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- 29 Tate, *Poems, Songs and Ballads*, 1–31.
- 30 Alexander Barrass, *The Derwent Valley and Other Poems* (Newcastle upon Tyne: J. M. Carr, 1887).
- 31 *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Alexander Barrass.”
- 32 Barrass, *The Pitman's Social Neet*, 3.
- 33 Barrass, *The Pitman's Social Neet*, 4.
- 34 Goodridge and Keegan, eds., *Nineteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets*, III: 156–57; *Polisses and Candyman*, 38, 58.
- 35 The full sequence of *The Pitman's Social Neet* is usefully listed and described in the *Wikipedia* article on Barrass. On these mining roles and terms see the glossary to Wilson, *Pitman's Pay*, and “A Glossary of the technical terms in use in the Newcastle (and UK) collieries. 1841,” The Coal Mining History Resource Centre, <http://www.cmhrc.co.uk/site/literature/glossary/index.html>.
- 36 On Carlyle and laboring-class poetry see Marcus Waithe, “The Pen and the Hammer: Thomas Carlyle, Ebenezer Elliott, and the ‘active poet,’” in *Class and the Canon: Constructing Labouring-Class Poetry and Poetics, 1780–1900*, ed. Kirstie Blair and Mina Gorji (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2012), 116–35.
- 37 Tate, *Poems, Songs and Ballads*, 108.
- 38 Genesis 4:19.
- 39 Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, 13.
- 40 See especially Pollard, *The Hardest Work Under Heaven*. Pollard's quotation-based titles for chap. 1 and 4 tell a story in themselves: “Frightful Fellows at First Sight” and “The Savage Tribes.”

Under Physical Siege: Early Victorian Autobiographies of Working-Class Women

FLORENCE BOOS

AFTER POETRY, AUTOBIOGRAPHY was the principal mode of nineteenth-century working-class literary expression, and there is a deeper sense in which it may have been crucial to the preservation of a working-class sense of identity. As David Vincent has observed in his pioneering work *Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom*, “The working class had few history books other than these autobiographies, no historians other than those who remembered and the few who wrote.”¹ But Vincent also commented on a “major silence”: there were many more autobiographies of Victorian working-class *men*, and it is not difficult to guess why.

How many poor Victorian women in a male-dominated social order could hope to interest a publisher? In Vincent's view, the principal causes of this dearth were subordination of working-class women in the family, their de facto exclusion from working-class organizations, and a closely related “absence among women of the self-confidence required to undertake the unusual act of writing an autobiography.”²

I will argue in this essay that more systematic barriers underlay this “absence . . . of self-confidence.” In *The Rise of Mass Literacy: Reading and Writing in Modern Europe*, Vincent followed rates of “literacy”—defined as recorded on census forms or manifested in the ability to sign a marriage register—and found that about forty percent of women and sixty percent of men were “literate” at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and by midcentury the rates had risen only modestly to sixty-five percent of men and slightly more than half of women.³ According to the Newcastle Commission Report of 1862, moreover, six-sevenths of the population could not be expected to pay for their children's education in private schools.⁴ Most “education” available to working-class girls took place in “voluntary” or “adventure” schools, and consisted of little more than training in sewing, catechism, and orderly behavior. Finally, among women who were able to

read and write, few would have had access to the leisure, knowledge, and physical means necessary to gather their thoughts, much less the ink and paper and lighting to record them. And the strait gate of publication for the few women who made it through these baffles lay through male editors and publishers who had every reason to favor and respect working-class men who had already achieved a measure of public recognition.

As I prepared *Working-Class Women Poets of Victorian Britain: An Anthology*, it became clear that publication of poems in newspapers or periodicals offered the best path through those strait gates, with the help of a few editors eager to promote working-class literature,⁵ but publication of memoirs was harder to come by for women whose proudest achievements were unheralded struggles for personal and family survival. Their narratives were usually less "heroic," less "exemplary," and more focused, in Valerie Sanders's words, on "the unpredictable sequence of events which mirrored the randomness of their own real lives."⁶

In what follows I will consider two memoirs of working-class women who made it through these barriers in the period prior to the Voting Rights Act of 1867 and the Education Acts of 1870, examine the injustices that drove these women to write (or in the case of Mary Prince, dictate) their accounts, and the contingencies and circumstances which helped them achieve publication.⁷

Vincent concluded his study of workingmen's autobiographies with a moving analysis of the value they held for those who wrote them: "The final, and perhaps most convincing reason why the autobiographers believed that some progress had been made by the labouring poor during their lifetime was the simple fact that they had been able to write an autobiography. . . . The autobiographies were sustained by and in turn transmit a deep sense of pride in the way of life they describe."⁸ On the evidence offered in *An Anthology of Working-Class Women Poets*, most working-class women poets felt such a sense of fulfillment, but the few working-class women autobiographers who published their memoirs before 1860 felt something more akin to catharsis and grim satisfaction.

