highly conventional Quaker productions.
autobiographical fragment. According to Robert Halsband, her biographer, it was probably written in 1711, when she was twenty-two and on the verge of marriage to Mr. Edward Wortley Montagu.

Despite its brevity and incompleteness, this document anticipates in many ways Rivella, the first full-length secular autobiography of the century; like Rivella, it is very different from anything we have encountered to date. It is consciously written in the style of the French romances which Lady Mary read so avidly:

I am going to write a history so uncommon, that in how plain a manner so ever I relate it, it will have the air of a romance, though there shall not be a syllable feigned in it except that of the names, which I cannot resolve to set down at length.

Of her heroine, Laetitia, she writes:

I need say nothing of the Pedegree of the unfortunate Lady, whose Life I have undertaken to write. 'Tis enough to say she was daughter of the Duke of Regiavilla, to inform my reader there is no nobler descent in Portugal. (p. 4)

She gives the following account of her education:

Laetitia had naturally the strongest inclination for reading, and finding in her Father's house a well-furnished Library, instead of the usual diversions of children, made that the seat of her pleasures, and had very soon run through the English part of it. Her appetite for knowledge increasing with her years, without considering the toilsome task she undertook, she began to learn herself the Latin grammar, and with the help of an uncommon memory and indefatigable labour, made herself so far mistress of that language as to be able to understand almost any author. This extraordinary attachment to study became the theme of public discourse. Her Father, though no scholar himself, was flattered with a pleasure in the progress she made, and this reputation which she did not seek (having no end in view but her own amusement) gave her enviers and consequently enemies among the girls of her own age. (pp. 4-5)

She then proceeds to her courtship by that by all evidence rather chilly and ungenerous soul, Mr. Wortley Montagu, otherwise Sebastian. An acquaintance of Laetitia boasts of being courted by Sebastian, and arranges for Laetitia to attend a party where she can be “a

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7 Quoted in Halsband, op. cit., p. 2.
8 This and all subsequent quotations are taken from Paston, op. cit. Page numbers cited refer to this edition.
witness both of his agreeableness and passion” (p. 7). Laetitia has barely entered her teens:

Sebastian, who seriously designed upon the fortune of Mlle. ---, who was three years older, proposed nothing by coming there but an occasion of obliging her, and being at that time near thirty, did not expect much conversation among a set of romps. Tea came in before cards, and a new play being then acted, it was the first thing mentioned, on which Laetitia took occasion to criticize in a manner so just and knowing, he was as much amazed as if he had heard a piece of waxwork talk on that subject. This led them into a discourse of Poetry, and he was still more astonished to find her not only well read in the moderns, but that there was hardly any beautiful passage in the classics she did not remember; this was striking him in the most sensible manner. He was a thorough scholar, and rather an adorer than an admirer of learning. The conversation grew so eager on both sides neither cards nor Mlle. were thought upon, and she was forced to call on him several times before she could prevail on him to go towards the table. When he did, it was only to continue his discourse with Laetitia, and she had the full pleasure of triumphing over Mlle., who was forced to be silent while they talked about what she could not understand. (pp. 7-8)

The two enter into a correspondence, but Laetitia does not make any emotional commitment:

Laetitia easily saw the conquest she had made of his heart; but that merit which was so powerful with Mlle. made very small impression on her. She had a way of thinking very different from other girls, and instead of looking on a husband as the ultimate aim of her wishes, she never thought of marriage but as a bond that was to subject her to a master, and she dreaded an engagement of that sort. The little plan she had formed to herself was retirement and study, and if she found any pleasure in Sebastian’s company, it was only when he directed her in the choice of her books, or explained some passage to her in Vergil or Horace. (p. 21)

He too maintains a reserved tone in his letters. But finally, deceived into thinking she has made a declaration of love, he writes her an impassioned love letter; this missive is discovered by her father, who is suitably enraged. Laetitia, mortified, appeals to Sebastian to clarify matters with her father, but the egotistical young man again misinterprets her response:

Sebastian had so far flattered himself with her love he did not doubt she had herself carried this letter to her father, and it was an artifice to bring this affair to a proper conclusion. He was delighted with the wit of this contrivance, which was very far from her thoughts, and full of the most
charming hopes went the next morning to her Father with a formal proposal of marriage, accompanied by the particulars of his estate, which was too considerable to be refused. The Duke gave him as favourable an answer as he could expect, and the lawyers were appointed to meet on both sides according to custom. (p. 30)

Here the narrative breaks off. It is a slight production, and, as Paston remarks, “its accuracy must not be taken too much for granted.”

b. Elizabeth Webb

Elizabeth Webb, a Quaker preacher, has left behind an account of her spiritual life in a letter written in 1712 to Anthony William Boehm, chaplain to Prince George of Denmark, consort to Queen Anne of England. Though fairly brief, it contains most of the characteristic features of Quaker autobiography.

Elizabeth Webb had contracted an acquaintance with the eminent divine during a stay in London. She seems to have had a few reservations about the way her narrative would be received, but there is a note of underlying confidence in the suitability of her life as subject matter for a letter:

And now, my dear friend, I will give thee a short account of the dealings of the Lord with me in my young years; how he brought my soul through fire and water. For what end this has lived in my mind I know not, except it be for our spiritual communion; but when my soul is lowest and nearest to the Lord in the simplicity of truth, then is my heart opened and my mind filled with divine love respecting this matter. I desire thee to peruse it inwardly, when thou art retired, and not to judge of it before thou hast gone through it; and then judge as freely as thou pleasest:— (p. 165)

Her sense of the propriety of such a procedure testifies to the extent to which spiritual autobiography had become an integral part of the Quaker tradition by the beginning of the eighteenth century.

She goes on to describe her youth. She was raised, she tells us, in the Church of England, but fails to find it adequate to her needs. At the age of twelve she becomes convinced that Quakerism is the true religion, but she has a series of lapses before she finally commits herself:

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9 Paston, op. cit., p. 28.
I did not join with them; for by that time flesh and blood began to be very uneasy under the yoke of retirement, and to groan for liberty. I was about sixteen years old; and the subtle enemy lay near, and did not want instruments: so I was persuaded by reasoning with flesh and blood, that I was young, and might take a little more pleasure, and might serve God when I was older. I let go my exercise of watching and praying, left off retirement, and let out my love to visible objects. Pride and vanity grew up again; the divine, sweet, meek, loving Spirit withdrew, and I could not find it again when I pleased, although I did seek it sometimes: for I could have been pleased with the sweet comforts of his love, yet I did not like to bear the daily cross. And being convinced that was [required by] the Quakers’ principles, and believing they did enjoy the sweetness of divine love in their meetings, I went sometimes a great way to a meeting to seek for divine refreshment there: but to no purpose; for I was like some dry stick that had no sap nor virtue, unto which rain and sunshine, summer and winter are all alike.--Thus it was with me for about three years. (pp. 166-67)

Her outward integrity is not enough to secure her salvation:

For I had been preserved in moral honesty in all respects, to that degree, that I durst not tell a lie, or speak an evil word, and could be trusted in any place, and in any thing; for this would be in my mind many times, that if I was not faithful in the unrighteous mammon I should not be trusted with heavenly treasure. But notwithstanding my righteousness, He whose eye penetrates all hearts, found me so guilty, that I thought there was no mercy for me.

Even after her conversion, she continues to be plagued by doubt:

Oh! the days of sorrow and nights of anguish that I went through, no tongue can utter, nor heart conceive which hath not gone through the like. I could have wished I had been some other creature, that I might not have known such anguish and sorrow; for I thought all other creatures were in their proper places. But my troubles were aggravated by the strong oppression and temptation of Satan, who was very unwilling to lose his subject: so he raised all his forces, and made use of all his armour which he had in the house: and I found him to be like a strong man armed indeed; for he would not suffer me to enter into resignation, but would have me look into mysteries that appertain to salvation, with an eye of carnal reason. And because I could not so comprehend, he caused me to question the truth of all things that are left upon record in the Holy Scriptures, and would have persuaded me into the Jews’ opinion concerning Christ; and many other baits and resting places he laid before me. But my soul hungered after the true bread, the bread of life, which
came from God out of heaven... which I had felt near, and my soul had tasted of. And although the devil prompted me with his temptations, my soul could not feed on them... (p. 167)

This passage emphasizes the anti-intellectual strain of Quakerism; reason is of the devil, and religion is a sensual experience. In another place, Satan is referred to simply as “the reasoner” (p. 168).

As frequently occurs with Quaker converts, the use of “plain language” precipitates a crisis for Elizabeth Webb:

... I was afraid of displeasing my superiors, being then a servant to great persons. It was shown me, that I should not give flattering titles to man; and I was threatened inwardly, that if I would not be obedient to the Lord’s requirings, he would take away his good Spirit from me again. So I was in a strait; I was afraid of displeasing God, and afraid of displeasing man; till at last I was charged by the Spirit, with honouring man more than God: for in my address to God I did use the plain language, but when I spoke to man or woman I must speak otherwise, or else they would be offended. Some would argue, that God Almighty being the only One, therefore the singular language was proper to him alone: and man being made up of compound matter, the plural language was more proper to him, &c. Oh! the subtle twistings of proud Lucifer that I have seen, would be too large to insert; but although God Almighty is the only One, yet is he the Being of all beings, for in him we live, move, and have our being. But let the cover be what it would, I had Scripture on my side, which they called their rule; and I knew proud man disdained to receive that language from an inferior, which he gave to the Almighty. So it became a great cross to me: but it was certainly a letting thing in the way of the progress of my soul, and, I gave up to the Lord’s requirings in this small thing. (pp. 168-69)

It is such struggles and doubts, as well as her religious satisfactions, which she considers to be her “qualification and call to the service of the ministry” (p. 170). She eventually comes to feel that God requires her to go to America as a missionary (a well-traveled route for eighteenth century Quakers), and we learn in passing that she has acquired a husband:

... I then told my husband that I had a concern to go to America; and asked him if he could give me up. He said he hoped it would not be required of me: but I told him it was; and that I should not go without his free consent, which seemed a little hard to him at first. (p. 172)

Yet another common feature of Quaker autobiography is the spiritual dream. Elizabeth Webb claims to have had “certain manifestations of many things in dreams, which did come to pass according to their significations” (p. 171). Her fascination with the black slaves is reflected in a dream which answers her question about their souls:
As I travelled along the country from one meeting to another, I observed a great numbers of black people that were in slavery. They were a strange people to me; I wanted to know whether the visitation of God was to their souls or not; and I observed their conversation, to see if I could discern any good in them. After I had travelled about four weeks, as I was in bed one morning in a house in Maryland, after the sun was up I fell into a slumber, and dreamed I was a servant in a great man’s house, and that I was drawing water at a well to wash the uppermost rooms of the house. When I was at the well, a voice came to me, which bid me go and call other servants to help me, and I went presently. But as I was going along in a very pleasant green meadow, a great light shined about me, which exceeded the light of the sun, and I walked in the midst. As I went on in the way, I saw a chariot drawn with horses coming to meet me, and I was in care lest the light that shone about me should frighten the horses, and cause them to throw down the people whom I saw in the chariot. When I came to them, I looked on them, and I knew they were the servants I was sent to call: I saw they were both white and black people, and I said unto them, “Why have you staid so long?” They said, “The buckets were frozed, we could come no sooner:”--So I was satisfied the call of the Lord was unto the black people as well as the white. . . . (p. 172)

The doubts, the dreams, the anti-intellectualism, the crisis over the use of “plain language,” the ecstasies, the abstractions, the call to preach—all are elements which will crop up again and again in eighteenth century Quaker autobiography. Though quite conventional by this time, such an account was found to be very inspiring, as the following passage from Anthony William Boehm’s reply reveals:

Your letter hath been read with great satisfaction by myself and many of my friends; but I have not been able to recover it yet, out of their hands. Some have even desired to transcribe it for their edification, and this is the reason I did not send you presently an answer; though it hath been all along upon my mind to express the satisfaction I had at the reading thereof. . . . (p. 173)

c. Delariviere Manley

Delariviere Manley’s fictionalized autobiography Rivella11, which was published in 1714, marks a complete departure from seventeenth century women’s autobiography. The character of its author, the circumstances under which it was written, the fact that it was written for publication, and the actual content of the work all testify to the changes that society in general and the condition of women in particular have undergone since

11 Delariviere Manley, The History of Rivella, in The Novels of Mary Delariviere Manley, ed. Patricia Köster (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, 1971), 729-856. This is a facsimile reproduction of the 1714 edition. Page numbers cited refer to Köster.
Margaret Cavendish and Lucy Hutchinson composed their touching memoirs of domestic devotion. Although autobiographies written by women in the eighteenth century are more varied and harder to generalize about than those written previously, *Rivella* is in every way a fitting introduction to secular autobiography in the eighteenth century, since it exhibits many of the qualities which come to characterize the works which follow it.

Mrs. Manley is primarily remembered as a novelist and, to a lesser extent, as a playwright. She was the daughter of Sir Roger Manley, a professional soldier and amateur belle-letterist. Not a great deal is known about her. Even her name is rather a mystery: it is commonly listed in bibliographies as Mary de la Riviere Manley, but there is little evidence for the "Mary." More likely her name was simply Delariviere Manley (probably after Lady Delariviere Morgan, the wife of her father’s superior officer\(^{12}\)), which is how it appears on her signed works, her letters, her will, and her tombstone. The year of her birth is also difficult to ascertain, since she tended to obfuscate this date; probably it was sometime between 1667 and 1672.\(^{13}\) Until recently she was little more than a footnote in the history of the novel, although she was tremendously popular in her own day. Scholars sneered at such productions as *The Secret History of Queen Zarah* (which may, however, not be Mrs. Manley’s work at all\(^{14}\)) and *The New Atalantis*, although even people such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu read them avidly and eagerly awaited subsequent installments. These books were romans à clef, scandalous collections of anecdotes about aristocratic men and women and the English court, thinly disguised by romance names and an exotic locale. *The New Atalantis* was also intended as a piece of Tory political propaganda, for which its author was briefly jailed and for which Swift attempted to use his influence to secure her a “pension or a reward for her service to the cause, by writing her *Atalantis*, and prosecution, &c, upon it.”\(^{15}\) Only within the past few years, as an outgrowth of the burgeoning interest in popular culture, have scholars such as Patricia Köster and John Richetti come to reject the condescension of earlier critics and to recognize the legitimate contribution which authors like Mrs. Manley made to fantasy and to the establishment and definition of popular myths about social organization and male/female relationships.\(^{16}\)

*Rivella* is the first autobiography of a woman who wrote in order to support herself—in other words, of a professional writer. Indeed, in *The New Atalantis*, she makes Astrea, the Goddess of Justice who acts as moderator throughout the book, say of the poet Anne Finch, Lady Winchilsea:

> I presume she’s one of the happy few, that write out of Pleasure, and not Necessity: By that means its her own fault, if she publish any thing but what’s good; for it’s next to impossible to write much and write well.\(^{17}\)

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\(^{13}\) Köster, op. cit., I, vi.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., pp. x ff.


\(^{17}\) Köster, op. cit., I, 443.
For *Rivella* there was another motive besides financial need: in the fourth edition, published after Mrs. Manley’s death, the publisher Curll tells us that the book was written to prevent publication of Charles Gildon’s “A severe Invective upon some Part of her Conduct,” which was apparently commissioned by the “unspeakable” Curll himself.\(^{18}\) The book is in effect an apology and an attempt to show its author and her conduct in the best possible light. It was evidently written in some haste; nevertheless, the facts, insofar as they can be checked, seem to be accurate, except for the business about the date of her birth.\(^{19}\)

The book takes the form of a conversation between Sir Charles Lovemore (usually but perhaps erroneously identified as General John Tidcombe) and the Chevalier D’Aumont, in which the former relates at the request of the latter at great length the history of Rivella. Sir Charles’ opening words give us what is probably the key to Mrs. Manley’s vision of herself and the world:

> There are so many Things Praise, and yet Blame-worthy, in *Rivella’s* Conduct, that as Her Friend, I know not well how with a good Grace, to repeat, or as yours, to conceal, because you seem to expect from me an Impartial History. Her Vertures are her own, her Vices occasion’d by her Misfortunes; and yet as I have often heard her say, *If she had been a Man, she had been without Fault*: But the Charter of that Sex being much more confin’d than ours, what is not a Crime in Men is scandalous and unpardonable in Woman, as she herself has very well observ’d in divers Places, throughout her own Writings. (pp. 743-44)

According to Richetti, sexual antagonism was the basis for much of the content and popularity of the scandal novel:

> Scandal novels owed a significant part of their popularity, that is, to their ability to evoke an essentially fictional world whose inhabitants were not so much real persons as they were embodiments of popular concepts, capable of provoking personal fantasy and projection precisely because they appealed to an immediately available and more or less communal mythology. That myth, the destruction of female innocence by a representative of an aristocratic world of male corruption, is a well-known eighteenth-century preoccupation, from its prominence in the drama to the prose fiction which begins with Richardson and expands all over Europe.\(^{20}\)

This “myth,” which Richetti concedes has “some basis in reality,”\(^{21}\) had for Mrs. Manley a personal as well as a general social application. What Sir Charles refers to as “Rivella’s real Misfortunes” are not actually recounted in this volume; the reader is referred to a

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\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. xx.
\(^{19}\) Ibid.
\(^{20}\) Richetti, op. cit., p. 125.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 124.
passage of about ten pages in *The New Atalantis*, in which her story is recounted under the name of “Delia.” This passage describes, in more or less the same style as *Rivella*, the story of how the young heroine is tricked into marriage with her cousin and guardian (John Manley), who reveals upon learning of her pregnancy that his first wife is still living. Though we have no way of knowing to what extent Mrs. Manley was complicit in her own deception, this incident set the tone for the remainder of her life and made it impossible for her to re-enter society on a completely respectable basis. It was indeed, as Sir Charles calls it, her “Ruin.” The double standard which dictated the loss of her reputation was evidently a great source of pain and irritation to her:

*RIVELLA* is certainly much indebted, continu’d *Lovemore*, to a Liberal Education, and those early Precepts of Vertue taught her and practised in her Father’s House. There was then such a Foundation laid, that tho’ Youth, Misfortunes, and Love, for several Years have interrupted so fair a Building, yet some Time since, she is returned with the greatest Application to repair that Loss and Defect; if not with relation to this World (where Women have found it impossible to be reinstated) yet of the next, which has mercifully told us, *Mankind can commit no Crimes but what upon Conversion may be forgiven.* (p. 748)

Perhaps for the first time in women’s autobiography since Anne Clifford, *Rivella* gives us an extended physical description of its subject:

HER Person is neither tall nor short; from her Youth she was inclin’d to Fat; whence I have often hear her Flatterers liken her to the *Grecian Venus*. It is certain, considering that Disadvantage, she has the most easy Air that one can have; her Hair is of a pale Ash-colour, fine, and in a large Quantity. I have heard her Friends lament the Disaster of her having had the Small-pox in such an injurious manner, being a beautiful Child before that Distemper; but as that Disease has now left her Face, she has scarce any Pretence to it. Few, who have only beheld her in Publick, could be brought to like her; whereas none that became acquainted with her, could refrain from loving her. I have heard several Wives and Mistresses accuse her of Fascination: They would neither trust their Husbands, Lovers, Sons, nor Brothers with her Acquaintance upon Terms of the greatest Advantage. Speak to me of her Eyes, interrupted the *Chevalier*, you seem to have forgot that Index of the Mind; Is there to be found in them, Store of those animating Fires with which her Writings are fill’d? Do her Eyes love as well as Her Pen? You reprove me very justly, answer’d the Baronet, *Rivella* would have a good deal of Reason to complain of me, if I should silently pass over the best Feature in her Face. In a Word, you have your self described them: Nothing can be more tender, ingenious and brilliant with a Mixture so languishing and sweet,

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when Love is the Subject of the Discourse, that without being severe, we may very well conclude, the softer Passions have their Predominancy in Her Soul. (pp. 744-45)

The Chevalier interrupts again, rather comically to the modern reader, to inquire after her lips and teeth, and the description continues downward in the same vein, ending with her feet which are “small and pretty” (p. 746). The passage is interesting in several respects: it calls attention to the extent to which a woman who was not supported by a husband and lived by her wits was forced by contemporary society to rely on her physical attractiveness; it suggests that physical appearance is coming more and more to be bound up with the actual identity or self-image of a person; and it demonstrates the influence of prose fiction upon autobiography, since novel and romance frequently treat us to lavish descriptions of the heroine’s beauty. That Mrs. Manley stretched the truth slightly to fit this ideal is suggested by Swift’s description of her, to Stella in 1711-12, as “about forty, very homely and very fat.”

Following the description of her appearance, we are given a briefer evaluation of her education (p. 748, quoted above) and of her character:

RIVELLA’S natural Temper is haughty, impatient of Contradiction: She is nicely tenacious of the Privilege of Her own Sex, in Point of what Respect ought to be paid by ours to the Ladies; and as she understands good Breeding to a Punctuality, tho’ the Freedom of her Humour often dispenses with Forms, She will not easily forgive what Person soever shall be wanting in that which Custom has made her Due: Her Soul is soft and tender to the Afflicted, her Tears wait upon their Misfortunes, and there is nothing she does not do to asswage them. You need but tell her a Person is in Misery to engage her Concern, her Purse, and her Interest in their Behalf...

NOW I have done with her Person, I fear you will think me too particular in my Description of her Mind: But Chevalier there lies the intrinseck Value; ’tis that which either accomplishes or deforms a Person. I will in a few Words conclude her Character; she has lov’d Expence, even to being extravagant, which in a Woman of Fortune might more justly have been term’d Generosity: She is Grateful, unalterable in those Principles of Loyalty, derived from her Family: A little too vain-glorious of those Perfections which have been ascribed to her; she does not however boast of what Praise, or Favours, Persons of Rank may have conferr’d upon her: She loves Truth, and has too often given her self the Liberty to speak, as well as write it. (pp. 749-50)

The book then launches into a series of liaisons, honorable in varying degrees, and most of the second half is devoted to a rather tedious and confusing account of a lawsuit by which she and her lover (John Tilly) attempted unsuccessfully to turn a profit.

23 Swift, op. cit., II, 474.
Rivella is not in itself a highly distinguished production, and the necessity for the author to write in her own defense lends the book a pathetic quality. But it is significant in that it represents a new direction for autobiography; perhaps the only earlier document in English which remotely resembles it is Sir Kenelm Digby’s Loose Fantasies, and even here the similarities are superficial. Certainly there is nothing like it among the works which we considered in chapter II. Yet the independent, self-supporting woman, who takes as her theme love and intrigue and the social inequities surrounding them, will become an increasingly common figure in the annals of eighteenth century autobiography.

**d. Elizabeth Thomas**

Like a number of the women autobiographers of the period, Elizabeth Thomas (1675-1731) is chiefly remembered today for being preserved in the amber of Pope’s *Dunciad*. Her role is particularly disgraceful:

> Full in the middle way there stood a lake,  
> Which Curl’s Corinna chanc’d that morn to make:  
> (Such was her wont, at early dawn to drop  
> Her evening cates before his neighbour’s shop.)  
> Here fortun’d Curl to slide. . . .

She earned this compliment in 1726, when, impoverished and sorely pressed by creditors, she gained possession of twenty-five letters written to Mr. Henry Cromwell by the youthful Pope and sold them to Curll, who of course published them illicitly. Yet the same Elizabeth Thomas began her career in 1799 when she sent two poems to Dryden for his critical appraisal; he bestowed the *nom-de-plume* Corinna upon her and said of her poems:

> They were, I thought, too good to be a Woman’s. . . . It is not over Gallant,  
> I must confess, to say this of the Fair Sex; but, most certain it is, that they generally write with more Softness than Strength. On the contrary, you want neither Vigour in your Thoughts, nor Force in your Expressions, nor Harmony in your Numbers. . . .

What has caused this metamorphosis? The autobiographical writings of Elizabeth Thomas give little direct information, but clues are to be found, perhaps, in the personality which emerges from them.

In 1731, the year of the author’s death, *Pylades and Corinna: or, Memoirs of the Lives, Amours, and Writings of Richard Gwinnett, Esq. . . .; and Mrs. Elizabeth Thomas, junior. . . . To which is prefixed, the Life of Corinna, Written by Her Self* was published. It is this *Life of Corinna*, plus a letter to Dr. Talbot, Bishop of Durham (also printed in

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this volume), in which she describes her life from a somewhat different angle, which constitute her autobiographical writings. The first of these documents runs on for some sixty pages; told in the third person, it open thus:

Having been long importuned to give some Account to the Publick of this Unfortunate Author; (whose worst Enemies could never Brand either with real Crime or real Misconduct: and yet, if one may dare use so bold a Phrase, seemed created only to suffer; her whole Life being only one continued Scene, of the utmost Variety of Human Misery) I the more readily comply with this Office, being well assured it cannot be performed by any more capable of it than myself; who have lived in the strictest Amity with her, from the earliest Remembrance. (p. iii)

The narrator goes on to allege herself:

... a (Female) Friend... resolved however to be so faithful a Register, that she will no more conceal her Failings, than she lessen her Deserts; and laying aside the FRIEND, is now only an impartial HISTORIAN. (p. iv)

She then launches into her story:

Her Family... was just beneath Envy, and above Contempt: was the Child of an Ancient and Infirm Parent, who gave her Life when he was Dying himself; and to whose unhappy Constitution, she was Sole Heiress: and always afflicted with Fevers and Defluxions...; which rendered her so Tender, that had she been of a gay Disposition, must have made her more unhappy than she really was. (p. iv)

Her mother, who figures prominently in this account, is widowed at eighteen; she thinks herself financially secure, but is soon disabused:

But, when the first Sallies of the Widow’s Grief were over, and she took an Estimate of her Substance, how mistaken! how shocked must this young Creature be? to find herself instead of many Thousands scarcely worth One. (p. v)

Corinna, Elizabeth Thomas tells us of herself, is a person of exquisitely refined tastes and sensibility. Even as an infant, there is nothing trivial about her interests:

I cannot omit one Circumstance in our Author’s Infancy, which however trifling it may seem, has something in it very odd, she could never be brought to lye in a Cradle, nor ever be diverted with such Play-things as usually please Children, but always flung them away with a Contempt uncommon to so tender an Age; but give her a Book, and she would sit
Her description of her physical appearance, too, underlines her serious nature--belied to some extent by her evident concern with her own attractiveness:

As for her Stature, it was, in Youth, a tall middling, but in her later Years, through the depression of her Spirits, or the turn of Fortune, and a long habitude of Reading, and Writing, she had contracted a droop of her Head; which, as it abated something of her height, did very much of her Presence. She was neither Fat, nor Lean, her Hair Auborne, her Eyes a darkfull Hazel, her Visage Oval, her Complexion and Teeth tolerable, her Shape neither excellent nor deformed, all together she was well enough; and had she studied the Adornment of her Body, as much as she did that of her Mind, she would have made a more agreeable Appearance; but that was not her Aim. . . . The Body she would say, was only a Case for the Soul, like the woodenwork of a Clock, which, if kept but whole, and clean-dusted, was sufficient. (pp. x-xi)

She then describes her personality:

Her Temper was much too warm, and apt to retain Resentment (but never malicious) nor was she ever known to disclose that in Anger, which was entrusted to her in Friendship. Towards her middle Age, when Troubles came thick, and nothing but Oppression, and Injustice surrounded her, the most intinmate of her Acquaintance, feared the Accumulation of her Sorrows, with her own high Spirit, would drive her desperate; but to their great surprize, she armed herself with a strong Resolution, and by the divine Assistance, subdued all her Passions at once.

She had but little, if any, of the Amorous in her Constitution; but then she had a Soul wonderfully turned for FRIENDSHIP, in its most exalted Sense. . . . (pp. xi-xii)

She proceeds to elaborate upon this favorite theme, with highly italicized fervor:

FRIENDSHIP was the darling Passion of her Soul; and if at any Time she seemed inspired beyond her natural Capacity, it was when she touched on the Subject. But all those fine Ideas, shall I call them, or rather Cobwebs of the Brain, so natural to THEORY, and so remote from PRACTICE, served only to give her too great a Delicacy of Taste, to be pleased with the Discourse of those who talk much, but say nothing. She was blest with several Friendships to her own Heart’s content; but, as they were Ladies of the last Age (when Thought and Sense were more in Fashion) the Course of Nature too soon deprived her of that Happiness, and after their Decease, she found but few susceptible of their refined
Notions . . . as made her resolve to commence no more friendships. (pp. xiii-xiv)

She then gives over several pages to documenting her religious speculations, at the conclusion of which she settles upon the Church of England, into which she was originally born, and finally turns to her “history.”

A good portion of that history is devoted to a fantastic and fascinating account of her mother’s experiences with an alchemist called Quibus; reputed to be:

. . . a parlous Learned Man, he lives in a little Cottage by himself, and does wonderful Cures among the poor People, but the Rich will not make use of him, because he is a Conjurer, and can raise the Devil. (p. xxxii)

He gains her confidence by performing magic tricks and then revealing how he does them. He then intimates that he is completing a great work, about which she inquires:

He replied, His Life was at Stake if it took Air, but he found her a Lady of such uncommon Candor and good Sense, that he should make no Difficulty of committing his Life and Hope to her keeping (all Women are naturally fond of being intrusted with Secrets, and she much more than many others;) he hit her Foible unknown, and she paid dear for the Trust, as will appear by the Sequel.

I have been, adds he, many Years in search of the Philosopher’s-Stone, and long Master of the Smaragdine-Table of HERMES TRISMEGISTUS, the Green and Red Dragons of RAYMOND LULLY, have also been obedient to me, and the Illustrious Sages themselves deign to visit me; yet is it but since I had the Honour of being known to your Ladyship, that I have been so fortunate as to obtain the Grand Secret of Projection. See here, Madam, with this little Powder, inconsiderable as it appears to be, I transmuted some Lead I pulled off my window last Night into this bit of Gold. (pp. xxxv-xxxvi)

She believes him and finances a most amazing operation, in which “Stills and Furnaces worked merrily” (p. xxxix), and which culminates in an explosion. Quibus, upon reviving, “fell to stamping, tearing his Hair, and raving like a Madman, crying out, Undone, undone, undone, lost and undone forever” (p. xliii). Her mother at this point wisely declines to throw good money after bad.

We next find the mother taking a house in which the Earl of Montagu takes lodgings, saying “I love a little Freedom more than my Dowager allows at home, and I may come sometimes and eat a bit of Mutton with four or five honest Fellows, whose Company I delight in” (p. lvi). These “fellows,” introduced as Jack, Tom, Will, and Ned, “good honest Country Fellows, who loved a Fox-Chase, and a Bottle, as they loved their Lives” (p. lvi), turn out to be a group of noblemen plotting the revolution of 1688. The mother becomes involved in the conspiracy, and after the revolution is accomplished Lord Montagu offers to reward her for her services on the condition that her daughter,
Elizabeth Thomas, should ask him for it personally. To her mother’s astonishment, she refuses, asserting that “when you know the Cause, you will not only forgive, but justify my Conduct, having done no more than practice what your own Prudence and Virtue had early taught me” (p. lx). She goes on to describe how Lord Montagu had once accosted her in her chamber:

...But I was extremely shocked when I found he began a new Discourse, telling me I was very pretty, how much he loved me, and if I would give my Self to him, he would settle an Estate, should render me happy all my Life. I heard him without answer, when he perceiving I was putting up my Work to be gone, caught me suddenly in his Arms, and attempted to throw me on the Couch, but frighted as I was, I scratched and bruised his Face, at the same time tearing off his fine Wig which cost sixty Guineas, flung it on the Floor; this indeed moved him to let me go, and with a scornful Sneer, asked, if I did not know what was due to his Quality? I replied, Yes, my Lord, I know what is owing to your Title, but at the same time I must not forget what is due to my own Honour. Merry enough, in Faith, cried he, I pray Miss, what Title do you bear in the World? That of a Modest Girl, said I, and I hope to maintain it.” (pp. lxi-lxii)

Now the mother becomes angry that her daughter has concealed this incident, and her daughter justifies herself thus:

I was very sure, Madam, said the Girl, you would have reproached him for it; and I had read, that a Woman who boasts of her Chastity, does but hang out a Flag of Defiance for a new adventure. (p. lxii)

Such subtlety is lost upon her mother:

Get out of my Sight, said her Mother (who loved Money, and had not all the fine Taste her Daughter afterwards discovered) it makes me sick to hear a Girl of Thirteen talk of Womanhood... (pp. lxii-lxiii)

However embroidered, this little scene illustrates beautifully not only the underlying brutality of contemporary relationships between men and women, but also the levels of complexity added by social and economic factors.

The Life of Corinna then draws to a close. The letter to the Bishop of Durham, after giving more genealogical information, turns to the sixteen-year courtship of Elizabeth Thomas by Richard Gwinnett, which occasioned the letters printed in Pylades and Corinna. The two meet when they are young, and “by Degrees contracted a mutual Esteem, which terminated in a sincere Friendship and Affection” (p. lxxi). For sixteen years he courts her, but he is not wealthy enough to encourage her to permit him to seek her relations’ consent to their marriage. Finally he comes into an estate, but now a new obstacle is presented in the form of her mother’s illness; the doctor, she avers:
... had declared my Mother could not live six Months. I told him I could not leave her in that weak Condition to die among Strangers, and as I had not thought sixteen Years long in waiting for him, he could not in Justice refuse me six Months to pay my last Duty to a dying Parent. He replied, with a deep Sigh, *Six Months, at this Time, is more than sixteen Years has been; you put it off now, and God will do it for ever.*—It proved as he too truly divined, he went down the next Day: made his Will, sickened and died, April 16, 1717, left me the Bequest of six hundred Pounds ... , and *Sorrow* has been my *Food* ever since. Had I married him then, I had been secured from the Insults of Poverty, but I am better contented as it is. ... (pp. lxxiii-lxxiv)

The reader can hardly help suspecting that she enjoyed being betrothed infinitely more than she would ever have enjoyed being married.

As can be seen from these excerpts, the narrator does not appear in a particularly attractive light. She is so fastidious as to miss the point of the situations she is involved in, yet she has an almost prurient interest in the shortcomings of others. Her refinement is clearly more significant to her than her integrity. Still it is difficult not to sympathize with her disastrous transformation from Dryden’s Corinna to “Curll’s Corinna,” and with the poverty which underlay this transformation.

e. Elizabeth Elstob

Elizabeth Elstob (1683-1756) was one of the few genuine female scholars of the eighteenth century. Against formidable odds she managed to learn not only several foreign languages but also Anglo-Saxon; she published a parallel text translation, with notes and comments, of the *Homily on the Birthday of St. Gregory*, and later produced an *Anglo-Saxon Grammar* which has been described as “remarkable for being the first effort to present the study of Old English through the medium of modern English.”26

In 1738 she supplied George Ballard, who was compiling a work entitled *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain, who have been Celebrated for their Writings or Skill in the Learned Languages Arts and Sciences*, with a brief memoir of her life.27 It is a modest document of a few hundred words, written straightforwardly and in the third person; to discuss it at great length would be to produce a critique more massive than its subject. But it is interesting as an exposition of the kind of encouragements and (mostly) discouragements which faced a young girl of a true scholarly bent:

From her childhood she was a great lover of books, which being observed by her mother, who was also a great admirer of learning, especially in her own sex, there was nothing wanting for her improvement, so long as her mother lived. But being so unfortunate as to lose her when she was about eight years old, and when she had but just gone thro’ her accidence and

grammar, there was a stop put to her progress in learning for some years. For her brother being under age when her mother died, she was under the guardianship of a relation, who was no friend to women’s learning, so that she was not suffered to proceed, notwithstanding her repeated requests that she might, being always put off with the common and vulgar saying that one tongue is enough for a woman. However, this discouragement did not prevent her earnest endeavours to improve her mind, in the best manner she was able, not only because she had a natural inclination to books herself, but in obedience to her excellent mother’s desire. She therefore employed most of her time in reading such English and French books (which last language she with much difficulty obtained leave to learn) as she could meet with till she went to live with her brother, who very joyfully and readily assisted and encouraged her, in her studies, with whom she laboured very hard as long as she lived. (pp. 170-71)

The brother she mentions was William Elstob, a linguist and antiquarian who became a fellow of University College in Oxford. She lived with him for twenty years, during which time he encouraged and assisted her greatly in her studies; this happy combination of circumstances gave her far greater access to the academic community and its resources than most women of the period enjoyed. After the death of her brother she was reduced to penury. Twenty years later, through the efforts of George Ballard, she was relieved by charity, and eventually a place as instructor in the household of the Duchess of Portland was procured for her. There she spent the remaining years of her life, comfortably but unproductively.

Elizabeth Elstob is surely one of the glories and tragedies of the literary history of women. Her scholarly output is a tribute to her intelligence and determination; her subsequent lapse of creative scholarship a sad example of how even the brightest and most highly cultivated intellect can be stifled by a lack of stimulation. As an explicit proponent of education for women (in her memoir and elsewhere), she must be taken with great seriousness, for she cannot be dismissed as a scholar manquée chewing on sour grapes. Little is known of her life; she is an extremely eligible candidate for a modern biography.

f. Mary Delany

Mary Granville Pendarves Delany (1700-1788) is remembered today primarily as one of the Bluestockings, that circle of intellectual and well-born women who held court for each other and for such luminaries as Dr. Johnson and his friends in the middle of the eighteenth century. She was apparently a woman of great personal charm. Her paintings—copies of old masters and portraits of friends—were highly prized in their day but have not withstood the test of time. Her main contributions to posterity are her delightful letters and her exquisite handwork; at seventy-four she started a collection of cut-paper flowers—not simply decorative art, but a serious and extremely accurate botanical study. She was well-educated and widely read, but should probably be described as accomplished rather than learned. She was married at seventeen, under family pressure,
to Alexander Pendarves, a jealous old man afflicted with gout and a drinking problem, and left a widow at twenty-four. She was assiduously courted by a number of men, but the only one she loved, Lord Baltimore, eventually chose to make a more advantageous marriage. So she remained unmarried until 1743, when she surprised her friends by marrying the Rev. Patrick Delany, a commoner. But this marriage was made by a mature woman on personal rather than social or family considerations, and it was a good one. Dr. Delany was a friend of Swift’s and a member of Dublin’s most distinguished literary circle, and by all accounts a man of genuine merit. She was widowed again in 1768; she lived out the remainder of her long life happily and productively.