For a somewhat more relevant parallel, consider Caroline Brearshears's "appeal memoirs," narrated by so-called "scandalous" (mostly) middle- or upper-class women in the eighteenth century—victims of sexual violence and economic injustice, who sought to bring their cases to the public.⁹ Despite their education and social station, these writers had suffered from legal indifference, limited earning power, and denial of the simplest forms of autonomy, and they responded to these violations with appeals to arraign their oppressors. Most nineteenth-century working-class women likewise

composed their counterparts of such "appeals" *de profundis*. Only a few could ever hope for recourse to friends in high places no matter how much documentation and how many testimonies they gathered, and the accounts of those who found such help ended "not with success but *in medias res* with a modest sense of fulfillment because little had been achieved."¹¹

In consequence, Storie's and Prince's memoirs blend documentary testimony, political treatise, and personal narrative.¹² Autobiography is by definition an interpretive genre, which draws on many sources and hovers between fact and imaginative re-creation,¹³ and the narratives of poor women who did find "help" were interpreted and to some extent mediated by others. *The Autobiography of Elizabeth Storie*, published by subscription in Glasgow in 1859, and *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave Related by Herself*, printed in London by the Anti-Slavery Society in 1831, were such narratives.

Neither Storie nor Prince had enjoyed any formal education, for reasons that went beyond poverty: Storie was physically disabled, and Mary Prince was a slave who had been taught to read by Moravian missionaries. Unlike more fortunate memoirists, neither aspired to "self-fashioning" or a tale of personal development, but instead protested direct and intrusive physical threats. Both their accounts were marked by striking bursts of eloquence. Storie's work was privately published and attracted little notice, but *The History of Mary Prince*, published with the ardent support of an abolition organization, contributed to the abolition of slavery in the territories under British control.

ELIZABETH STORIE

The Autobiography of Elizabeth Storie, A Native of Glasgow: Who Was Subjected to Much Injustice at the Hands of Some Members of the Medical, Legal and Clerical Professions, published in Glasgow in 1859 when its author was forty-one,¹⁴ bore the epigraph "Truth stranger than fiction." On the first page of *Autobiography's* second page, Storie wrote that she could "offer nothing attractive to the reader of this book except the truthfulness of the statements made therein." Her lucid standard English was apparently her own, but the first volume's one hundred and five subscribers—doctors and clergymen among them—provided money for her to pay its printing costs.

Her epigraph might also have read "Truth grimmer than fiction," for the voice that emerged from its opening paragraphs was angry, righteous, and polemical:

Having a strong impression that injustice is often done to the poor, and more especially to the women of that class, who are more defenceless, both from their sex, and from the difficulty which poverty combined with it exposes them to, in obtaining the help of those who are their natural protectors, I have been induced to publish a statement of the wrongs and trials I have been subjected to, in the hope of encouraging those who may be similarly afflicted to put their trust in God, as they too often will find that "vain is the help of man."

The facts which will be brought to light may also serve to warn those in high power of the danger of doing injustice or injury to any, trusting that through the insignificance of their victims the world may never know how much they have made others to suffer. (1)

No subaltern tonality there. In fact, Storie's account of justice denied might have emboldened a potential future evildoer, but her history was a stringent moral appeal for redress and justice, however long deferred.

She was born in Tradeston, Glasgow, in 1818 to "poor but respectable parents," and her father was described only as "a tradesman." When at the age of four she contracted a common childhood ailment called "nettle-rush,"¹⁵ her parents took the advice of Robert Falconer, the surgeon son of a neighbor, who offered them allegedly medicinal powders to give their child, and continued chemical applications on succeeding visits. As a result of these "treatments," Elizabeth's body began to exude a stench, her face turned black, her mouth, teeth, and gums began to dissolve, part of her jawbone fell away, and her mouth fused so that she could take nourishment only through a tube. But Falconer continued to prescribe his "medicine" until her family intervened and called in a second practitioner, who told them she had been "*ruined for life by the excessive use of mercury*" (7). When they took the last powder Falconer had prescribed to a chemist, he found it contained "*as much arsenic as would have killed seven persons*" [italics in original] (9).

In 1823 Storie's father sued for damages to pay for his daughter's medical care, which by the time of Storie's autobiography had included no fewer than twenty operations to relieve pressure on her mouth and enable her to continue to eat. After extensive medical testimony, the court awarded Storie's family the very substantial sum of one thousand pounds, but Falconer delayed payment, prospered in his medical practice, and after many years prepared to emigrate to the United States. Though "prevented by early suffering from taking advantage of even an ordinary education" (2), Storie clearly learned to read and attended Sunday school. Her father died of typhus when she was fifteen and she supported herself as a milliner and seamstress, but her need for money to pay for the operations motivated her to seek redress for her claim at law from 1849 to 1853.

The next hundred and fifty-two pages of her *Autobiography* documented the deceptions, legal quibbles, frustrating delays, and inexplicably lost documents which "necessitated" deferral of her suit on technical grounds

until the statute of limitations had passed. Falconer seemed to know many of the local legal officers involved in the case, and the denial of Storie's plea most likely resulted from a series of payoffs. Only *one copy* of the original decree remained on record, and many of Storie's petitions were to regain possession of this essential document. Falconer's lawyer had been granted access to "borrow" it, and so not surprisingly it had disappeared.

Storie was not by temperament inclined to accept defeat, however, and she would have appealed her case to a higher court had the last decree not awarded her opponents damages to be collected if she again brought suit. As the court knew, the expenses of such litigation were far beyond Storie's means as a needleworker and sometime recipient of church relief. But she was not bowed, gathered together the other documents that buttressed her case, and resolved to carry her appeal to the world in print.

By this point, Storie had also come into conflict with her local religious establishment. A devout Presbyterian who had worshipped at St. Matthew's Church in Glasgow since 1840, she appealed to the Kirk Session in 1853 for a testimonial of good character and permission to be placed on the poor rolls in order "to carry on a law-suit in the Court of Session" (77).¹⁶ In response to her plea, however, Archibald Watson, the minister of St. Matthews, removed her name from the communion rolls. Storie was deeply hurt, for "I was certainly not in a very comfortable state in my outward circumstances, and needed all the more the soothing consolations which are often found in attendance on the ordinances of religion, and which they are suited to afford" (88).

Storie then petitioned the Kirk Session of St. Matthew's for reinstatement, and when this was denied, the Synod, and she told its members that if they rejected her "on a quibble" she would "appeal to the general public by a published statement of the whole facts" (97):

Defeat never had the effect of daunting me—like George Stephenson,¹⁷ when striving to perfect his locomotive, his many defeats only stirred him up to renewed exertion, till he at last gloriously succeeded, —so every new defeat seemed to me just some new opportunity for exerting the little strength I had in the cause of right, hoping that at last I might succeed, and the cause of truth would triumph. (98–99)

This time she won, or so it appeared. But when she petitioned for the sum of twelve pounds to help her with her legal expenses, the local church authorities refused to provide the legal records needed for such a petition, then offered them at a price much beyond her means. In the years that followed, Storie seems to have continued to attend church but refrained from asking for communion for fear of further conflicts.

Storie also included in her account documents she had gathered or solicited at each stage of her struggles—filling all or part of 103 of 154 pages of her narrative, testifying to the importance she placed on official documents per se, and at times overpowering her own voice. Among the testimonies at the court hearing at which she had sought to collect damages in 1850, *twenty-eight years* after Falconer's original condemnation, were those of her intelligent and well-spoken brother and twelve family friends,¹⁸ even though by this point she no longer lived in Tradeston, and many of the friends had also moved away.