“At different periods,” according to her editor and grand-niece, Lady Llanover, “Mary Granville had commenced a history of her own recollections, of which two unfinished MSS. still exist.” The first of these is a brief fragment, apparently written during the latter part of her life, which deals with her birth and childhood; it is attractively written and closes with the following anecdote:

In the year 10 I first saw Mr. Handel, who was introduced to my uncle Stanley by Mr. Heidegger, the famous manager of the opera, and the most ugly man that ever was formed. We had no better instrument in the house than a little spinnet of mine, on which that great musician performed wonders. I was much struck with his playing, but struck as a child, not a judge, for the moment he was gone, I seated myself to my instrument, and played the best lesson I had then learnt; my uncle archly asked me whether I thought I should ever play as well as Mr. Handel. ‘If I did not think I should’ cried I, ‘I would burn my instrument!’ Such was the innocent presumption of childish ignorance. (pp. 5-6)

The other autobiographical piece which has come down to us is a much more remarkable document. It is actually an epistolary autobiography, written at the request of her intimate friend Margaret Cavendish Harley, Duchess of Portland, in a series of fifteen letters (there may have been more: the last of these letters clearly indicates the author’s intention of continuing the account in subsequent letters) begun in the year 1740. Its unusual format accounts for some of the interesting aspects of this work: it is to some extent motivated, shaped, and altered by the responses of the recipient, making it read like a peculiar but effective amalgamation of autobiography, letter, and epistolary fiction. She maintains a pose of reluctance to write and actually assumes a certain amount of knowledge in the reader:

The task you have set me, my dearest Maria, is a very hard one, and nothing but the complying with the earnest request from so tender a friend, could prevail with me to undertake it. You are so well acquainted with my family, that it is unnecessary for me to inform you of the ebbs and

flows that have attended it for many years; in the most prosperous time of our fortune you were not born. (p. 7)

Sometimes she will anticipate the reader’s response and offer a defense or apology:

I shall not disguise my thoughts, or soften any part of my behaviour, which I fear was not altogether justifiable, and which, though your judgment may condemn, your indulgence and partiality I hope will find some excuse for. (p. 28)

Occasionally she will go back to supply further information which was evidently requested by the recipient: “You say I have omitted giving you his character, ’tis true I have not been very particular in it” (p. 34; she goes on to satisfy the request). The illusion of fiction, if such it can be called, is supported by the use of romance names (the author is “Aspasia,” the recipient “Maria,” Alexander Pendarves “Gromio,” and so forth), then a fashionable custom among correspondents; a key was provided by the writer. The subject matter, too, is reminiscent of the romances Mrs. Delany liked to read; we get no account of her intellectual development, as we might expect in one of her attainments, but rather a series of stories about young men who attempted, in various ways (ranging from persuasion to virtual imprisonment), to seduce her into an intrigue.

We have perhaps no more moving account of the way in which a young woman, a girl actually, could be bartered into a marriage for social and financial reasons without regard to her own preference or personal happiness. Gromio was an old friend of her uncle, in whose household she was living at the time. She found him comic and contemptible, and her reaction when she learned of his designs upon her was, like Clarissa’s toward Mr. Soames, one of extreme repugnance. She acquiesces in her relations’ wishes, however, out of a sense of duty:

I thought that if I could convince Gromio of the great dislike I had to him, that he would not persist, but I was disappointed in that view. I had nobody to advise with; every one of the family had persuaded themselves that this would be an advantageous match for me--no one considered the sentiments of my heart; to be settled in the world, and ease my friends of an expense and care, they urged that it was my duty to submit, and that I ought to sacrifice everything to that one point. I acted as they wished me to do, and for fear of their reproaches, made myself miserable: my chief motive, I may say, was the fear of my father and mother suffering if I disoblighed Alcander [her uncle]. I then recollected the conversation I had with my father in the gallery the day before he left us. I considered my being provided for would be a great satisfaction and relief to him, and might be a means of establishing a good understanding between the brothers; that if I showed the least reluctance, my father and mother would never consent to the match, and that would inevitably expose them, as well as myself, to Alcander’s resentment. These considerations gave me courage, and kept up my resolution. (pp. 28-29)
Her wedding she portrays as a ritual sacrifice:

I had now nothing to do but to submit to my unhappy fortune, and to endeavour to reconcile myself to it. I pass over the courtship, it was awkward to Gromio (who saw too well my unmountable dislike), and too painful to me to raise any entertainment to you from the relation. I was married with great pomp. Never was woe drest out in gayer colours, and when I was led to the altar, I wished from my soul I had been led, as Iphigenia was, to be sacrificed. I was sacrificed, I lost, not life indeed, but I lost all that makes life desirable—joy and peace of mind. . . . (pp. 20-30)

And indeed, her married life is not a happy one; she describes it as seven years of misery in “a remote country, with a man I looked upon as my tyrant—my jailor” (p. 31), during which time she is spied upon by servants and even provided with a duenna in the form of her husband’s foolish and intrusive sister. It is terminated by her husband’s death as he lies beside her in bed, a shocking experience to a young woman not yet twenty-four. Regrettably, the account breaks off shortly after this period.

Mrs. Delany’s autobiography is a fascinating work consummately that of an eighteenth century woman. Though there is nothing else quite like it, it seems perfectly representative of its author and period, in its use of the leisurely and conversational letter as a medium for expression, in its quasi-fictive techniques, and in its recourse to affairs of the heart as a main source of subject matter.

g. Elizabeth Cairns

Elizabeth Cairns (1685-1741) was a deeply religious Scots Calvinist with mystical and visionary learnings. She can be compared most aptly, perhaps, to Anna Trapnel, in the intensity of her religious experiences; but her account is much longer and less concentrated, and shot through with a kind of practicality and sense of the real world (we watch her struggle through the trials of doing her farm chores, leaving home, entering service and later running a school, and ministering successively to her old and dying parents) which exist in a kind of tension with her desire for total absorption in her spiritual experiences. And unlike Anna Trapnel, her devotions and mystical experiences are strictly private; indeed, if we are to believe her protests, it is only by an accident that this autobiography has come down to us at all:

There fell out a Providence that was a great Trial and exercising to me: I left some Passages of my Life, that I had write in my young Days, together with my Clothes, in a Christian Friend’s House, and while they lay there, it fell out in Providence, that a Fire broke out in a neighbouring House, which occasioned the carrying out of all that was in my Friend’s House, and what belonged to me among the Rest, at which Time these Experiences of mine, so many as were then write, were copied, and so went abroad unknown to me, and were hid from me for the Space of
Twelve Years, I having gotten my own Copy with my Clothes, never thought any had known of it, until some Strangers whom I never knew before, came, and told me: Upon this I was surprized with Amazement and Confusion, so that I could not get it born, and these Reasons were weighty on my Mind; 1. That what was recorded there, I never told Mortal of, and was fully of the Mind to have kept these Secrets between God and my own Soul. 2. I having lived so long among the bruit Creatures without either christian Converse, or hearing of the Gospel, as also the Want of Education: I had so ordered Things that others could not understand them, according to my own Meaning, and some Expressions would seem at least unguarded, on which Account I was persuaded Religion would be exposed to Ridicule and Reproach. 3. Those Copies, in many Expressions, differed from mine, for my Writ being so bad, none could copy it according to my Meaning. This hath exceedingly wronged both Truth and me.

This will oblige me to let my original Copy stand as a Witness against those incorrect Copies that are gone abroad. This I am constrained to do, although I was fully resolved to have buried this Original in my own Day, not that I think that some of those more uncommon Experiences were Delusions, so as to be ashamed of them; but, all along, I never had Freedom to discover the Secrets of Religion to the World: The Lord knows I never loved to make Appearance this Way. (pp. 216-17)²⁹

The heavy influence of the language of the Bible is clear from her opening word:

As I was informed by my Parents, I was born in the Year 1685 when the Persecution was very sharp; and through the bloody Cruelty which was then exercised, my Parents were deprived of all they had in the World, and cast out of House and Hold, because of their joining with, and adhering and cleaving to the then persecuted Gospel, and Remnant. In this Extremity, my Mother, by the Providence of God, got into a little Cottage, where she brought me forth a living Child, to the Hazard of her own Life. And three Quarters of a Year thereafter, my Parents got an Opportunity of a persecuted Minister by whom I was baptized in the Night time. (pp. 1-2)

She feels that this beginning has conferred upon her a great obligation to her parents and to God. When very young, she becomes convinced that she is one of the Elect; yet she is always very conscious of being tainted by original sin, by her “wicked Nature” (p. 8).

At one point she summarizes her perception of life thus:

I see this life made up of these three; 1. Wrestling and pursuing. 2. Enjoying. 3. Stripping out of those Enjoyments again, which makes me

²⁹ Elizabeth Cairns, Memoirs of the Life of Elizabeth Cairns (Glasgow: John Grieg, n.d.). Page numbers cited refer to this edition.
long to have the wrestling Life ended, that I may win away to full Enjoyment and Possession, never to be stript any more. (pp. 106-107)

and this passage describes fairly accurately the process of her spiritual experiences. In her early years she basks in the assurance of salvation but never again quite recaptures the serenity of her childhood, for though she is informed that the mature Christian must live the “life of Faith,” she longs for the “life of Sense,” the feeling of God’s presence within her which she describes in terms of marital intimacy:

... If a rich Man would marry a poor Woman, and so infest her in all that he had, yet if he should deny her himself, she would not be satisfied, if she had true Love to his Person, This I applyed, and said, Although God would interest me in all that Heaven and Earth could afford, and though he would deliver me from the Wrath to come, and give me Pardon of all my Sins, and all Pleasures imaginable, yet I could never be satisfied, if he withheld from me himself, and the Sense of his Love; for I am persuaded, that, as there is a real difference between a Man and his Benefits, so is there between God and his Benefits.

Donald A. Stauffer calls Elizabeth Cairns “a servant and a schoolmistress with the soul of a poet.”30 She gives us frequent glimpses of the Scottish countryside from which she draws metaphors for her spiritual experiences:

... one day ... I was going by a Corn-field; I stood up by a Stalk of Corn, and it was higher than I, at which I fell a weeping, when I considered, how short a Time it had been in the Earth, yet had come so great a Length, and I had made so little Progress, in my Way to Heaven. (p. 10)

... sometimes, I remarked in a cloudy Day, that the Sun would have given a Blink, and immediately the Cloud would have covered it again: O! thought I this did represent to me my Condition in this World; and then I would have longed for the Day, when the Sun of Righteousness would shine to all Eternity on my Soul, and never be covered with a Cloud any more. (p. 11)

These “Blinks”--momentary visions of light, moments of comfort and security--become the object of her spiritual searches, and she refers to them repeatedly. They are so ineffable that she often refrains from attempts to articulate them: “what I here both felt and saw, I will neither word nor write, and so the Vail returned. ...” (p. 106). Her absorption in these experiences sometimes interferes with her ability to function in society: “Sometimes in Meditation, on spiritual Mysteries, I was carried so far above my self, that I would have forgotten where I was, and whither I was going” (p. 11). When her parents chastise her for her failure to carry out her tasks, she prays for divine aid:

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as I asked, he answered me, so that immediately after he endued me with a Strength of Mind, by which I could accomplish my Business, and yet keep up my Intercourse with Heaven; so that even in Time of Harvest, when there was no absenting from Company, nor yet Time for Prayer, yet when I lifted up my Head with my Handful to lay it in the Sheaf, I would have sent up a short Prayer, in which Time there shined Rays of divine Light that filled my Soul with sensible Manifestations of divine Love: And when I was thus engaged in Company, and could not win out of hearing their idle, and vain Talking, I would have been as one deaf, while my Meditation was taken up in maintaining my Intercourse with God. . . . (pp. 32-33)

Later, when she is in service, she finds that

. . . my Spirits were so wrapped up in the views of unexpressible Mysteries that I could think on no other at these Times; my Mistress would have been obliged to say, I was either deaf or stupid, for sometimes when she spoke to me, I either did not hear, or when I spoke to her it was not suitable to what she asked, my Mind not being present when I spoke. (pp. 117-118)

Her most dramatic moments occur during her various encounters with Satan:

. . . now I was not only deprived of the Blinks of divine Light, and of the sensible Smiles of my Beloved; but also of the sensible Exercise of all Grace, and all Duties, I had been exercised in: And this was not all, but the Chain of the Devil was let out, and all the Troops of infernal Spirits, and Swarms of Lusts, Members of the Body of Death, did gather themselves together against me. This did holy Sovereignty see meet to permit for Ends known to himself. Here I stood stript naked of all my Armour, as to my Sense, and exposed to the open Field of Temptation, where I endured the Thunderbolts, and fiery Darts of the Devil. . . . (p. 57)

She is tempted to atheism and even to suicide:

One Day I was praying alone in a secret Place, and he set violently upon me, and presented to me, both Conveniency and Instruments to murder myself; upon this I was forced to fly out of the Place. Another Day, I was going some Space of Way alone, and in the Way there was a Ditch of Water, where he set violently on me, to drown myself, busking his Temptation with this, Thou need’st not fear, thou wilt immediately go to Heaven, and the World will never know what is become of thee. O! now I was like to go distracted. . . . (p. 59)
Though she weathers this crisis, Satan continues to plague her. One night “there came something that chopped three Times at my Bed” (p. 116); another night “I heard the Chairs drawing through the Room, when I knew there was no Mortal to do it” (p. 117).

The autobiography of this humble fanatical Scotswoman differs from the autobiographies of Quaker women in that her religious energies are not channeled into dramatic actions (traveling, preaching) but are turned almost entirely inward. It is in her own feelings, the “life of Sense,” that she finds her refuge from the humdrum activities open to her, and perhaps a safer outlet for her passions than normal human interactions would provide.

h. Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough

The Memoirs of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough is the first and perhaps the only truly political autobiography ever written by a woman in English. Sarah Jennings Churchill (1660-1744) was a childhood friend of Princess Anne, and her intimate companion and advisor until their final falling-out in 1710; according to some, she was virtually the ruler of England until she was maneuvered out of favor. She was also the wife of John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, the brilliant Whig general and diplomat—evidently a love match on both sides.

Her Memoirs were written around 1740, and published in 1742, to explain and justify her actions during the various scandals and crises that occurred in the critical period of party factionalism and struggle in the reigns of William and Mary and of Anne. The Memoirs were dictated to the historian Nathaniel Hooke, who may have assisted in the actual composition. The author was then an octogenarian and almost bedridden, but her acerbity and combativeness have by no means mellowed.

The book-length autobiography cannot be read intelligently without some understanding of the politics of the “Glorious Revolution” and of the War of Spanish Succession. Most people are familiar with the history of the former: when the second wife of the Catholic monarch James II unexpectedly gave birth to a son, who displaced James’ Protestant daughters Mary and Anne as heir to the throne, Mary and her husband William of Orange were invited to send an army from Holland to restore an Anglican monarchy. James had managed to antagonize almost all factions, and William and Mary received such strong and decisive support that they were quickly proclaimed king and queen in a bloodless coup. Anne and Mary were not on good terms with one another, and eventually Mary’s demand that Anne dismiss the Duchess of Marlborough, whose husband was out of royal favor, caused a complete rupture. Sarah Churchill urged Anne to secure an income from Parliament so that she would not have to depend upon the conditional largess of her sister and brother-in-law; on the other hand, she advised Anne to support William’s appointment as king for life, even after the death of Mary. After the death of Mary in 1694, Anne and William were reconciled, and four years later Marlborough was restored to favor; when William died in 1702, Anne ascended the throne, bringing her favorite with her. Her husband was already vigorously employed in the service of the crown. The War of Spanish Succession had broken out in Europe in

1701, the immediate issue being whether the Spanish throne should go to the grandson of Louis XIV of France, who was one of the closest in line to inherit. A contributing factor to the outbreak of war was Louis' recognition, upon the death of James II (in exile in France) in 1701, of James' son as King James III. The underlying concern was, as usual, the maintenance of a balance of power in Europe, for France was threatening to achieve control over Spain and its extensive empire, as well as undue influence in British affairs. The Whigs, especially, were determined to thwart French hegemony, and the Duke of Marlborough implemented this policy by leading the British in a series of stunning victories on the continent. The number of casualties in these battles was enormous, however; to quote Donald Greene in his splendid little book, *The Age of Exuberance*, "in its scope and ferocity, the War of Spanish Succession might be termed the first of the modern world wars."

By 1708, the English were deeply divided over the question of continuing the war. The Whigs favored pursuing and consolidating their victories and argued that to withdraw from the war would be to betray their allies. The Tories felt that the war had already achieved its purpose and that enough blood had been shed; they accused Marlborough of wishing to acquire personal power and glory at the expense of the good of England. Much talent was arrayed on either side--Addison and Steele staunchly supporting the Whigs, Swift by then an ardent advocate of the Tories; Swift, indeed, had the following to say about the Duchess of Marlborough: "three Furies reigned in her breast, the most mortal enemies of all the softer passions, which were sordid Avarice, disdainful Pride and ungovernable Rage." In 1710 the Tories triumphed, the Whig ministry was ousted, and the Duchess of Marlborough was disgraced--displaced as favorite by her own cousin, Abigail Hill Masham, whose place the Duchess had originally obtained for her but who supported the Tory cause. The peace, an ignominious one in the Whigs' eyes, was settled by the Treaty of Utrecht, which was negotiated by the poet-diplomat Matthew Prior.

Both the strength and weakness of Sarah Churchill lay in her incredible persistence and strong-mindedness. As a child the friendless Princess Anne was greatly attracted to the slightly-older Sarah Jennings, who was everything she was not: attractive, extroverted, highly intelligent. The Duchess' account opens with the beginnings of this attachment:

> The beginning of the Princess's kindness for me had a much earlier date than my entrance into her service. My promotion to this honour was wholly owing to impressions she had before received to my advantage; we had used to play together when she was a child, and she even then expressed a particular fondness for me. This inclination increased with our years. I was often at Court, and the Princess always distinguished me by the pleasure she took to honour me, preferably to others, with her conversation and confidence. In all her parties for amusement I was sure by her choice to be one, and so desirous she became of having me always near her, that upon her marriage with the Prince of Denmark in 1683 it

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33 Swift, quoted in King, op. cit., p. xi.
was at her own earnest request to her father I was made one of the Ladies of her Bedchamber.

What conduced to render me the more agreeable to her in the station was doubtless the dislike she had conceived to most of the other persons about her, and particularly to her first Lady of the Bedchamber, the Countess of Clarendon, a lady, whose discourse and manner, though the Princess thought they agreed very well together, could not possibly recommend her to so young a mistress, for she looked like a madwoman, and talked like a scholar. Indeed her Highness’s Court was throughout so oddly composed, that I think it would be making myself no great compliment if I should say her choosing to spend more of her time with me than with any of her other servants did no discredit to her taste. (pp. 7-8)

The tenor of that friendship is revealed in the following passage:

Kings and Princes for the most part imagine they have a dignity peculiar to their birth and station, which ought to raise them above all connection of friendship with an inferior. Their passion is to be admired and feared, to have subjects awfully obedient, and servants blindly obsequious to their pleasure. Friendship is an offensive word; it imports a kind of equality between the parties; it suffests nothing to the mind of crowns or thrones, high titles, or immense revenues, fountains of honour or fountains of riches, prerogatives which the possessors would have always uppermost in the thoughts of those who are permitted to approach them.

The Princess had a different taste. A friend was what she most coveted, and for the sake of friendship, a relation which she did not disdain to have with me, she was fond even of that equality which she thought belonged to it. She grew uneasy to be treated by me with the form and ceremony due to her rank, nor could she bear from me the sound of words which implied in them distance and superiority. It was this turn of mind which made her one day propose to me, that whenever I should happen to absent from her, we might in all our letters write ourselves by feigned names, such as would import nothing of distinction of rank between us. Morley and Freeman were the names her fancy hit upon, and she left me to choose by which of them I would be called. My frank, open temper naturally led me to pitch upon Freeman, and so the Princess took the other, and from this time Mrs. Morley and Mrs. Freeman began to converse as equals, made so by affection and friendship. (pp. 10-11)

Sarah Churchill was by her own account a faithful friend, and there is no reason to doubt her assertion that she was guided always by her concern for the queen’s best interests. She was, however, a forceful advocate of her own beliefs, and there is little question that for several years she exerted a strong influence over the queen and hence over
government policy. But that influence depended upon the queen’s fundamental sympathies with her friend’s position rather than upon trickery or seduction; for diplomacy was not her forte, and her methods of persuasion seem to have resembled a blunderbuss. When the queen came to draw closer to the Tory position, symbolized by her acquiescence and participation in the secret marriage of Abigail Hill to the Tory Mr. Masham, the duchess protested so vehemently that a complete in the friendship occurred despite the more tactful duke’s urgent requests that “Mrs. Freeman would see what she so frequently observes that 42 [the Queen] is not capable of being chang’d by reason, so that you shou’d be quiet til the time comes in which she must change.”³⁴ Sarah Churchill never seemed to know when to leave well enough alone. What, for example, can the queen, after writing the duchess a letter accusing her of “inveteracy,” have made of this reply:

Upon receipt of this letter I immediately set myself to draw up a long narrative of a series of faithful services for about twenty-six years past; of the great sense the Queen formerly had of my services; of the great favour I had been honoured with on account of them; of the use I had made of that favour; and of my losing it now by the artifice of my enemies, and particularly of one whom I had raised out of the dust. And knowing how great a respect her Majesty had for the writings of certain eminent divines, I added to my narrative the directions given by the author of “The Whole Duty of Man” with relation to friendship; the directions in the Common Prayer Book before the Communion with regard to reconciliation; together with the rules laid down by Bishop Taylor upon the same head; and I concluded with giving my word to her Majesty that if after reading these she was still of the same opinion as when she wrote that harsh letter, which occasioned her this trouble, I would never more give her the least trouble upon any subject but the business of my office, as long as I should have the honour to continue her servant; assuring her, that however she might be challged towards me, and how much soever we might still differ in opinion, I should ever remember that she was my mistress and my Queen, and should always pay her the respect due from a faithful servant and dutiful subject.

The final interview between the duchess and the queen is worth quoting at length for the light it sheds upon the characters of both:

... when I began to speak, she interrupted me four or five times with these repeated words: “Whatever you have to say, you may put it in writing.” I said her Majesty never did so hard a thing to any as to refuse to hear them speak, and assured her that I was not going to trouble her upon the subject which I knew to be so ungrateful to her, but that I could not possibly rest, till I had cleared myself from some particular calumnies with which I had

been loaded. I then went on to speak (though the Queen turned away her face from me) and to represent my hard case; that there were those about her Majesty who had made her believe that I had said things of her, which I was no more capable of saying than of killing my own children; that I seldom named her Majesty in company, and never without respect, and the like. The Queen said, without doubt there were many lies told. I then begged, in order to make this trouble the shorter and my own innocence the plainer, that I might know the particulars of which I had been accused. Because if I were guilty, that would quickly appear; and if I were innocent, this method only would clear me. The Queen replied that she would give me no answer, laying hold on a word in my letter, that what I had to say in my own vindication would have no consequence in obliging her Majesty to answer, etc., which surely did not at all imply that I did not desire to know the particular things laid to my charge, without which it was impossible to me to clear myself. This I assured her majesty was all I desired, and that I did not ask the names of the authors or relators of those calumnies, saying all that I could think reasonable to enforce my just request. But the Queen repeated again and again the words she had used without ever receding. And it is probable that this conversation had never been consented to, but that her Majesty had been carefully provided with those words, as a shield to defend her against every reason I could offer. I protested to her Majesty that I had no design, in giving her this trouble, to solicit the return of her favour, but that my sole view was to clear myself; which was too just a design to be wholly disappointed by her Majesty. Upon this the Queen offered to go out of the room, I following her and begging leave to clear myself, and the Queen repeating over and over again:--“You desired no answer, and shall have none.” When she came to the door, I fell into great disorder; streams of tears flowed down against my will and prevented my speaking for some time. At length I recovered myself and appealed to the Queen, in the vehemence of my concern, whether I might not still have been happy in her Majesty’s favour, if I could have contradicted or dissemble my real opinion of men or things: Whether I had ever, during our long friendship, told her one lie or played the hypocrite once? Whether I had offended in anything, unless in a very zealous pressing upon her that which I thought necessary for her service and security? I then said I was informed by a very reasonable and credible person about the Court that things were laid to my charge of which I was wholly incapable; that this person knew that such stories were perpetually told to her Majesty to incense her, and had begged of me to come and vindicate myself; that the same person had thought me of late guilty of some omissions towards her Majesty, being entirely ignorant how uneasy to her my frequent attendance must be after what had happened between us. I explained some things which I had heard her Majesty had taken amiss of me, and then with a fresh flood of tears, and a concern sufficient to move compassion even where all love was absent, I begged to know
what other particulars she had heard of me, that I might not be denied all power of justifying myself. But still the only return was:—“You desired no answer, and you shall have none.” I then begged to know if her Majesty would tell me some other time. “You desired no answer, and you shall have none.” I then appealed to her Majesty again, if she did not herself know that I had often despaired interest in comparison of serving her faithfully and doing right? And whether she did not know me to be of a temper incapable of disowning anything which I knew to be true? “You desired no answer, and you shall have none.” This usage was so severe, and these words so often repeated were so shocking (being an utter denial of common justice to one who had been a most faithful servant and now asked nothing more), that I could not conquer myself, but said the most disrespectful thing I ever spoke to the Queen in my life, and yet what such an occasion and such circumstances might well excuse, if not justify. And that was that I was confident her Majesty would suffer for such an instance of inhumanity. The Queen answered:—“That will be to myself.” Thus ended this remarkable conversation, the last I ever had with her Majesty. I shall make no comment upon it. The Queen always meant well, how much soever she might be blinded or misguided. (pp. 170-173)

As I suggested above, it is the political orientation of this work which sets it apart from all other autobiographical works by women. A large portion of this narrative consists of letters to and from various people, which the duchess adduces in support of her veracity or of the correctness of her interpretation of events. Sarah Churchill’s personal life is largely incidental. The account begins not with her birth or parentage but with her acquaintance with the queen. Personal events were revealed, if at all, only in passing; the queen writes, “I am very sensible touched with the misfortune that my dear Mrs. Freeman has had of losing her son, knowing very well what it is to lose a child” (p. 56)—and that is all we know of her son. Such an orientation would not surprise us in a man; but Sarah Churchill was perhaps in a unique position, for a woman, to produce such a document, and produce it she did. Its very existence provides an interesting (though hardly conclusive) clue to the extent to which environment affects the central focus of an autobiographer.

**i. Sarah Osborn**

Sarah Osborn (1714-1796) was born in England but came at the age of nine to America, where she spent the rest of her eighty-two years. Her autobiography, some fifty pages of chill piety relieved by impassioned bursts of religious fervor, was written in 1743, when the author was in her thirtieth year.\(^{35}\)

In her opening lines she states her reasons for writing, stressing her own unworthiness:

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Having been for some years strongly inclined to write something of what I can remember of the dealings of God with my soul from a child, I now, being about thirty years old, attempt to do it; hoping it may consist with the glory of God, at which I trust, through grace, I sincerely aim: And the good of my own soul, as a mean to stir up gratitude in the most ungrateful of all hearts, even mine, to a glorious and compassionate Savior, for all his benefits towards so vile a monster in sin as I am: And for the encouragement of any who may providentially light on these lines after my decease, to trust in the Lord, and never despair of mercy, since one so stubborn and rebellious as I have been, has obtained it, through the sovereign riches of free grace. (p. 6)

She proceeds to mourn her misspent youth, again describing herself as

... the most ignorant and vile of all creatures: Whose deep rooted enmity against thee and thy laws broke out into action, as soon as I was capable of any. The first that I can remember of actual sins, of which I was guilty, was telling a lie. And then that text of scripture often rang in my ears. “All liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.” (pp. 6-7)

She achieves a measure of devoutness, but then falters:

So I continued for a while, as I thought, to delight in the ways of holiness. But alas! alas! how soon was it over! My goodness was like the morning cloud and the early dew, which soon passeth away; for when I was in my ninth year my father sent for my mother and me to come to New England to him. And on board the ship I lost my good impressions, and grew vile, so that I could then play upon the Sabbath. But was convinced of that sin by an accident which befell me; or rather what was ordered by infinite wisdom for that end. For as I was busy in boiling something for my amusement, I fell into the fire with my right hand, and burnt it all over; which I presently thought came justly upon me for playing on the Sabbath day: and I was ashamed and sorry I had done so. (pp. 8-9)

She continues to yearn after goodness, however, and almost seems to feel that she can absorb it through physical contact; she tells, with a touch of the comic which is probably unintentional, how she would sneak up behind those she took to be good people to touch their garments. But she falls repeatedly into misadventures such as this:

Sometime after this, contrary to my parents’ commands, I got into a canoe to paddle about in the river, and could not get on shore again. It being in the night, though the moon shined bright, I expected no other but to be drowned. Once I thought to get out, and pull the canoe to the shore; but tried first if I could reach the bottom with my paddle: And finding I
could not, durst not venture. Then I could see no probability of escaping death. So I kneeled down and prayed. . . . (p. 11)

Her first marriage is a subject she treats with evident ambivalence, for the young man did not meet with the wholehearted approval of her parents; and although she feels an almost reflex guilt about displeasing them, she continues to feel that their objections were not justified. Her conflicting emotions are transformed into a kind of paranoia:

After I came home, I met with much affliction in many respects. It seemed to me that the whole world were in arms against me, I thought I was the most despised creature living upon earth. . . . I was then with child, and often lamented that I was like to bring a child into such a world of sorrow. . . . (p. 17)

Shortly after the birth of her child her husband dies. She becomes a schoolmistress to support herself, and experiences an extended period of doubt and despair; the following passage is a graphic example of the spiritual sophistry she engages in:

When Satan, and my wicked heart, had prevailed so far as to make me despair of the mercy of God, and verily to believe hell would be my portion, I was tempted to try to get the easiest room there: and to that end to keep myself as ignorant as I could; it being suggested to my mind, that the servant who knew not his Lord’s will would be beaten with few stripes; while he who knew it, and did it not, would be beaten with many stripes: And as my time was over for doing his will, I had better leave off reading, praying, or hearing the word preached any more. (p. 23)

Finally, however, her distress is relieved; thereupon follow several pages of rapture, in the course of which she joins the church and has various mystical experiences at communion-experiences of which she states “it is impossible for me to describe the thousandth part of what I then felt” (p. 37). Then she has yet another lapse of faith, in which she is tempted to believe that “singing and dancing now and then, with a particular friend, was an innocent diversion. Who did I see, besides myself, so precise and strict?” (p. 42).

By the time her second husband proposes, she has become older and wiser, and more attentive to practical considerations:

About this time I had the offer of a second marriage, with one who appeared to be a real christian (and I could not think of being unequally yoked with one who was not such.) I took the matter into serious consideration. I foresaw there were difficulties which I must unavoidably encounter; and many duties would be incumbent on me, to which I had been a strangers: Particularly, in my being a mother in law to three sons, which my proposed husband had by a first wife. But after weighing all circumstances, as well as I could, in my mind, and earnest prayer, which God enabled me to continue in for some time, I concluded it was the will
of God, that I should accept of the offer, and accordingly was married to
Mr. Henry Osborn, on the fifth day of May 1742. (pp. 51-52)

She and her husband are plunged into debt, which she sees as a trial of faith, a device of
God to humble her:

I have often thought God has so ordered it throughout my days
hitherto, that I should be in an afflicted, low condition, as to worldly
circumstances, and inclined the hearts of others to relieve me in all my
distresses, on purpose to suppress that pride of my nature, which doubtless
would have been acted out greatly to his dishonor, had I enjoyed health,
and had prosperity, so as to live independent of others.

It is on this note that her narrative closes.

The autobiography of Sarah Osborn can only be described as pedestrian. Its main
interest lies in its depiction of the continual and almost schizophrenic swings between
faith and doubt which sometimes attend the religious life and which must be a source of
considerable torment.

j. Elizabeth Ashbridge

The autobiography of Elizabeth Sampson Ashbridge (1713-1755) is one of the
most fascinating of the autobiographies of Quaker women which have come down to us. Some Account of the Early Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge is highly atypical--not as the work of Mary Penington, with her relatively un stereotype and fresh responses, is atypical, but in its peculiar fusion of the usual fare of Quaker autobiography with elements seemingly more characteristic of contemporary secular autobiography. Her interest in the subtleties of human interaction, her ability to portray character and depict incident in a lively, colorful fashion, and what might be called her sense of melodrama all serve to separate her from the reductive attitude towards things of this world that we have come to expect in Quaker writings and link her with the novelistic tendencies which are beginning to be more and more evident in secular autobiography; yet enough of the accoutrements of Quaker journalizing are present (e.g., the clichéd phraseology) to save from the imputation of being simply a fictionalized tale of titillating adventure with a little religion thrown in as a moral sop. The overall impression of the narrative is one of tension between a deeply religious woman who is willing to suffer and sacrifice much for her faith and a good storyteller with an irrepressible interest in the human drama and her own participation in it.

This book was probably written sometime before 1746, when she marries her third (not second, as Matthews and Stauffer both state) husband, since it ends with her widowhood after the death of her second husband. The opening words hint at the rhetorical tension underlying this work:

My life having been attended with many uncommon occurrences, I have thought proper to make some remarks on the dealings of divine goodness with me. I have often had cause, with David, to say, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted;” and most earnestly I desire that they who read the following lines may take warning, and shun the evils into which I have been drawn. (p. 7)

The “uncommon occurrences,” the “dealings of divine goodness with me,” all have the authentic ring of Quaker confessional writing, but by the end of the paragraph we cannot help suspecting that we are to hear a rather different species of confession, and that the “evils into which I have been drawn” are not going to be simply a youthful display of high spirits and a love of singing and dancing.

Her description of her childhood begins with the usual recounting of thoughtlessness and unperceptiveness; but instead of going on to describe spiritual doubts and searchings, it is transformed into something quite different as she plunges into a genuine human adventure;

I was sometimes guilty of the faults common among children, but was always sorry for what I had done amiss; and, till I was fourteen years of age, I was as innocent as most children. About this time, my sorrows (which have continued, for the greatest part of my life, ever since) began, by my giving way to a foolish passion, in setting my affections on a young man, who, without the leave of my parents, courted me till I consented to marry him; and, with sorrow of heart, I relate, that I suffered myself to be carried off in the night. We were married. My parents made all possible search for me, as soon as I was missing, but it was in vain. This precipitate act plunged me into much sorrow. I was soon smitten with remorse for thus leaving my parents, whose right it was to have disposed of me to their content, or who, at least, ought to have been consulted. But I was soon chastised for my disobedience, and convinced of my error. In five months, I was stripped of the darling of my heart, and left a young and disconsolate widow. I was now without a home; my husband had derived his livelihood only from his trade, which was that of a stocking weaver; and my father was so displeased that he would do nothing for me. My dear mother had some compassion for me, and kept me among the neighbours. Afterwards, by her advice, I went to a relation of hers, at Dublin. We hoped that my absence would soften my father’s rigour; but he continued inflexible; he would not send for me back, and I dared not return unless he did. (pp. 9-11)

Her first contact with the Quakers is not charged with symbolic significance or portentous intuitions; she simply reports her negative reactions, allowing the reader to infer the ironic import of the encounter (ironic in view of her subsequent conversion):
The relation I went to reside with was one of the people called Quakers. His habits were so very different to what I had been accustomed to, that the visit proved disagreeable to me. I had been brought up in the way of the Church of England, and though, as I have said, I had a religious education, yet I was allowed to sing and dance, which my cousin would not permit. The great vivacity of my natural disposition would not, in this instance, suffer me to give way to the gloomy sense of sorrow and conviction; and therefore my present restraints had a wrong effect. I became more wild and airy than ever; my cousin often reproved me, but I then thought his conduct was the result of singularity, and would not bear it, or be controlled. (p. 11)

Later she is tempted to convert to Catholicism; she goes to speak with a priest, who hears her confession:

When I had done, he took a book, which he read, and told me, I was to swear I believed, if I joined them. I shall not trouble my reader with the recital of its ridiculous contents. What principally made me sick of my new intention was, that I was to swear I considered the Pretender to be king James’s son, and the true heir to the crown of England; and that all who died out of the pale of the popish church, would be damned. (p. 12)

Finally, she meets a woman who encourages her, under false pretenses, to accompany her to Pennsylvania:

I was ignorant of the nature of an indenture, and suffered myself to be bound. This was done privately, that it might not be found out. As soon as it was over, she invited me to see the vessel in which I was to sail. I readily consented, and we went on board, where there was another young woman, who, as I afterwards found, was of a respectable family, and had been brought there in the same way as myself. I was pleased with the thought that I should have such an agreeable companion in my voyage. While we were busy conversing, my conductor went on shore, and, when I wished to go, I was not permitted. I now saw I was kidnapped. I was kept a prisoner in the ship three weeks, at the end of which time my companion was found out by her friends, who fetched her away; and, by her information, my friends sent the water-bailiff, who took me on shore. I was kept close for two weeks, but at length found means to get away. I was so filled with the thoughts of going to America that I could not give up the design; and, meeting with the captain, I inquired when he sailed; he told me, and I went on board. (pp. 14-15)

Her dramatic pronouncement that she has been kidnapped is the key to her interpretation of the events. A sea voyage is often a symbolic undertaking, but the usual Quaker metaphor is that of a spiritual voyage or a pilgrimage; Elizabeth Ashbridge recognizes on
some level and exploits the romance rather than the religious connotations of her embarkation.

During her passage, she thwarts an attempted mutiny and assassination, but despite this service she is betrayed by the captain into the indenture she thought she had escaped. Her master is cruel and evidently attempts to seduce her; she tells a friend, and when the tale returns to her master, he threatens to have her whipped:

... he sent for the town’s whipper to correct me. I was called in. He never asked me whether I had told any such thing, but ordered me to strip. My heart was ready to burst. I would as freely have given up my life as have suffered such ignominy. “If,” said I, “there be a God, be graciously pleased to look down on one of the most unhappy creatures, and plead my cause; for thou knowest that, what I have related, is the truth; and, had it not been for a principle more noble than he is capable of, I would have told it to his wife.” Then fixing my eyes on the barbarous man, I said, “Sir, if you have no pity on me, yet, for my father’s sake, spare me from this shame... and, if you think I deserve such a punishment, do it yourself.” He took a turn over the room, and bade the whipper go about his business. Thus I came off without a blow; but my character seemed to be lost. Many reports of me were spread, which I bless God were not true. I suffered so much cruelty that I could not bear it; and was tempted to put an end to my miserable life. I listened to the temptation, and, for that purpose, went into a garret to hang myself. Now it was I felt convinced that there was God. As I entered the place, horror and trembling seized me, and, while I stood as one in amazement, I seemed to hear a voice saying, “There is a hell beyond the grave.” (pp. 20-21)

Here we have a vividly depicted scene, complete with snappy dialogue and stage directions; yet annexed to it is the temptation to suicide and accompanying spiritual revelation, which is practically de rigueur in religious autobiography (a device which fictional autobiographers such as Defoe adapted to their own purpose).

Subsequently she remaries:

... when I had served about three years, I bought out the remainder of my time, and worked at my needle, by which I could maintain myself handsomely. But alas! I was not sufficiently punished. I released myself from one cruel servitude, and, in the course of a few months, entered into another for life; by marrying a young man who fell in love with me for my dancing; a poor motive for a man to chuse a wife, or a woman a husband. For my part, I was in love with nothing I saw in him; and it seems unaccountable to me, that, after refusing several offers, both in this country and Ireland, I should at last marry one I did not esteem. (pp. 22-23)
Despite her deep ambivalence, however, her marriage seems to plod along serviceably enough at first. Gradually, however, her interest in Quakerism increases, to the great distaste of her husband. Again, there is an ironic twist to her original aversion to aspects of Quaker religious practice:

While we were in Boston, I went, one day, to the Quaker’s meeting, where I heard a woman friend speak, at which I was a little surprised. I had been told of women’s preaching, but had never heard it before; and I looked upon her with pity for her ignorance, and contempt for her practice; saying to myself, “I’m sure you’re a fool, and, if ever I turn Quaker, (which will never be,) I will never be a preacher.” Thus was my mind occupied while she was speaking. When she was done, a man stood up, who I could better bear. (p. 26)

In a contemporary novel, such a passage would be an unmistakable hint that the narrator will eventually become a preacher; and so it is in this account.

She still has many trials to suffer, however, before she is finally converted and publicly declares her commitment to Quakerism. At one point, for example, she gives an extremely realistic and vividly realized account of a temptation to theft which she barely resists:

Having been abroad one day, I perceived that the people, in whose house we had a room, had left some flax in an apartment through which I was to pass; at the sight of it, I was tempted to steal some to make thread. I went to it, and took a small bunch in my hand, upon which I was smitten with such remorse that I laid it down again, saying, “Lord keep me from so vile an action.” But the temptation to steal became stronger than before; and I took the bunch of flax into my room; when I came there, horror seized me, and, with tears, I cried out, “O, thou God of mercy, enable me to abstain from this vile action.” I then took the flax back, and felt that pleasure which is only known to those who have resisted temptation. (p. 27)

Eventually, however, she is overcome with the despair which often precedes conversion:

I thought myself sitting by a fire, in company with several others, among whom was my husband; when there arose a thunder gust, and a noise, loud as from a mighty trumpet, pierced my ears with these words; “OH ETERNITY! ETERNITY, THE ENDLESS TERM OF LONG ETERNITY!” I was exceedingly astonished, and, while I was sitting as in a trance, I beheld a long roll, written in black characters, hearing, at the same time, a voice saying, “These are thy sins,” and afterwards adding, “And the blood of Christ is not sufficient to wash them out. This is shown thee that thou mayst confess thy damnation to be just, and not in order that thou shouldst be forgiven.” I sat speechless; at last I got up trembling, and threw myself on the bed. The company thought my indisposition
proceeded from a fright occasioned by the thunder; but it was of another kind. (p. 28)

She withdraws into a state of profound melancholy, refusing to sing and dance, and fearing to go out alone. During a visit to relatives she is converted. Reunited with her husband, she is subjected to his violent disapproval:

Before he reached me, he heard I was turned Quaker; at which he stamped, and said, “I had rather have heard she was dead, well as I love her; for, if it be so, all my comfort is gone.” He then came to me; it was after an absence of four months; I got up and said to him, “My dear, I am glad to see thee.” At this, he flew into a great rage, exclaiming, “The devil thee thee, don’t thee me.” (pp. 39-40)

Her husband tries every means he can devise to turn her away from her faith. He takes lodgings in the home of a man who is violently anti-Quaker. He forces her to walk eight miles to meeting, though he has a horse; when her shoes wear out she has to bind them to her feet with strings. He beats her and threatens to stab her. Finally, however, he relents, though he cannot bring himself to accompany her to church, saying “I would go to meeting, only I’m afraid I shall hear your clack, which I cannot bear” (p. 57). But by now he has become an alcoholic, and there is little domestic peace. One day, when he is beating her, she cannot forbear protesting:

. . . I broke out into these expressions: “Lord, look down on my afflictions, and deliver me by some means or other.” My prayer was granted, but in such a manner that I thought it would have killed me. He went to Burlington, where he got drunk, and enlisted to go as a common soldier to Cuba, in the year 1740. I had drunk many bitter cups, but this seemed bitterest of them all. A thousand times I blamed myself for making such a request, which I was afraid had dis pleased God, who had, in displeasure, granted it for my punishment. (p. 61)

And so she is, in a manner of speaking, freed. She is later informed that her husband finally “suffered for the testimony of truth” (p. 61)--by refusing, as a Quaker, to engage in battle. A few months later he is dead. Her final comment upon him is a tribute to her perception of the complexity of human relationships:

Having been obliged to say much of his ill usage to me, I have thought it my duty to say what I could in his favour. Although he was so bad, I never thought him the worst of men. If he had suffered religion to have had its perfect work, I should have been happy in the lowest situation of life. I have had cause to bless God, for enabling me, in the station of wife, to do my duty, and now that I am a widow, I submit to his will. (p. 62)
Perhaps it is not surprising that commentators have paid practically no attention to this little book, despite its many interesting qualities; for it is a true mongrel, difficult to categorize and tending to confute generalizations about various types of autobiography. But as a detailed portrait of social interaction and as a curious literary hybrid, I believe it deserves notice. For if Laetitia Pilkington is, as Virginia Woolf would have it, “a . . . cross between Moll Flanders and Lady Ritchie,” Elizabeth Ashbridge is a cross between Moll Flanders and any one of a half dozen female Quaker autobiographers; she invokes the conventions of Quaker autobiography only—probably unintentionally—to subvert them.

**k. Laetitia Pilkington**

Laetitia Pilkington (1712-1750) gained her small permanent niche in literary history because she was in her salad days a peripheral member of Swift’s Dublin circle and because she includes in her *Memoirs* a number of homely, and sometimes brutal, anecdotes about Swift. Scholars, after rifling her work for Swiftiana, generally discard the rest or perhaps retail a few racy incidents and then dismiss her as a minor poetaster and adventuress. Even Virginia Woolf, who treats her with great sympathy, describes her, as we have just seen, as “a very extraordinary cross between Moll Flanders and Lady Ritchie, between a rolling and rollicking woman of the town and a lady of breeding and refinement.” Yet considered from her own point of view—as a victim of circumstances to whom few options were open, Laetitia Pilkington is a fascinating and touching figure, and her *Memoirs* have a tragic quality underlying the jests and (often rather forced) merriment, as we watch her gradual slide down the social scale and her increasing desperation. And perhaps no eighteenth century autobiographer is more sensitive to the implications of being female and in need of living by her wits in an era when such a combination of circumstances guaranteed notoriety and virtually forced a woman into compromises of one sort or another. As she herself sums up her situation:

> But I have been a lady of adventure, and almost every day of my life produces some new one: I am sure, I ought to thank my loving husband for the opportunity he has afforded me of seeing the world from the palace to the prison; for, had he but permitted me to be what nature certainly intended me for, a harmless household dove, in all human probability I should have rested contented with my humble situation, and, instead of using a pen, been employed with a needle, to work for the little ones we might by this time have had. (p. 289)

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39 Woolf, loc. cit.
40 The phrase “harmless household dove,” interestingly, is taken from Dryden’s *All for Love.*
Like Mrs. Manley, Mrs. Pilkington began life most respectably. Her father, Dr. Van Lewen, was a highly-regarded Dublin man-midwife; her mother was a descendant of the Earl of Kilmallock. By her own account she was a highly intelligent child, with a prodigious memory, who taught herself to read before she was five. Her precocity and diminutiveness secured her many admirers, and at the age of eighteen she was cajoled into marrying an impoverished clergyman, Matthew Pilkington, in the face of what was either ambivalence or indifference on the part of her parents. Because both the Pilkingtons, but especially Laetitia, were facile versifiers, they were cultivated by Dr. Delany (whose wife’s autobiography we have already discussed) and introduced by him to the aging Swift, who patronized the pair and was evidently charmed and amused by them.

But the happiness and security of these early years were not to last. Matthew Pilkington was a mean-minded man, lacking in humanity and envious of his wife’s abilities. One night, when Swift posed a question to each of the Pilkingtons and was better pleased with the wife’s answer, he turned to the husband and said, “P_x on you for a dunce . . . were your wife and you to sit for a fellowship, I would give her one sooner than admit you a sizar” (p. 80); Pilkington, instead of taking his defeat with good grace, became very irritated. On another occasion, the pair were each writing Horatian odes; when Laetitia finished hers and showed it to Matthew, who instead of bestowing the expected approval, “was very angry, and told me the Dean had made me mad; that the lines were nonsense, and that a needle became a woman’s hand better than a pen. So to bring him into temper I praised his ode highly, and threw my own into the fire” (pp. 81-82)—which led her to the following reflections on the reasons that men do not like their wives to write:

. . . it seems to set them too much upon a level with their lords and masters; and this I take to be the true reason why even men of sense discountenance learning in women, and commonly choose for mates the most illiterate and stupid of the sex; and then bless their stars that their wife is not a wit. (p. 82)

Their life together became one of “subtle cruelty” (p. 81) and psychological torture:

Mr. Pilkington viewed me with scornful, yet with jealous, eyes. And though I never presumed to vie with him for pre-eminence, well-knowing he not only surpassed me in natural talents but also had the advantage of having those talents improved by learning, and was sensible the compliments I received were rather paid to me as a woman, in whom any thing a degree above ignorance appears surprising, than to any merit I really possessed, he thought proper to insult me every moment. Indeed, he did not beat me, which some of the good-natured ladies have brought as an argument that he was an excellent husband. . . . (p. 80)

Eventually Swift obtains for Matthew Pilkington a one-year post as chaplain to the Lord Mayor of London:
Mr. Pilkington, contrary to everybody's advice who had any regard for him, went to England. I was very desirous of going with him; but he told me plainly he did not want such an encumbrance as a wife, and that he did not intend to pass there for a married man; and that, in short, he could not taste any pleasure where I was. As this was a secret I did not know before, I received it with astonishment; for amidst all his wayward moods, I ever imagined, till then, that he loved me, and that the many ill-natured speeches he made me were rather the effect of a bad temper than any settled aversion he had taken against me; especially as I observed he treated everybody with contempt, even persons every way superior to him (the Dean alone excepted, to whom he paid even a servile complaisance). And, though he now fairly plucked off the mask and let me see my mistake, I could hardly give him credit—so unwilling are we to believe truth when it runs counter to our wishes. (pp. 82-83)

When she follows him to London at the end of his year to accompany him home, she finds him involved in an intrigue which her presence does not seem to interfere with; on the contrary, he attempts to place her in compromising situations to justify his own laxity. She is finally led to conclude that "I could scarcely after regard Mr. Pilkington as a husband, but rather as a man whose property I was, and who would gladly dispose of me to the best bidder. Shocking thought!" (p. 103). He refuses to return to Dublin with her, and when he does he becomes chaplain to Widow Wrr_n (who Donald Stauffer speculates may be the prototype for Widow Wadman in Tristram Shandy41), with whom he enters into a questionable relationship. He finally maneuvers his wife into a divorce:

I own myself very indiscreet in permitting any man to be at an unseasonable hour in my bed-chamber; but lovers of learning will, I am sure, pardon me, as I solemnly declare it was the attractive charms of a new book which the gentleman would not lend me but consented to stay till I read it through—that was the sole motive of my detaining him. But the servants, being bribed by their master, let in twelve watchmen at the kitchen-window, who, though they might have opened the chamber-door, chose rather to break it to pieces, and took the gentleman and myself prisoners.

For my own part, I thought they had been house-breakers, and would willingly have compounded for life, when entered Mr. Pilkington, with a cambric handkerchief tied about his neck after the fashion of Mr. Fribble, and with the temper of a Stoic, bid the authorized ruffians not to hurt me. But his Christian care came too late; for one of them had given me a violent blow on the temple, and another had dragged two of my fingers out of joint. The gentleman, at the sight of Mr Pilkington, threw

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41 Stauffer, op. cit., p. 99n.
down his sword, which he observing, made two of the watchmen hold him, while he most courageously broke his head.

After this heroic action, he told me, who stood quite stupified between surprise and pain, that I must turn out of doors; but, observing that I was fainting, he brought up a bottle of wine, and kindly drank both our healths. He would fain have prevailed on us to pledge him; be we were not in a temper to return civility. Upon which he took my hand, and very generously made a present of me to the gentleman, who could not in honour refuse to take me, especially as his own liberty was not to be procured on any other terms. Mr Pilkington kindly dismissed our guards, and assured us, as soon as ever he had obtained a divorce, he would with great pleasure join us together in holy matrimony. At the door the gentleman’s sword was delivered to him. Mr. Pilkington offered to kiss me at parting, which mean piece of dissimulation, so much in the style of Jack Ketch, gave me the utmost contempt for the villain. (pp. 133-134)

Even allowing for what Stauffer calls her “novelizing her own life,” Pilkington must have been an unusually brutal man, and the bitterness towards him which pervades her book is eminently understandable.

So Laetitia Pilkington goes off to London in the hopes that she will find there more opportunities to support herself. The difficulties are enormous. She enters into a number of relationships, the nature of which remains ambiguous, though Stauffer seems to infer that she was little more than a prostitute. But it is evident that much of her income comes from writing verse, which she does competently (many examples are inserted in her Memoirs); a little she publishes directly, some she ghost-writes for Lord Worsdale who passes it off as his own, and much is panegyric which she addresses to wealthy people with the hope of being rewarded. At one point she opens a shop where she sells pamphlets and writes letters for a fee. But she is seldom far from hunger and hardship; she spends some time in prison, and she even considers suicide:

. . . having been three days and three nights without food of any kind, Heaven pardon me! a melancholy thought came into my head that it was better to die at once than die daily; and that, as I could not fardles bear, it was best to make my own quietus, and no longer strive to keep up a frail and feverish being. . . . (p. 267)

She makes plans to drown herself in St. James’s Park, but she is deterred by two women who engage her in conversation and later insist that she accompany them to supper:

We were let in at the back-door, by a servant in livery, to genteel house, where, on a sofa, sat a very handsome man in a gold brocade nightgown, to whom the young lady presented me, and said he was her spouse; the cloth was ready laid, and a cold supper on the table: I would

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42 Ibid., p. 97.
very fain have prevailed on the lady to permit me to go through her house home, for I could easily perceive the gentleman’s civility was quite forced, and that he was impatient to revenge on his wife the liberty she had taken of inviting a stranger in; which, indeed, I believe she did on no other account but that she thought decency would prevent him from giving her a beating, of which, it seems, he was very liberal, though he was but a footman when the lady married him, and threw herself and twenty thousand pounds away upon him, as I afterwards learned. (pp. 268-69)

The Memoirs actually take on a kind of life of their own. They were written in three volumes and were intended to provide her with a source of income. As she states repeatedly, words are her stock in trade, her only negotiable commodity. When Samuel Richardson gives her some money, she praises him lavishly and adds:

When he reads these lines as I read them I am certain he will—even for the writer’s sake, let him reflect that at least his bread was not scattered on the water; but that, though I have no other way of shewing my gratitude for his boundless and repeated acts of humanity to me and my children but words, mere words yet, if every word of mine could charm down blessings on him:

Then Never should misfortune cross his foot;
But peace would be within his walls, and plenty,
Health and happiness his constant Attendants.

(p. 283)

She refuses a drink because “having no other estate but my head, on which were hourly demands, it was by not other means my interest to destroy it” (p. 391). She is a conscious stylist and aware of the connection between her personality and her writing style:

. . . I am no Methodist either in writing or religion. Sometimes irregularities please; shapeless rock, or hanging precipice, present to the poetic imagination more inspiring dreams than could the finest garden . . .

I am, in short, an heteroclite, or irregular verb, which can never be declined or conjugated. (p. 359)

But the book also interacts with her life on another level--by serving as a kind of literary blackmail; she warns that “if every married man who has ever attacked me does not subscribe to my Memoirs, I will without the least ceremony, insert their names, be their rank ever so high or their profession ever so holy” (p. 141). At the end of the volume I, she promises that “if this volume meets with a favorable reception, I can assure my readers the next will be infinitely more entertaining” (p. 169). When she runs short of material from her own life, she dips into other people’s lives as a source of stories. As her situation becomes more and more desperate, so does her writing. Towards the end of volume II her writing practically degenerates into gibberish. By the time she reaches
volume III, she is frantically stringing anecdotes and stories together, by a process which
as she describes it is almost stream of consciousness:

I have observed that the scent of a flower, or the tune of a song,
always conveys to remembrance the exact image of the place in which they
were first noticed. Well, therefore, in the relation of a story, where one
circumstance insensibly brings on another, may a writer who scorns to deal
in romance be led like me to digress. (p. 373)

She even confesses to padding:

If the reader thinks this little narrative is not quite in point--which now it is
related I begin to find out myself--he may blot it out of his book if he
pleases, but he shall not blot it out of my manuscript, for that would be to
deprive me of a page, that is worth a crown to me. . . . (p. 377)

But it is important that she complete this volume, which indeed was published
posthumously; for, as she says, “It is the only legacy I have to leave my poor boy . . .” (p. 445).

When in the end she tells us that “poor Laetitia is become the football of fortune”
(p. 424), we must concede the justice of this remark. Though her suffering, perhaps, does
not entirely excuse her occasionally questionable morality, it certainly gives it a context.
I believe that her Memoirs would profit from a scholarly rereading, for they are by no
means simply a mine from which we can extract a few choice Swiftian nuggets; for those
interested in the situation of women in the eighteenth century and the forces that shaped
the emergent class of women writers who depended upon the pen for their livelihood,
there is no better source book than these Memoirs.

I. Teresia Constantia Phillips

Donald Stauffer, who permits himself the pleasure of an occasional scholarly
sneer, tends in general to be rather hard on female autobiographers; but it is Teresia
Constantia Phillips (1717- ) who elicits his most envenomed attack. Comparing her
with Laetitia Pilkington, whose autobiography appeared in the same year (1748), he
writes:

... as writers they both had Mrs. Manley for a mother and Colley Cibber
for a father. But if Laetitia Pilkington has some agreeable traits, Con
Phillips has none. The reader is inclined to agree with the Gentleman of
the Inner Temple, who, in A familiar epistle to the celebrated Mrs. Con.
Phillips, on her Apology (n.d., p. 5), speaks of “making the People
accessary to your Faults after the commission,” and believes it possible
that her subscribers give her “a larger Encouragement for a Detail of your
Gallantries, than,--perhaps they originally afforded: Which must be very
dangerous Precedent, and terminate in the Ruin of numbers of your Sex,
who will need no great Persuasions, to give up their Virtue, when convinc'd the History of its loss will yield a Profit, after the Sweets are gone.” He suggests only one practical use for her Apology.43

Stauffer goes on to accuse her of foaming at the mouth, airing her dirty linen, and the like. He remarks in closing his discussion of her that “in this one instance, perhaps, the argument of the usefulness of biography in furnishing warning examples may hold true, for the figure of Con Phillips is indeed direful.”44 Such a harsh judgment of Con Phillips’ character is nothing new. Fielding in Amelia classes her with such legendary figures as “Dalila, Jezebel, Medea, Semiramis, Parysatis, Tanaquil, Livilla, Messalina, Agrippina, Brunichilde, Elfrida, Lady Macbeth, Joan of Naples, Christina of Sweden, Katharine Hays, Sarah Malcolm...”45

Whence all this fierce condemnation? There is no question that Con Phillips is capable of considerable viciousness. She will treat secretly with a new lover while still under the “protection” (eighteenth century euphemism for sharing bed and purse) of an old. Before its compilation into three volumes, her Apology46 was brought out as a series of short pieces, which, as Stauffer gleefully notes, “offered magnificent opportunities for extortion.”47 And yet, when she offers to suspend publication of an incident in which she is raped if her noble ravisher will give her money, is not her crime extenuated by her needs at least as much as his is by his “needs?” As she notes (writing in the third person), “as the Necessity of her Circumstances forces her to this Publication, it is absolutely incumbent upon her, in telling her Misfortunes, to set forth the Means by which they came upon her” (I, p. 69). Clearly Con Phillips was no saint; but then, neither were any one of a number of other autobiographers who stood ready to capitalize on the public taste for scandalous reminiscences. Why was Con Phillips singled out for such unmitigated denunciation?

It is hard to resist wondering whether her contempt for the male sex had anything to do with it. Surely no writer of the period is more sensitive to the double standard of morality and behavior and more bitter about its effect on the lives of women. Examples abound:

But here let us pause for a Moment, to remark the Baseness and Sensuality of the Perfidious Sex, and wonder at your strange Infatuation, ye credulous Fair! Though every Day presents ye some new Instance of their Baseness and Cruelty, still ye believe; and what will certainly follow is—ye are deceived; for let the Beginning be ever so flattering, sooner or later, Thus will it end!—If ye escape the Censure of the World, which seldom happens, they themselves will be at last the Instruments of your

43 Ibid., p. 104.
44 Ibid., p. 107.
47 Stauffer, op. cit., p. 104.
Misery; and he, the perfidious he, who has ruined and betrayed you! will be the first to upbraid you for your Loss of Virtue. (II, p. 112)

And again:

How bad is the Fate of a Woman, who has had the Misfortune to make any false Step in her Conduct! She may prostrate herself at the Feet of the Public; she may, with the utmost Humility and Contrition, confess her Offences; she may implore Forgiveness of an offended World; and, with the deepest affliction, take Shame to herself for any Scandal she has given them; but in vain! that Penitence which we are taught to believe the Wrath of an offended God, is not Atonement sufficient in the Opinion of our much severer Judges, the World. (III, pp. 3-4)

Her concluding letter to Lord Chesterfield, who “jocosely recommended to me the Writing of the Whole Duty of Woman” (p. 259), is given over almost entirely to imprecations against such unfairness. She contends that condemning a woman for one false step “has ruined innumerable Women”--“this very tyrannic, unchristian Custom . . . was the Reason I became careless of my Conduct; because I found all my Efforts to retrieve my Loss were vain” (III, p. 266). Her statement of her case is telling and succinct:

. . . if in the first Outsetting of a young Girl’s Life, she makes a Slip from Honour, how quick soever her Return be, though her Life and Conduct should ever after escape even the Rancour of Envy, yet she shall be branded to her last Moments with that Misfortune; and if she is beautiful, every Man thinks he has a Right to demand the Possession of her Person, upon the same base Terms with the first: And really, my Lord, considering you are the Law-makers, and always seduce us to offend them, I think, in Honour and Justice, there should be some lesser Punishment than that of eternal Infamy affixed to a Crime in which you are the principal Aiders and Abettors, or else that the Crime should be equally odious in both; for at present the Thief is exempted from Punishment, and it is only the Party despoiled who suffers Death. (III, p. 271)

At one point an abbess “of a most philosophical Temper, and masculine Understanding” (II, p. 5) tells her:

. . . no Ties, no Obligations, can bring that perfidious Sex to think a Woman is made for any thing but their Prey; they solve all the tender Proofs of Affection we lavish upon them into the Word Gallantry: It was an Affair of Gallantry, he grew weary and left her; no Matter what Sacrifice she has made to indulge him. (II, p. 6)
A man to whom she complains of another man’s despicable behavior replies, “I do not see . . . you have more Reason to complain than any other Woman, who grants Favours to Men upon such Terms; we always leave a Woman, when we are tired of her” (II, p. 163). In her letter to Lord Chesterfield she complains of being treated like a child by men, even when she is forty (III, p. 267). It is hardly surprising that she concludes:

. . . these are the Disadvantages we labour under from being born Women; and they are such that, for my own Part, were Beauty as lasting as our Date of Life, to change my Sex I would be contented to be as deformed and ugly as Aesop. . . . (III, p. 267)

To learn what engendered this bitterness, it is necessary to turn to the story of her life. It is written in the third person, by a male narrator who claims to have known her for twenty years but only recently become intimate with her; but since the narrator knows a great deal about his subject, and since his writing is delayed when she becomes sick, it is easy enough to detect the author. Aside from the statement that she was “the Daughter of a Gentleman of a good Family, Son of a younger Brother of the Phillips’s of Picton Castle in Wales” (I, p. 45), we learn little of her early history. When her father marries a cruel stepmother, she leaves home at the age of thirteen and applies herself to her needle as a means of support. She quickly attracts the attention of a young gentleman “whose Reason (as all who have the Honour of knowing him will admit) was absolutely subordinate to his Passions in Matters of Amour; and whose peculiar Taste was for girls of that Age” (I, p. 55). She attempts to resist his superior wiles, but at last he inveigles her into his lodgings and proceeds to rape her:

. . . One Day, that the King returned from Hanover, there were great Rejoicings and Fireworks, which Miss was invited, by her Lover, to see from his Window that fronted the Street. She accordingly went, though (as I have heard her say) not without inconceivable Reluctance and Horror. At her coming in, he received her with all possible Marks of Respect, Tenderness, and Affection. . . . When the illuminations were over, there was set on the Table some Sweetmeats, Wine, &c. He prevailed on her to sit down. . . . He Press’d her extremely to drink a Glass or two of Wine, and when she consented he deceived her, by giving her Barbados Water. She had been so little accustomed to Wine that it was easy to put such an Imposition upon her; and, no Doubt, the Liquor had the desired Effect upon her tender Head. However, when she express’d a Desire to go Home, he began, by little and little, to discover his Design. What Effect soever the Liquor had upon her, it was not sufficient to lull her into a quiet Submission to such a Proposal; and, upon his absolutely refusing to let her go, it put her in the most terrible Agonies: Tears and Prayers were all in vain; she was then in his Power, and he resolved to make Use of it. However, he tried first what could be done by fair Means, protesting to her, that, though no Ceremony had pass’d between them, he should always look upon her as his Wife, and would instantly make such a Provision for
her, as should put her out of the *Power of Fortune*: but, at last, finding nothing, that he could invent or say, could reconcile her to the Thoughts of staying there, as he walk’d backwards and forwards in the Room, he took an Opportunity of *coming behind her*, while she sat upon an old-fashion’d high-back’d Cane Chair, and, *catching hold of her Arms, drew her Hands* behind the Chair, which he held fast with his Feet. In *this* Position, it was an easy Matter for him with one Hand to secure both of her’s and take the Advantage, he had previously meditate, of ripping up the Lacing of her Coat with a Penknife; which he performed with such Precipitation, as even to cut her. When her Coat was off, he tore away, with little Difficulty, what else she had on. (I, pp. 58-60)

“I believe the Reader will not be offended,” she adds, “if I pass over in Silence what followed from this base Procedure” (I, p. 60). Not knowing what to do, she continues as his lover; but within two months he tires of her and leaves her without support.

Before long she has run into debt, and finally she consents to a scheme whereby she is “married,” in the presence of witnesses, to a man who already has a legal wife, “and by that means screen her from her Debts” (I, p. 76). Later Mr. Muilman, a Dutch merchant, becomes infatuated with her and wants to marry her; she tells him, she insists, her past history, which he assures her is not obstacle. When, after the marriage, his father threatens to disinherit him, his ardor cools somewhat; he proposes that they annul the marriage--she will be his mistress until his father’s death. She refuses, and a good deal of the remaining work is taken up with the resulting litigation. The descriptions of her legal battles are so complicated and confusing that they were later to induce Jeremy Bentham to advocate reform of the English legal system. Her husband comes to appear Satanic--”being an exact Copier of his *Original*, [he] could not avoid *his* Defects, and, like *him*, disclosing the *cloven Foot*” (I, p. 176). At first his behavior is “Proteus-like” (p. 182), one moment besetting her with ruffians, the next passionately loving. But eventually he becomes her implacable adversary and at length remarries. At one point, he even agrees to pension her off if she will only retire permanently to Jamaica.

“Is it then wonderful,” she asks,

if, deserted by him, and *under Circumstances that of Necessity made the Nature of their Separation public*, a young Creature of Mrs. M____n’s extraordinary Beauty, and other Accomplishments, should draw the Attention and Admiration of Mankind upon her? left to herself, without any Protection, or Friends to counsel or advise her, and in the Midst of these destructive Allurements, though she stray’d from that Path the discreet and amiable Part of her Sex make the most shining Figure in, if the *Just*, the *Generous*, and the *Good*, will but for a Moment turn their Thoughts inward, how will they lament! how pity her! for there they will see human Nature in its primitive Dress; and every Man and Woman of the least Discernment knows, when left to themselves, how little we are capable of, let the natural Bent of our own Inclinations be what they will. (p. 216)
In other words, it is not long before she has taken a lover—and a lover who is so jealous that her life is made utterly miserable. She proceeds, understandably, to justify his suspicions and flee to another man. From this point on, the stories of her numerous love affairs are interpolated in the long saga of her lawsuit. Her pièce de résistance is the extended tale of her five-year relationship with Tartuffe:

Tartuffe was too much a Master of every ruinous Art necessary to engage the Affections of the Fair, to fail of Success in any Enterprise of the amorous kind: There was no Shape or Form but he could with Ease assume, that was liable to captivate the unwary Sex. If the Heart he was in Pursuit of, was to be won by the gay, polite and easy, he could be that Sort of fine Gentleman; if to be taken by Storm, the Soldier; were she devout, he good Soul! could be the Saint.

Thus was his Genius fitted to every Foible of that weak, unguarded Sex. (II, p. 105)

The story closes with a several-page itemized “Account” of the money she has paid out for him, ranging from “Hush-Money to her Servants, to prevent Letters and Meetings coming to the knowledge of Mr. B____” (II, p. 186), and “A Pocket Book Mounted with Gold” (II, p. 186), to “Maintenance of the Child eleven Years” (II, p. 187), and “funeral Expenses for the Child” (II, p. 187). Nonetheless, she is, like Laetitia Pilkington, “convinced of the Certainty of her being formed to make the best Wife in the World” (I, p. 217).

Con Phillips, in short, was no pillar of rectitude, but she had many redeeming virtues. If nothing else, she must be given credit for the clarity with which she perceived the social injustices of which she was a victim. And if her hatred of men was relentless, we must acknowledge that it was to some extent founded on the social realities of the period in which she lived.

2. Patterns in Women’s Autobiography: 1700-1750

Con Phillips brings us to the midpoint of the century. Before proceeding with the authors who wrote after 1750, it might be desirable to survey briefly the works we have been considering and to note the many new directions in which women’s autobiography seems to be heading.

The first salient characteristic of women’s autobiography between 1700 and 1750 is the great increase in decisively secular works; in fact, in contrast with the previous century, the secular works now outnumber the religious works. In the seventeenth century, moreover, even the works which we have labeled secular were heavily steeped in the authors’ religious faith. In the eighteenth century, the secular and the religious have become much more polarized; outside of works whose impetus was explicitly religious, the formal spiritual life of the author seems to have little relevance to her idea of herself as expressed in her autobiography.
As Stauffer remarks, “Women had a virtual monopoly in recording the affairs of the heart.”48 This statement applies to the seventeenth century as well as to the eighteenth, but a remarkable change has occurred: love has come out of the home and into the market-place, so to speak. For the more respectable secular autobiographers--Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Mrs. Delany, and (perhaps) Elizabeth Thomas--the focus has shifted from married life to courtship; for their more tarnished sisters, it has shifted to intrigue. For many of the women, retailing their relationships is literally a matter of economic necessity; for Laetitia Pilkington, to take but one example, writing is an alternative to begging and prostitution. As early as Delariviere Manley in 1714, we see the beginnings of professionalism; the great majority of autobiographies by eighteenth century women were written for publication--and for money.

Women are still by and large dependent on men, but the complexity of that dependence becomes clearer as the socially institutionalized cruelty of men towards women becomes more prominent. A few women even achieve a measure of independence, or have it thrust upon them. Though the duchess of Marlborough was evidently devoted to her husband, he scarcely figures in her autobiography, for she had important work of her own which was only indirectly related to his career. Elizabeth Elstob and Elizabeth Thomas remained unmarried, pursing such careers as they had, albeit in dire poverty. Delariviere Manley, Laetitia Pilkington, and Con Phillips, though married, can count on no support from their husbands; but they manage to eke out some sort of living by their writing and other activities.

All this is not to say that the autobiographies of the eighteenth century represent an abrupt and total break with those of the seventeenth century. Religious autobiographies, still largely Quaker, continue to be written. For the most part, these works do not differ radically from those of their seventeenth century predecessors. Elizabeth Ashbridge, to be sure, achieves an interesting mixture of the religious and secular modes, but this work appears to be a literary cul-de-sac; on the whole, religious autobiography manages to remain surprisingly insulated from developments in secular literature. Among secular works, not all are the work of women who must support themselves. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Mary Delany, though the content of their works differs markedly from that of the seventeenth century writers, hark back to a more leisurely tradition of aristocratic writing--not for money or for publication, but for the diversion of themselves and a few friends.

On the whole, however, one is struck with the differences rather than the similarities between the works on the first half of the eighteenth century and those which have gone before. In the next chapter we shall see how many of the trends of early eighteenth century autobiography are further developed and refined in the latter half of the century.

48 Ibid., p. 461.
V. EIGHTEENTH CENTURY AUTOBIOGRAPHIES: 1750-1800

The second half of the century builds upon and extends the new tendencies which have become apparent in the first half. The themes of scandal and intrigue continue to be popular. Professionalism, and the financial need which underlies it, becomes even more pronounced. A new but related development is the appearance of several works whose authors are connected primarily with the theatre. But perhaps the most striking aspect of eighteenth century autobiography is its relationship to the growth of fiction. In the early half of the century several writers disguise their characters with romance names and place their stories in exotic settings. After 1750, the influence of the great novelists of the mid-century--Fielding, Sterne, and especially Richardson--becomes increasingly evident, and the autobiography, like the novel, becomes a medium for the cultivation of sensibility.

1. The Authors

a. Viscountess Frances Anne Vane

In no instance are novel and autobiography more thoroughly intertwined than that of the Viscountess Frances Anne Vane; surely her “Memoirs of a Lady of Quality”\(^1\) are among the oddest autobiographical documents of the century. These memoirs were compiled by Lady Vane--possibly, according to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, with the aid of Dr. John Shebbeare\(^2\)--and inserted by Smollett as chapter 88 in *Peregrine Pickle*, a service for which she allegedly paid him. The run to some length, and as Stauffer observes, “her amazingly delicate psychological--or psychopathic--analyses surpass anything that is recorded for her gallant listener Peregrine Pickle.”\(^3\) They are about as well integrated into the narrative as such digressions usually are in eighteenth century novels, but nonetheless we are treated to a fictional interaction between the fictional Peregrine and the real author; Peregrine contemplates making love to her, but concludes that

\[\ldots\text{unless Lady ______ could engross his whole love, time and attention, he foresaw that it would be impossible for him to support the passion which he might have the good fortune to inspire. He was, moreover, deterred from declaring his love, by the fate of her former admirers, who seemed to have been wound up to a degree of enthusiasm, that looked more like the effect of enchantment, than the inspiration of human attractions; an ecstasy of passion which he durst not venture to undergo. (p. 142)}\]

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The work focuses most of its attention upon love intrigues, to the extent that it becomes almost a parody. (Indeed, the works which most nearly resemble this one are primarily fictional rather than authentic autobiography.) Her opening paragraph gives a fairly accurate picture of what is to follow:

By the circumstances of the story which I am going to relate, you will be convinced of my candour, while you are informed of my indiscretion. You will be enabled, I hope, to perceive, that, howsoever my head may have erred, my heart hath always been uncorrupted, and that I have been unhappy, because I loved, and was a woman. (p. 133)

After a brief description of her childhood, in which she likens her disposition to that of Shakespeare’s Henry V, she plunges into her entrance at Bath—a fitting beginning since life and love seem to be virtually synonymous. When she marries her first husband, a love match whose bliss was terminated only by his early death, she bemoans the sorrow which her father suffered because of her undutiful behavior, but in justification utters what may aptly serve as her credo: “love, where he reigns in full empire, is altogether irresistible, surmounts every difficulty, and swallows up all other considerations” (p. 40).

Upon the death of her first husband, she is persuaded for financial reasons to marry a man whom she finds disgusting and contemptible; to boot he is impotent:

He had, about nine months after our marriage, desired that we might sleep in separate beds, and gave a very whimsical reason for this proposal. He said, the immensity of his love deprived him of the power of gratification, and that some commerce with an object, to which his heart was not attached, might, by diminishing the transports of his spirits, recompose his nerves, and enable him to enjoy the fruits of his good fortune. You may be sure I made no objection to this plan, which was immediately put into execution. He made his addresses to a nymph of Drury Lane, whose name, as he told me, was Mrs. Rock. She made a shift to extract some money from her patient, but his infirmity was beyond the power of her art. . . . (pp. 58-59)

For a woman to whom love is paramount and who thinks “nothing else worth living for” (p. 135), such a situation is clearly intolerable, and she is quickly precipitated into a series of affairs. Her descriptions of her mental states demonstrate that the subtlety and precision which the French had achieved in analyzing emotion (and in cultivating it) have been naturalized by this point in English:

. . . nothing was wanting to my happiness, but the one thing to me the most needful—I mean the enchanting tenderness and delightful enthusiasm of love. Lord B____’s heart, I believe, felt the soft impressions; and, for my own part, I loved him with the most faithful affection. It is not enough to say I wished him well; I had the most delicate, the most genuine esteem for his virtue; I had an intimate regard and anxiety for his interest; and felt
for him as if he had been my own son. But still there was a vacancy in my heart; there was not that fervour, that transport, that ecstasy of passion which I had formerly known. . . . (p. 87)

And indeed, to have a notion of my passion for that man, you must first have loved as I did. But, through a strange caprice, I broke off the correspondence, out of apprehension that he would forsake me again. From his past conduct I dreaded what might happen; and the remembrance of what I had undergone by his inconstancy, filled my imagination with such horror, that I could not endure the shocking prospect, and prematurely plunged myself into the danger, rather than endure the terrors of expectation. (p. 91)

Clearly the interest in how she feels is greater than in the object of these feelings.

Stauffer judges the author of what he calls these “shocking Memoirs” rather harshly: “Her cold sneers at her husband’s sufferings and shame, her sadism and nymphomania are obvious enough.” Without saying anything in extenuation of this verdict, we may speculate whether her perverse cruelty may have had its roots in the tensions between what marriage was supposed to be, a union of two people perfectly in tune with one another (as in her first marriage, made in the face of parental objections), and what it often was, a business arrangement based largely upon financial considerations (as in her second marriage). Lady Vane pragmatically accepts this disjunction between love and marriage; when one of her lovers negotiates a marriage without her knowledge, she replies to the protests of a mutual acquaintance that she has been ill-treated:

I told him that I was of a different opinion; that it was not only just, but expedient, that a young man of Mr. _____’s fortune should think of making some alliance to strengthen and support the interest of his family; and that I had nothing to accuse him of but his letting me remain so long in ignorance of his intention. (p. 137)

Such a solidly institutionalized social schizophrenia could hardly fail to provoke behavior which was less than human; and Lady Vane, who at least preserved a quasi-marital devotion and fidelity to each lover for the duration of the liaison, was hardly the worst offender which the contemporary mores produced. Another factor which undoubtedly contributed to the formation of Lady Vane’s character was the seeming dearth of other interests and activities to occupy her time. Except for a few “avocations”--generally hunting--she and her lovers seem to have little else to do, and indeed seem to have the leisure and means to chase all over the continent in pursuit of an amour, if necessary.