Other supporters and subscribers who made her book possible included ministers, parishioners, and legal "writers" and lawyers ("Alex. Moncrieff, advocate"),¹⁹ as well as several physicians and surgeons, among them "Dr. M'Donald, . . . who [took] a lively interest in my case" (70) and wrote "in my behalf to the Lord Provost."²⁰ Six surgeons testified at her hearing in 1850, for example, and others who had probably offered surgical help pro bono offered written testimonies (recall the many operations mentioned earlier). The magnitude of this outpouring suggests that one of Storie's motives for continued attendance at her local congregation was the strong personal support many of its members had offered her.²¹

Storie's predicament clearly brought to light the situation of penniless nineteenth-century victims of medical quackery and legal contempt for the poor, and the larger aim of her narrative was, as mentioned, "to warn those in high power of the danger of doing injustice or injury to any" (1). But the very idea that a deformed working-class woman could "warn" them about anything apparently infuriated some of her "betters" and their accomplices. Storie's most striking quality was her persistence in her hunger and thirst after justice, and the latter prompted the following political analysis of the injuries inflicted on her by a well-connected scofflaw and his accomplices:

By my very birth—the daughter of a tradesman—a barrier seems to have been placed between me and my formidable opponents . . . in my case, . . . when God gives the energy of mind to combat with the foe, it is . . . one's duty to use their energies in the assertion of what is just and right. (88)

In keeping with these aims, she appealed to her readers to reform the political and professional institutions of her day:

A living victim of the three learned professions—Medicine, Law, and the Church; with bodily infirmity, physical weakness; dependent on my needle for my bread . . . I leave in the hands of the reader this narrative of my sufferings, with an ardent hope that it may be the means of interesting the sympathy of those who have the power to exert it in favour of the oppressed against their oppressors. (153)

In passages such as these, Storie appropriated the language of law and church for her own purposes.²² Her use of forceful standard English rather than the Lallands Scots of her region reflected personal aspirations, as well as an attempt to underscore the generality of her cause and convey it to middle-class as well as working-class readers. Expressions of support from members of both classes abounded in her text, among them the following:

I consider [Elizabeth Storie] a person of much intelligence and piety; and I know that she was most devoted and industrious in earning her livelihood.

Peter M'Morland, Minister

and

I can with the greatest confidence state that she is a young woman of the best character, and very industrious indeed, as she requires to support herself; and has hitherto, besides, supported her mother, an aged woman.

Robert T. Corbett, M.D. (21)

The second attestation was also cosigned by seven others, including three "Manufacturers," two "Merchants," a "Corn Factor," and a "Measurer."²³

One of Storie's operations, in 1856, finally enabled her to breathe more freely, and it was "impossible to express the relief this afforded me. . . . Since then, I speak better, and am able to take more solid food" (116). But after her book appeared in 1859, the thread of extant knowledge about her unraveled. The *Glasgow Herald* reported the death of an Elizabeth Storie in 1898 at age seventy-nine (an age which would match her birth date of 1818),²⁴ but no corroborating entry appeared in the official Scottish death records for that year.

Perhaps she did, in fact, survive to old age and witness a time in which the gross malpractice which deformed her became less common. But whatever her fate, the strong solidarity she had marshaled was damning, for it suggested that her "class analysis" was essentially correct. No redress was forthcoming from the presbyters she confronted, and the lawyers and "agents for the poor" who had dealt with her case were almost certainly bribed. However long Storie herself survived, her testimony survived as she would have wished: as a humble but unique poor woman's memoir, an indictment of the people and institutions which oppressed Scotland's lower classes in the early and mid-nineteenth century, and a testimony to the faith of the literate and aspiring poor in the elusive ideals of legal redress.

MARY PRINCE

Mary Prince's 1831 appeal for emancipation, *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself*, followed a pattern of slave narratives which Frederick Douglass, among others, later employed in his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845).²⁵ Both works' titles reflected their intention to write a "history" or "narrative," that is, a carefully documented and factual record, rather than an "autobiography," for they knew well that they wrote for countless others who had no voice.

In her narrative, Prince described her relative freedom as a small child, her sale and separation from her family, her subsequent life in Bermuda, Turk's Island,²⁶ and Antigua, and her labor for three owners: Captain I,²⁷ a Mr. D.; and the Wood family, who routinely beat her when she worked for them as a cook and servant. While in Antigua she found a measure of solace in the Moravian church and secretly married a freeman and fellow Moravian named Daniel James, a decision that infuriated her current owners, the Woods.²⁸ The Woods unwisely took her with them on a trip to England, and while there, were incensed when rheumatism made it difficult for her to complete the heavy tasks they set for her. At this point, in late 1828, Mary sought refuge at the home of a sympathetic couple who helped her contact local Moravians, who sought aid for her from the Anti-Slavery Society.