The overall effect which this narrative produces is one of sadness rather than titillation. The underlying emptiness of the author’s life is ultimately rather pathetic: when she is young she can afford the luxury of expatiating on the evils of jealousy, but towards the end, when she is deeply involved with a younger man, she herself becomes

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4 Ibid.
its victim. Such is the fate of a woman who accepts the basically male view of how men and women are and who has never been encouraged to develop any real interests of her own.

b. Charlotte Charke Sacheverel

Charlotte Charke Sacheverel (1726-1760) is one of the most attractive and entertaining of the eighteenth-century female autobiographers. She was the daughter of Colley Cibber, theatre impresario, poet laureate, and protagonist of *The Dunciad*; she seems to have inherited a good deal of his charm, vivacity, recklessness, and absurdity, despite the seemingly irreconcilable breach that, to Charlotte Charke’s sorrow, separated father and daughter.

*A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke, Daughter of Colley Cibber* was published serially, in eight parts, in 1755. Like many eighteenth century autobiographies, the publication process permitted the work to be shaped and modified by audience feedback:

...I...must now beg Leave to apologize for swelling out my Numbers with my own History, which was originally designed to have consisted only of a short Sketch of my strange Life: But, on the Appearance of the first Number, I was enjoin’d (nay ’twas insisted on) by many, that if ’twas possible for me to enlarge the Account of myself to a Pocket Volume, I should do it. (p. 142)

She opens her account with a dedication to herself, full of humorous and ironical self-praise, which sets the tone for the narrative; the following passage is typical:

Your exquisite Taste in Building must not be ommitted: The magnificent airy Castles, for which you daily drew out Plans without Foundation, must, could they have been distinguishable to Sight, long ere this have darken’d all the lower World. . . . (p. 13)

She then proceeds to one of her principal themes, that of her own oddity:

As I have promis’d to give some Account of my UNACCOUNTABLE LIFE, I shall no longer detain my Readers in respect to my Book, but satisfy a Curiosity which has long subsisted in the Minds of many: And, I believe, they will own, when they know my History, if Oddity can plead any Right to Surprise and Astonishment, I may positively claim a Title to be shewn among the Wonders of Ages past, and those to come. Nor will I, to escape a Laugh, even at my own Expence, deprive my Readers of that pleasing Satisfaction, or conceal any Error, which I now

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rather sigh to reflect on; but formerly, thro’ too much Vacancy of Thought, might be idle enough rather to justify than condemn. (pp. 16-17)

Her personal eccentricity is reflected in her language, as when she calls an unsuccessful benefit a “Malefit” (p. 192), or as when she tells how she could not keep from laughing during a performance at a suggestion from a man in the audience that she mix in speeches from another play: “the Strangeness of his Fancy had such an Effect on my risible Faculties, I thought I should never close my Mouth again in the least Degree of Seriosity” (p. 168). It even appears in the structure of the book; she ends with a summary, remarking:

'Tis generally the Rule to put the Summary of Books of this Kind at the Beginning, but as I have, through the whole Course of my Life, acted in Contradiction to all Points of Regularity, beg to be indulged in a whimsical Conclusion of my Narrative, by introducing that last, which I will allow should have been first. (p. 215)

This pose of ostentatious peculiarity should not mislead the reader into failing to take her seriously. She is tough, and her behavior and responses have a convincing authenticity which transcends the mores and traditions of the society which engendered her. Her education, she claims, was like that which might be given to a boy, which may account for her relative freedom from the stereotyped femininity which little girls were trained to exhibit:

... my Education was not only a genteel, but in Fact a liberal one, and such indeed as might have been sufficient for a Son instead of a Daughter; I must beg Leave to add, that I was never made much acquainted with that necessary Utensil which forms the houswifery Part of a young Lady’s Education, call’d a Needle; which I handle with the same clumssey Awkardness a Monkey does a Kitten, and am equally capable of using the one, as Pug is of nursing the other. (p. 19)

As a child she learns to ride, garden, and use firearms, and she even sets up for a time as a doctor dispensing free drugs to the local poor--leaving her father to pay the bill. Her marriage to Richard Charke is based on infatuation:

... I, as foolish young Girls are apt to be too credulous, believed his Passion the Result of real Love, which indeed was only Interest. His Affairs being in a very desperate Condition, he thought it no bad Scheme to endeavour at being Mr. Cibber’s Son-in-Law. . . . (p. 45)

But when she discovers his philandering, she does not repine or blame herself, but rather loses interest in him as unworthy of her devotion: “I had, indeed, too often very shocking Confirmations of my Suspicions, which made me at last grow quite indifferent; nor can I avoid confessing, that Indifference was strongly attended with Contempt” (pp. 47-48).
She spends many years living as a man and wearing men’s clothing, in which guise an heiress falls in love with her. She develops an elaborate puppet show which is her chief claim to fame today. She experiences and describes an emotion which women of the period seldom admit to in autobiography—sheer, unmitigated anger. For example, she reacts strenuously to a rumor-monger’s tale that she had robbed her father at gunpoint:

A likely Story, that my Father and his Servants were all so intimidated, had it been true, as not to have been able to withstand a single stout Highwayman, much more a Female, and his own Daughter too! However, the Story soon reached my Ear, which did not more enrage me on my own Account, than the impudent, ridiculous Picture the Scoundrel had drawn of my Father, in this supposed horrid Scene. The Recital threw me into such an agonizing Rage, I did not recover it for a Month; but, the next Evening, I had the Satisfaction of being designedly placed where this Villain was to be, and, concealed behind a Screen, heard the Lye retold from his own Mouth.

He had no sooner ended, than I rushed from my Covert, and, being armed with a thick oaken Plank, knocked him down, without speaking a Word to him; and, had I not been happily prevented should, without the least Remorse, have killed him on the Spot. I had not Breath enough to enquire into the Cause of his barbarous Falshood, but others who were less concerned than myself, did it for me; and the only reason he assigned for his saying it, was He meant it as a Joke, which considerably added to the Vehemence of my Rage: But I had the Joy of seeing him well caned, and obliged to ask my Pardon on his knees—Poor Satisfaction for so manifest an Injury! (p. 96)

Her anger and frustration at being imprisoned are also expressed vehemently:

Rage and Indignation having wrought such an Effect on my Mind, it threw me almost into a Frenzy; and arose to such a Height, that I very cordially desired my Fellow-Prisoners would give me Leave to cut their Throats, with a faithful Promise to do the same by my own, in Case we were doomed to remain there after the Tryal. (p. 171)

Here is not the soul-shriveling bitterness of a Laetitia Pilkington, but rather a frank and direct sense of outrage.

Not that she ever breaks through to a clear-cut notion of sexual equality. Even this forthright woman has absorbed the traditional ideas of women’s secondary status; of her geography lessons, for example, she remarks that “tho’ I know it to be a most useful and pleasing Science, I cannot think it was altogether necessary for a Female” (p. 26). And while she is in some respects remarkably free of the self-hatred which women in Western society have often manifested in one way or another, her tendency to trivialize
herself may perhaps be seen as self-demeaning.\textsuperscript{6} Still, her bumptiousness, her unwillingness to apologize for herself, and her sense of herself as having a career set her apart from her more traditionally-oriented contemporaries.

c. Catherine Jemmat

Catherine Yeo Jemmat, daughter of a naval officer in Plymouth, claimed self-justification as her motive for writing her Memoirs:\textsuperscript{7}

To arraign my words, thoughts, and actions, with the minutest truth, at the tribunal of publick justice, is one principal inducement to my resigning the needle for the pen. If from the series of indisputable facts here set forth, I am deemed a wilful and incorrigible offender, I can expect little lenity; but if it shall appear upon a candid summing up of the whole, that a thousand natural, as well as accidental incidents, gave birth to the long train of my misfortunes, perhaps I may find even strangers, more sensible of the “compunctious visitings of nature,” in my favour, than I have yet been able to awaken in the bosoms of my kindred. (I, p. 3)

Be that as it may, the long subscription list at the head of her two-volume production suggests that financial need may have played its part. And the desire to entertain could not have been more consciously embraced; she maintains a lively, vivid manner of writing and frequently introduces examples of her own rather uninspired verse. As an apology, indeed, it is as weak as or weaker than such works usually are; most of her exploits are trivial enough, but if her autobiography represents the utmost she can say in her own defense, the reader may be inclined to consider the justice of her relatives’ position, given their assumptions about morality.

Catherine Jemmat has a dry, ironical style; nowhere is it more evident than in her description of her father:

I cannot say whether it was for want of ambition to reap laurels, or want of an opportunity to distinguish himself, that my father passed many years in the service, without attaining glory from any particular action; nor do I think it any honour to memory, that he was at last raised to the rank of a half-pay Admiral; as those compliments are frequently paid by the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty, to make room for junior officers, who, perhaps, may have been born under a more auspicious planet than their seniors.

This I can venture to allege in favour of his memory; that whatever might be deficient in his character as a commander on the liquid

\textsuperscript{6} We should, however, note that these are books by men who strike a similar pose—her father Colley Cibber, for one. To some extent this narrative stance grows out of a general interest in \textit{Don Quixote}; this, let us remember, was the literary background against which Sterne was shortly to erupt.

element, he was a finish’d tar in his own house; a bashaw, whose single nod of disappotion [sic] struck terror into the whole family. (I, pp. 4-5)

She is five when her mother dies; her father, who has been at sea, comes rushing back distraught and even demands the disinterment of the body. What follows upon this show of grief is best told by the author:

Richard the Third, when he has conquered the scruples of Lady Anne, and persuaded her to marry the butcher of her husband, in the person of himself, says,

"Thus mourn’d the dame of Ephesus her lover,
And thus the soldier fir’d with martial glory,
Told his fond tale, and was a thriving woer."

Shakespeare has taken another occasion to depreciate our sex, where one of the courtiers expressing his admiration at this marriage says, "What do I see?" It is immediately answered, "Why you see a woman."

Now should I tell you that this gentleman [her father] married again in seven years after, a prudent motherly woman, to look after his house, and manage the education of his children; you’d say, perhaps, Well he mourned long enough, and it was proper he should have a helpmate.

But when I represent to you in nine weeks after, married to a giggling girl of nineteen; should you apply to me the interrogation, What do I see? I should naturally reply, Why you see a man. (I, pp. 8-10)

Her stepmother in short order bears five children, four of whom die; of the fifth the author remarks that “had the worthy captain my half-brother compleated the number of the deceas’d, the world and myself might well have borne the loss with Christian patience and resignation” (I, p. 11). She can never resist an opportunity for digressing from her narrative to excoriate her relatives.

She describes herself as a precocious and high-spirited child, “endow’d with a quick genius, and a propensity to learn whatever was within the reach of my capacity” (I, p. 16). As she grows older, she manages to win admirers despite her lack of beauty:

With regard to my person, I never could boast of it; for I was never a beauty. I was what you might call a comely black girl with a blooming country complexion; I was remarkable indeed for an easy, obliging disposition, which perhaps was the only attraction of the many addresses I was afterwards honoured with. (I, p. 17)

She then launches into a description of a series of flirtations which are facilitated by various chambermaids and impeded by her strict father. The lengthiest of these amours involves her infatuation with a Mr. B. They are eventually forced to separate but agree to maintain a correspondence. She is sensitive to stylistic nuances and their implications, and his letter, when it finally arrives, seems to her to be lacking in fervor; it contains “all the tenderness of an affectionate husband, blended with all the flowers of refined
elocution; yet notwithstanding there was a certain formality in the style that plainly indicated a decrease of fondness on his part” (I, p. 104). Upset, she takes his letter to bed with her and has a dream. The significant dream is, of course, a common characteristic of religious autobiography; here there is a religious element, but it is used for rather different ends:

I imagined myself coming from church, and that I was accosted on the way by an old gentleman, who asked me if I chose to take a survey of the goods that were to be sold by auction. . . . the first object he pointed out to me was a clock-case, I opened the door and saw Mr. B standing within dressed in blue and gold; I gave him a pull to draw him out, and that instant his body seemed to shrink through the cloaths, which were still obvious to my sight. . . . he . . . then led me into another apartment, where I discovered a coffin placed on two stools, and upon lifting the lid perceived it to be Mr. B.

But still I was not terrified.--I was contemplating the body with earnestness, when suddenly a snake jumped from it, twisted round my arm, and stung me; upon this I shrieked out and awoke. . . . (I, pp. 107-8)

At about this point, she begins to wonder about the impression such tales may be making on the reader:

It should seem by what I have been writing, that these were the memoirs of a disappointed old maiden, who to extort an opinion that she was once agreeable, tells you the variety of conquests she has made. . . . (I, p. 114)

But, she concludes, why shouldn’t her true story be as entertaining as those of fictional heroines? And indeed, she is surely indebted to the novel for her ability to depict scenes in a lively manner. The following passage, in which an old man attempts to seduce her, and, when that fails, to rape her, is a good example:

The old fox, imagining that spirits were on his part wanting, to complete his diabolical scheme, drank two or three bumpers successively, and used all the language he was master of to entice me to follow his example; but maugre all his efforts, I peremptorily refused it, and desired to go home. My pretty miss, said he, sure you can’t be in a hurry, you are with the only man that idolizes your beauty and your merit; my whole fortune, which is not inconsiderable, I’ll throw at your feet; you shall vie in grandeur with any princess in Christendom, if you will but indulge the glowing transports of an amorous man--and should a child come--

Here I interrupted him, with a What does the monster mean? He indeed, like the ass imitating the lap dog, ran into the most ridiculous absurdities, which would scarcely have been sufferable in a youth of nineteen. I attempted to leave the room--he intercepted me, kneeled, wept,
and swore; but in short, had so much the resemblance of an old frantic baboon, that I could not avoid a hearty fit of laughter.

As he lay sprawling on the floor, and creeping after me like an abject spaniel, he had the consummate assurance to lay hold of one of my legs. I immediately withdrew it, and with the other gave him so smart a kick on the nose, that the sanguine current flowed copiously from it, and I embraced that opportunity of delivering myself from his clutches, by slipping down stairs. (I, pp. 124-26)

As she reaches the end of volume I, she turns to the subject of her marriage:

I am now going to enter upon the particulars of an area in my life, which may seem as unaccountable to the reader, as it was unfortunate in its consequences to me, namely my marriage with Mr. Jemmat, whose name I have the misfortune to bear. (I, p. 157)

Mr. Jemmat, the keeper of a mercer’s shop in Plymouth, misrepresents his solvency; and so, to escape from the increasing onerousness of her relationship with her father, she agrees to marry him although she is not greatly attracted to him. She is soon punished for this compromise, for her husband proves to be extremely jealous and inclined to drink. This situation leads to such scenes as the following Fielding-esque farce, which took place when she and her husband were guests in the S. household:

About two o’clock in the morning he returned, but so disordered with liquor, that he was scarce able to speak, and being incapable of undressing himself, I performed that office for him as well as I had power to do, and put him into bed;--he had not been there long, when he either was, or feigned himself to be in convulsion fits; this very much terrified me, as I had no creature to give me any assistance. I recollected just that moment, that Mr. S’s niece lay but in the opposite room; I therefore run in without a candle, and drew back the curtain with some emotion, when, to my infinite surprise, I heard the parson’s voice cry, who’s there? what’s the matter; I was retiring with precipitation to my own room, when behold, I met the gentleman whom I left in fits, with the candle in his hand, and in his shirt. Well, madam, said he, I find you know the ways of this house, I am now satisfied. I explained the matter to him so as to leave no hinge to hang a doubt on,--but he was sullen, and only answered; pray, madam, come to bed.

The next morning at breakfast I was heartily bantered by Mr. S’s family and the clergyman for my mistake, which Mr. S. said was very easily accounted for, as his niece had always slept in that room, but resigned it to the curate, who had accommodated Mr. Jemmat and me with his. (II, pp. 28-30)

She suffers much abuse from his drunken brawling:
... he abused every body who came in his way; nor were his maker or his king exempted from the rancour of his tongue.

How then must it fare with his poor wife, who was soon after brought to bed of a daughter? His behaviour to me at that season, when even brutes and savages shew some marks of tenderness to the suffering female, was such that humanity would blush at the repetition of;--in short, it threw me into a violent child-bed fever; in which I was delirious for some weeks, and should have been utterly lost, but that I found in strangers what I might reasonably have expected in a husband. (II, pp. 55-56)

It is in this situation that we leave her as her account draws to a close.

For some reason Catherine Jemmat has been buried in obscurity, although her memoirs are highly readable and amusing. It is difficult to explain the almost total neglect of an author who deserves to take her place alongside of Laetitia Pilkington, Con Phillips, Frances Ann Vane, George Anne Bellamy, Elizabeth Gooch, and Mary Robinson, of whom most scholars of eighteenth-century literature have at least heard. Like them, she builds out of the wreckage of her social transgressions an attractive (and let us hope profitable) edifice.

**d. Margaret Lucas**

The book-length (134 pages) autobiography of Margaret Brindley Lucas (1701-69) is an attractive and well-written Quaker autobiography. Though her temporal and spiritual experiences do not particularly set her apart from other Quakers, they are recounted in such a way as to make us sense that the author was a living breathing human being.

"I was born," she tells us,

... in the year 1701, in Fleetstreet, London; my father's name was James Brindley, who kept a china shop at the corner of Fetterlane. I was the youngest of fourteen children, and my mother died when I was one year and a half old; after which my father removed to Lambeth, to the house called Vauxhall, where he erected a pothouse; there my father married a second wife, who, dying before him, left two children; my father himself died when I was about seven years old, leaving six orphans, two of them younger than myself. (p. 1)

So she became the responsibility of an uncle, in whose house she was "brought ... up strictly in the protestant religion" (p. 2). She received the education thought appropriate to a young woman:

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... my uncle thought proper to board me at school. ... I was then thought
dextrous at my needle beyond most of my years; and indeed I have
observed in myself, that from a child there seemed fit for impression and
improvement. (p. 4)

When she reaches her teens, she has masters to teach her writing, pastry-making, singing,
and dancing, the last of which “being a diversion which (as I was very agile) they said I
was fit for, and indeed it was an amusement I was very fond of” (p. 8).
Some of her thoughts were of more sober matters, however, and, thinking about
the clergy, she

... concluded they had a peculiar advantage in the mysteries of divine
things, and a more thorough knowledge of the Lord, and his ways to man;
often saying to myself, and others, if I had been a boy I would have been
of their cloth (and brought up, as my brother was designed by my father to
have been, at the University). (pp. 9-10)

When her uncle moved to a larger house just opposite a churchyard, she frequently
witnessed burials and found herself pondering the subject of death:

As I lived so near, I often waited upon the corpse to the grave,
musing in myself how it must be with the deceased in the hour of death;
for, though I had often heard that sentence pronounced; by the priest, in
which it is said, “We commit the body to the ground, (note) in sure and
certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life;” yet, upon the strictest
review, I could not find I had any evidence of that hope abiding in me. (p.
12)

Little by little we see her drawing away from the formal religion in which she was raised;
she begins to suspect tradition and to believe that faith is “the immediate gift of God” (p.
16).

When she is eighteen, her uncle buys her a shop, and before the previous owner
vacates the premises she goes in to learn the trade. The previous owner, S. Taylor, is, as
it happens, a Quaker, and her uncle has “so good an opinion of the Quakers, that he left
the appraising of the goods entirely to her” (p. 19). Her uncle’s good opinion of the
Quakers, however, does not include acceptance of his niece’s growing sympathy for that
sect. He becomes worried and sends for some clergymen who attempt to dissuade her.
Many of the misconceptions which were then current about Quakers emerge in the
following conversation which she had with one of them:

Why, said he, they deny the Scriptures! I said, if they do, I promise you I
will never own them, but I know they do, I promise you I will never own
them, but I know they do not. Why then, said he, they wrest them to their
own destruction, and they deny baptism. I said they do of water, but they
preach a baptism. Yes, said he, and a strong one too; put your finger into that fire, a fire being in the room, and see how you can bear that baptism. This filled my mind with indignation, and I said, no, I scorn it; for I believe they no more mean elementary fire, than the baptism of elementary water. At this time I may conclude that neither he nor I knew that mysterious baptism, which my soul has at times since experienced. (pp. 29-30)

She is subjected to great abuse by her acquaintances:

The uneasiness of our family was now no longer a secret, my intimates, one after another. [sic] would accost me by the name of flat-cap, friend; or deridingly ask, does the spirit move thee? with which, and such other mockeries, I must say my natural inclination was much buffeted, and now the storm began to be more boisterous, both within and without. . . . (p. 31)

Her uncle, drunk, threatens to “bereave me of my life” (p. 37) if she continues to attend meetings.

Finally a major crisis develops in the reform of her aunt’s hysterical opposition. She feels called upon to “use the plain language” (p. 65), and the first person she meets after coming to this decision is her aunt, who becomes extremely incensed. After this she tries to avoid the locution with her aunt, but one time when she has called her aunt ‘thou’:

. . . it so inflamed her, that, as there stood a fire-shovel in her way, she took it up, and struck at me. . . . she often declared, she believed it was no more sin to kill me than a dog. (p. 66)

Another time her aunt flings a brass candlestick at her. Finally she begins to fear “my aunt’s going quite distracted” (p. 70). Indeed, her aunt’s behavior becomes increasingly bizarre:

One market-day, she followed me as I went behind the counter, and kept me there for some hours; though I desired her to set me go, yet she would not; nor did I chuse to put her away, she saying, she would hear my language today. . . . When any one came into the shop, she told them, I was the new-made Quaker; and filled those who were strangers to her with admiration of us both; and I may say, I blushed as much for her as for myself. Each time she thus exposed me, she held me by the left arm, which was next to her; and when I used the plain language she pinched me very bad. . . . (pp. 72-73)

Her aunt persists until her arm is so swollen that it requires medical attention. Her aunt repeatedly attacks her:
My soul now fled to the Almighty for refuge, and I sat before her a witness of her frenzical behavior, with more solidity and composure than she expected. At last, she came to me, and said, I am mad; thou, thou has driven me mad! And I am mad! I was surprised to hear her say so, and thought there was some hopes for me, as she had yet so much reason left as to tell me of the thing she knew I was so afraid of. (p. 93)

She bears up under this persecution and eventually is relieved. At the age of twenty-four she is married, a circumstance which seems to persuade her relatives to relent. And so at last she is permitted an interval of peace:

I may now conclude my narrative thus far, with truly saying, how blessed in my situation was I; having a loving, kind, and tender husband; our lawful endeavours made prosperous; the affections of my relatives restored; and above all, the blessing of the Almighty sanctifying these enjoyments to my soul. . . . (p. 113)

She then turns to a new crisis, her calling to preach:

To introduce this heavy relation, I must go back to my childhood, and say, that the first time I ever heard a woman preach, from a prejudice imbibed from my companions, and, probably, an aversion in my own nature, I thought it very ridiculous, and the oftener I had opportunities to see it, the more I secretly despised it. (p. 115)

Her strong sense that she has been chosen for this work creates an intense conflict with her deeply ingrained acceptance of the social system which does not permit women to engage in such activities. Again she suffers great distress, and for a while prefers the idea of death to the prospect of preaching. It is only after this turmoil is resolved that she is able to achieve inner peace once again. Here her narrative draws to a close.

The art of this account lies in its author’s ability to portray the gradual development of her faith and the realities of her sufferings for it. In place of a guilt-ridden childhood, by now practically a Quaker formula, she gives us a growing thoughtfulness as she matures and sifts the evidence. The utter lack of resentment with which she accepts the unthinkable of her ever being a clergyman, despite her youthful conviction that her talents lie in that direction, subtly anticipates her later resistance to the calling to become a Quaker preacher, in sharp contrast to the heavy-handed premonitions that we frequently find in descriptions of the pre-conversion years in Quaker autobiography. In place of the self-righteous attitude which zealots often take towards their persecutors, Margaret Lucas reveals a profound sympathy with her uncle and aunt, whom she loves and whose good intentions she recognizes and respects. This book demonstrates that in capable hands even so rigid a form as Quaker autobiography does not have to become completely fossilized.
e. Jane Hoskens

*The Life and Spiritual Sufferings of that Faithful Servant of Christ, Jane Hoskens*\(^9\) is a fairly typical Quaker autobiography, in most ways similar to those examined in the seventeenth century, although reflecting some social changes—travel to America, for example, has become less of a heroic undertaking. It runs to thirty-one closely printed pages and was published in 1771, though it was probably written rather earlier; the author was born in 1693/94.

Like Elizabeth Ashbridge, Jane Hoskens traveled to America as a young woman, where she was converted to Quakerism, was indentured for a period, and spent time as a teacher. There, however, the resemblances end, for the personalities of the two women and their attitudes towards what has happened to them are very different. It is a tribute to Elizabeth Ashbridge’s independence and originality to compare these two treatments of similar material.

Jane Hoskens’ childhood is like that of most of the Quaker women we have seen, though rather less hounded with guilt than is usual:

> I was born in London, the 3rd day of the 1st month, in the year 1693-94, of religious parents, and by them strictly educated in the profession of the church of England, so called; who, according to the best of their understanding, endeavoured to inculcate into my mind the knowledge of a divine being, and how necessary it was for all professing christianity, to live in fear of God: But this good advice I too often slighted, as likewise the blessed reproofs of the holy spirit of Christ in my soul; though I was but young, I was, through mercy, preserved from the commission of gross evils; yet being of a cheerful disposition, and having a turn to musick and singing, I was much delighted therewith, and was thereby led into unprofitable company, all which had a tendency to lead my mind from GOD, for which strong convictions followed me as a swift witness against sin, but he who had compassion on me from the days of my infancy, was pleased in the 16th year of my age, to visit me with a sore fit of sickness, nigh unto death. . . . (p. 3)

Her illness frightens her:

> . . . [I] was ready to make covenant that if he in mercy would be pleased to spare me a little longer, the remaining part of my days should be dedicated to his service, and it was as though it had been spoken to me if I restore thee, “go to Pennsylvania”. . . . However, it pleased the Lord to raise me up from this low condition, and I as soon forgot the promises I had made

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in deep distress, and returning again to my old amusements, endeavored
thereby to stifle the witness of God, which was then awakened in me. (p. 4)

But the call is repeated and the conflict continues; finally she feels she has been given an ultimatum:

. . . by the light of Christ . . . I was clearly told, that if I did not comply, I
should be forever miserable; wherefore, I took up a resolution, and
acquainted my parents with the desire I had of going to America; they
seemed shocked to hear it, and were very averse to my going. “I told them
it seemed as a duty laid upon me, and that I thought it might be for my
good to go, for that by being among strangers, I might with more freedom,
serve God, according to their frequent precepts to me.” I remember the
remark my father made on these arguments, was, “the girl has a mind to
turn Quaker.” He charged me never to speak any more about it, for he
would never consent to my going; his will was as a law to me, and
therefore I concluded to obey him, making myself for the present easy,
with having so far endeavoured to comply with the heavenly requiring; but
it did not last long, Pennsylvania was still in my mind. . . . (pp. 4-5)

So she elopes when the opportunity presents itself. In Pennsylvania she indentures herself to a group of Quakers, for whom she acts as governess. She is impressed by their “solid, weighty and tender frame of spirit” (p. 7) and their evident peace of mind; after a period of penitential mourning, she fulfills her father’s prediction and becomes a Quaker—“and Oh! the calm, the peace, comfort, and satisfaction wherewith my mind was
cloathed, like a child enjoying his father’s favour” (pp. 9-10).

Her happiness continues until she receives a command to become a public preacher. The dialectical pattern of conflict caused by her resistance to what she feels is God’s will followed by an ultimatum and subsequent submission which we saw in her call to Pennsylvania is repeated. Her first response is one of shock; she finds herself “full of sorrow and anguish of soul, and knew not what to do; but often wished myself dead, hoping thereby to be exempt from pain” (p. 11). Finally she senses that she has been called for the last time and says “Lord I will submit” (p. 12). She is still subjected to occasional periods of doubt and despair, but she eventually has an extensive missionary career which includes trips (not very well particularized) to New England, the Barbadoes, and back to the British Isles.

Her attitude towards her position as servant stands in sharp contrast to Elizabeth Ashbridge’s feeling that she had been kidnapped and enslaved:

I am persuaded that if servants were careful to discharge their trust
faithfully, to their masters and mistresses, the Lord would provide suitable
for their support, through the world, with credit and reputation: I never
was more easy and contented in mind, with regard to outward things, in
any station of life, than when I was a servant. . . . (p. 15)
Later she even takes pride in her position of high-ranking and trusted servant:

I entered into friend Loyd’s family as an upper servant, such as we call in England, house-keepers, having all the keys, plate linen, &c. delivered unto me; they had a great family; and everything passed through my hands, and as they had reposed such a trust in me; it brought a weighty concern on my mind, that I might conduct aright, and discharge my duty faithfully to my principals and their servants. . . . (p. 21)

. . . I considered I I [sic] had been tried in low life, though never wanted for any necessaries, but was always provided for, having met with kind treatment from all sorts of people, and was blessed with contentment in the station allotted me; now I was to be proved with greater plenty, and favoured with the company of valuable friends, who often frequented our house, and though I was but in the station of a servant, yet was taken great notice of by them, for when they came, I was always allowed to be still in the room with them, this was a great obligation conferred on me, and it did not elevate my mind, but made me more humble and assiduous in my business. . . . (p. 22)

Another point of contrast with Elizabeth Ashbridge lies in her uncommunicativeness regarding her intimate relationships. Her husband is mentioned only in passing; her meeting with her employers is described in a little more detail, but her primary purpose here is to present an example of the divinely inspired ESP of which Quakers often boast:

One first-day, after I had sat some time in Haverford meeting, David Loyd from Chester, with his wife and several other friends came into meeting; as soon as they were seated it was as though it had been spoken to me: “These are the people with whom thou must go and settle”: They being strangers to me, and appearing as persons of distinction, I said Lord how can such an one as I get acquaintance with people who appear so much above the common rank: the word was in my soul, be still, I will make way for thee in their hearts, they shall seek thee. . . . I afterwards understood that David Loyd and his wife fixed their eyes upon me, felt a near sympathy with me, such as they had never known towards a stranger before, and said in their hearts this young woman is or will be a preacher, they were both tendered, and it was fixed in their minds, that they were to take me under their care, and nurse me for the Lord’s service, with a promise that his blessing should attend them. . . . (pp. 16-17)

Perhaps it is unfair to compare this work with that of Elizabeth Ashbridge, since it must of necessity come off second best; for Jane Hoskens, with all her servility, gives us
in her own right some interesting glimpses into Quaker psychology and contemporary mores. But on the whole it is an undistinguished production.

**f. Anne Wall**

*The Life of Lamenther,* by Ann Wall, has been described by Stauffer as “the most unrelieved example of pathos and despair” to be produced in this period. It is also unusual in that it is almost entirely devoted to the author’s childhood; the account draws to a close when she is little more than fifteen.

The tone of the work is set in the opening words “To the Reader”:

As the Occasion of this short Work is real, and *that* the Sequel will evidence, I need not therefore adorn it with the Flowers of Rhetoric, which serve to illustrate fabulous Histories. I only mean to shew to the World a Series of unparalleled Misfortunes, adorned only with the naked Beauty of Truth in as clear a light as my weak Capacity will permit.--Know then--The cruel Author of all my Distress in Life--O hard to say! was my Father--and, therefore, Ah *Lament Her.* . . . (pp. iii-iv)

She begins with her mother, whose story is related to her own life more artistically and coherently than is usual. Her mother is engaged to a young gentleman and has every prospect of happiness, when suddenly a mysterious breach occurs:

. . . behold the Uncertainty of human Happiness! and how little ought we to promise, much less rely, on the favourable Prospect of Joys in view; for were we but to give ourselves Time to reflect a single Moment, we should soon be convinced that some unforeseen Accident or sudden Alteration might entirely put a stop to our gay Schemes of Happiness, and totally destroy our Castle of imaginary Bliss.--And so it proved with this till then happy Pair; for scarcely had Sol twice journeyed from the East ere there was a Period to their Happiness, and a final Separation immediately ensued, nor would they ever more behold each other to the latest Hour of their Lives.

I doubt not but Curiosity must naturally excite the Reader to enquire the Cause of so sudden and surprizing as the Separation may appear, the Cause is yet more so, as a total Ignorance of it is yet predominant in the Breast of every human Being; nor was it ever n the Power of their most intimate Friends to procure that Knowledge. . . . (pp. 3-4)

Her mother angrily storms off to London, “with all the mad Rage of an incensed Woman, with this Determination, ‘To marry the first Man that offered himself, should his

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Occupation descend as low as a Chimney-Sweeper” (p. 5). As fate would have it, that man turns out to be her father—a gentleman, and “in exterior Appearance quite genteel and agreeable, nay even handsome” (p. 7), but a feckless and degenerate creature underneath, as her friends try to warn her:

. . . she wrote into the Country and acquainted her Friends of the Engagement she had entered in with one whom she assured them was a Gentleman of Fortune. But they had received Intelligence from a more authentic Quarter of the very Reverse from that she had presented; for though his Person and Education might justly claim the Title of Gentleman, yet the Baseness of his Mind and Principles degenerated even lower than a Brute, and almost made him forego human Shape, to mingle with Devils; and even the most reduce her to want a Morsel of Bread. (pp. 7-8)

Her mother stands by her declared intention, however, and proceeds with the marriage. The predictions of her friends are soon fulfilled; not only does he deprive her of the means of support in order to maintain a mistress, but he also reveals his underlying sadism:

Within six Months after Marriage he not only stripped her of every Necessary of Wearing-Apparel, but also of every Conveniency of Life, excepting a House, which afforded very little besides a Protection from the Weather; and he stripped her for what?—to support a Hussy that was a Servant-Wench in the Family, till he thought fit to make her his Roxana, and then kept in handsome Lodgings, and supported in an elegant Manner. Many curious Ornaments, brought from abroad by her Father, he took to decorate the Rooms, and he and his Dulcinea both took Pride in what ought to have been their Shame, and what he did not take he would dash to Pieces before his Wife’s Face, meerly because he knew she valued them for her Father’s Sake. (pp. 9-10)

His children, too, bear the brunt of his cruelty, and the author is permanently crippled by one of his assaults:

. . . I was scarce two Years old when he went to strike my Mother when she had me in her Arms, with some Part of a Bedstead just taken to Pieces, and missing his Aim, I received a Hurt that can never end but with my Life; and though he saw me languish in extreme Misery many Months, he would never suffer me to have any Relief. (p. 12)

Her mother is finally driven to leave her husband with her three daughters and seek the protection of her sister and brother-in-law:
... my Uncle informs me, that a few Months after this Affair, Mr. W____ came Home one Night at near Eleven o’Clock, much out of Humour, as was usual, he immediately whetted a Knife, and laid it on a Table before his Wife, with a strict Charge not to move it before his Return, which was to be at an Hour he then mentioned, and said he then purposed to be her Butcher; that was the very Word, and I have since too often hear him use it.--He then went out, but as my Mother chose rather to forfeit her Charge than her Life, she therefore took her three Children to her Sister. . . . (pp. 12-13)

There they remain for three years in relative peace and security, although one of her sisters dies. At length, however, the mother is stricken; her concern for her daughters during her last illness illuminates some of the injustices and inequities of the social system:

... I fear their Innocence will again be exposed to the Mercy of an unmerciful Father and a lude Paramour! Was he not a Gentleman, the compassionate Parish would provide for them in a necessary though plain Manner; but even they will deny them Relief, and refuse them that Shelter which the meanest Beggar can claim. (p. 18)

After the death of her mother, “Lamenter” and her remaining sister are sent to live with their father, his second mistress, and his two illegitimate sons by his first mistress (who, understandably enough, has decamped for parts unknown). Her sister is designated errand girl, and she herself is forced to live in a closet, so that even the neighbors are unaware of her existence, and she is virtually starved:

I say, in this Cell was I fixt, nor dared stir out of it, unless at Night to lie down on the wretched Bedstead, not even to obey a natural Call; and though there was no Fastening to the Door of this dismal Region, yet I was to sit in one Corner motionless, and dared not to venture my Head out of the Closet, when I was almost suffocated with the Closeness of my Confinement. (pp. 33-34)

They are subjected to a constant round of terrorism and physical brutality. Once her sister stays longer on an errand than expected, and her father becomes enraged:

... she fell on her Knees, and begged he would not hurt her. . . . All she could say would not appease him, and, with one Blow, he levelled her to the Ground; not contented with that, his remorseless Feet kicked her, till, in a violent Torrent of Blood, she lay breathless before him. This was the first Time he ever stood alarmed at his cruel Actions; for whether through Fear or Conviction I am not able to tell, but he stampt and swore he should be hanged, for he had killed the Girl: They used all Means to recover her, and with much Difficulty she revived, to his no small Satisfaction. (p. 43)
On another occasion, when he wrongly suspects her of lying on the boys’ bed, he kicks the author from room to room and thence down the stairs.

Her mother’s relatives are finally apprised of the girls’ situation and make arrangements for her to live with other relatives. Her father “raged and stormed at the presumptuous Assurance of any Person that dared, in such a Manner, invade his Liberty” (p. 76). She is finally permitted to leave, however, and is taken to the country where she is treated kindly and given an education; she is responsive and learns rapidly:

As soon as I was capable of Reading, I grew passionately fond of Books, and dedicated many Hours, which Others of my Age generally pass in childish Amusements, to that early Exercise and improvement of my Faculties; and whenever I met with a Case any Way similar to my own, I did not fail to lament the innocent Sufferer. (p. 91)

But after six years her uncle and aunt die, and she is once again thrown on the nonexistent mercies of her father and his woman. Her father even goes so far as to attempt to send her to a brothel, which she describes vividly:

I can scarce give a Description of the horrid Scene which presented itself before my astonished Eyes.--In an Instant I was surrounded with a numerous Crowd of Wretches whose Countenances were the Residence of Guilt, Prostitution, and every hellish Principle: they stood some Time gazing on me, and giving their Verdict on my Case. The Oaths and Execrations they intermingled with their Oration, were shocking to hear; an Assembly of Infernals might have equalled, but surely not exceeded this Clang of Creatures, and with such was I doomed to dwell. We had scarcely entered this Sink of Wickedness ere my Guide left me with these Emissaries with a strict Charge to be careful of me--From such Care good Lord deliver me!

She escapes from the brothel and elopes from her father’s house, after which she is shuffled about and forced to depend on the kindness of various friends and relatives, many of whom are afraid of interfering with her father’s prerogatives. She is sent to the workhouse for a period, which is a source of extreme mortification to her although she is well treated. At times she is able to support herself doing needlework. Her autobiography, published by subscription, represents yet another attempt to achieve financial security.

Though Ann Wall’s picture of misery may not be typical, it clearly shows some of the abuses which were possible under the contemporary social system, and the particular vulnerability of women. Throughout her book there is an element of tension between her natural resentment at her injuries and the attitude of philosophical resignation that was traditionally encouraged for all, but especially for women:
Here I am ready almost to cry out, O why is the Earth yet incumbered with such a Monster [her father]! But let me moderate the presumptive Exclamation, and arraign myself for daring to call to an Account that great and wise Being, who orders every Thing by secret Means for some Good or other to Mankind. I say I more than twice condemn myself for that irreverent Thought, and humbly rest in the Opinion of my favourite Author Pope, that, “Whatever is, is right.” (pp. 11-12)

As Samuel Johnson noted, Pope perhaps did not know what it was to be poor. But Johnson’s social conscience was in many respects considerably more developed than most of his contemporaries. The Life of Lamenther demonstrates how little provision there was, even at this period, for the relief of those who found themselves in the hands of people who were not concerned for their welfare.

g. Mary Eleanor Lyon Bowes, Countess of Strathmore

One of the most peculiar and interesting of the eighteenth century autobiographies is that of Mary Eleanor (Lyon) Bowes, Countess of Strathmore (d. 1800). Not the least curious aspect of this document is the circumstances under which it was written. She was married in 1767 to John Lyon, ninth Earl of Strathmore; both before and after her husband’s death in 1776, she indulged in various indiscretions. Later she was married to a fortune-hunter named Andrew R. Stoney, a bankrupt lieutenant on half-pay. The marriage was predictably stormy: he mistreated her and she instituted divorce proceedings. At one point he hired a gang of ruffians to kidnap her and imprison her in Straitland Castle, from which she was later rescued. The Confessions of the Countess of Strathmore were written in 1778 at his behest, apparently under duress.

The narrative is addressed to her husband, and since it assumes some prior knowledge of her life-story, it is in parts a little confusing. As she becomes more deeply involved in her task, however, the book seems to take on a life of its own, and thoroughness becomes almost an obsession:

Many of the things these papers contain, I have had an opportunity of telling you since I began to write them, which I did not intend to do, till you read them here: other things you have, in the course of the same time, told me you was thoroughly acquainted with: however I would not alter, and I give you my thoughts exactly, as they first presented themselves to me, as you will easily perceive I wrote no rough copy. (p. 91)

We can almost see her sitting at her desk, and her husband interacting with her papers as she produces them:

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I have now fully performed my promise, and I rely on your’s to excuse all my faults, except want of veracity, which I am certain you cannot find here, and never shall again, even in the most trifling matter: as I will always rather prefer incurring your more than usual share of dislike to me, than say what is not true.

You saw a bit of these papers last night, when you came into my dressing-room, though I begged you would not look, and was angry at my minuteness, and telling you such trifles: if I had done otherwise, (besides my oath) might you not with justice, and would you not have said, I ordered you to be exact, minute, and scrupulous; so as to declare every thought you had, were not these your own words? And how did you know what I should esteem trifling? Therefore, my dearest, you should excuse this minuteness, and whatever manner I may mention the facts in, so they be but facts! (pp. 93-94)

Her concern with the truth is touching if silly, as she worries over how many kisses she had from this man or that: “Though I do not recollect, I declare upon oath, Mr. Stephens kissing me oftener than I have mentioned . . . ; yet I have such a dread of the possibility of perjuring myself, that I will not take my oath without a proviso” (pp. 98-99). To her veracity she will soundingly swear:

May I never feel happiness in this world, or the world to come; and may my children rest every hour of their lives unparalleled misery, if I have, either directly or indirectly, told one or more falsehoods in these narratives; or if I have kept any thing a secret, that even Mr. Bowes could esteem a fault. (p. 99)

The work as a whole has a two-part structure: in the first she enumerates her “crimes” and imprudences; in the second she provides the background for these slips by describing her youth and giving a more coherent autobiographical account. “I have been guilty,” she begins, “of five crimes” (p. 5)--and all of them stem directly from failures in her roles of wife and mother:

The first, my unnatural dislike to my eldest son. . . . My second crime was, my connection with Mr. Gray before Lord Strathmore’s death; in punishment of which very crime, God blinded my judgment, that I could not discern, in any case, what was for my children’s and my own advantage; but in every thing where there were two expedients, I chose the worst.

By medicines, I have reason to think, I miscarried three times, and attempted it the fourth. . . . Next I repent having profaned Saint Paul’s and Westminster Abbey, by giving Mr. Gray meetings there, before Lord Strathmore’s death.
Another crime was, plighting myself most solemnly to Mr. Gray, at St. Paul’s, to marry none but him; and yet I married you. . . . (pp. 5-7)

She then lists her imprudences, which include a year-long flirtation at the age of fourteen, giving “improper encouragement” to a young man (she burnt one of his letters and swallowed the ashes to prevent discovery), and various visits to conjurers and gypsy fortune tellers. Her naive attitude towards gossip seems almost calculated to besmirch her reputation:

I was always extremely silly, in not minding reports; on the contrary, rather encouraged them; partly, that I might laugh at other people’s absurdities and credulity, and partly, because I left it to time and reason, to shew they were false, and thought a variety of reports would puzzle people; so that they would look upon every one relating to me, as equally false, and even not credit the truth. Whereas, I have since had reason to fear it had quite a contrary effect from what I imagined and intended. (p. 27)

Her account of an abortion gives a fascinating glimpse into the unreliability of contemporary methods of birth control and the inevitable consequences:

I was once with child by him, before I heard of Lord S.’s death. . . .; but was so frightened and unhappy at it, that I prevailed on him to bring me a quack medicine he had heard of for miscarriage, but never tried it: it was of copperas substance, by the taste and look; he gave it to me very reluctantly, as he said he did not know but it might be poison; however, I would have it.

All the time of my connection with Mr. Gray, precautions were taken; but an instant’s neglect always destroyed them all: indeed, sometimes, even when I thought an accident scarce possible. (pp. 22-23)

She then turns to her upbringing, for it is to a faulty education, “a want of a proper sense of religion” (p. 48), that she attributes her moral turpitude. Her father, a reformed rake, “felt the want of education and study, for he was . . . determined his heir should not feel the same inconveniences” (p. 49). Except for Latin, her education was a thorough one; “I read the Bible, but at the same time equal or greater pains were taken to instruct me in the Mythology of every Heathen nation that ever existed” (p. 50); her mind, she tells us, was “puzzled with such a variety of religions” (p. 50). Her father also concentrated, it would seem, on the pagan virtues:

My father’s whole care and attention was bestowed on the improvement of my knowledge . . . ; and in acquiring me a great stock of health. . . . My father was continually talking of, and endeavouring to inculcate into me, sentiments of generosity, gratitude, fortitude, and duty to himself, and an insatiable thirst for all kinds of knowledge. But I never heard him once
say, to the best of my recollection, that chastity, patience, and forgiveness of injuries, were virtues... (pp. 51-52)

She is greatly attracted to Lord Strathmore, a handsome man, and a marriage settlement is arranged. During the course of the negotiations she starts to perceive some incompatibilities, but she cannot bring herself to halt the machinery she has set into motion:

My marriage-treaty with Lord S. for one delay or other, trailed on about a year and a half; during which, I found our tempers, dispositions, and turns different--wished to retract (and would, if I durst have consulted with my mother) but my pride, and some times my weakness, would not let me... (pp. 65-66)

Thus the stage is set for her indiscretions. Some of these are serious enough; many are rather trivial, however, and the reader sometimes feels a mountain is being made out of a molehill:

Once... as I was admiring some very scarce and valuable plants at Hammersmith, Mr. Lee told me, if I would allow him the honour to salute a countess, he would give me the most curious; which I did, and had the plant. I recollect once, that Mrs. Stephens sitting on one of her husband’s knees, I sat on the other. (p. 90)

Towards the end of the first part of her narrative, the Countess of Strathmore beseeches her husband to destroy her Confessions:

If you think my sincerity and unreserved confession of my faults may entitle me to ask a favour, let me beg your promise to burn these papers, at least, that you will destroy them when I die, that I may not stand condemned and disgraced, under my own hand, to posterity. (p. 47)

Though it is impossible not to sympathize with this desire, especially in view of the fact that the book was published before her death, we must be thankful that it has been preserved. The author is in every way a lightweight, with little sense of dignity and small talent for moral discrimination. But she is an interesting lightweight and in an odd way even an attractive one; there is a certain strength in her refusal to wallow in the self-pity that characterizes much of the sentimental autobiography by women of this era. And her Confessions clearly reveal the equation between chastity and morality which drained off the energies of so many women of the period.

h. George Anne Bellamy
The *Apoloogy*\(^\text{13}\) of George Anne Bellamy (1733-88) takes its place among the fairly substantial group of theatrical memoirs produced in the eighteenth century. Though unduly long—it runs to some nine hundred pages in five volumes—it is no run-of-the-mill production, but one of the most powerful autobiographical memoirs of the period. The source of its strength, perhaps, lies in its author’s peculiar combination of sensibility and tough-mindedness. Some of her apostrophes to benevolence and friendship are excessively purple, but she is a masterly anecdotist who has known many interesting and influential people and who is not afraid to relate a lively story even if she herself is its butt.

The autobiography is written as a series of letters to the Hon. Miss _____, which she compares to chapters in a work of fiction. The narrative opens with an account of her mother, the impulsive and headstrong daughter of a Quaker family. She forms an early connection with Lord Tyrawley, bears him a son, and then, in anger at his unfaithfulness, marries a Mr. Bellamy when she is seven months pregnant with George Anne by Lord Tyrawley. Mrs. Bellamy goes on the stage, and George Anne is raised by an Irish nurse who gains her charge’s lasting respect and affection. When the nurse brings the child backstage to present her to her mother, that woman exclaims:

‘My God! what have you brought me here? this goggle-eyed, splatter-faced, gabbart-mouthed wretch, is not my child! Take her away!’
(I, p. 28)

The child left “as much disgusted with my mother as she could be with me” (I, p. 28). Her relationship with her mother later improves, but it continues to have tempestuous moments.

Her father, Lord Tyrawley, eventually takes an interest in her, and she is exposed to a number of prominent people. One of the more amusing anecdotes she tells on herself concerns her interest in and eventual meeting with Pope:

Lord Tyrawley, having prohibited my reading Cassandra, the only romance in his library, and on which a girl of my age and lively disposition would naturally have first laid her hands, preferring poetry to history, I endeavoured to learn Pope’s Homer by rote. In this I made such proficiency, that in a short time I could repeat the first three books. When I thought myself sufficiently perfect, I languished to be introduced to the incomparable author of them; not doubting but he would be as much charmed with my manner of repeating “The wrath of Peleus’ son,” as I myself was. (I, p. 36)

Lord Tyrawley finally consents to take her:

As I rode along, the suggestions of vanity overpowered every apprehension; and I was not a little elated when I reflected on the conspicuous figure I was about to make. The

carriage stopped at the door. We were introduced to this little great man. But before I had time to collect myself, or examine him, Mr. Pope rang the bell for his housekeeper, and directed her to take Miss, and shew her the gardens, and give her as much fruit as she chose to eat. (pp. 36-37)

After some reflection, she pitches upon a suitable plan of revenge: “I determined never to read the cynic’s translation of the Iliad again, but wholly to attach myself to Dryden’s Virgil” (p. 37).

Given her theatrical background, it is not surprising that she tries her luck on the stage, where her beauty, vivacity, and talent captivate the attention of the aging Garrick. Her career is interrupted when she is kidnapped by an admirer who lures her to his coach by claiming a friend wishes to speak with her there:

... without staying to put on my hat or gloves, I ran to the coach, when, to my unspeakable surprise, I found myself suddenly hoisted into it by his Lordship, and that the coachman drove off as fast as the horses could gallop. (I, p. 70)

Her mother blames her for the elopement, and she is reviled and forced to spend a long period with relatives in the country before she and her mother are finally reconciled. But eventually she resumes her stage career, towards which she takes an unusually professional attitude:

Though apparently digressive from my history, yet it may perhaps tend to further the purpose of it, which is to mingle instruction with amusement.--It is by industry and application alone a person can arrive at eminence in any profession. Though natural genius is the most essential quality towards the attainment of every art or science, yet genius unassisted by cultivation can never reach perfection. Intense study and close application are absolutely needful (save in a few instances) to form the truly great. . . . (I, p. 118)

Her dedication pays off in considerable success, and she is for a number of years a much sought-after actress. She eventually contracts long-lasting liaisons with two men, both under the false promise of eventual marriage, and has a son by each. With Jack Calcraft, the more despicable of the two, she describes herself “joined, not matched” (II, p. 113), and comments thus on his cooling passion:

My gentleman, who by this time imagined that I had relaxed from my insensibility, and contracted some regard for him, no sooner thought he perceived this, than from the natural fickleness of his sex, he became indifferent himself. . . . Is it not strange that there should be this unaccountable propensity in man? What they strive to obtain by vows, by bribes, or the most abject submission; and purchase by whole years of assiduity; is no sooner secured, than it loses its value. (III, pp. 23-24)
She places great stock in sensibility and benevolence, and repeatedly asserts that “my errors have proceeded rather from imprudence than a bad disposition” (V, p. 129). The following paeon to sensibility, with its vehemence, intrusive narrator, and heavy Sternean influence, is a good example of these proclivities:

I am almost tempted, at times, to envy those who are born with an insensible heart.--Happy people! (I am sometimes on the point of crying out) happy people! who pass through life in a state of enviable tranquillity. --If ye do not taste, in an exquisite manner, of the pleasures this sublunary state affords; neither do the pains, with which it abounds, pungently affect you. And as the former are uncertain and transitory, and the latter sure and lasting, ye are gainers by the allotment.--So wise a man as Zeno is said to be, could never have taught the doctrine of Stoicism, nor his followers, the most sensible of the Greeks, have embraced it, had there not been some rational foundation for it, and the insensibility it enjoins desirable.--Had thy days, 0 Sterne, been spared to the united wishes of the lovers of genius, and thou hadst attained a good old age, it is a doubt, whether, upon a review of thy life, thou wouldst not have exchanged, had it been in thy power, thy susceptibility, (and, surely, no mortal was ever endowed with a greater portion) for this unfeeling Stoicism.--Impious thought! it admits not of a doubt.--Thou wouldst rather have exclaimed with me, “Give me my susceptibility, though it be attended with more than proportionate unhappiness!”--The pleasures flowing from love and from philanthropy, neither of which can ever find residence in a Stoic’s bosom, fully compensate for the augmented pains!

As I write from the heart, my pen, notwithstanding my assurances that I would check its sallies, has again, Pegasus like, run away with me.--And so I fear it will do to the end of the chapter. (III, pp. 147-48)

Her kindness is not merely theoretical; her tribute to her nurse after the nurse’s death is one of the few expressions of genuine tenderness towards a servant that we meet with during the period:

At this time I lost my faithful O’Bryen, whose memory will be ever dear to me. In her I lost not only a good servant, but a real friend. For though at times she would give into my innocent whims, yet whenever she thought me wrong, she took the liberty to represent the impropriety of my conduct to me with such mildness and good sense, that her reproof always carried conviction with it, and generally had the desired effect. So that O’Bryen usually succeeded, when my mother’s violence of temper failed, and, I am concerned to add, made me more obstinate. (II, p. 113)
Her description of her suicide attempt illustrates not only her benevolent impulses but also her highly developed sense of the dramatic. In despair over financial distress, she sits by the river and waits for the tide to engulf her:

I was suddenly roused from my awful reverie, by the voice of a woman at some little distance, addressing her child; as appeared from what followed, for they were neither of them visible. In a soft plaintive tone she said, “How, my dear, can you cry to me for bread, when you know I have not even a morsel to carry your dying father?” She then exclaimed, in all the bitterness of woe, “My God! my God! what wretchedness can compare to mine! But thy almighty will be done.”

The concluding words of the woman’s pathetic exclamation communicated instantaneously, like an electric spark, to my desponding heart. I felt the full force of the divine admonition; and struck with horror at the crime I had intentionally committed, I burst into tears; repeating in a sincere ejaculation, the pious sentence she had uttered, “thy almighty will be done!”

As I put my hand into my pocket, to take out my handkerchief in order to dry my tears, I felt some halfpence there which I did not know I was possessed of. And now my native humanity, which had been depressed, as well as every other good propensity, by its pleasing influence, I hastily ran up the steps, and having discovered my hitherto invisible monitress, gave them to her. I received in return a thousand blessings; to which I rather thought she had a right from me, for having been the means of obstructing my dire intents. (V, pp. 61-62)

But her real strength lies less in her overblown declarations of susceptibility than in her cool psychological penetration and acute observation of social forms. She is expert at drawing thumbnail sketches which capture the essence of a person’s demeanor; describing the “genteel education” of an acquaintance, for example, she tells us:

. . . she was well versed in the fashions, and in the amusements, of the fashionable world, she spoke bad French, and could invent with great facility, additions to the lie of the day. She had a good address, and abounded in what is usually denominated small talk. She understood the art of flattery so well as to be able to charm her female customers, and of coquetry, sufficient to captivate the men. (I, p. 30)

She is quite subtle in her analysis of the workings of the mind:

There is, I believe, no impression that affects so strongly a young mind as the supposition of being dear to another. Though originating merely from self-love, it incites a reciprocation. They very idea that you are pleasing, stimulates you to render yourself really so, even though there
be not that similarity of manners and disposition on which an union of souls is usually founded. (I, p. 33)

She also has an intelligent grasp on the social pressures which affect behavior:

To what continual solicitations are females in the theatrical line, whose persons or abilities render them conspicuous, exposed! They go through an ordeal almost equally hazardous to that used of old as a test of chastity. The maturest judgment and firmest resolution are required to steer them aright. And is this to be expected from frail fair ones, hoodwinked by youth, inexperience, vanity, and all the softer passions? Instead of wondering that so many of those who tread the stage yield to the temptations by which they are surrounded, it is rather a matter of amazement that all do not. Continually besieged by persons of the highest rank, who are practised in the arts of seduction, and empowered by their affluence to carry the most expensive and alluring of these into execution, it is next to impossible that the fortress should be impregnable.---Fortunate is it for many who pride themselves in their untried virtue, that their lot is cast in a less hazardous state. (II, pp. 14-15)

Her skill at self-dramatization, her self-deprecating irony, her ability to convince us that she and her acquaintances are real flesh-and-blood people, and her recognition of the social forces that may control the behavior of people (including herself)---all these qualities make George Anne Bellamy's Apology a significant chapter in the history of eighteenth century autobiography.

**i. Elizabeth Sarah Villa-Real Gooch**

In some ways the skeleton of the story of Elizabeth Sarah Villa-Real Gooch resembles that of Con Phillips. Both are cast aside by their husbands and go on to formidable careers as mistress to a long succession of wealthy men. But Mrs. Gooch is Con Phillips with a difference; she is Con Phillips bathed in the soft light of sensibility. There is probably no writer who better exemplifies the influence of sensibilité upon autobiography, and upon an author's perception of herself, than Mrs. Gooch.

The general tone of The Life of Mrs. Gooch\(^\text{14}\) is set in the opening pages:

> This work is the offspring of solitude and reflection. It has been necessary, in order to complete it, that every recollection should be awakened---every painful idea recalled---and it is to be observed, that some allowances are to be made in a publication of this kind, written more from the heart than from the head.

> I am well aware that the language of the heart frequently subjects us to ridicule where we intend it to produce far other emotions; for, among

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the many readers into whose hands ever publication finds its way, how numerous is the class, that, destitute of sentiment themselves, cannot comprehend its reasoning, much less its merits! (I, pp. 6-8)

The idea that the “want of one real friend” (I, p. 15) has caused all her troubles runs through the narrative like a litany. She seems consciously and decisively to select for misery; the comfortable periods of her life are mentioned only in passing and almost grudgingly. Her sensibility seems to deprive her of every facility for coping with the real world. She is continually bestowing her trust in people who deceive her, steal her belongings, and so forth. At one point she signs a paper “the contents of which I never looked at” (II, p. 92). Yet somehow she seems to thrive, living as mistress to various titled figures and extricating herself from scrape after self-created scrape, only to plunge headlong into others.

The deciding event of her early life is her marriage to Mr. Gooch. Like the Countess of Strathmore, she contracts an engagement hastily and then has second thoughts before the wedding day:

Before this fatal day I had sincerely repented my engagements. Some things that Mr. Mellish had said to me, some remarks I had myself made, and a dislike that I had, in consequence of both these, taken to Mr. Gooch’s family, determined me of seizing [sic] the first favourable opportunity, when alone with him, of disclosing my sentiments... I told him that my mind had changed, and it was my wish to break off the connection. His answer to me was, that if I did, it should be the ruin of my character, and the loss of half my fortune, for which he would sue me. (I, pp. 55-56)

At first her married life was, she concedes, “on the whole... not uncomfortable”:

. . . the only complaint I had to acknowledge against Mr. Gooch was his continually shutting himself up in the study to receive letters, and write to his family, without imparting the contents on either side to me. This was foreign to my ideas of domestic confidence, without which I think, exist any domestic felicity. (I, pp. 92-93)

She is not happy, however; in a bout of puerperal fever after the birth of her second son, she tells us “I wished earnestly for death, and repeatedly told my nurse so. She... asked me what could possibly make me desirous of quitting a life which, to her, appeared to possess for me every charm?--I knew not why it was so, yet I did wish it” (I, p. 99). Eventually she receives an apparently compromising note from her music teacher and, though insisting upon her innocence, endeavors unsuccessfully to conceal it from her husband. Gooch’s family determines to make public the story and separate the couple. He retains custody of the children but refuses to grant the divorce she eventually requests, thus cutting her off from the possibility of remarriage. Her uncle advises her to wait out

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the storm in banishment in France and she blames him rather than herself for the seduction that follows:

Yet how could my uncle avoid foreseeing that, during that interval of time, it was almost impossible I could be able to avoid falling into some of the snares which surrounded me, and particularly as he had seen at my lodgings this Mr. Semple, who was surely well skilled in the arts of seduction?--On the day of his leaving Lille he wrote me a few lines to caution me against this only acquaintance I had made.--He must have perceived that he was likely to gain an ascendency over me. (I, pp. 164-65)

After that she is kept by a number of wealthy men and travels through Europe and the British Isles at their sides, shuttling from England to France, intrigue to intrigue. Later, as she ages, she can no longer attract a succession of lovers and lives in constant flight from her creditors; it is in this situation that her account closes.

Because she affects to write with her heart rather than her head, her narrative often gives the impression of running away with itself; passages such as the following recur throughout her account:

Why cannot I write this page with composure?--Why, at the recollection of these past times, cannot I partake of that easy indifference, that stoic apathy, which cheers the path of other mortals throughout life?--Why, at this long, this distant period, do my eyes swim in tears, and blot what I am writing?--but I must not, I dare not revert to my own feelings--would that they were buried in a long, long oblivion! (I, p. 75)

Clearly the business of stirring up her own emotions is part of the process, and pleasure, of writing for her. She has an extravagant love of scenic beauty; of Studley Park she says:

This charming spot has surely received a peculiar mark of favour from Heaven; all that art could most ingeniously contrive to assist nature, is there lavished with a liberal hand. The eye is fascinated by variegated walks and temples, and the soul finds food for contemplation in the majestic and vulnerable ruins of Fontane’s Abbey. (I, p. 29)

Mr. Aislabie (the gardener told me) has left five hundred pounds a year to keep it in repair; but how much it is to be lamented that such a place is not the property (not of royalty, for Princes are too lofty to enjoy such scenes! but) of some noble-minded, generous lord, whose doors would not be shut against the poor, and whose true English hospitality, unlike the pampered luxuries of France, would teach him to be happy, and to make others so. Such an owner would I wish for Studley! (I, pp. 31-32)

Despite her pride in her aristocratic lovers, she waxes enthusiastic over what she perceives as a Utopian democracy in a little French town:
In this pleasant country there is no master of ceremonies required to regulate the laws of Society; every person of a decent appearance is well received there; and if the frequenters of Evian have any ill-nature in their composition, or a taste for detraction, they must leave those qualities behind them. There is no distinction paid to rank or precedence; every one is on the same footing, and no impertinent questions are asked concerning who or what they are. (II, pp. 120-21)

Her idea of freedom is also a romantic one; she is convinced that her failure to follow her inclinations and marry an ardent but impoverished suitor in defiance of family opposition was an act which committed her to a lifetime of bondage:

Had I then known my independence—nay, had I even formed an idea of that liberty every British subject is born with the privilege to enjoy, I would have shaken off the fetters in which I was ignorantly bound; I would have spurned at the violence offered to my inclinations, and I would have declared that Dr. Crawford should be my husband—the consequence of his birth and fortune I must have taken on myself; but I knew not that I was the mistress of my choice. Would to God I had; for I am now firmly of opinion, that, had I married him, I should have been spared the weight of woe ever since laid upon me.... This idea will never forsake me: it is twisted round every fibre of my heart, and will only be renounced with its last sigh. (I, pp. 20-21)

Despite the tearful, self-pitying excesses and self-conscious emotional posing which render this narrative occasionally rather cloying, Mrs. Gooch is capable of being entertaining and amusing. Her description of one of her early lovers is comical, though it suggests a sort of heartlessness where any but her own life and feelings are concerned:

He was a handsome man; his uniform was white, with pink cuffs and lappels, and he wore an enormous muff, that looked as if it might occasionally serve him for a bed. I admired him, were it only for the novelty of his appearance—he looked like a pretty trinket for a watch. (I, p. 179)

Droll, too, is the controlled bathos of the following passage, in which she is conducted to a luxurious French bedchamber:

... I prepared to get under the high down beds which were to insure me a repose, far preferable, as I then conceived to the peaceful bed and homespun sheets in which the labourer stretches his weary limbs, and reaps the sweet reward of cheerful industry—I was intoxicated with the rich Tokay, and all the luxuries which surrounded me.... But, alas! a few minutes only had encircled me in darkness, and sleep was just beginning to favour
me, when all the tenants of the bed came forth to hail my arrival!—a thousand, I may indeed say a million, of bugs covered me. (II, pp. 84-85)

Withal, the reader senses a deep-seated ambivalence towards herself and her life—she is both attracted and repelled by the pattern of lurching from crisis to crisis which characterizes her life. One evening she passes a quiet hour in solitude, which inspires the following exclamation:

The evening was charmingly serene, and while the gentlemen were strolling about the woods, I passed an hour there in sweet and melancholy contemplation; no sound broke in upon it but the murmurs of the river beneath, and the sweet warbling of many birds.—“Ah,” said I to myself, “What a luxury would it be to a mind like mine to live secluded from the world in an habitation near this, where I could, free and unmolested, invoke the aid of the muses, and enjoy my loved society of books!”—But it is my wretched fate still to be buffeted about by the rude billows of the world, and I am probably, even at this time, entering on another strong sea, from which no port, but that of death will welcome me! (III, pp. 110-11)

The sentiment is highly conventional, yet the note of anticipation in the last sentence—at once fearful and eager—rings true. It is perhaps too simple to say that she enjoys being unhappy, but her autobiography stands as a monument to the emotional blurriness that is implicit in sensibility carried to its extreme.

j. Hester Ann Rogers

Hester Ann Roe Rogers (1756-95) was a convert to Methodism, a sect which produced a number a number of autobiographies in the latter half of the eighteenth century. *An Account of the Experience of Mrs. H. A. Rogers. Written by Herself* was written around 1792 and runs to some fifty-four closely printed pages. It is a severe work indeed, unleavened by any lightness or touches of self-irony. Her youth was fittingly strict and sober:

I was born at Macclesfield . . . in which place my father was Minister for many years; being a clergyman of the Church of England. He was a man of strict morals, and, as far as he was enlightened, of real piety. I was trained up in the observance of all outward duties, and in the fear of sins, which, in these modern times are all too often deemed accomplishments. I was not suffered to name God but with the deepest reverence; and once for telling a lye, I was corrected in such a manner as I never forgot. We had constant family prayer; the sabbath was kept strictly sacred and as far as outward morality, my parents lived irreproachably, and in all social duties were regular and harmonious. (p. 3)

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Even a missed prayer is an occasion for visions of hell:

I never remember going to bed without having said my prayers, except one: I was then diverted by a girl, who told me many childish stories, and so took up my attention, that I forgot to pray till I was in bed: and then being alone, I recollected what I had done, and conscience greatly accused me; so that I began to tremble lest satan should be permitted of God to fetch me away body and soul, which I felt I deserved. I soon after thought I saw him coming to the side of my bed; when I shrieked out in such a manner, as brought my parents up stairs to see what was the matter. This made a lasting impression. . . . I was at this time about six years old. (p. 4)

Her father sharply discouraged any hint of frivolity; he “warned me against reading Novels and Romances; would not suffer me to learn to dance, nor go on visits to play with those of my own age. He said it was the ruin of youth to suppose they were only to spend their time in diversions” (p. 4).

The death of her father is a bitter blow to her, but after she is deprived of his watchful eye she begins to deviate from his standards:

My grief for some time would not suffer me to take recreations of any kind; but I would sit and read with my mother, or weep with her. But after a season, I was invited to the houses of relations and friends; and as I soon became a laughing-stock among them for my seriousness, and dislike to their manners and their plays, I began to be ashamed of being so particular. My mother was also now prevailed on to let me learn to dance, in order to raise my spirits, and improve my carriage, &c. This was a fatal stab to my seriousness, and divine impressions: It paved the way to lightness, trifling, love of pleasure, and various evils. As I soon made a proficiency, I delighted much in this ensnaring folly. My pride was fed by being admired, and began to make itself manifest with all its fruits. I now aimed to excel my companions, not in piety, but in fashionable dress! and could not rest long together without being engaged in this (what the world calls) innocent amusement. I also obtained all the Novels and Romances I possibly could. . . . After this, I attended Plays also. . . . Thus was my precious time mispent, and my foolish heart wandering far from happiness and God; yea, urging on to endless ruin! (pp. 5-6)

After a bout of illness, however, thoughts of religion are reawakened, and cause her sporadic periods of distress. When her uncle, a Methodist, comes to Macclesfield, she is initially hostile but becomes more and more drawn to Methodism; still, she wavers considerably:

But I still had one great hindrance . . . a young person, for whom I had a sincere affection. . . . I was sensible, if I renounced my pleasures, and
because God and my own conscience now required, I must, in the first place, give him up, and that fully; or he would be the means of drawing me back; for he was yet unawakened, tho’ outwardly moral. (p. 14)

Finally, she is deeply moved by a sermon and resolves to renounce all worldly pursuits:

I slept not that night; but arose early next morning, and without telling my mother, took all my finery; high dressed caps, &c. &c. and ripped them all up; so that I could wear them no more. Then cut my hair short, that it might not be in my own power to have it dressed; and in the most solemn manner, vowed never to DANCE again! (p. 16)

Her mother, understandably, objects strenuously, first pleading with her and then persecuting her for her new commitment. She threatens to leave home and become a servant, but states she would rather remain in her mother’s house as a servant. Her mother, after consulting friends, agrees, thinking she will soon tire of the difficult work and give it up; “But they knew not the power and goodness of that God, who strengthened me in all my tribulation” (p. 19).

It is shortly after this that she spends an entire night “wrestling with the Lord,” recounted in a dramatic passage which is in effect a conversation between the Lord, Satan, and herself as the forces of good and evil struggle for possession of her soul:

“Lord, dost thou care for me! and is this faith, to cast all my care, even all my SINS . . . upon thee? May I? Dost thou bid me? A poor hell-deserving sinner . . . can such love dwell in thee? Is it not too easy a way? May I, even I be saved, if only I cast my soul on Jesus. My burden of sin; my load of guilt; my every crime? What! saved from this moment!—O it is too great; it cannot, surely it cannot be!” (O what a struggle had satan and unbelief with my helpless, sinful soul!) But the Lord applied, “Fear not, only believe.” Satan suggested, “Take care; suppose Jesus Christ should fail thee; suppose he is not God! What, if he was an imposter, as the Jews believe!” Oh, the agony my soul felt at that moment. But I cried, “If this be so, I am undone without remedy! . . .” (p. 21)

This remarkable passage shows the vivid contrast which existed between the outer restrictiveness and the inner ecstasy which often accompanied such a religious commitment. She ends the night exhausted, but with a feeling of bliss and a firm conviction of salvation.

After a long passage inserted from her journal, she resumes her narrative with an account of her marriage:

I come now briefly to observe, that after a wonderful Chain of divine leadings, and remarkable providences (too tedious to dwell upon
here) on August 19, 1784, I was married to Mr. Rogers. In whom the Lord gave me a help-mate for glory; just such a partner, as my weakness needed to strengthen me. He hath made us one heart, and one soul: For now, for above eight years, he hath crowned our union with his constant smile. (p. 49)

Her husband is an itinerant minister, and the remainder of her life seems to have been spent in producing babies and happily accompanying him on his travels.

Our assertion that she was happy must, however, be qualified somewhat, for at times that happiness was achieved in the face of rather difficult circumstance. One passage in particular gives a clear view of the function religion played in promoting acceptance of adversity:

At the time I now speak of, my own recovery was doubtful. Mr. Rogers (oppressed with grief, thro' my illness, and by his attention to me night and day,) was very ill. James had a worm fever: The maid confined with sickness; and my little John, six weeks old, lying in convulsions, for three days!—Surely in this scene, the Lord magnified his power in supporting my weakness, and enabling me then to say, “Good is the will of the Lord.” (p. 50)

This autobiography is not distinguished by any particular artistry or imaginativeness. Its main interest lies in the awesome seriousness which characterized its author’s entire life, and the way in which fundamentalist religion evidently provide an acceptable emotional release from the “regular and harmonious” life which she led as a child.

k. Frances Dodshon

Some Account of the Convincement and Religious Experience of Frances Dodshon

is a fairly pedestrian example of Quaker autobiography. It is brief (approximately thirty-two pages) and was published in 1793, though it was probably written rather earlier. As a piece of literature, it can best be described as disorganized and repetitive.

Frances Henshaw Paxton Dodshon (1714-93) describes her life as one of “trials and afflictions, almost unparalleled in the present age” (p. 6); evidently she is referring to the periods of grief, anxiety, and temptations she experiences (tinged, perhaps, by the sentimentalism which bathed the latter part of the eighteenth century), since there appears to be little in the external events of her life to justify this extreme statement. Her childhood is not especially unusual; orphaned early in life, she and her sister are placed under the guardianship of their step-uncle:

... his concern for our present and future happiness was demonstrated in placing us with such persons as might be confided in, and also be instruments to implant in our tender age, a love of virtue and abhorrence of vice. The education he gave us was liberal, being equal with that of many of much greater affluence. ... We were instructed in reading, writing, working, and other things—as music and dancing, which by some were thought expedient for our sex and fortune, and which I had naturally a great life in, and which in my more mature age, cost me much sorrow to lay aside; together with other follies of the like tendency, viz. singing, playing at cards, &c. (p. 8)

Though committed to the Church of England, she takes an interest in the Quakers and feels that their practices are closer to those of the “Primitive Believers”:

... the inward sense given me of them as a people, so conscientious in their converse and commerce among men, kept me from prejudice against them, nor durst I, like some of my acquaintance, (though in other cases I had as quick a satirical disposition as most) make this people the subject of ridicule, nor speak lightly of the spirit they professed, feeling in the interior of my mind it would be at my own peril, if I should so daringly and imprudently indulge my wit. (p. 12)

When she is twenty, her sister becomes gravely ill, and both are afflicted with terrors of death:

Yet grieving to see her so afflicted, and being naturally of a bolder spirit than she, I was ready to petition the Almighty in the secret of my mind, that she might be relieved if it were consistent with his will, and if one of us must suffer, that it might rather be myself than she, judging myself less timorous; but in the midst of these considerations, I was informed as certainly in my own conscience, as if it had been told me by a person of unquestionable validity and authority, that I must undergo a great work, and know a thorough change before I could be prepared for a happy death. A query arising in me what this could import, and what this change must be, I presently had an answer uttered to my breast with great weight and solemnity to this effect—The change is this: Thou must with others bear the Cross in the closest way, and become a Quaker! (pp. 14-15)

This calling, which she resists, is followed by periods of sorrow and despair so profound that she is tempted to suicide and for a time stops eating altogether. Her friends, too, frown on her conversion:

Oh! most severe and fiery trial! I have read thy word is sharp and piercing, yea, sharper than any two-edged sword; and so indeed I find it to bear even to the dividing asunder, of soul and spirit joints and marrow;
what will my friends and all the world say of me, if I profess the opinion of a people so much despised? Oh! that when I was born I had given up the ghost, then I had been at peace.

Finally, however, her relations assent to her conversion, and she makes a public commitment to the Quaker faith:

... which I had not done above three or four months before my health was restored, to the surprise of all my acquaintance, and my mouth was opened in a powerful manner in a public testimony, to the praise of that Almighty and all-sufficient arm, that had wrought my preservation and deliverance out of the manifest temptations and provocations I had had, through unfaithfulness, to pass through. (p. 35)

Her narrative ends with an account of her marriage, and her idealizing paean to her husband modulates into a declaration of faith and exaltation of God. The courtship begins during one of her periods of doubt, and she gives the impression that her successful marriage is somehow implicated in the ultimate resolution of her doubts:

... in this situation, wherein I looked upon myself as one bereft of all comeliness, I was sought after by several of the chiefest persons in the society, as a companion for life. One WILLIAM PAXTON, imbued with every qualification I could desire, found me in the covenant of light and life, and steadfastly adhered to his fixed resolution to seek me therein, till through much opposition arising from a sense of my duty, and the nature of his intentions, I was made his and he mine; in the unchangeable covenant of life. The Lord was pleased to bless us together for the space of about eight years, in which time I bore him four sons; and after being helped through many visitations of bodily affliction, my dear and valuable husband resigned his precious life into the hands of him who gave it, with a fortitude of patience, becoming a complete Christian--his life adorned his profession, and his death crowned all; being remarkable solemn, and attended with a full evidence of everlasting glory, as well as a promise of an easy or quiet dissolution of his body! Thus lived and died one of the most amiable of his sex; ripe for glory at an age, when few remember their latter end, or take thought for futurity. I cannot repine, though the greatest loser of all his acquaintance; the Lord is sufficient, and as my dear husband said to me before his departure, would make it up to me abundantly, which expressions he repeated twice or thrice; and it has been so, the Lord by his presence has made up all the deficiencies, and is, and I hope ever will be, my all in all, the chiefest of ten thousand, unto my soul that waits to be clothed in the beautiful garment of clean linen, the righteousness of Christ, that an entrance may be given me into the mansions of uninterrupted rest and neverfading glory, where the redeemed
The strange combination of distance and devotion inextricable from her worship of God provides a good example of the integral part that a successful marriage played in the spiritual life of a Quaker.

As Frances Dodshon’s autobiography suggests, the opportunities for originality within the traditional format of Quaker autobiography had been pretty well exhausted. In the seventeenth century Quaker autobiography made a number of contributions to the art of self-analysis, but by the eighteenth century the formula had become stale and the possibilities for self-analysis were being explored more subtly in other types of narrative.