As might be expected, the stone wall of "respectable" patronage and documentation confronted with even greater force the authors of slave narratives.²⁹ In his preface to Prince's *History*, Thomas Pringle, a Scottish poet resident in London and secretary of the London Anti-Slavery Society,³⁰ went out of his way to confirm that her narrative was an exact transcription, "taken down . . . by a lady [Susanna Strickland] who happened to be at the time residing in my family":

It was written out fully, with all the narrator's repetitions and prolixities, and afterwards pruned into its present shape; retaining, as far as was practicable, Mary's exact expressions and peculiar phraseology. No fact of importance has been omitted, and not a single circumstance or sentiment has been added. It is essentially her own, without any material alteration farther than was requisite to exclude redundancies and gross grammatical errors, so as to render it clearly intelligible. (55)³¹

Even then, it had been further probed for consistency:

After it had been thus written out, I went over the whole, carefully examining her on every fact and circumstance detailed; and in all that relates to her residence in Antigua I had the advantage of being assisted in this scrutiny by Mr. Joseph Phillips, who was a resident in that colony during the same period, and had known her there. (55-56)

Pringle also took care to clarify that Prince "wished it to be done, she said, that good people in England might hear from a slave what a slave had felt and suffered" (55), and that the *History* was "essentially her own" work, vetted only to ward off the denials and rebuttals his work for the Society had taught him to anticipate. In passages such as the following from the memoir's final pages, her passion spoke for itself in clear colloquial periods:

And then when we are quite done up, who cares for us, more than for a lame horse? This is slavery. I tell it to let English people know the truth; and I hope they will never leave off to pray God, and call loud to the great King of England, till all the poor blacks be given free, and slavery done up for evermore. (94)

A different form of authentication appeared in an appendix to the *History's* third edition. Pringle's wife Mary and three abolitionist friends, Susanna Strickland,³² Susan Brown,³³ and Martha A. Browne, attested to the scars on Mary Prince's body:

I beg in reply to state, that the whole of the back part of her body is distinctly scarred, and, as it were, *chequered*, with the vestiges of severe floggings. Besides this, there are many large scars on other parts of her person, exhibiting an appearance as if the flesh had been deeply cut, or lacerated with *gashes*, by some instrument wielded by most unmerciful hands. (130)

Mary Pringle also affirmed that "of the entire truth of this statement I have no hesitation in declaring myself perfectly satisfied, not only from my dependence on her uniform veracity, but also from my previous observation of similar cases at the Cape of Good Hope" (130-31) (the Pringles had lived for a time in South Africa). Such intrusive forms of corroboration, of course, reflected the suspicion which greeted any claim of abuse by slave owners.

The Pringles were well advised to prepare for legal challenges. A 1772 ruling had held that slaves brought to England could not be forcibly repatriated to the Caribbean.³⁴ But another judge more than fifty years later ruled that Caribbean slaves lost their claims to freedom when they left Britain and that he "should not notice" any evidence of removal of the plaintiff against her will, for "public inconvenience . . . might follow from an established opinion that negroes became totally free in consequence of a voyage to England."³⁵ Mindful of such rulings, when Prince sought their help in 1828, the members of the Anti-Slavery Society realized that she would be re-enslaved if she returned to Antigua, and tried in vain to "buy" her from her master John Wood. When this failed, they brought a petition to Parliament, but their petition languished after Wood returned to Antigua, as did a further appeal to the governor of Antigua.

When the *History* appeared in London and Edinburgh in 1831, its indictment of Caribbean slave owners infuriated James Macqueen, editor of the

Glasgow Courier, who attacked the character of Prince and her supporters in a November 1831 article in *Blackwood's Magazine*.³⁶ In 1833, the Society, perhaps hoping to publicize Prince's case, mounted a libel suit against *Blackwood's*,³⁷ but although they "won" three pounds, Prince's owner won a countersuit against Pringle and the Society for the larger sum of twenty-five pounds.³⁸ Fortunately the Emancipation Bill was passed later that year, but since its provisions were not scheduled to take effect until 1838, Mary Prince would have remained officially liable to recapture. This was the crux of a dilemma expressed by her anguished declaration that she "would rather go into my grave than go back a slave to Antigua, though I wish to go back to my husband very much—very much—very much!" (95). Fortified by all this, the *Jamaican Royal Gazette* triumphantly greeted the success of the 1827 ruling that Caribbean slaves remained unfree on British soil as follows:

There will be few remaining [who will deny] that the slaves in the West-Indies are . . . property under the special guarantee of the laws of England . . . and farther, [the ruling] calls on the laws of their country to hang those who may forcibly wrest [their property] from them.³⁹

Moira Ferguson and Sara Salih have recently reproduced the transcript of the interrogation Prince endured before and during the libel trial against Pringle.⁴⁰ Grilled about her past sexual history, Prince acknowledged on the stand that she had lived briefly in Antigua with a freeman named Mr. Oyskman, who had seduced her with false promises that he would gain her freedom (147), and had cohabited for a time with a white man, a certain "Captain Abbott" (146),⁴¹ before she "discharged herself" after he "kill[ed] a man on board one of [Wood's] vessels" (148).⁴² She also explained that she had been allowed to make small sums selling produce and taking in washing.⁴³

The central text of Prince's actual "Autobiography" had been brief but grim—twenty-three pages in the first edition and less than forty in the 1997 University of Michigan reprint.⁴⁴ The Anti-Slavery Society had already documented common forms of mistreatment in *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*:⁴⁵ meager rations; inadequate clothing; lack of medical care; protracted beatings and whippings; denial of permission to attend religious observances; refusal of marriage aggravated by hypocritical charges of "immorality"; and long hours of debilitating labor in circumstances which led to disability and death.

Most of these practices were explicitly confirmed in one way or another in Prince's brief memoir. The *Anti-Slavery Reporter* had argued: "The most appalling evil resulting from the power entrusted by the law to individuals, of inflicting the severest corporal punishment upon the slave, is unques-

tionably the extensive and systematic destruction it occasions of unchildren."⁴⁶ This was the fate of Hetty and her child in Prince's *History*; house-slave whose offense had been the loss of a cow:

My master [Captain Ingham] flew into a terrible passion, and ordered the poor creature stripped quite naked, notwithstanding her pregnancy, and to be tied up to a tree in the yard. He then flogged her as hard as he could lick, both with the whip and cow-skin, till she fell all over streaming with blood. . . . The consequence was that poor Hetty was brought to bed before her time, and was delivered after severe labour of a dead child. She appeared to me after her confinement, so far that she was repeatedly flogged by both master and me afterwards. . . . Ere long her body and limbs swelled to a great size; and she lay on a mat in the kitchen, till the water burst out of her body and she died (67).

In their efforts to refute claims that existing laws protected slaves from such brutality, the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* documented scores of such abuses, as well as the routine failure of colonial administrators to offer any over or redress to the relevant owners' "properties." In rare cases, an indictment was brought, but the testimony of slaves was legally inadmissible, and the resulting light sanctions were commonly disregarded.

One more than usually brutal case described by the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* for 12 July 1831 involved cases of death from *mal d'estomac*, so-called "disease resulting from famished slaves' practice of eating dirt" (321):

[Instead of being fed] The dirt-eaters had broad wooden collars placed round their necks. One of them, William Noble, had one of these collars fastened round his neck; he was obliged to cry out with the pain produced by its tightness. The collar was at last taken off, but in a few hours he died. (322)⁴⁷

Another passage in Prince's *History* clarified a sense in which enslavement of women was a form of prostitution:

[Her then-master Mr.D.] had an ugly fashion of stripping himself quite naked and ordering me then to wash him in a tub of water. This was worse to me than all the licks. Some times when he called me to wash him I would not come, my eyes were so full of shame. He would then come to beat me. . . . [On one occasion] I then told him I would not live longer with him, for he was a very indecent man—very spiteful, and too indecent; with no shame for his servants, no shame for his own flesh. (77–78)

Compare the *Reporter's* observations that "[t]he master himself . . . enjoys his lives with some coloured female, perhaps one of his own slaves, or he systematically seduces every attractive object among his people,"⁴⁸ and that it was common for such masters to deny their slaves the right to marry "for the most unworthy motives."⁴⁹

As an instance, when Mary Prince clandestinely married the freer cooper, fiddler, and fellow Moravian convert Daniel Prince, the *Reporter* punished her for this "act of gross indecency":⁵⁰ "When Mr. Wood h

of my marriage, he flew into a great rage . . . Mrs. Wood was more vexed about my marriage than her husband. She could not forgive me for getting married, but stirred up Mr. Wood to flog me dreadfully with his horsewhip" (85).