1. Catherine Phillips

Catherine Payton Phillips (1726/27-94) was another of those peripatetic Quakers; in her Memoirs of the Life of Catherine Phillips, this indefatigable woman describes her missionary activities in America, all over the British Isles, and Holland. At one point she mentions “having in fifteen weeks attended 117 meetings, and travelled about 1230 miles; nearly the whole on horseback” (p. 198). When she chances to remain ten months in Cornwall, she calls it “the longest period I remember to have been confined within the limits of one country, since my first journey in the service of Truth to Wales, in the year 1749” (p. 235). Her autobiography is lengthy (over three hundred pages) and in many places rather tedious, being frequently an unvarnished recital of the places she has gone, meetings she has attended, and various blessings and lucky escapes. She evidently compiled these memoirs by consulting notes she had made at the time, as she tells us at the beginning of chapter VIII:

From the occurrences related in the close of the foregoing Chapter, until after I entered into a marriage state, I made no minutes of my religious labours, although I was as constantly engaged as heretofore, in attending yearly and quarterly meetings, &c. in diverse parts of the nation. . . . (p. 206)

This method of composition, combined with the lack of any extraordinary imagination, probably accounts for the apparent absence of any real integration into some unified conception of her life and work. The book is a relatively late Quaker work; it was first printed in 1797 and was probably completed not more than a few years before her death, since it breaks off shortly after her husband’s death in 1785.

She was born to a pious Quaker couple; her father was himself a missionary until disabled by paralysis. Her mother, left at home to raise the children, is described by Catherine Phillips as “an example of fortitude, cheerfulness, gravity, industry, economy, self-denial, and resignation to the divine will” (pp. 4-5). In common with many Quakers, she had a guilt-ridden childhood:

... as I grew up, I yielded to divers temptations, and was allured from the simplicity of truth; the evil propensities in nature getting the ascendency. But even in my childhood I experienced many conflicts, and my convictions for evil were strong; so that at times my heart was sorrowful, and my pillow watered with my tears, although my countenance and deportment were mostly cheerful. Once, having yielded to temptation, my sense of guilt was such, that I concluded I had sinned against the Holy Ghost; and that, agreeable to Christ’s testimony, I “should never be forgiven.” This so affected my tender mind with sorrow and unutterable distress, that it could not be entirely concealed from the family; although I was enabled, even in childhood, to keep my exercises of mind much to myself. I think I must have been about eight or nine years old when it was thus with me. . . . (pp. 6-7)

The anti-intellectual strain of left-wing Protestantism is here evident:

My natural disposition was very volatile, and my apprehension quick; and as my faculties opened, I delighted much in books of a very contrary nature and tendency to those which had engaged my attention in my childhood. I had a near relation, who notwithstanding his having been divinely favoured in his youth, had slighted his soul’s mercies, and pursued lying vanities. He kept house in the town; and through him, myself, and my sisters, had opportunities of obtaining plays and romances, which I read with avidity. I also spent so much time at his house as to be introduced into amusements very inconsistent with the simplicity of truth, and my former religious impressions; so that my state was indeed dangerous, and but for the interposition of Divine Providence, I had been left to pursue courses which must have terminated deplorably. I also read history, was fond of poetry, and had a taste for philosophy; so that I was in the way to embellish my understanding (as is the common phrase), and become accomplished to shine in conversation; which might have tended to feed the vain proud nature, render me pleasing to those who were in it, and make me conspicuous in the world. But the Lord, in his wisdom, designed to bring me to public view in a line directly opposite to worldly wisdom, pleasure, or honour; and when he was pleased more fully to open to my understanding his great and glorious work of renovation of spirit, I saw that I must desist from these amusing publications and studies, and pursue the one necessary business, viz. working out the salvation of my immortal soul. . . . (pp. 7-8)

Later she gives up her attempts at verse-writing for similar reasons:

. . . soon after I appeared in the ministry, I dropped my pen in regard to verses. I do not say it was a sacrifice required; but the continuing of the
practice might have proved a snare some way: it might have engaged my
attention too much, or tended to make me popular, which I have ever
guarded against, perhaps too much so in some points; but I was early
afraid of my mind and services being tarnished with vanity. (pp. 18-19)

Once she has “entered the list of publick combatants in the Lamb’s army” (p. 21),
she embarks upon the travels which occupy most of the remainder of the narrative. There
are few mildly amusing incidents, such as the following encounter with a priest on
shipboard:

The parson, observing that in our ministry, we spoke extempore,
told me that he could preach extempore, and we should hear him if we
pleased the next Sunday. Accordingly when the day came, we were all
seated in the great cabin, and he preached without notes. His subject was
the transfiguration of Christ, which he found a wonder,--expatiated upon it
as a wonder,--and left it a wonder; without entering into the spirituality of
the text: indeed I doubt he did not understand it. (pp. 64-65)

On the whole, however, the descriptions are lacking in animation. Some are of interest
because they convey the difficulties and dangers of traveling in America, as in the
following passage:

Another night, we lay in the woods, with tolerable comfort, though
the weather was cold, and the ground damp. About two hours before we
stopped, as I was attempting to cross a swamp on some loose pieces of
wood, one of them rolled, and threw me backward into it. On of our
friends was leading me, and the other, seeing me in danger of falling,
stepped behind me into the swamp, and caught me, so that I was wet but
on one side, except my feet: and, although I mounted my horse
immediately after putting on a dry pair of stockings, rode in my wet
clothes, and lay down in them, I was preserved from taking cold. In the
night two of our horses strayed away from us, and our guides were obliged
to leave us and go in quest of them; so that we were several hours
ourselves in this wilderness, surrounded, for aught we knew, by bears,
wolves, and panthers. (pp. 80-81)

The personality which emerges from these memoirs is a prim and fussy one, yet a
pragmatic one, with the self-righteousness that often accompanies piety. Meeting with an
intoxicated man triggers a long diatribe against drinking:

... that evening [I] visited a young man, who I thought was near his end;
but we had little to say to him, his condition being lamentably stupid. I
thought intemperance was the cause of is indisposition, and found
afterwards I was not mistaken. O! the deplorable effects of this degrading
vice on the body, soul, and temporal substance, of numbers who unhappily
indulge in it; whose faculties are debased below those of the brute animals; and so stupefied as not to be roused to the most important work of their soul’s salvation. It lays men open to every temptation, and reduces many from opulent circumstances to extreme poverty. It is destructive of every delicate social enjoyment; it often emaciates the body, deprives the soul of its highest good, the divine Presence, whilst in time; and if continued to the end of it, finally excludes it from Christ’s pure kingdom of everlasting bliss. Alas! that men should indulge in it to their shame. (p. 43)

And so on. At another point she preaches to a woman who has borne her brother-in-law’s child, hoping that her ministrations will promote “the extendings of his grace . . . towards her, although she had been so great an offender” (p. 124). Clues to how she manages to regulate her own life are to be found in the following words of practical advice:

Here I suggest some cautions necessary to be observed by young women in a single state, who travel in the service of the ministry, towards those of the other sex, who are also unmarried.

First, to guard their own minds, lest they admit of any pleasing imagination, and stamp it with the awful name of revelation; and so slide into a familiarity and freedom of conversation and behaviour, which might tend to engage the affections of young men. Secondly, to endeavour to retain a feeling sense of the state of the spirits of those with whom they are intimate, and strictly to observe their conduct and behavior towards them: so will they be the better able to judge of their motives for accompanying them, or of any other act of kindness; and may wisely check any forward though which looks beyond friendship; which may easily be done by some prudent remarks (yet obliquely) in conversation. Thirdly, to beware of hurting any of these tender plants by an austere conduct. When we are singularly made instruments of good, in the hand of Providence, to any soul, there is a natural aptitude to lean a little to the instrument, and to prefer it above others, which for a time may be allowable. The Lord, leading the mind by gradual steps from the love of other objects to the entire love of himself, the only pure, eternal, Excellency, may permit it for a season to lean to an instrument; in which case a prudent reserve is necessary, as well as a tender regard to the growth of the party thus visit. I confess, it is sometimes a nice point, to be ready to be of service to such, and preserve the unity of the spirit, free from a mixture of natural affection; a distinction which I fear has been overlooked by some to their great hurt, but which Truth, if adhered to, will make; and will also direct to steer safely betwixt these dangerous extremes. (pp. 109-10)

Her relationship with her husband, and her curiously oblique descriptions of their twenty-three year courtship, is one of the most interesting aspects of this book. Her initial feelings towards him are ambivalent:
William Phillips was then a widower, and had two young children. His worldly circumstances I was unacquainted with, further than that I then learned the place of his residence, and somewhat of his business, which was, in part, that of an agent to a copper-company. He was considerably older than myself. So that none of these circumstances could of themselves make a connection with him desirable. For as to his employ, which might seem the least exceptionable, it was less pleasing to me than would have been his being his own free man. It was therefore improbably that temporal considerations should bias my mind in his favour; and as to his religious experience, it appeared to be but in its infancy. He had indeed, a frank and open disposition, which, joined to a good understanding, rendered his conversation agreeable. . . . (p. 208)

They correspond and occasionally see each other; “yet such was the restriction we were preserved under, that not sentiment transpired, nor was there any, the least part of his conduct, more than was consistent with a distinguished friendship: and thus we again parted, and continued our religious correspondence” (p. 209). In view of his evidently rather lukewarm pursuit, she decides it is safest to break off the relationship. But later she receives a divine hint that they are to be united after all:

In the year 1766, I attended the Circular meeting, and visited most of the meetings of Friends in Cornwall. Previously to my taking that journey, I had an intimation in my mind, which seemed to point towards a revival of our intimacy. This happened at a time when I was quite free from impressions of natural affection towards W. Phillips: for I was deeply engaged in thoughtfulness respecting another friend, and humbly and earnestly desirous to be informed whether I might safely remove to the place of his residence.

Under this exercise, my mind was turned with uncommon force to Cornwall; and the name of the place where W. Phillips resided was revived with such strength, that it was as if vocally spoken in my soul. (p. 211)

Her urgent compulsion to assure herself that natural feeling and attraction had nothing to do with her desire for union with William Phillips fosters the suspicion that her religion has put her rather out of touch with her own motivations. However that may be, they are finally married in 1772. The marriage is evidently a happy one, and her husband figures more prominently in the remainder of the narrative than is usual in the autobiographies of Quaker women. After his death, which she describes in considerable clinical detail, she launches into an extended tribute to his virtues:

Indeed he was a man who commanded love, esteem, and respect, from his numerous relations, friends, and acquaintance, in their different ranks and stations. . . . Such was his publick character, drawn, as far as it goes, not beyond the life, though by his afflicted affectionate widow.
She also best knew his private virtues, and engaging manners, exemplified in his family connections, friendships, and the general tenor of his conduct. . . . An affectionately tender husband—Ah, me! how shall I delineate this part of his character! Bound to me by the endearing ties of love and friendship, heightened by religious sympathy, his respect as well as affection, was apparent to our friends and acquaintance. (pp. 301-2)

This passage runs on for nearly two more pages. Her sudden shift to the third person supports the illusion that the narrator is an impartial observer, and her return to the first person underscores the intimacy she is describing.

After the death of her husband is a brief description of her brother’s death, and then the narrative breaks off abruptly, giving the impression that it was left unfinished. This autobiography is not a memorable production; there is a little meat and a lot of gristle.

m. Mary Alexander

Some Account of the Life and Religious Experience of Mary Alexander\(^{18}\) is an autobiography which is continued as memoirs compiled from her memoranda by her brother. The latter section continues on into the nineteenth century, but the brief autobiographical portion was written, as the author informs us, in 1798.

Mary Alexander (1760-1809) was a Quaker preacher, and her account of her life falls well within the tradition of Quaker autobiography. She was raised as a Quaker and was zealous in defense of her religion as a child:

At a very early age I believe my mind was, at times, visited with the heart-tendering power of the Lord; long before I knew what it was that contrited my spirit before him. This led me to feel a very great love for such as I esteemed good friends, and enabled me to plead their cause when I heard some speak slightly of them, on account of what were considered singularities. . . . When about 10 years of age, I rebuked a person, who was ridiculing one whom I believed to be a valuable woman; and the person’s answer to me was—“I make no doubt but you will be a preacher when you grow up.” I silently received what she said, and felt a secret reward, which enabled me to rejoice that I was permitted to bear my little portion of suffering for espousing the good cause. (p. 13)

She later becomes a little more lax, indulging “in many inclinations and propensities, which required to be slain by the sword of the Lord” (p. 140); eventually and inevitably, however, she is brought to the state of rigid piety which characterized devout Quakers of the period.

This document is neither detailed in its descriptions of events nor highly introspective. Its most interesting aspect, perhaps, is the insight it gives into the process by which the author summons and organizes her material. She begins by disclaiming any belief that her life will edify others; rather, she seems to feel that the act of writing will trigger other memories which will bolster her faith:

It is not with the smallest supposition that any thing I may have to commit to paper can be likely to yield either edification or consolation to those who survive me, that I am induced to attempt to write down some circumstances of my life hitherto: but I am led to it from a belief... that to look back and consider the merciful dealings of a gracious Creator, with one of the least in his spiritual family... and, as events may be brought afresh to my remembrance, to pen them, may tend to my own future satisfaction and instruction. (p. 12)

The process is exemplified in the following passage (which is also of interest for its derogation, very common in religious works of the latter half of the eighteenth century, of novel-reading):

At this time I was favoured to receive much comfort in reading the Holy Scriptures, which I often took up when alone, to my consolation and encouragement. Then, deeply did I lament that any of my precious time had been spent in perusing publications of an unprofitable tendency; such as plays and romances; and I was made sensible that nothing I had ever been in the practice of, had so much alienated my mind from the love and fear of God, or led me so far from the simplicity of the pure truth, as books of this kind. How often did I wish I could warn the whole world of their pernicious effects, and especially the young people in our society. Penning this remark brings to my remembrance, how, in an instant, I was entirely weaned from ever desiring again to look into a book of this description. It was by a few words expressed by a beloved friend, when I was reading to her one night after we got up stairs, and were retiring to bed. She queried with me, and I believe under divine influence, “Dear Mary, is such a subject likely to profit us upon our pillows?” The question so forcibly struck my mind, that I very willingly laid down the volume, and, to the best of my remembrance, I never more read a page in that, or any of the like kind. (pp. 16-17)

The haphazard, unpremeditated organization is not an accident but is rather deliberately cultivated, illustrating in humble way the emphasis on process, as distinguished from product, which Northrop Frye has perceived as a characteristic concern of the period.19

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The autobiography of Mary Darby Robinson (1758-1800), a promising actress, legendary beauty, and mistress of the Prince of Wales while in her early twenties, was written in 1800 and first published in 1801. If Mrs. Manley’s *Rivella* is fitting beginning to eighteenth century women’s autobiography, *Mrs. Mary Robinson, Written by Herself* is more than a fitting conclusion, for it brings together many of the various characteristics of autobiography which have been developing over the course of the century.

Although it was left unfinished at the author’s death in 1800 (the account was completed by her daughter), it is one of the most competently-written and consciously artistic of the works examined in the course of this study. The author was a minor novelist (as well as a minor poet), and her autobiography reveals her familiarity with the techniques of contemporary fiction. In *Rivella* the application of the novelistic techniques is relatively superficial; romance names and a romance aura are substituted on a one-on-one basis for real people and place, and a third-person narrative framework is provided to give the illusion of objectivity and conform with the practices of the *roman à clef*. Mary Darby Robinson has actually absorbed, in many respects, the myths underlying gothic and sentimental novels, and has incorporated them into her conception of herself. Her opening words conjure up visions of past glories and present ruins:

> At the period when the ancient city of Bristol was besieged by Fairfax’s army, the troops being stationed on a rising ground in the vicinity of the suburbs, a great part of the venerable minster was destroyed by the cannonading before Prince Rupert surrendered to the enemy; and the beautiful Gothic structure, which at this moment fills the contemplative mind with melancholy awe, was reduced to but little more than one-half of the original fabric. Adjoining to the consecrated hill, whose antique tower resists the ravages of time, once stood a monastery of monks of the order of St. Augustine. This building formed a part of the spacious boundaries which fell before the attacks of the enemy, and became a part of the ruin, which never was repaired or reraised to its former Gothic splendours. (p. 1)

In a house built on this site and incorporating part of the ruins into its structure, Mary Darby was born:

> In this awe-inspiring habitation, which I shall henceforth denominate the Minster House, during a tempestuous night, on the 27th of November, 1758, I first opened my eyes to this world of duplicity and sorrow. I have often heard my mother say that a more stormy hour she never remembered. The wind whistled round the dark pinnacles of the minster tower, and the rain beat in torrents against the casements of her

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chamber. Through life the tempest has followed my footsteps, and I have in vain looked for a short interval of repose from the perseverance of sorrow. (pp. 2-3)

Her personality is, fittingly, of a “most pensive and melancholy cast” (p. 7). Despite these Gothic touches, there is no reason to suspect that she actually parts company with truth and reality. Indeed, interspersed among these descriptions are a number of homely details; her brother George “is now a respectable merchant at Leghorn, in Tuscany” (p. 7), and her physical description of herself as a child is not at all high-flown: “I was swarthy; my eyes were singularly large in proportion to my face, which was small and round” (p. 7).

Her life was a brief one, and, as she frequently reminds us, not a happy one, despite intermittent periods of relative prosperity. During her early years her father was a successful merchant, and she was indulged and caressed by both her parents. When she was around nine, however, her father was seduced by a grandiose plan to make a fortune:

... a change took place as sudden as it was unfortunate, at a moment when every luxury, every happiness, not only brightened the present, but gave promise of future felicity. A scheme was suggested to my father, as wild and romantic as it was perilous to hazard, which was no less than that of establishing a whale fishery on the coast of Labrador, and of civilising the Esquimaux Indians, in order to employ them in the extensive undertaking. During two years this eccentric plan occupied his thoughts by day, his dreams by night: all the smiles of prosperity could not tranquilize the restless spirit, and while he anticipated an acquirement of fame, he little considered the perils that would attend his fortune. (p. 12)

He finally departed for two years, leaving his wife and children behind. At first their accustomed course of life was continued:

Still the comforts, and even the luxuries of life distinguished our habitations. The tenderness of my mother’s affection made her lavish of every elegance; and the darlings of her bosom were dressed, waited on, watched, and indulged with a degree of fondness bordering on folly. My clothes were sent for from London; my fancy was indulged to the extent of its caprices; I was flattered and praised into a belief that I was a being of superior order. To sing, to play a lesson on the harpsichord, to recite an elegy, and to make doggerel verses, made the extent of my occupations, while my person improved, and my mother’s indulgence was almost unexampled. (pp. 14-15)

Eventually, however, communications between the father and his family lapsed, and it was learned that the father had taken a mistress. The mother was prostrate with grief, and the family was plunged into a life of relative hardship and deprivation.
From then on, her father glides into their lives occasionally, issues a few orders, and glides out again. At one point the father lays the following “stern injunction” on her mother: “‘Take care that no dishonour falls upon my daughter. If she is not safe at my return, I will annihilate you!’” (p. 31). Her mother, not a strong-willed woman, is understandably frightened at this threat. Her daughter by now has become very lovely and has already attracted the honorable or less than honorable interest of various men. It is almost decided to try her acting talents, which have attracted the attention of the aging Garrick, upon the stage; but at the last minute her mother wavers and persuades her to enter what looks to be an advantageous marriage settlement. She is around sixteen on her wedding day:

As soon as the day of my wedding was fixed, it was deemed necessary that a total revolution should take place in my external appearance. I had till that period worn the habit of a child, and the dress of woman, so suddenly assumed, sat rather awkwardly upon me. Still, so juvenile was my appearance, that, even two years after my union with Mr. Robinson, I was always accosted with the appellation of “Miss” whenever I entered a shop or was in company with strangers. My manners were no less childish than my appearance; only three months before I became a wife I had dressed a doll, and such was my dislike to the idea of a matrimonial alliance that the only circumstance which induced me to marry was that of being still permitted to reside with my mother, and to live separated, at least for some time, from my husband. (p. 45)

Although she does not love her husband, she is determined to be an exemplary wife. Her husband is troubled by no such scruples. He neglects her and spends his time gaming and philandering, running his family badly into debt. Other men, however, are not so inattentive, and she is subjected to sophisticated and reprehensible attempts at seduction:

Lord Lyttelton, who was perhaps the most accomplished libertine that any age or country has produced, with considerable artifice inquired after Mr. Robinson, professed his earnest desire to cultivate his acquaintance, and, on the following day, sent him a card of invitation. Lyttelton was an adept in the artifices of fashionable intrigue. He plainly perceived that both Mr. Robinson and myself were uninitiated in its mysteries; he knew that to undermine a wife’s honour he must become master of the husband’s confidence, and Mr. Robinson was too much pleased with the society of a man whose wit was only equalled by his profligacy, to shrink from such an association.

Fortunately for me, Lord Lyttelton was uniformly my aversion. His manners were overbearingly insolent, his language licentious, and his person slovenly even to a degree that was disgusting. (pp. 66-67)

By another suitor she is even subjected to a kidnapping attempt, having been lured out on the promise of meeting her husband:
A servant opened a chaise door. There were four horses harnessed to it; and by the light of the lamps on the side of the footpath, I plainly perceived a pistol in the pocket of the door which was open. I drew back. Mr. Fitzgerald placed his arm around my waist, and endeavoured to lift me up the step of the chaise, the servant watching at a little distance. I resisted, and inquired what he meant by such conduct. His hand trembled excessively, while he said, in a low voice, “Robinson can but fight me.” I was terrified beyond all description. (pp. 82-83)

Her claim, however, is that she remained faithful to her husband until her liaison with the Prince of Wales—credible enough, actually in view of the lengths to which her devotion carries her, as we shall see.

The birth of her daughter is a happier experience:

At length the expected, though to me most perilous, moment arrived, which awoke a new and tender interest in my bosom, which presented to my fondly beating heart my child,—my Maria. I cannot describe the sensations of my soul at the moment when I pressed the little darling to my bosom, my maternal bosom; when I kissed its hands, its cheeks, its forehead, as it nestled closely to my heart, and seemed to claim that affection which has never failed to warm it. She was the most beautiful of infants! I thought myself the happiest of mothers; her first smile appeared like something celestial,—something ordained to irradiate my dark and dreary prospect of existence. (p. 95)

Through the conventional language of sensibility shines a genuine devotion which is reiterated throughout the narrative. Shortly thereafter, however, her husband is remanded to debtors’ prison. She chooses to accompany him, along with her daughter, living there with him until his release fifteen months later. A touching moment is Maria’s first word, which occurs as her mother is taking an evening stroll around the grounds of the prison:

It was during one of these night walks that my little daughter first blessed my ears with the articulation of words. The circumstance made a forcible and indelible impression on my mind. It was a clear moonlight evening; the infant was in the arms of her nursery-maid; she was dancing her up and down, and was playing with her; her eyes were fixed on the moon, to which she pointed with her small forefinger. On a sudden a cloud passed over it, and the child, with a slow falling of her hand, articulately sighed, “All gone!” This had been a customary expression with her maid, whenever the infant wanted anything which it was deemed prudent to withhold or to hide from her. These little nothings will appear insignificant to the common reader, but to the parent whose heart is ennobled by sensibility they will become matters of important interest. I can only add, that I walked till near midnight, watching every cloud that
passed over the moon, and as often, with a rapturous sensation, hearing my little prattler repeat her observation. (pp. 111-12)

This form of interest in the development of her child is something new in autobiography, exemplifying the growing recognition of childhood qua childhood that was occurring at this period in history.21

Around this time she begins to think of resuming her professional career in order to ease the family’s financial burdens. She publishes a little book of poems which enjoys indifferent success; then she goes onto the stage, with the approval of her husband, where she is an instant success. During a performance at court she attracts the attention of the Prince of Wales—at eighteen around three years her junior—who falls passionately in “love” with her. She enters into a correspondence with him but is reluctant to become his mistress, knowing the sacrifices she may be required to make:

During many months of confidential correspondence, I always offered his Royal Highness the best advice in my power; I disclaimed every sordid and interested thought; I recommended him to be patient till he should become his own master; to wait till he knew more of my mind and manners, before he engaged in a public attachment to me; and, above all, to do nothing that might incur the displeasure of his Royal Highness’s family. I entreated him to recollect that he was young, and led on my the impetuosity of passion; that should I consent to quit my profession and my husband, I should be thrown entirely on his mercy. I strongly pictured the temptations to which beauty would expose him; the many arts that would be practised to undermine me in his affections; the public abuse which calumny and envy would heap upon me; and the misery I should suffer, if, after I had given him every proof of confidence, he should change in his sentiments toward me. To all this I received repeated assurances of inviolable affection; and I most firmly believe that his Royal Highness meant what he professed--indeed, his soul was too ingenuous, his mind too liberal, and his heart too susceptible, to deceive premeditatedly, or to harbour even for a moment the idea of deliberate deception. (pp. 160-61)

Shortly after this point her narrative breaks off. To bring her story to its close, however, her fears were fully justified. After a couple of years living in royal splendor, her lover tires of her and pensions her off (under pressure) at five hundred pounds per annum. She contracts a rheumatoid disease and becomes progressively crippled. She bravely continues writing, turning out novels, poems, and her autobiography, and dies a disillusioned and unhappy woman in 1800.

The social forces that end to divide women and promote their dependence upon men, and the prejudices and traditions that underpin this model of social behavior, are very clearly illustrated in Mary Robinson’s autobiography. The need to compete with one

another for male attention necessarily causes a good deal of friction, and Mary Robinson evinces a considerable antipathy towards other women:

During my long seclusion from society, for I could not associate with those whom destiny had placed in a similar predicament, not one of my female friends even inquired what was become of me. Those who had been protected and received with the most cordial hospitality by me in my more happy hours now neglected all the kind condolence of sympathetic feeling, and shunned both me and my dreary habitation. From that hour I have never felt the affection for my own sex which perhaps some women feel; I have never taught my heart to cherish their friendship, or to depend on their attentions beyond the short perspective of a prosperous day. Indeed, I have almost uniformly found my own sex my most inveterate enemies; I have experienced little kindness from them, though my bosom has often ached with the pang inflicted by their envy, slander, and malevolence. (pp. 116-17)

From men, on the other hand, she is able to tolerate much abuse. We have already observed her generous judgment of the Prince of Wales’ motives. Her husband, too, is exculpated:

. . . I was never beloved by him whom destiny allotted to be the legal ruler of my actions. I do not condemn Mr. Robinson; I but too well know that we cannot command our affections. I only lament that he did not observe some decency in his infidelities; and that while he gratified his own caprice, he forgot how much he exposed his wife to the most degrading mortifications. (p. 133)

Her father’s behavior, objectively speaking, is despicable. Not only does he desert his family; he also undermines any attempt the mother may make to secure her position independently. Mary Robinson lauds her father’s pride, for example, when he forces her mother to relinquish the little school she has established:

The number of my mother’s pupils in a few months amounted to ten or twelve, and just at a period when an honourable independence promised to cheer the days of an unexampled parent, my father unexpectedly returned from America. The pride of his soul was deeply wounded by the step which my mother had taken; he was offended even beyond the bounds of reason: he considered his name as disgraced, his conjugal reputation tarnished, by the public mode which his wife had adopted of revealing to the world her unprotected situation. A prouder heart never palpitated in the breast of man than that of my father. . . . (p. 28)
Her general opinion of her father’s rectitude, which she repeats a number of times, is most clearly sated in the following passage:

This deviation from domestic faith was the only dark shade that marked my father’s character. He possessed a soul brave, liberal, enlightened, and ingenuous. He felt the impropriety of his conduct. Yet, though his mind was strongly organised, though his understanding was capacious, and his sense of honour delicate even to fastidiousness, he was still the dupe of his passions, the victim of an unfortunate attachment. (pp. 20-21)

Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to speculate that her complete acceptance of a double standard of behavior, which holds women responsible for peccadilloes but excuses men for major lapses on the grounds of “impetuosity of passion,” constituted the basis for Mary Robinson’s tragedy.

2. Patterns in Women’s Autobiography: 1750-1800

The second half of the eighteenth century, as we have seen, confirms some of the new trends established in the earlier part of the century. Quaker autobiography continues to be written in significant numbers, though by now the form has become so convention-bound that the content seems highly diluted. Some Quaker works of the period, such as that of Margaret Lucas, are charming and well-written; but none are surprising and most are fairly pedestrian. The work of Hester Ann Rogers represents the influence of Methodism on women’s autobiography; but this influence can in no way be compared to that of the Quakers.

Secular works continue to predominate, and almost all were written for publication and under pressure of need. No longer are the secular works clustered within a few years of one another, as they were in the seventeenth century; rather they are scattered throughout the century. Even more tenaciously than in the beginning of the century, the authors of this period draw their material from love and its variations of intrigue and ambivalence or hostility towards men; indeed, with the partial exception of Ann Wall, it is difficult to think of an exception to this generalization. The handling of this theme by women autobiographers has grown increasingly sophisticated—not coincidentally paralleling the publication of Pamela and the subsequent appearance of the great eighteenth century novels. The catalytic function of the novel in the formation of women’s evolving idea of themselves as evinced in their autobiographies can hardly be overestimated. This influence can be traced in the increasing intricacy of self-analysis and in the growing impact of the cult of sensibility. Another development which deserves particular mention is the sudden début of several theatrical figures as autobiographers.

The autobiographies written in the eighteenth century, taken as a group, are radically different from—and much more diversified than—those of the seventeenth century. Religious autobiography has lost a lot of its freshness and originality. And gone are the simple and touching accounts of domestic trial and devotion produced in the
privacy of their closets by aristocratic wives. Here instead are Elizabeth Elstob, austerely pursuing her scholarly studies; Sarah Churchill, staunchly defending her conduct of the political affairs of the nation; Charlotte Charke, sitting in her dreary quarters with a broken set of bellows in her lap to serve as a writing desk, negotiating with a publisher for the latest installment of her *Narrative*; and Mary Robinson, abandoning her acting career to become a mistress of the Prince of Wales. What has happened in the space of just a few years to cause such a striking shift in the nature of the autobiographical writings of women? In chapter VI, I shall attempt to isolate some of the developments underlying these changes.
VI. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Women's autobiography, as we have seen, became much more diverse and more self-consciously artful in the eighteenth century, and in some ways more mature, than it had been in the seventeenth century. Its social base broadened considerably. Many of the elements discussed in Chapter III remain important as factors in the growth of autobiography; but as autobiography itself becomes more complex, so too do the various social and literary developments by which it is affected. To pinpoint all of them would require a book, if indeed it could be done at all. Following my practice in Chapter III, I shall attempt only to isolate some of the more striking of the factors which shaped and influenced the growth of women's autobiography over the course of the eighteenth century.

1. The Religious Climate

Religion plays a less conspicuous part in the history of eighteenth century women's autobiography than it does in that of the seventeenth century. Secular autobiography no longer required justification—with the result that the century saw the production of a widely varied group of works whose authors made little or no reference to their religious beliefs. In the seventeenth century, even the authors whom we have considered as primarily secular make their religious commitment clear; in the eighteenth century, many authors tell us next to nothing about their spiritual lives. We cannot infer from this omission that they were lacking in religious devotion, but we can at least conclude that they regarded it as a less memorable aspect of their lives than did their seventeenth century counterparts. Some authors, such as Elizabeth Thonlas and the Countess of Strathmore, did indeed give some attention to the formation of their religious beliefs during their youth, but there is little indication of how these beliefs were manifested in their later lives. That is not to say that the tradition of religious autobiography did not thrive along side the development of secular autobiography. Religious autobiographies obviously continued to be written, but they formed a smaller proportion of the total.

Of the religious autobiographies that were written, the writings of Quakers continue to form the majority. The Quakers had grown phenomenally, so that by 1700 they were the largest by far of the sects dissenting from the Church of England. Quakerism itself had also undergone some changes. It had become increasingly conservative; “[e]ven before 1725,” writes Luella M. Wright, “the early aggressiveness of the Quakers had shifted to a quietistic view of the place of religion in life.” No longer do we find records of massive disruptions of Anglican services. Quakerism had also gained a measure of respectability. Gone, for the most part, are the scarifying persecutions described by Elizabeth Andrews and Elizabeth Stirridge. As early as 1712,

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2 Ibid., p. 1.
Elizabeth Webb, an obscure Quaker preacher, was corresponding with the august chaplain of the consort of Queen Anne.

By now, too, the form of Quaker autobiography has become so standardized that there is little room for innovation (Elizabeth Ashbridge, as we have seen, is a partial exception). To some extent, such formulizing follows inevitably from the assumptions underlying the genre; as Luella Wright remarks:

These confessions are unmistakably dominated by a prevailing consciousness of the group mind. The dominance of the Society intervenes between the personality of the writer and the mind of the reader. The Quaker memorandist constantly played a double rôle. As an individual, recounting the events of his life, he stressed those that duplicated the experiences of others within the group; as spokesman for the Society, he subordinated personal episodes in his own life to those shared by the group.3

Quaker autobiography at first seemed precocious in its self-analysis; by the eighteenth century, the fresh psychological insights are to be found largely in secular works.

The issue of women’s preaching is no longer such a shocking one. Boswell in 1763 still finds it worthy of note, eliciting the notorious Johnsonian reply: “Sir, a woman’s preaching is like a dog’s walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all.”4 It is around this time that Margaret Lucas writes of her initial aversion to women’s preaching. But we no longer find women debating with their detractors as Elizabeth Stirredge and Joan Vokins had a century before. For the most part the Quaker women preachers go about their business matter-of-factly.

Other sects, too, produced a small body of autobiographical writings. A little group of Scottish Covenanters are represented by Marion Fairly Veitch and Elizabeth Cairns. Later in the century, the Methodists turned out a number of autobiographies. Stauffer writes,

What the Quakers accomplished during the first half of the century, the Methodists carried on during the second half, largely through a single act of John Wesley. “Mr. Wesley,” writes Thomas Jackson, “requested many of the Itinerant Preachers who were employed under his sanction to give him in writing an account of their personal history, including a record of their conversion to God, of the circumstances under which they were led to minister the word of life, and the principal events connected with their public labours. . . .”5

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3 Ibid., p. 11.
Unlike the Quakers, however, Methodist itinerant preachers were almost exclusively male, so women were not materially affected by Wesley’s request. It is Hester Ann Roger’s husband, and not she herself, who is a minister; she faithfully accompanies him on his evangelizing travels in accordance with the more traditional patter.

The process of sectarian diversification which had begun in the seventeenth century continued into the eighteenth century. Moreover, the sects tended, as we have seen with the Quakers, to become more institutionalized as they grew and matured; that is to say, religious diversity acquired a quasi-official sanction as various sects become almost a sub-stratum of the establishment. This process is in keeping with the general trend towards broadening the social base which characterized many aspects of English life in the eighteenth century. The expansion of the sects, and their concomitant growth of respectability, tended to break down still further the monolithic influence of Christianity as expressed through the Church of England; its dicta could no longer be received as unchallenged authority. While it would be difficult if not impossible to trace any direct relationship between these developments and specific autobiography, it seems likely that such occurrences as the Quaker insistence on women’s preaching contributed to a re-examination of the traditional interpretation of Pauline pronouncements and, in a more general way, to a questioning of the ageless assumption of female inferiority. This questioning was not yet extensively articulated or translated into action, but it did promote a clearer recognition of the double standard and certain traditional inequities in male-female relationships.

Another force which held considerable sway in the first half of the eighteenth century, to the detriment of traditional religion, was the deistic “heresy.” Deism held in essence that the existence of God and his commands could be naturally recognized by man (as, for example, natives of parts of the world which had never been exposed to Christianity). This doctrine was articulated as early as 1624 by Lord Herbert of Cherbury, and later espoused by Bolingbroke and by Pope in his Essay on Man. But by the end of the seventeenth century writers such as John Toland in Christianity not Mysterious (1696) and later Matthew Tindal in Christianity as Old as Creation (1730) began to flirt with the radical idea that scripture, revelation, and ultimately institutionalized religion were unnecessary. Such ideas were naturally rejected firmly by orthodox theologians and did not gain many thorough-going adherents; but the fact that they were in the air and voiced in some form by a writer such as Pope (who was hardly trying to set up as an apostle of dissent) suggests that the tenets of revealed religion (including subordination of women) were in a small way being undermined during the general intellectual ferment of the period.

2. The Political and Economic Situation

There was no single event in the political sphere in the eighteenth century which had the far-ranging impact of the two great upheavals of the seventeenth century, the Civil Wars and the Glorious Revolution. These events had become history; and more than just history, they formed the mythical underpinnings for the increasing democratization that characterized the period. Gerald M. Straka has written that the
“eighteenth century Englishman believed in the reigning House of Hanover because it acted as guarantor of the Settlement; the Settlement, conversely, was the guarantee of Protestant religious freedom, the regularization of parliamentary sittings, and due process.” Hume wrote as follows of the years that followed 1688:

Public liberty, with internal peace and order, has flourished almost without interruption: Trade and manufactures, and agriculture, have increased: The arts, and sciences, and philosophy, have been cultivated. Even religious parties have been necessitated to lay aside their mutual rancour. . . So long and so glorious a period no nation almost can boast of: Nor is there another instance in the whole of mankind, that so many millions of people have, during such a space of time, been held together, in a manner so free, so rational, and so suitable to the dignity of human nature.7

This is ideological rhetoric, not history, but it suggests the extent to which events of the seventeenth century have caused succeeding generations to articulate the idea of governmental accountability to the people.

But probably the real forces that shaped the lives of English people in the eighteenth century were economic. It was in this century that the foundations of the modern British state were laid; the eighteenth century saw the establishment of modern party politics, the emergence of Britain from the isolationism to internationalism, the change in economic policy from mercantilism to laissez-faire capitalism, the growth of the British empire, and the start of the industrial revolution.

For the most part, women’s participation in these processes was indirect. Among the autobiographers we have been discussing, only Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, can be said to have played anything approaching an active role in policy-making. But the life patterns of English women were radically affected by the changes in social and economic conditions, and many of the new features of women’s autobiography of the period are linked with these developments.

To explain the changes which took place in the condition of women over the course of the eighteenth century, it is necessary to say a few words about the economic situation in general. It has been estimated that the population of England in 1714 was around 5.5 million, and that this figure increased slowly during the first half of the century.8 After 1780, the population began to increase very rapidly;9 the first national census, taken in 1801, showed a population in excess of nine million and laid to rest once and for all widespread fears that England was becoming depopulated.10 The reasons for the increase included immigration from Ireland,11 improved hygienic methods in the

7 Quoted in Straka, op. cit., p. 146.
10 Plumb, op. cit., p. 144.
11 Ibid., p. 11.
cities (for example, the partial covering over of Fleet Ditch, an open sewer in London, in 1737\textsuperscript{12}), and lowered infant and child mortality rates resulting from obstetrical advances and the establishment of lying-in hospitals and orphanages.\textsuperscript{13}

The distribution of the population also underwent a radical change over the course of the century, from country to city and from South to North. At the beginning of the century the population of England was largely rural; such towns as existed were concentrated on the coast.\textsuperscript{14} London, even at the beginning of the century, had truly become a capital city; its growth had greatly exceeded, for example, that of Paris,\textsuperscript{15} and in 1801 it accounted for roughly ten percent of the population of England.\textsuperscript{16} But the eighteenth century saw a population boom in such towns as Bristol, Manchester, Sheffield, and Birmingham\textsuperscript{17} in response to the enticements and demands of increasing industrialization.

The mushrooming of the cities caused inevitable growing pains. Despite improvements in sanitation and the introduction of street lights, city life was difficult and dangerous. Crime and disease were rife, and alcoholism was a serious problem. The inhabitants were usually from somewhere else; they lacked the roots that traditionally supported village dwellers and the inherited sense of where they fit into the picture. But this rootlessness could be a blessing as well as a curse. The Cities permitted greater social mobility and offered much more diverse economic opportunities than were possible in a rural setting; many successful entrepreneurs--Watt, Wedgwood, Arkwright, and Peel, to name a few--rose from the lower middle classes.\textsuperscript{18} Rural life, though more stable, also underwent changes. There was an increasing consolidation of power and wealth in the hands of a few. According to Plumb:

From the end of the seventeenth century, possibly since the Civil War, there had been a tendency for estates to grow larger, and this was beginning, by the early eighteenth century, to affect the nature of rural society. By prudent marriages and careful purchases, some of the aristocratic families of the seventeenth century amassed estates which made them far richer than many of the sovereign powers of Germany. . . . This made them a class apart from the small squire. The distinction was further underlined by the way of life which these agrarian millionaires designed for themselves. The point of pride was the rural palace. There was no modesty felt about the ostentation of wealth.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{13} Plumb, op. cit., p. 78.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 11
\textsuperscript{16} Marshall, op. cit., p. 24.
\textsuperscript{17} Plumb, op. cit., p. 11.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 78.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 18.
Advances in breeding of livestock and improved agricultural practices (crop rotation, for example) made farming more efficient and profitable. The rapid acceleration in the enclosure of common lands stimulated this sort of innovation, since it permitted controlled experimentation; but since enclosure required a considerable financial outlay, many yeoman farmers were squeezed out and either went to the workhouse or flocked to the cities.

All these changes added up to the birth of a capitalistic economy. The population growth, to quote Plumb, “increased the home market, provided more labour, and swelled the growing, man-eating towns.” Agricultural improvements lowered the price of food and enabled the country to feed the cities. Industrialization allowed the production of “cheap goods for a mass market,” says the French historian F. Crouzet, noting that “A. H. John has pointed out that this permanently affected the level of consumption in most classes and even aroused an appetite for mass consumption.” Property was virtually sacrosanct; a child could be hanged, and often was, for pilfering a handkerchief. Marriage yielded increasingly to economic demands; Ian Watt remarks that:

There is much evidence to suggest that marriage became a much more commercial matter in the eighteenth century than had previously been the case. Newspapers carried on marriage marts, with advertisements offering of demanding specified dowries and jointures; and young girls were driven into flagrantly unsuitable marriages on grounds of economic advantage...

An important development of this period, which was undoubtedly stimulated to some extent by the needs of the industrial society, was the growth of literacy. Plumb states that:

Although higher education decayed, primary education improved immensely through the charity school movement. This began in the latter years of the seventeenth century. At first, the schools were run largely by Dissenters, and then by mixed bodies of Anglicans and Dissenters, who were also associated together in the three other societies concerned with moral education—the Society for Propagation of Christian Knowledge, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, and the Society for the Reformation of Manners. However, by the reign of George I the charity school movement was dominated by High Anglican Tories, some said by Jacobites. It provided educations for the artisans’ and small

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20 Ibid., p. 82.
21 Ibid., p. 78.
22 Crouzet, op. cit., p. 164.
23 Ibid., p. 162.
shopkeepers’ children. In the expanding world of commerce there was an ever-increasing demand for clerks, and these schools provided them.²⁵

Not that there was anything approaching universal literacy, even as we know it today, but the great increase in the number of printing presses in London²⁶ and in the number of provincial newspapers during the early part of the century²⁷ suggest the expansion of the reading public. The demand for printed matter created a need for writers, and many literary hacks were able to support themselves through their efforts. (It is this drawing of literature into the capitalistic economy, with its inevitable subjection of values to popular taste, which Pope protests in *The Dunciad*; though ironically it also enabled good writers, like Pope, to support themselves.)

The nineteenth century myth that the eighteenth century was one of history’s peaceful backwaters has long since been discredited by responsible historians. There was a great deal of popular unrest over the course of the century, and during the last quarter of the century much of Europe and America was shaken by revolution. In 1780, the discontent of the poor was expressed in the Gordon Riots, when London was in the hands of an unruly mob for several days before order could be restored. Even among citizens of unquestioned loyalty, dissent from government policy became a respectable position. The reasons for this ferment are complex, but the grim working conditions in the factories, the relative rootlessness of the city-dwellers, the visible disparities in wealth, the influx of foreign ideas as a result of trade, and the rapid and unsettling changes in social circumstances must all have played a part. The American revolution and subsequent loss of the colonies had raised the issue of freedom as a right and had deeply divided the nation; the French revolution, though it didn’t threaten the British Empire in the way that the American revolution had, brought to prominence even more basic questions regarding the rights of individuals and governmental accountability.

All of these phenomena had a profound effect upon women. Marriage remained, as it had been, the principal respectable option for women. Indeed, certain traditional alternatives were becoming more restricted. Midwifery, a traditional women’s occupation, was being taken over by men. Unmarried women, once at least an economic asset to a household, were no longer needed for spinning, weaving, and similar tasks, since these industries were moving into factories; Old Maids became figures of scorn and were frequently caricatured in eighteenth century literature. So more than ever, it was incumbent upon women to marry well; indeed, it was a matter of economic necessity. T. C. Phillips’ endless lawsuit to preserve her marriage long after love and respect have evaporated testifies to the importance of matrimony both for economic and for social reasons.

But at the same time, various forces conspired to make it more difficult for a woman to make a satisfactory marriage. For one thing, economic pressures tended increasingly to make financial considerations rather than the happiness and compatibility of the partners the criteria for suitability. Thus we see Mrs. Delany married at seventeen to a man she despises and who is nearly three times her age; Lady Vane’s disastrous

²⁵ Plumb, op. cit., p. 31.
²⁶ Watt, op. cit., p. 37.
²⁷ Plumb, op. cit., p. 30.
second marriage is dictated by financial matters; Mary Robinson allows herself to be tricked into a loveless marriage by Mr. Robinson’s false claims to wealth. Moreover, it was a man’s market. The 1801 census revealed a surplus of women in England which had probably existed throughout the century. A character in Steele’s Tender Husband suggest that the war has devalued women:

SIR HARRY: Ay, but Brother, you rate her too high, the War has fetched down the Price of Women: The whole Nation is overrun with Petticoats; our Daughters lie upon our Hands, Brother Tipkin; Girls are Drugs, Sir, mere Drugs.28

Then too, men were evidently marrying later, and the opprobrium attached to spinsterhood did not apply to bachelors. Furthermore, as Utter and Needham point out in Pamela’s Daughters, a woman in the home had become more of a luxury than a necessity:

Under the domestic system of industry a wife was no less an economic asset to a man than a husband was to a woman. They bore practically equal shares in the economic burden of the family. They worked together as a unit, the wife not only performing the household tasks, but working with the man in whatever industry was his. Thus it was less often a question of whether a man could afford to marry than whether he could afford not to. But by the beginning of the eighteenth century the capitalistic organization of industry on an individual basis had advanced so far as to free men from much of their economic dependence on their wives, and woman’s economic value was lessened.29

Above the level of the servant class women were not educated to perform useful tasks like cooking; even gardening was considered a man’s job—Charlotte Charke, when she took it up, considered it an unusual and masculine pursuit for a woman. Instead, women were expected to acquire accomplishments, such as music, and decorative skills, such as needlecraft. Since their idleness and uselessness were an advertisement for their husbands’ affluence, women were actually encouraged to cultivate weakness. Burke warned that an “air of robustness and strength is very prejudicial to beauty. An appearance of Delicacy, and even fragility, is almost essential to it.” He added that the “beauty of women is considerably owing to this weakness, and is even enhanced by their timidity.”30 A good many women probably undermined their health in their efforts not to appear too athletic or robust.

The one thing women did remain useful for was continuation of the species—or, on a more personal level, production of heirs to the wealth and prestige that a man might amass. Hence Samuel Johnson’s argument for the double standard of morality:

29 Utter and Needham, op. cit., pp. 21-22.
Confusion of progeny constitutes the essence of the crime; and therefore a woman who breaks her marriage vows is much more criminal than a man who does it. A man, to be sure, is criminal in the sight of GOD: but he does not do his wife a very material injury, if he does not insult her; if, for instance from mere wantonness of appetite, he steals privately to her chambermaid. Sir, a wife ought not greatly to resent this. I would not receive home a daughter who had run away from her husband on that account. A wife should study to reclaim her husband by more attention to please him. Sir, a man will not, once in a hundred instance, leave his wife and go to a harlot, if his wife has not been negligent of pleasing.31

In her quest for a husband, a woman’s positive skills were of little market value; she was not expected to perform much in the way of useful work, and superiority of intelligence was as threatening and frightening to men as it had always been. Only the passive attributes of virginity, wealth, and comeliness counted for anything. And a lapse from virtue, even once, even before marriage, could never be retrieved; when Boswell asked Johnson if this judgment wasn’t a little severe, Johnson retorted:

Why no, Sir; it is the great principle which she is taught. When she has given up that principle, she has given up every notion of female honour and virtue, which are all included in chastity.32

Boswell, no feminist, was simply playing devil’s advocate; it would be difficult to find a man who did not equate premarital chastity with female virtue. Most women, of course, accepted the traditional formulation as well. But some, like T. C. Phillips and George Anne Bellamy, had the courage and originality to interrogate their own experience and protest the social code whereby a man is exonerated for promiscuity even if he is married and woman is damned for yielding once to a seducer--or for being raped--even if she is unmarried.

The marriages in seventeenth century secular autobiography by women and those in the eighteenth century are a study in contrasts. The latter are as studded with unhappiness and boredom as the former with love and devotion. To some extent this may reflect a difference in the social strata from which the authors came; yet at least some of the authors--Delarivière Manley, Laetitia Pilkington, and T. C. Phillips, for example--seem to have started out genteelly enough and slid down the social scale only later, when they had failed to consolidate their positions by successful marriages. This difference will be discussed in greater detail in chapter VII; but given the obstacles to a union based on love and supported by the contributions of both partners, it is hardly surprising that the possibilities for extracting satisfaction from marriage have deteriorated considerably.

What happened to the women who were not able to gain social and economic security through marriage and who in one way or another lost their gentility and respectability? Many of the autobiographers gravitated to London and in some fashion

31 Boswell, op. cit., II, 63-64.
32 Ibid., II, 64.
capitalized on their own downfalls. The existence of a sizable reading public with a taste for mémoires scandaleuses actually enabled several to support themselves, at least in part, as authors. Manley, Thomas, Pilkington, Phillips, and Gooch wrote poetry or novels as well, and though they suffered many indignities were at least spared the necessity of turning common prostitutes. Since the Restoration, women had been allowed to take female roles on the stage, and theatre attendance grew steadily over the course of the century; so several women, like Bellamy and Gooch, turned to the stage. Mary Robinson tried both of these alternatives with considerable éclat. Some, too, like Elizabeth Elstob and Mary Robinson, responded to increased demands for lower education and were able to support themselves for a time by teaching children. Thus, the economic revolution, while cutting off many of the old options, did at least create a few new opportunities which while not considered desirable at least allowed women to live by their wits or talents rather than their bodies; many of the secular autobiographies of the period, indeed, are the sustenance as well as the record of their authors’ lives. Indeed, some of the new characteristics of eighteenth century autobiography—the scandals, the sensationalism, the unhappiness—are undoubtedly a result of the operation of the market economy upon autobiographical writing; audience demands were greater and very different than they had been for the seventeenth century autobiographers. These new sources of income, however, were very unreliable and did not often obviate completely the necessity or temptation to make capital of their bodies. Phillips, Gooch, Bellamy, and Robinson all became professional mistresses, throwing themselves under the “protection” of a succession of wealthy men. Even so, several authors were no strangers to the inside of a debtor’s prison, and a couple engaged in more or less criminal activities; Elizabeth Thomas, it will be remembered, stole some letters of Pope for surreptitious publication. On the whole, the eighteenth century cannot have been an easy time for a human being who had the misfortune to have been born female in England.

But the foundations for a theoretical rejection for the oppression of women were being laid in the democratic ideals which were being asserted in the American and French revolutions. For a concern with the Rights of Man raises implicitly the issue of the Rights of Woman; and though most of the defenders of the former did not have the latter in mind at all, it is hardly surprising that the connection should occur to at least a few of those most directly concerned (i.e., women).

3. Philosophical Tendencies

The philosophical tendencies of the eighteenth century are not easy to generalize about. Many ideas, vaguely interrelated but often confusing and even contradictory, were in the air as thinkers attempted to grasp, explain, respond to, or criticize the social upheavals which marked the period. A number of these issues implicitly raised questions about the status of women, although this was often not the original intention of those who formulated the ideas. Especially in the latter part of the century, many ideas surfaced which profoundly affected the way men thought about themselves, and the way women thought about them.
Arthur O. Lovejoy has devoted a whole book to the *Great Chain of Being*, a view of the world which was very pervasive in the early part of the century. Stated simply, this view held that there was an immutable hierarchy extending continuously from God to nothingness; it professed to resolve the problem of evil in the world by asserting that what seemed like evil to one member of the chain was ultimately for the good of the chain as a whole. Pope stated this view most succinctly in his *Essay on Man*, which we should remember was one of the firmest foundations of his reputation in his own time:

> All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;  
> All Chance, Direction, which thou canst not see;  
> All Discord, Harmony, not understood;  
> All partial Evil, universal Good:  
> And, spite of Pride, in erring Reason’s spite,  
> One truth is clear, “Whatever IS, is RIGHT.”

This doctrine, which Basil Willey has called “cosmic Toryism,”\(^{34}\) in effect sanctifies subordination as a principle of existence and insists that power remain concentrated wherever it is already found. As Willey remarks, “It was in essence an apologia for the status quo.”\(^{35}\)

The economic developments which we have been discussing were clearly antithetic to this philosophy, since they tended by their very nature to break down the traditional hierarchical structure and substitute a more immediate economic one; a poor man need not—and if he is to be economically productive, should not—resign himself to a life of deprivation simply because he is born to poverty. By the middle of the century, “Whatever IS, is RIGHT” was an idea whose time had passed. When Soame Jenyns attempted another popularization of it in 1757, he drew forth a heated reply from Samuel Johnson, who refuted point by point the whole argument and in particular rejected the notion that the poor should be kept in ignorance, “the only opiate,” Jenyns felt, “capable of infusing that insensibility which can enable them to endure the miseries”\(^{36}\) of destitution and drudgery. Johnson was neither a feminist nor a radical democrat; he saw subordination as a perquisite for an orderly society but rejected it as divinely ordained justification for perpetuating misery and extreme deprivation. His review of Jenyns’ work suggests that the Chain of Being was no longer tenable as a *Weltanschauung*. The breakdown of this doctrine allowed for a greater elasticity in thinking about traditional role assignments of all sectors of society, including those of men and women.

While the essentially conservative ideas embodied in the Great Chain of Being became less influential, some more democratic ideas gained ground over the course of the century. The idea that man was endowed with certain inalienable, “natural” rights had

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\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 48.

held a place in the mainstream of English philosophical thought at least since Locke, but the controversies aroused by the American and French revolutions spurred a more practical application of these ideas. The fervency of the opposition to them is a measure of their threat to the established order; for, as I pointed out above, once a notion of the "natural rights of man" has been lodged in a nation's collective mind, the question of the natural rights of oppressed groups within society will inevitably be raised sooner or later in some form. Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*--the title itself is suggestive--stemmed indirectly from conversations on the subject of the French revolution with Thomas Paine, William Godwin, Joseph Priestley, Henry Fuseli, and other radicals; it was written only a year after her *Vindication of the Rights of Man*, which was an attempt to answer Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, a masterly statement of the conservative position. This is not to say, of course, that feminism and political radicalism necessarily go hand in hand; even in France, many of the most ardent supporters of a democratization of society resisted the idea of equality for women. Condorcet advocated suffrage and equal education for women and opposed other forms of social inequity; but others, like Rousseau (whom Mary Wollstonecraft refutes at great length) justified subordination by a kind of argument which today would be summed up as "biology is destiny."

A related idea, that of man's innate original goodness, was expressed in various guises over the course of the century: the noble savage, the Golden Age, the state of nature. (Hobbes and others, to be sure, had a considerably less exalted notion of the state of nature.) This idea, not altogether consistently, is also found in the *Essay on Man*:

The state of Nature was the reign of God:
Self-love and Social at her birth began,
Union the bond of all things, and of Man.
Pride then was not; nor Arts, that Pride to aid;
Man walk'd with beast, joint tenant of the shade;
The same his table, and the same his bed:
No murder cloath'd him, and no murder fed.
In the same temple, the resounding wood,
All vocal beings hymn'd their equal God:
The shrine with gore unstain'd, with gold undrest,
Heav'n's attribute was Universal Care,
And Man's prerogative to rule, but spare.
Ah! how unlike the man of times to come!\(^{37}\)

Children, too, were sometimes depicted as creatures of nature, unspoiled by civilization. Rousseau's glorification of children was an aspect of his thought which Mary Wollstonecraft much admired. This primitivism, as it is generally called, tended by implication to promote the dignity of women, since it glorified the natural responses and put a greater value on accomplishments which were not the result of superior education.

It would be difficult to ascribe specific developments in women’s autobiography to these currents, but taken together they probably produced a philosophical climate which enabled the form to thrive. The very fact that there exists a body of secular autobiographies by women without independent means stands as a kind of assertion of their authors’ dignity. A new sense of self-worth surely underlay the questioning of the double standard, the anger at men, and the resentment of cruel treatment which run in and out of such works as those of Pilkington, T. C. Phillips, Jemmat, Bellamy, Gooch, and Robinson; unlike Anne Clifford more than a century before, they will not gloss over marital strains and ruptures. And the increased appreciation of children, combined no doubt with a somewhat lowered infant mortality rate, probably encouraged a new attitude towards children which is starting to become evident in the later eighteenth century autobiographies. One work, that of Ann Wall, is actually devoted entirely to the author’s childhood, a circumstance unheard of in seventeenth century works by women. Mary Robinson gives us a touching picture of her child uttering her first words. George Anne Bellamy distinguishes between the characters of her two sons. For most women, however, their attitude towards their children remains casual; we only learn of the existence of T. C. Phillips’ child (she does not mention its sex) and its death at the age of eleven when she includes its care and funeral costs in her list of expenditures incurred by her lover Tartuffe.

But the philosophical tendencies which most directly and immediately influenced the way in which women perceived themselves were what are variously known as benevolism, philanthropy, sentimentalism, sensibility, or sensibilité. The impact of sensibility on women came largely through the novel, but it had its roots in philosophical thought reaching back through Shaftesbury’s Characteristicks, in which he praised “enthusiasm” over rationality and equated emotional indulgence with “following nature,” to the Latitudinarian divines of the period from 1660 to 1725. R. S. Crane, in “The Genealogy of the ‘Man of Feeling’,” has outlined their tenets under four headings: (1) “Virtue as universal benevolence”—advocating a kind of practical Christianity which saw the locus of faith as love of God and a universal charity towards man rather than in particular adherence to particular doctrines and forms of worship; (2) “Benevolence as feeling”—opposing the chilly rationality of the Stoics and enjoining pity and tenderheartedness as the marks of a good Christian; (3) “Benevolent feelings as ‘natural’ to man”—rejecting the Puritan notion of natural depravity and the Hobbesian picture of man as an egotistical creature whose natural passions are selfish and anti-social; and (4) the “Self-approving joy”—maintaining that benevolent feelings are pleasurable and that even the sorrow that comes of pitying another’s distresses can be pleasurable.38

A number of fairly succinct expressions of sensibility as it had developed by the middle of the eighteenth century can be found in the autobiographical writings of women of the period. George Anne Bellamy provides a number of examples, some of which were quoted in chapter V; another is the following passage, when her ex-husband has an opportunity to relieve a poor woman’s distress:

Oh how I envied Sir George his feelings upon this occasion! For the exquisite sensation such a benevolent act must excite in a susceptible mind is truly enviable.—Though envy is a vice, with which, thank Heaven, I am totally unacquainted, yet I never hear of the performance of a generous action, but a wish instantly arises in my breast, that I had been the happy person who possessed the power with the inclination to perform it. . . . To light up the face of distress into gladness, and to pour the blame of comfort into the wounded mind, is the truest felicity the human heart is capable of feeling. 39

Bellamy, Gooch, Robinson, and Lamenther were profoundly affected by the cult of sensibility, as, to a lesser extent, were the earlier authors Jemmat, Pilkington, and T. C. Phillips. A related development is the interest in scenery, picturesque or sublime, and its power to stir powerful emotions. This interest is manifested most clearly in Gooch and Robinson.

When carried to extremes, as it often was, an indulgence in sensibility can be absurd and even nauseating. Mrs. Gooch, for example, seems to select for misery and pass over briefly periods of her life which were relatively comfortable almost as though it were disreputable or unfeeling to be happy. And her reiterated assertion that her faults proceeded not from a “depraved mind” but “the want of a friend” tends to suggest a kind of amoral determinism in which she abdicates all responsibility for her own actions. She takes such pleasure in wallowing in misery that she seems to become wrapped up in the compositional aspects of the picture she is painting, as in the following description of her mother and her stepfather’s mother upon her stepfather’s death:

On her arrival she [her mother] sent for me, and our meeting was truly affecting: the affliction she was in, (for she had sincerely loved Mr. Hutchinson [her stepfather]) the dismal dress she wore, the grief of the old lady for her son, and the melancholy appearance of us all, made up a sad picture of human woe, the most calamitous where it is the least expected. 40

Worst of all, her sensibility seems to deprive her of every facility for coping with the real world, for she is constantly trusting people who dupe, betray, and steal from her. But despite the unattractiveness of sensibility at its whining worst, it did provide a good corrective for certain aspects of traditional ideology, for it encouraged women to forgive themselves for their own faults and to concentrate upon their own emotions and feelings rather than simply pleasing others.

4. Literary Developments

39 George Anne Bellamy, An Apology for the Life of George Anne Bellamy, Late of Covent-Garden Theatre. Written by Herself (London: J. Bell, 1785), VI, 78.
“Significantly enough,” writes John Tinnon Taylor, “the new novel and the new reading public grew up together.” He might have included autobiography in this analysis as well. Like the novel, the autobiography changed and was changed by the expanding reading public. Moreover, the interaction between novel and autobiography during this formative period is a significant aspect of the history of both genres. Donald A. Stauffer writes (of biography, in which category he includes autobiography):

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the rise of the novel radically altered the art of English biography. Conversely, the established biographical tradition affected the development of the novel to an extent not yet fully realized. During this period, neither form can be fully understood without the other.

To understand the relationship of the novel to women’s autobiography and the implications for women’s autobiography of the expansion of the reading public, it will be useful to go back a step and trace briefly the development of women’s reading habits during the period. The increasing sex role specializations fostered by capitalism and the emergence of lower and lower middle class women as an economic force created certain instabilities in the relationship between the sexes which demanded social readjustment. A particularly charged subject was that of women’s education. The greatly increased availability of reading material, the increased leisure among middle class women, and the need for working class women with at least some clerical skills made the rise in literacy among women inevitable; but the extent and form which their education was to take aroused considerable controversy.

By the last decade of the seventeenth century a number of voices were beginning to speak out in favor of equal educational opportunities for women. Mary Astell asserted that the apparent differences between the intellectual capacities of men and women were a consequence of educational inequities and proposed the establishment of an academy for women. John Dunton vigorously defended her against criticism in the Athenian Mercury and said of women’s ability to learn, “we believe there’s no Essential Difference between theirs and ours.” Defoe included in his Essay on Projects, published in 1767, a proposal for “An Academy for Women”; he argued:

I have often thought of it as one of the most barbarous customs in the world, considering us as a civilized and a Christian country, that we deny the advantages of learning to our women. We reproach the sex every day with folly and impertinence, while I am confident, had they the advantages of education equal to us, they would be guilty of less than ourselves. One would wonder indeed how it should happen that women are conversible at all, since they are only beholden to natural parts for all their knowledge. Their youth is spent to teach them to stitch and sew, or

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42 Stauffer, op. cit., p. 65.
43 Quoted in Humphreys, op. cit., p. 258.
make baubles; they are taught to read, indeed, and perhaps to write their own names, or so, and that is the height of a woman's education; and I would but ask those who slight the sex for their understanding, what is a man (a gentleman I mean) good for, that is taught no more?  

Isolated voices continued to speak up for women's education, and for their equal intellectual potential, over the course of the century. For the most part, however, women were taught to believe that learning was no asset; even Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, advising her daughter on the education of her granddaughter, recommended concealment of whatever knowledge she attained.  

The opposition to learning for women took many forms and often betrayed a note of hysteria. The learned lady was a well-known satiric figure on the stage and in the literature of the period from the late seventeenth century on through the eighteenth--stimulated particularly by the comedies of Molière. This phenomenon was of course not simply a conspiracy to keep women down; whenever a skill or activity is associated almost exclusively with one sex in any culture, the sight of the other sex engaging in that activity will strike people as comic and incongruous. Moreover, the obstacles to a woman's acquiring an extensive body of knowledge in a well-disciplined fashion were such that most learned women were only relatively so; as Swift wrote, "after all the Pains you may be at, you never can arrive, in Point of Learning to the Perfection of a School-Boy." And society was simply not prepared to cope with intellectual women. Elizabeth Elstob, as we have seen, was a competent Anglo-Saxon scholar; yet it was unthinkable that she should teach at or be formally enrolled in a university. Consequently, she ended her days teaching children, much to the detriment of her scholarly pursuits.  

But opposition to women's learning also had a darker side. Both advocates and opponents realized that extending educational opportunities for women would have far-reaching social implications; the opponents correctly perceived, as the advocates often did not, that ignorance was the cornerstone of subordination and that intellectual parity would ultimately create a challenge to male domination. (This reasoning clearly applies to any system of subordination; in the dispute between Dr. Johnson and Soame Jenyns, both recognized the role of ignorance in perpetuating the existence of a poor and unskilled working class.) Lady Bradshaigh feared such a threat to the status quo and wrote to Richardson, whose views were very progressive for his day:  

Everything moves easiest in its own sphere. Indeed, Sir, great learning would make strange work of us. You know we are to submit and obey; and it is much as ever we can do, often more, in our inferior state of knowledge.  

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45 Humphreys, op. cit., p. 261.  
Those who saw the subordination of women as the natural order of things often justified their position by asserting the innate intellectual inferiority of women; Halifax, for example, wrote in his immensely popular “The Lady’s New Year’s Gift: or, Advice to a Daughter”:

You must first lay it down for a Foundation in general, That there is *Inequality* in the Sexes, and that for the better economy of the World, the *Men*, who were to be the Lawgivers, had the larger share of Reason bestow’d upon them; by which means your Sex is the better prepar’d for the *Compliance* that is necessary for the better performance of these Duties which seem to be more properly assigned to it.\(^{48}\)

Steele, who brought condescension towards women out of the pulpit and on to the coffee table, took a more subtle tack and formulated a kind of separate-but-equal argument.

Resistance to permitting women to expand their horizons through reading was not limited to outrage at the prospect of women’s studying Latin or discussing Thucydides. One of the most popular targets of the critics was the novel. To be sure, hostility to the novel was not strictly on women’s account. The genre had a disreputable past and did not meet the standard literary criteria for didactic value. And admittedly a number of eighteenth century novels, particularly before Richardson, have little socially redeeming value; the *romans à clefs* often provided juicy scandal and erotic titillation, and not much else. But women formed a large part of the eighteenth century novelists’ new constituency; and indeed, of the novels published during the eighteenth century, more were written by women than by men. George Anne Bellamy, forbidden to read the one romance in her father’s library, admitted that this is the book she would have chosen above all others. To quote Taylor, “As young as the novel itself in their enjoyment of any sort of rights and educational privileges, women seemed the persons most susceptible to the inordinate sensibility which was generally accredited with being the worst type of poison contained in this dangerous plant.”\(^{49}\)

Opposition to the novel took many forms. The traditional objection was on religious grounds; it was conducive to frivolity and wasted time. Among religious autobiographers, as we have seen, the novel often came to symbolize the wicked world which a committed Christian must renounce. Hester Ann Rogers’ father warned her against reading novels and romances; later, when her father died, she lapsed into sinful habits: “I ... obtained all the Novels and Romances I possibly could. . . . Thus was my precious time mispent, and my foolish heart wandering far from happiness and God; yea, urging on to endless ruin!”\(^{50}\) Mary Alexander called them “publications of an unprofitable tendency” and came to feel that “nothing I had ever been in the practice of,

\(^{48}\) Quoted in Reynolds, op. cit., p. 320.

\(^{49}\) Taylor, op. cit., p. 52.

had so much alienated my mind from the simplicity of the pure truth, as books of this kind."

Other objections to the novel were raised on the premise that it distracted women from their duties, created unrealistic expectations for their relationships with others, and gave them a taste for more excitement than their humdrum existence as devoted wives could offer. Swift made an eloquent case for this position in his unfinished essay “On the Education of Ladies”:

That a humor of reading books, except those of devotion or housewifery, is apt to turn a woman’s brain. That plays, romances, novels, and love-poems, are only proper to instruct them how to carry on an intrigue: That all affectation of knowledge, beyond what is merely domestic, renders them vain, conceited, and pretending. That the natural levity of woman wants ballast; and when she once begins to think, she knows more than others of her sex, she will begin to despise her husband. . .

Although it is always wise to suspect irony in Swift, the context does not suggest that we are to take these words other than seriously. Addison in Spectator 37 made fun of the books in a lady’s library and claimed that reading romances “has given her a very particular turn of Thinking”; thought he patronizingly approved of reading in preference to “Diversions that are less Reasonable, though more in Fashion,” he wished she had been guided to such Books as have a tendency to enlighten the Understanding and rectify the Passions, as well as to those which are of little more use than to divert the Imagination.”

When Addison and Steele published their own Ladies’ Library, it was largely a compilation of seventeenth century devotional works and traditional advice to women. The woman whose brain was turned by reading novels was a popular butt of satire; though her ancestry can be traced to Cervantes, it is interesting that in the eighteenth century a woman rather than a man was most often portrayed as suffering from this sort of insanity. Biddy Tipkin in Steele’s The Tender Husband, Arabella in Charlotte Lennox’s The Female Quixote, and Lydia Languish in Sheridan’s The Rivals are among the better known examples of this type.

Is there any fire amidst all this smoke? John J. Richetti argues that novel-reading did in fact affect the responses of women of the period towards themselves and towards the world:

It is probably no accident that the most considerable writers of scandalous memoirs during the eighteenth century were women, and it is certainly likely that their most eager readers were largely women as well. It is important to say this without lapsing into that condescension with which the Augustans regarded female literature and scribbling women, for

51 Mary Alexander, Some Account of the Life and Religious Experiences of Mary Alexander, Late of Needham Market (Philadelphia: A. Griggs & K. Dickinson, 1815), p. 16.
the changes which take place in prose narrative are partly the result of the changes in the market brought about by the needs of an expanding female audience. Given the increased leisure time of many middle-class women and the widespread literacy among the female upper-servant class, as well as the severe legal and social limitations upon female action, it is not surprising that novel-reading, with its great possibilities for vicarious experience and liberating fantasy, formed an important part of their lives. Neither should we underestimate the importance of that ‘social learning’ and extension of emotional capacity which novel reading made possible for many eighteenth century women.  

Although Richetti is speaking primarily of the period before 1739, the autobiographies we have been discussing suggest that throughout the century the novel influenced women’s perceptions of themselves and the ways in which they organized their thinking about their lives. This tendency can be observed from the very beginning of the century. Both Delariviere Manley and Mary Wortley Montagu, writing in the third person, use romance settings and romance names for themselves and others. Mary Wortley Montagu calls particular attention to the way in which she perceives her life as a kind of romance adventure--she being, obviously, the heroine: “I am going to write a history so uncommon, that in how plain a manner so ever I relate it, it will have the air of a romance, though there shall not be a syllable feigned in it except that of the names, which I cannot resolve to set down at length.” Mary Granville Pendarves Delany also uses romance names, and sets forth her autobiography in a series of actual letters to a friend; as in the more sophisticated epistolary novels, the recipient’s reply can actually alter the course of the narrative. George Anne Bellamy also uses the letter form, and she is even more conscious of the analogy to fiction. Her recipient is evidently imaginary, though she is endowed with a rudimentary personality (she is sympathetic, intelligent, and insistent upon thoroughness; clearly this indicates the relationship which the author wishes to establish with her audience). She sees her life as a series of adventures which arrange themselves into chapter-like divisions:

As I fix, which you must have observed, on the most remarkable periods of my life for the introduction of my letter, in imitation of the division of their chapters by chronologers; and as I am now about to enter on the beginning of my theatrical existence on the Dublin Stage, I shall here conclude.  

The autobiographers refer frequently to prominent novelists, especially Richardson, Fielding, and Sterne. That Catherine Jemmat consciously considers herself in the light of a Richardson heroine is clear:

56 Bellamy, op. cit., I, 117-18.
But why may not the true story of Catherine Yeo, who absolutely does exist, divert as much, allowing for the different abilities of the authors, as those of Miss Pamela, [sic] Andrews, or Miss Clarissa Harlowe, who never had any local habitation except in the happy fancy of their admirable author, whose characters of virtue and constancy are the native children of his truly benevolent soul?  

George Anne Bellamy chooses a more unlikely fictional analogue:

Indeed, my life has been productive of so many untoward, and almost incredible events, that were there not many persons still living who can bear witness to the authenticity of them, I should be ashamed to relate them; as they must appear rather the memoirs of a female Crusoe, than a relation of facts.

Mary Robinson, as we have seen, charges her entire past with the atmosphere of a Gothic novel. And surely there is no more bizarre instance of the way in which novels affected women’s self-image than that of Frances Anne Vane, who paid Smollett to introduce her as a character in his novel, interacting with fictional characters and telling them her memoirs as a digressive episode.

We also find novelistic techniques being used in autobiography. As Stauffer remarks:

In reconstruction and recording life, a certain amount of imagination is necessary to the biographer no less than to the novelist, for the process is that of bringing into the actual present what does not exist. If biographers taught novelists how to imitate nature by imitating actual memoirs, the novelists reciprocally exercises a fortunate influence upon the writers of lives: they showed them that the record of human life may be an art; that the attempt at interpretation and appraisal may be of more significance than the setting down of dates, facts, and actions; and that in reviving the dead, the prevalence of the imagination is less dangerous than its absence.

People and places are made to seem more real by naturalistic descriptions and details of appearance and gesture. The following passage from Mrs. Gooch is practically a set-piece:

But soon we repented our temerity—nothing could exceed the horrors of that road. We were in two separate carriages, to which horses

58 Bellamy, op. cit., IV, 120.
59 Stauffer, op. cit., p. 131.
and oxen were yoked in abundance. The mountains were nearly perpendicular. To our right were tremendous precipices; at the bottom of them was a river we could scarcely discover, and a very low parapet wall bordered the road, which preserved us from falling down more from appearance than from strength. The road was cut out in these rocks, and so narrow as hardly to admit of the breadth of a carriage. To our left were mountains whose heads were lost in the clouds, and from the top of which ran foaming cataracts, which crossed the road, and descended into the labyrinth beneath. Night came on, and added horror to the already-dreadful scene.  

The use of an intrusive narrator to create a kind of double time-scheme—what Natascha Würzbach calls “narrator’s present” and “the narrative past”—may also reflect the influence of the novel. In the following passage from Bellamy’s Apology, for example, we see the author sitting at her desk emoting over her past as she describes it.

> We are now arrived at the most important crisis of my fate: the moment which was to determine the tenor of my future life. The die was to be thrown, and my happiness was to be the stake.--My heart flutters at the recollection.--But I will endeavor to still it, and proceed.

Mary Delany often seems to be reliving her past as she writes: “I assure you the recollection of this part of my life makes me tremble at this day. I must relieve my spirits by concluding this letter: adieu." There also emerges from Mrs. Delany’s work a rather sophisticated sense that the narrative has its own demands, a life of its own:

> This is a little digression from the main story, which you must excuse; I spare you any more particulars about this unfortunate brother, though I feel myself inclined to enlarge on this subject.

Charlotte Charke actually projects her narrative into the future, creating a kind of suspense that even the narrator could not resolve:

> . . . I hope, ere this small Treatise is finish’d, to have it in my power to inform my Readers, my painful Separation from my once tender Father will be more than amply repaid, by a happy interview. . .

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60 Gooch, op. cit., II, 111.
62 Bellamy, op. cit., II, 57-58.
64 Ibid., p. 110.
As I mentioned in speaking of philosophical currents of the period, the novel was the primary medium through which sensibility was disseminated among women. I suspect it would be difficult to overestimate the role which Richardson and his followers played in giving a kind of dignity to “tender weeping” and its validity as a positive and mature response to life. Utter and Needham, in *Pamela’s Daughters*, remark on the functions of cultivating one’s sensibilities in promoting self-consciousness:

Most important of all in the consideration of the quality of Richardson’s sentimentality is his sense of emotional values. His declared purpose in *Pamela* is “to teach the man of passion how to subdue it”; his effect was to teach the novelist of passion how to dramatize it. . . . [T]he emotional essence is distilled thoroughly drop after drop for page after page. The process is even more slow and thorough in *Clarissa*. It is undubitably of the essence of Richardson’s moral purpose. It is our feelings, he implies, that move us to actions right and wrong. The motion may come from a feeling so obscure as to be unperceived, unsuspected. Therefore no feeling is trivial enough to neglect. Each down to the minutest must be observed, scrutinized, analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively for its faintest traces of right and wrong. This self-consciousness in every conscious moment is essential in Richardson’s purpose and method, and self-consciousness in all moments is inevitably sentimentality in most. It is important in the history of Pamela’s daughters because they inherit from her the trait of self-consciousness that so often spells sentimentality, and the sensibility that so often finds expression in terms of liquid sorrow.66

The implications of this expanded self-consciousness for women’s autobiography are clear enough. It would hardly be an exaggeration to describe Gooch, Bellamy, Robinson, Jemmat, Lamenther, and even T. C. Phillips, Pilkington, and Charke, as “Pamela’s daughters,” no less than the heroines of contemporary novels. The role of literature in the formation of personality has not been explored with much sophistication to date, but the eighteenth century novel and its female readers would surely be fertile ground for such a study.

Although the novel seems to me the most important literary influence upon eighteenth century women’s autobiography, there are other literary forms which deserve mention as having exerted some influence upon autobiography. Drama is the most salient, if for not other reason than that a number of female autobiographers were professional actors: Charke, Bellamy, and Robinson were all associated with the theatre. Quotations from Shakespeare and many other dramatists are sprinkled liberally throughout the works of the period. The following scene from Mrs. Gooch was quite obviously staged:

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66 Utter and Needham, op. cit., pp. 111-12.
On her arrival she sent for me, and our meeting was truly affecting: the affliction she was in, (for she had sincerely loved Mr. Hutchinson) the dismal dress she wore, the grief of the old lady for her son, and the melancholy appearance of us all, made up a sad picture of human woe... 

Echoes of travel and even utopian literature occur occasionally, though they were probably filtered through the novel. And by now, of course, the woman’s autobiography has developed a set of conventions unto itself: the focus on love interests, the seduction and loss of virtue, the temptation to suicide, and so forth are practically *de rigueur* in secular autobiography by the end of the eighteenth century.

There is probably a great deal which could be added to this chapter, but I believe I have touched on the most outstanding historical factors involved in the autobiographical writings of British women in the eighteenth century. I think at this point that it would be useful to turn to the changes in the perception of themselves and of their lives which occurred over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as manifested in their autobiographies, and to attempt to draw some conclusions about the evolution of women’s consciousness during that period.

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67 Gooch, op. cit., I, 18.
I. Problems of Definition

Scholars and critics of autobiography have generally either assumed or claimed to discern a peculiarly feminine sensibility in the autobiographical writings of women. Their attempts at designating this quality have been sometimes penetrating, sometimes vague, sometimes silly, and frequently confusing and contradictory. Anna Robeson Burr, as we have seen, proclaims that "there is no sex to the autobiographer," but she goes on to add that:

The great self-student may be either man or woman; it is only required that he be thoroughly the one or the other. Equipment for this task is as much woman’s as man’s; each has his special candor, each his temperament reticence. As regards memory alone, the woman’s is usually more intimate, more personal, more limited and more complete; and the data furnished by both may be used without undue attention to the fact of sex. Comparative study tends to show, at least, that those powers of memory which bring about and confirm the autobiographical impulse, belong to both sexes, and place the results of self-study equally within the reach of both.2

The difficulty of determining precisely her position on the subject is compounded by the difficulty of determining her meaning. The question she raises, that of memory, seems in itself to be a rather peculiar angle of attack, and I think there may be more to be gained from posing the question in other terms. Another odd assertion—odd because it doesn’t really bear up when applied to actual cases—is Lord Butler’s remark:

... I should like to ask why there have not been more women autobiographers. This I think is because they are usually more interested in other people than they are in themselves. One cannot imagine a female Rousseau or a woman like Montaigne. Santa Theresa is perhaps an exception, but there is a reticence which is not found in the true male egotist. ... There is no female Pepys, much less Boswell. Women are shrewder observers of others than of themselves. This observation of the rest of the world is too precious to leave time for introspection. As V. S. Pritchett has put it, they have not by nature the degree of egotism which allows a man to split in two and follow one part of himself like a devoted dog.3

While it is true that women have traditionally been trained in an ethic of service to others, the prejudice against women writers is more than sufficient to account for the relative scarcity of female autobiographers. And as an egotist, Margaret Cavendish, for one, stands up with the best of them, with Charlotte Charke not far behind. If one cannot imagine a female Rousseau or Montaigne, neither can one very well imagine, in their respective periods, an English Rousseau or Montaigne. On the whole, it seems wise, at least at this point, to be a little more conservative about stating what men or women, or Englishmen or Frenchmen, are like "by nature." Joyce M. Horner, speaking primarily of novelists and moderately lucid on the subject of masculine and feminine characteristics in writing, is more sensibly cautious:

It would be interesting to look back from a point in the future to see how far women's work has changed as their experience has widened. Then, indeed, we might be able to judge between the feminine mind and the feminine tradition.  

Donald A. Stauffer, while not very specific, suggests a more manageable method of dealing with autobiographies by women (in the seventeenth century):

As a class they are far more interesting and important than the autobiographies of men--more personal, informal, and lifelike. Where the men tend to digress on questions of history, or grow prolix in controversial accounts, the women remain self-centered and confidential, engrossed in the more enthralling problems of their own lives.

Paul Delany extends and refines Stauffer's observations:

To discuss female autobiographers separately, discarding the categories previously used, is a choice which requires explanation and, perhaps, defence. This choice stems from the observation that English women of the seventeenth century lacked, because of their subservient social position, that firm identification with profession or occupation which was typical of their male counterparts. Often their experience of wider horizons than simple domesticity came from identification with their husbands' careers and interests--at best, a second-hand participation.

Perhaps as a result of this relatively weak vocational interest, female autobiographers strike the modern reader as having, generally, a more 'unified sensibility' than their male counterparts: their lives seem

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4 Joyce M. Horner, "The English Women Novelists and their Connection with the Feminist Movement (1688-1797)," *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages*, 11 (1929), 143.
less compartmentalized, they have a wider range of emotional responses to everyday events and more awareness of concrete realities.⁶

All this sounds very good; but is it true? His isolated examples support his thesis, but one is left to wonder whether they are really representative. What, for example, are we to make of the following observation:

Lady Fanshawe’s memoirs showed how anecdotes from the world of society and politics could be enlivened and humanized by the addition of small, but significant, details such as the feminine eye did not scorn to notice and record—the colour of the cabin-boy’s cap, for example, in the passage quoted on p. 161.⁷

Pouncing upon the single word “blue,” he proceeds to infer a whole concept of the “feminine eye.” I do not wish to denigrate the value of such impressions, especially when formed by a sensitive scholar who has immersed himself in his subject. But there is nonetheless a tendency in such circumstances to see what one expects to see—especially when the subject itself is so encrusted by traditional notions and unquestioned assumptions. Nor do I wish to deny the existence or importance of stylistic differences between the autobiographies of men and women. The whole subject of whether there is actually a woman’s style that is independent of the time or place in which she is writing is a very interesting one, and one to which feminist literary criticism is only beginning to address itself. Much of it harks back to Virginia Woolf, who contends in A Room of One’s Own that the great women novelists of the nineteenth century were handicapped by the lack of a feminine tradition in style.⁸ But the question of whether it is possible to distinguish the whole body of autobiographies written by women before 1800 from those written by their male contemporaries on the basis of style alone, and the related question of whether these hypothetical distinctions are to be attributed to innate or environmental differences, is enormously complicated and outside the scope of such a study as this. My suspicion is that it would be rather difficult to do so.

A difference which is at once more obvious and more crucial is the difference in subject matter. Shulamith Firestone, the radical feminist Marxist thinker, has pointed out that:

... the difference between the “male” approach to art and the “female” is not, as some like to think, simply a difference of “style” in treating the same subject matter (personal, subjective, emotional, descriptive vs. vigorous, spare, hard-hitting, cool, objective) but the very subject matter

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⁷ Ibid., p. 164.
itself. The sex role system divides human experience; men and women live in these different halves of reality; and culture reflects this.9

And indeed, the larger part of most women's autobiographies, especially those which are primarily secular in orientation, are taken up with matters which men usually relegate to a few sentences or omit altogether as not being germane to an evaluation of who and what they are—namely, domestic connections and intimate interpersonal relationships.10 Such a difference in subject matter is no more trivial than the difference in subject matter between Shakespeare's Sonnets and Donne's Holy Sonnets. If women were relegated to hearth and home, they compensated for their lack of worldly experience by actively cultivating their interest in the human drama. What for man was mere background in his overall conception of his life became for woman the main event. Moreover, the constellation of myths that produced the cultural idea of woman was so perverse that it affected every woman's idea of what she was: man is the norm, woman is the other.

Such sweeping generalizations cannot be made without the qualifying statement that the outlooks and interests which can be said to characterize women underwent a considerable change of focus over the course of the period. For example, every woman autobiographer, on some level, accepted the proposition that she was a member of the subordinate sex, but her interpretation of and attitude toward this postulate altered considerably. My aim, as stated in chapter I, was to trace the development of the feminine sensibility as expressed in women's autobiography, a genre which implies a conception of the author's life as an organic whole and not merely as a series of events. A general assessment of the works discussed in this study will perhaps help us to draw some tentative conclusions about this development, and to perceive the shifting patterns in women's awareness of themselves.

2. Autobiography and the Changing Mood of Women before 1800

If the mood of women in the seventeenth century as expressed in their autobiographies can be summed up in a single word, that word would be “accepting.” Because the old traditions of order and female subordination are still workable within this social context, women can engage fairly comfortably in conventional relationships and can submit to a subordinate role without being overwhelmed by a sense of oppression. For Lucy Hutchinson, it was simply a matter of following the natural order of things:

... never man had a greater passion for a woman, nor a more honourable esteem of a wife; yet he was not uxurious, nor remitted he that just rule which it was her honour to obey, but managed the reins of government with such prudence and affection that she who would not delight in such an

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10 Rarely, however, on the sexual aspects of these relationships. Occasionally men will deal with such matters; but even the raciest accounts of women seldom touch on them. That Fanny Hill could have been written by an eighteenth century English woman is most improbably.
honourable and advantageable subjection, must have wanted a reasonable soul.\textsuperscript{11}

Especially after the political turmoil of the Civil Wars, clinging to the old patterns may actually provide an element of serenity and stability in a world where the sanctity of these patterns can no longer be simply taken for granted.

As the following passage from Margaret Cavendish suggests, the differences between males and females, and the importance of perpetuating those differences through education, were part of a larger pattern of order in society which was necessary for human happiness:

As for my breeding, it was according to my birth, and the nature of my sex; for my birth was not lost in my breeding. For as my sisters was or had been bred, so was I in plenty, or rather with superfluity. Likewise we were bred virtuously, modestly, civilly, honourably, and on honest principles. As for plenty, we had not only for necessity, convenience, and decency, but for delight and displeasure to a superfluity; it is true we did not riot, but we lived orderly; for riot, even in kings’ courts and princes’ palaces, brings ruin without content or pleasure, when order in less fortunes shall live more plentifully and deliciously than princes that lives in a hurly-burly, as I may term it, in which they are seldom well served. For disorder obstructs; besides, it doth disgust life, distract the appetites, and yield not true relish to the senses; for pleasure, delight, peace, and felicity live in method and temperance.\textsuperscript{12}

The superiority of males simply was not questioned. Alice Thornton casually remarks on her husband’s hopes for a son.\textsuperscript{13} When one of her sons dies, she explains to her four-year-old daughter that her husband grieves so because “being a son he takes it more heavily.”\textsuperscript{14} Women not only accepted their subordination but actually found it a positive virtue, one which they could constructively work to achieve. Lucy Hutchinson proclaimed herself:

\ldots a faithful mirror, reflecting truly, though but dimly, his own glories upon him, so long as he was present; but she that was nothing before his inspection gave her a fair figure, when he was removed, was only filled with a dark mist, and never could again take in any delightful object, nor return any shining representation. The greatest excellency she had was the power of apprehending and the virtue of loving his; so as his shadow she

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 126.
They take pride in their husbands’ accomplishments. In the following curious passage from Anne Fanshawe, her husband is even given credit for successfully delivered children, while she takes the blame for the abortions: "My dear husband had six sons and eight daughters, born and christened, and I miscarried of six more. . . ."16 Mary Penington desires to be “serviceable” to her husband and finds a kind of exaltation in sacrificing for him: “I gave up much to be a companion to him in . . . his suffering.”17

As one reads these words, one senses that the feeling of subordination sat relatively lightly on these women because the social system still allowed them a kind of dignity. They were not simply thrust under the thumb of any man who could successfully barter for them; they played an essential role and saw themselves as essential to the completion of the social unit. Anne Fanshawe calls her husband her “better half” with no irony and asserts “we never had but one mind throughout our lives. Our souls were wrapped up in each other’s; our aims and designs one, our loves one, and our resentments one.”18 There was still a sense of connectedness with their husbands, a sense of linked and shared fates. She was not simply a part of him; rather, they were both a part of something larger. Though Anne Clifford clearly had great difficulty with both of her husbands, she not only defends them but identifies herself with them and their families.

It may also be that subordination was less onerous than it might have been because, as is evident from the autobiographies of the period, the social system permitted upper-class women to take some legitimate pleasure in their own achievements. Many of them evince self-satisfaction in their early precocity. And though a declaration of timidity is practically a badge of membership in the female sex, there is a certain amount of pride in Ann Halkett’s description of herself fending off enemy soldiers; in Mary Rich’s journey unaccompanied through the embattled countryside; in Anne Fanshawe’s facing Turkish pirates at her husband’s side. Though these pleasures were in a sense anomalous, they were not perceived as such, perhaps because the husbands of these women, secure in their high birth, were self-confident enough to be supportive, and perhaps because such exploits offered a kind of escape valve to keep the sense of subordination from becoming oppressive. As long as women were willing and able to operate within the system of female subjugation, to see evidence of their own excellence as exceptional, individual marks of courage or intelligence did not threaten the social fabric and perhaps even reinforced it.

Moreover, the single life was still seen as an acceptable way of life, for the unmarried female relative could still be a productive member of a household. Almost every seventeenth century female autobiographer eventually married, but before doing so many professed great aversion to the married state; “I did dread marriage,” said Margaret

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15 Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 63.
18 Fanshawe, op. cit., p. 36.
Cavendish, “and shunned men’s company as much as I could.”\textsuperscript{19} To be sure, such reluctance is not shocking in view of the realities of marriage: it represented not only a great burden of responsibility, but also the pain and extreme danger of repeated childbirth. But women also had genuine and positive feelings about the unmarried state for its own sake, not simply for the absence of the problems imposed by marriage. Mary Rich enjoyed “living so much at my ease that I was unwilling to change my condition, and never could bring myself to close with any offered match”;\textsuperscript{20} and Alice Thornton asserts “I was exceeding satisfied in that happie and free condittion, wherein I injoyed my time with delight abundantly in the service of my God, and the obedience I owed to such an excelent parent, in whoes injoyment I accounted my daies spent with great content and comfort. . . .”\textsuperscript{21}

Since the single life at least appeared to be a genuine option, the decision to marry became a matter of choice rather than necessity. Even though marriage was, for the woman, a clear-cut matter of self-surrender—Mary Rich described her commitment as having “given away myself to him”\textsuperscript{22}--the act of choice is of itself a kind of self-ratification. Certainly financial pressures often exerted great influence in the selection of mates, but not as extensively and as explicitly as was to occur in the eighteenth century. Though women may not have been very free to choose their mates, they accepted by and large the cultural myth which said that they were.

For seventeenth century English women, much more than men, love acted as a defining force. Although it is not possible to say whether love was inherently more important to women than to men, we can assert with confidence that it was more crucial to the way women saw themselves, especially among women whose orientation was primarily secular. The self, we may say, is largely defined by the choice one makes; but we must recognize that the choices realistically open to a woman were far more limited than those open to a man. The professions were virtually closed to women. For a woman to sustain any sort of a position of independence required a more radical social and intellectual posture than most human beings are willing to take. In other ways, too, women’s lives were more restricted than men’s. Because they lived in a world where men made the rules, and had for centuries, women were bound much more oppressively by tradition and prescriptions for behavior. Even biologically their lives were less under their own control. Sex within marriage meant pregnancy after pregnancy, a life of “female troubles,” and very possibly early death from puerperal fever; sex outside marriage meant all these things and severe social stigmatization to boot; the alternative was celibacy. On every social level, however unfree the men were, the women were more unfree. But loving was something a woman could legitimately do.

Either because they weren’t expected to or because they didn’t have to, men simply did not define themselves in this way. Even those men whose marriages we know from other sources to have been happy and fulfilling make little or no mention of it. For example, Sir Richard Baxter, the great Puritan divine, has left in his \textit{Reliquiae}

\textsuperscript{19} Cavendish, op. cit., p. 162.
\textsuperscript{21} Thornton, op. cit., p. 75.
\textsuperscript{22} Rich, op. cit., p. 11.
*Baxterianae* a lengthy and thoughtful "Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of his Life and Times"; he has also left a penetrating and sympathetic biography of his wife Margaret—a work which stands as a touching memorial of his affection and respect for her. Yet it is significant, I think, that the two were conceived as separate works, and no hint of the latter appears in the former.

An unusual example of a male autobiography in which love plays an extensive role is Sir Kenelm Digby’s *Loose Fantasies*, and autobiographical work thinly disguised as a romance, dealing largely with his love affair and subsequent marriage to the notorious Venetia Stanley. The narrative was a bit of a private scandal in its day, as was the marriage it chronicled; and though its focus on love as a sexual fantasy represents a departure from the usual male autobiography, it bears stylistic and philosophical affinities to *Euphues* and the *Arcadia*:

"... I, by soaring up to perfections above me, do daily refine myself, whilst you are fain to let yourself down, unless it be when your contemplations, rolling like the heavens about their own centre, do make yourself their object."

"Fie, fie", said Stelliana, "stop that mouth, which were it any other but whose it is, I would call it a sacrilegious mouth, that thus blasphemeth against the saint that I adore".

"If I have sinned", replied Theagenes, "then sanctify it with yours; and if you fear it should blaspheme . . . here take you the merit of preventing the issuing of any sacrilegious words!" The last of which he breathed into her mouth; for joining his lips fast to hers, all other language was stopped between them both, whilst their souls, ascending to the very extremities of their tongues, began a mystical discourse, which ended not till Theagenes, thinking he was too prodigal of heaven's blessing to let time slide away whilst he contented himself with the possession of but half of that which maketh lovers happy, did bid his hands speak for him, in their dumb language expressing what it was he desired.23

It need hardly be said that there is nothing remotely comparable to this in any of the autobiographical writings of seventeenth century women which have come down to us. Strictly speaking, there is also little of this sort of thing in works by men. But love and sexual love, insofar as they are mentioned at all, are frequently synonymous in the works of men. Thomas Raymond tells us "I was soe pestered by the foolish blynde boy with a young defte wench that waited on my aunte that I could not rest for it. And this being the proper age for love matters, I had a greate and vexatious share of them."24 Such "loves" are easily dispensed with: "still I had some pangs of the boy Cupids tricks about

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me for that pretty wench, but left hir now the more litly for my deere friend, honest J. Bouillon, whoe was almost madd for hir. We had some turnes aboute hir by letter."  

More often, a man will scarcely touch on his intimate or domestic relations. One can thumb through index after index in works by men and find only the most cursory references, if any, to wife and children. Clarendon, if we are to believe his protestations, was most shaken by the death of his first wife; yet he disposes of courtship, remarriage, and the death of his wife in a few lines:

... to call home all straggling and wandering appetite, which naturally produce irresolution and inconstancy in the mind, with his father's consent and approbation he married a young lady very fair and beautiful, the daughter of sir George Ayliffe, a gentleman of a good name and fortune in the county of Wilts, where his own expectations lay, and by her mother (a St. John) nearly allied to many noble families in England. He enjoyed this comfort and composure of mind a very short time, for within less than six months after he was married, being upon the way from London to his father's house, she fell sick at Reading, and discovered themselves, and (she being with child) forced her to miscarry; and she died within two days. He bore her loss with so great passion and confusion of spirit, that it shook all the frame of his resolutions, and nothing but his entire duty and reverence to his father kept him from giving over all thoughts of books, and transporting himself beyond the seas to enjoy his own melancholy; nor could any persuasion or importunity from his friends prevail with him in some years to think of another marriage.

Perhaps it will be argued that this marriage lasted only a few months; yet Clarendon, barely a page later, gives us scarcely more of his second wife, "by whom he had many children of both sexes, with whom he lived very comfortably in the most uncomfortable times, and very joyfully in those times when matter of joy was administered, for the space of five or six and thirty years." He adds that from "the time of his marriage he laid aside all other thoughts but of his profession, to the which he betook himself very seriously."

However much he may have loved his wives, it is clear that he vies the primary function of marriage as providing him with a stable sex life, so that his libido will not distract him from his career. Clarendon, of course, is of lasting interest as a distinguished historical figure; but even men whose careers seem to provide less matter for autobiography do not dwell on their domestic relations. Sir John Bramston tells us matter-of-factly that "On the 19th of Nouember followinge, I married, in the parish church, St. Diones Backchurch, London, vnto Alice, the eldest daughter of Anthony Abdy, alderman of London." After the marriage we hear nothing of her beyond a list of

25 Ibid., pp. 44-45.
27 Ibid., p. 15.
28 Ibid.
the miscarriages and births of their children, until she dies. On this subject, he waxes more eloquent than most male writers do; still, the whole sequence of events from his marriage until his wife's death takes up some ten pages in a book over 400 pages long. These ten pages, nonetheless, are a volume compared with Sir John Reresby's only mention of his wife in an account almost as lengthy: "But to resume other things, I married, and was thereby prevented from being an eye witness of the Dutch war; and so I shall only say that his highness obtained a glorious victory over that republic."

It hardly seems necessary to multiply examples of men not mentioning their home lives. The point is that for women, and not for men, the domestic choices were, partly by default, a medium for self-expression; and as men began gropingly to write about their public lives, so, amazingly, did a few women write about their private lives. The idea that oneself, one's feelings, one's spouse and domestic relations were properly and innately worth writing about was essentially a female idea, however tentatively conceived at the time; there is little or no precedent for such a notion, at least in English, in male thinking or practice—though a century later it was espoused and elaborated upon by so eminent a man as Samuel Johnson.

Apart from interpersonal relationships, the other area in which women could operate with relative freedom was religion. The role of religion, even in the accounts we have been describing as primarily secular, is clearly an extensive one. For one thing, it provides an explanation and consolation for the grief, pain, and loss that were inevitably associated with life of that period but most particularly with childbearing. Nothing that can happen is so devastating that it cannot be justified or redeemed by being the will of God. Moreover, seventeenth century Christianity by its nature dispelled most stirrings of a sense of injustice, for justice was to be sought in the next world rather than this; and women were effectively encouraged to cultivate a kind of undifferentiated piety. It is also obvious, especially among a large number of the Quaker autobiographies, that religion provided an emotional outlet and a legitimate alternative to humdrum existences; women often turned to religion to find the mystery and excitement that was not provided in the course of their daily lives; and converts to Quakerism could rebel against their families without dooming themselves to social isolation, for Quakers existed in sufficient number to provide companionship and support.

It is certainly significant that the women who wrote primarily secular autobiographies in this period came without exception from upper-class backgrounds, for their relatively comfortable circumstances undoubtedly mitigated some of the most overt causes of oppression. The preponderance of religious autobiographies strongly suggests that introspective women whose lot was less favored tended to retreat to religion rather than dwell upon the inequities of life in this world. Potential protest was muted, for women were propelled by the force of privilege and tradition to find the causes of any dissatisfaction within themselves and to interpret any restlessness as a failure of piety.

The eighteenth century saw many alterations in this picture. Economic developments and social dislocations began to disturb the equilibrium maintained by the force of centuries of tradition. In effect, the disparities between the traditional picture of

women and the realities of their existence became too great to gloss over easily, and vague rumblings of dissatisfaction began to be heard.

To begin with, new elements of society found voices: women whose lot in life was less sheltered and whose married lives were less idyllic than those of their aristocratic sisters; women for whom a religious commitment was not an adequate substitute for domestic satisfaction. Such women undoubtedly existed before the eighteenth century, but they were largely isolated and unheard; there was no joining of voices, no sense of a shared fate. The growth of literacy and of the publishing industry created a non-elitist audience and a tribe of authors eager to satisfy its tastes. Many female authors of the period were people who were forced to live either by their wits or their bodies to keep the two together and who found that they could make a shift to support themselves by writing.

As I have already observed, eighteenth century England was not an easy time or place to be a woman. As single women became more and more of an economic burden to their families, the social stigma attached to the single state for women increased considerably. It was around this time that the term “old maid” came into vogue and the term “spinster” acquired its negative connotations.\textsuperscript{31} We no longer find women considering in a leisurely fashion whether or not to marry; the pressure on them to do so was tremendous and the life of an unmarried woman an unenviable one in which she was the butt of constant joking or denigration.

At the same time, it became more and more difficult to make a satisfactory marriage. As I mentioned above, the 1801 census showed a preponderance of women, a situation which had probably existed throughout the eighteenth century and which created what was perceived as a marriage crisis. Moreover, women were much more dependent upon men than men on women. These factors made marriage more than ever a men’s market. Marriages were more blatantly mercenary, as parvenus struggled to consolidate their newly acquired wealth and older families to maintain or strengthen their position. Mary Granville’s reaction to Mr. Pendarves, strikingly reminiscent of Clarissa’s physical aversion to Mr. Soames, did not deter her connections from pressing her into an uncongenial marriage. Repeatedly autobiographers comment that the forces which impel them to marry are often other than love; more often it is a need for financial security or for assurance that they are attractive and worthwhile. T. C. Phillips is a typical example:

\ldots among the various Passions in Female Nature, Love is not always the principal one to which their Views are directed: How many more Instances of Fair Ones may we remember, who have fallen Victims to their Interest, their Pride, their Vanity, their Credulity, their Revenge &c. than to the rare and honest Simplicity of a mutual Inclination? And unless a Woman be endued with an uncommon Share of Understanding and Prudence, she inevitably becomes a Sacrifice to some of these.\textsuperscript{32}


\textsuperscript{32} Teresia Constantia Phillips, \textit{An Apology for the Conduct of Mrs. T. C. Phillips} (London: G. Smith, 1761), iii, 49-50.
Love as choice became diminished, a less potent force for self-definition than it had been in the seventeenth century.

Women who couldn’t snag a husband or who couldn’t make a marriage that guaranteed economic security were frequently forced, especially in an urban setting, to take their wares to the market place to maintain a decent existence. Such a life was extremely precarious. As M. Dorothy George observes of women:

... there can be little doubt that the hardships of the age bore with especial weight upon them. Social conditions tended to produce a high proportion of widows, deserted wives, and unmarried mothers, while women’s occupations were over-stocked, ill-paid and irregular.33

Scarcely any profession in which women were allowed to engage had more than a very marginal respectability attached to it. The trajectory of a woman’s life as it emerges from several of the autobiographies of the period is one of early peaking, when the woman is still fresh and pretty enough to attract men who will support or assist her temporarily; after that the path goes downhill, with monotonous episodes of frantic scrabbling for money and frequently with periods spent in debtors’ prison.

Love and marriage were still a woman’s subjects, as they had been in the seventeenth century; this field was seldom extensively invaded by men: Gibbon, who “sighed as a lover, obeyed as a son,”34 is almost a parody of male restraint and coolness. But the attitude of women has changed. Domestic love has in some ways fallen into disrepute and is not invested with much importance or dignity. As has frequently been observed, many of the major intellectual figures of the period--Swift, Pope, Gibbon, Burke, and so forth--never married at all; and the eighteenth century produced little lyric poetry of lasting value. Moreover, as the disenfranchised started making themselves heard, the stories they told of their less sheltered marriages were at odds with the domestic idylls of the seventeenth century aristocrats. Women, as Con Phillips’ lawyer gleefully told her, had no legal rights, and unless their husbands were men of good will, they could be subjected to monstrous indignities. The Countess of Strathmore was actually kidnapped and imprisoned by her husband. In some quarters the restraints of family tradition were breaking down; Con Phillips’ husband was a Dutch merchant whose family lived in Holland, too far away to have any understanding of what was going on between their scion and his wife. Women like Laetitia Pilkington felt that they were formed for domesticity but had been thwarted in their true calling. Marriage had become so debased that in most cases the connectedness, the sense of a shared fate that characterized seventeenth century secular autobiography, was lost.

So instead of love in domestic circles, we frequently find love taking its chances in the tougher world outside the home. There the antagonistic nature of relations between the sexes becomes far clearer. The growth of the novel, with its structural demand for conflict, undoubtedly helped to throw the adversary relationship between men and women into sharper focus; there is no more succinct statement of the model for interaction

between the sexes which the eighteenth century had inherited from the past and elaborated upon in its own way than Lovelace's: "Men are to ask; women are to deny."\(^{35}\) Men were excused or even approved for being creatures of ungovernable passions. Any method of lying or playing on a woman's weakness was a fair tactic. Kidnapping and even rape, as we have seen, do not appear in most cases to have been indictable offenses, though they may have raised a few eyebrows; the experiences of Con Phillips, George Anne Bellamy, and the Countess of Strathmore prove that Richardson's kidnapping episodes were not merely the fantasies of a repressed male. "Men in general are rascals," the actor James Quin told George Anne Bellamy.\(^{36}\) The idea of male virtue and premarital chastity was so laughable that it formed the basis for Fielding's parody of *Pamela* in *Joseph Andrews*. Women, on the other hand, were to resist as though life depended upon it; for so, in effect, it did. A single slip for whatever reason and under whatever pressure, meant a lifetime of dishonor; if she was drugged, intoxicated, or raped, she was still defiled. To succumb to passion was to be a whore, nothing less; it often meant resigning any possibility of achieving the security of marriage. Such a woman, said George Anne Bellamy, was truly "the martyr of an unguarded moment."\(^{37}\)

A growing sense of the injustice of these disparities made resentment of the double standard and even outright hostility towards men a significant element in the autobiographies of eighteenth century English women. "What is not a Crime in Men is scandalous and unpardonable in Woman,"\(^{38}\) Mrs. Manley remarked early in the century, and this theme is picked up and elaborated upon by a number of women later in the century. Or contempt may be shown indirectly; Catherine Jemmat, one of the bitterest, compared her potential rapist to a whole zoo full of animals within the space of two paragraphs quoted earlier in this study.

The other important women's topic, religion, still looms large in eighteenth century autobiography. It accounts for a smaller proportion of the total output, however, and many of these works seem largely to be going over old terrain rather than breaking fresh ground. The general secularization of life, abetted perhaps by the increased availability of consumer goods, seems to have promoted a change of emphasis from the after life to the here and now. The new religions growing up, such as Methodism, were less committed to female participation than some of the earlier radical sects. Quakerism, however, still deserves a special note, for if its adherents were less likely to break new spiritual ground, they were more likely than ever to seize the opportunity to go far afield in the literal sense. As travel in America became somewhat less hazardous, missionary excursions became an increasingly common feature of the Quaker experience; many women traveled extensively, unaccompanied by men, and lived to tell of their adventures.

It would be a misleading anachronism to speak of woman's movement in the eighteenth century; there was no organized movement, no role models for excellence

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\(^{35}\) Quoted in Christopher Hill, "Clarissa Harlowe and her Times," *Essays in Criticism*, 5 (1955), 322.

\(^{36}\) George Anne Bellamy, *An Apology for the Life of George Anne Bellamy, Late of Covent-Garden Theatre. Written by Herself* (London: J. Bell, 1785), I, 59.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., IV, 118.

outside their assigned sphere to emulate (even Mary Wollstonecraft in her most utopian visions cannot conceive of a society in which women operate on an equal basis with men). There were severe social and economic consequences for deviation from the normal expectations. The treatment of women as sex objects and the race for husbands tended to divide women from one another, so that when they were discarded, locked into an uncompanionable marriage, or otherwise deprived of intellectual stimulation, they found themselves without class consciousness and with few friends among women. Several autobiographers of the period express their reservations about members of their own sex in general. Men were quick enough to foster this separation; the classic example is Swift’s “Letter to a Very Young Lady on her Marriage,” in which he advises that young person to eschew the company of her own sex and sniffs that he “never yet knew a tolerable woman to be fond of her own sex.” Except on the most superficial level, women did not challenge the supposition that their subordinate position in society was divinely and biologically ordained. Any evidence of superiority in a woman was declawed by being taken as exceptional; Dryden praised Elizabeth Thomas by contrasting her to other women and setting her against her own sex. These attitudes probably do not represent a conscious conspiracy on the part of the individual men; as Basil Willey has observed:

... it is almost insuperably difficulty to become critically conscious of one’s own habitual assumptions; “doctrines felt as facts” can only be seen as doctrines, and not facts, after great efforts of thought, and usually only with the aid of a first-rate metaphysician.

There is, however, much evidence in the autobiographies of the period of widespread feelings of dissatisfaction, isolated voices speaking out, and a burgeoning sense of (often unwanted) independence. There is an increasing disparity between what women are told they should be and life as they are actually experiencing it. The economy did not require and therefore did not value productivity within the home; the qualities needed to snare a husband were not skill and intelligence but rather such passive attributes as youth, beauty, submissiveness, and wealth. Yet the realities of existence often demanded something quite different, as even genteel women were often forced by a bad marriage, widowhood, or no marriage at all to enter the labor force or in some way to live by their wits. By the same token, there was an increasing awareness of the difference between what men are and what they are supposed to be; Catherine Jemmat, looking at her husband, comments:

... as the unhappy victim I cannot refrain mentioning, that night after night, like a poor submissive slave, have I laid my lordly master in his bed, intoxicated and indefensible: day after day have I received blows and


bruises for my reward: in short, I thought I had married a man, I found I had married a monster.41

Though there is little direct challenge to the old system of subordination, many women cite educational differences as the primary basis for male superiority, and a few even flirt with more radical notions of social equality. George Anne Bellamy relates, only half-jokingly, the following anecdote:

One day, as I sat reading Dryden's Virgil, on a bench in Lord Essex's park, an old gentleman came and seated himself by me. After sitting a little while, he asked me the subject of my studies? Upon my telling him, he seemed to be surprised that a girl of my age should have either taste or erudition enough to understand works of that kind. Piqued at this supposition, I undertook to vindicate my sex from the want of knowledge in literature generally imputed to them. I told him there would not be the least room for such a reflection, did not the lords of creation take care that we should not eclipse them in this respect. The old gentleman then said, "As that is your opinion, I suppose you would have a female parliament." To which I replied, "I do not know that the present is much better, for I do not hear of any thing that is done among them, but scolding like old women."42

By the end of the eighteenth century women are beginning to realize that they will have to look elsewhere than to love and marriage for satisfaction and self-fulfillment. The bitter pill of subordination is no longer sugar-coated with protection, attentiveness, and the self-respect that goes with the knowledge that one is making a positive contribution to the functioning of the household. This situation can be contrasted with that of Anne Clifford, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, who, though her marriages were clearly less than harmonious, took great satisfaction in overseeing the restoration of the familial estates.

The novel, as we have seen, contributed to this new awareness by helping to expose the assumptions underlying the traditional model for relations between the sexes. Perhaps equally important was its function as a medium for the spread of the cult of sensibility. To some extent the contribution may have been negative, since it tended to substitute a strong emotional response to tragedy and injustice for positive action to rectify them. But self-justification and self-pity, for all their excesses, led women to an examination of the forces outside themselves which contributed to their problems and promoted self-forgiveness. By the end of the eighteenth century, autobiographers such as Mrs. Gooch had become quite sophisticated in analyzing the apportionment of blame between self and society for their shortcomings and lapses. Moreover, the shift of attention from the object to the subject of love—to their own feelings—encouraged women to analyze the effect of the more cruel aspects of male behavior upon themselves; from

42 Bellamy, op. cit., I, 192.
here it is only a short step to a consideration of the psychology of subordination, as we find in Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Finally, the exaltation of friendship could hardly fail to stir reflections about the limitations placed by society and by accepted male behavior upon the possibilities for friendship between a man and woman; George Anne Bellamy comments wistfully than the distinction between friendship and love is “beyond the comprehension of the million” and that only a “truly delicate mind” will perceive it.\(^{43}\)

With the increasing discontent came a shift in the social framework for expressing that discontent. The idea of natural rights superseded the soul as the basis for justice and equality. The American and French revolutions and the spread of democratic ideas affirming the rights of man inevitably raised the question of the rights of women. Though such radical notions are beyond anything expressed in women’s autobiographies of the period, it is clear that women are becoming more interested in finding satisfaction in this world than in deferring until the next.

Within the context of this general ferment, Mary Wollstonecraft’s outburst represents a distinct advance but not an entirely surprising one. The traditions which were still working after a fashion in the seventeenth century were breaking down in the eighteenth, shaken by major social and economic changes. It would be pleasant to report that once Mary Wollstonecraft had articulated the sources of female discontent and suggested a theoretical basis for social change, women were immediately spurred to free themselves from oppression. As we all know, no such thing happened. This history of women, as I observed in the beginning, has always been retrogressive. The nineteenth century saw, if anything, a backlash; the fluffy, kittenish child-women in Dickens’ novels sink below anything portrayed in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Repudiation of Mary Wollstonecraft became, in early nineteenth century autobiography, a way of establishing the respectability of the writer’s views and forestalling or propitiating male criticism, much as a woman today might say “I’m no women’s libber, but . . .” It is interesting to speculate whether the peculiar violence of British feminism, when it finally erupted in the twentieth century, might have been caused by a revulsion against the image of women promulgated in nineteenth century England.

But that is a tangential issue. What, finally, can we say of autobiography in the eighteenth century? On the whole it is more varied, revealing more vigor and independence, than that of the seventeenth century. Yet in one sense the eighteenth century showing is disappointing; unlike the century before, the truly outstanding names in autobiography are no longer those of women. Women with a serious, comprehensive world view seem to have channeled their energies largely into other forms. The novel and the autobiography grew up together; yet women produced novels that were the equal of any written by men, whereas there is nothing comparable to Gibbon among women’s autobiographies of the eighteenth century. The answer, I suspect, lies in the nature of the form itself. Dr. Johnson’s “compliment” to Fanny Burney and Mrs. Thrale may give us a clue: “‘Tis a terrible thing that we cannot wish young ladies well, without wishing them to become old women.”\(^{44}\) The traditional view of women is antithetical to the crucial

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\(^{43}\) Ibid., II, 203.

motive of autobiography--a desire to synthesize, to see one’s life as an organic whole, to look back for a pattern. Women’s lives are fragmented; they start as young women and are successively transformed from without into either spinsters, demimondaines, wives, mothers, or matriarchs. The process is not one of growth, or evolution; rather, they enter each stage as a failure of the previous stage. Earlier and more decisively than for a man, the curve of a woman’s life is seen by herself and society to be one of deterioration and degeneration. Men may mature, but women age. It is significant that the eighteenth century novel often ended with the marriage of the heroine; the author’s vision of life is not forced to accommodate the fate of the heroine as she ages. Time after time, the eighteenth century autobiographies of women make energetic and entertaining starts, but dwindle in the end to overly-drawn-out sagas of dreariness and debt. The seventeenth century author of secular autobiography escaped this dilemma by defining herself entirely as a wife and creating within the domestic theatre a little stage for growth and maturation. The simplicity of such a limited solution was evidently less accessible to the eighteenth century women who wrote autobiography. Nevertheless, the autobiographies of the period are well worth reading, from both a literary and sociological point of view. Their authors may not yet have found a way to integrate their lives into a society which discouraged women from doing so, but they were gamely groping.
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