In Thomas Pringle's "Supplement to the History of Mary Prince," he confronts the charges against her with telling sarcasm:

[H]ow comes it that a person so correct in his family hours and arrangements as Mr. Wood professes to be, and who expresses so edifying a horror of licentiousness, could reconcile it to his conscience to keep in the bosom of his family so *depraved*, as well as so *troublesome* a character [Wood's charges] for at least thirteen years, and confide to her for long periods too the charge of his house and the care of his children. (105)

Readers of the *History* would naturally have sympathized with Prince's Christian convictions, influenced by Moravian and Methodist teachings.⁵¹ Moravian missionaries had taught Prince to read, and at one point before her marriage she had "felt sorry for my sins [at a Methodist prayer meeting]":

I cried the whole night, but I was too much ashamed to speak. I prayed God to forgive me. This meeting had a great impression on my mind, and led my spirit to the Moravian church . . . and I followed the church earnestly every opportunity. I still live in the hope that God will find a way to give me my liberty, and give me back to my husband. I endeavour to keep down my fretting. . . . Yet, I must confess, I find it a hard and heavy task to do so. (93)

Readers would also have responded to her work ethic and respect for free if humble labor:

Let them work ever so hard in England, they are far better off than slaves. . . . They have their liberty. That's just what we want. We don't mind hard work, if we had proper treatment, and proper wages like English servants, and proper time given in the week to keep us from breaking the Sabbath. (94)⁵²

Most of all, they would have responded to Prince's appeal against the scourge which had blighted her life and the lives of countless others:

How can slaves be happy when they have the halter round their neck and the whip upon their back? and are disgraced and thought no more of than beasts?—and are separated from their mothers, and husbands, and children, and sisters, just as cattle are sold and separated? . . . This is slavery. I tell it to let English people know the truth; and I hope they will never leave off to pray God, and call loud to the great King of England, till all the poor blacks be given free, and slavery done up for evermore. (93–94)⁵³

As in the case of Elizabeth Storie, nothing is known about Mary Prince's subsequent life. In March of 1833, Susan Brown, mentioned earlier, testified that she had "examined [Mary Prince's] person, and found many marks of wounds upon her. She was as active as her state would allow; but she was so

ill as to be hardly able to do any work" (148). And in the *History's* second edition, Thomas Pringle wrote that "Mary Prince has been afflicted with a disease in the eyes, which, it is feared, may terminate in total blindness" (129).

CONCLUSION

Elizabeth Storie's *Autobiography* expressed a *personal* desire to right a particular wrong, and Mary Prince's *History* arose—in part at least—from a *collective* desire to rectify an ancient evil. Each was sustained by forms of medical, familial, and religious support without which neither could have pled her worthy case. Each, moreover, strove very hard to express herself with dignity—in Storie's case, in an elevated standard English inflected by her religious convictions; and in Prince's, in an elevated *nonstandard* English, also inflected by her religious convictions—and each recalled her experiences with near-visceral urgency. Both had been deprived in different ways of forms of basic autonomy most of their readers could take for granted, and both strove to live with scrutiny of their private lives and intrusive demands for factuality and legal defensibility imposed by powerful adversaries.

Nan Hackett, Regenia Gagnier, and others have argued that most working-class autobiographers present themselves as representative members of a class, rather than individuals.⁵⁴ This was true of Prince and, to some degree, of Storie, but clear individuating features remained. Storie mentioned only briefly the difficult aspects of her private life—her fears as she confronted potentially fatal surgeries without anesthesia, for example, or the death of her mother, her caretaker and companion. But she took great care to describe her religious "awakening" in 1840, and the injustice of her rejection by the local minister. Prince, similarly, responded stoically to the brutalities of her daily life, but reacted sharply to its deep emotional losses—the forcible separation from her family, the humiliation of constant harassment and grossly unfair accusations, and the emotional loss of forced separation from her husband.⁵⁵ In response to these emotional as well as physical tribulations, both women also found solace in religious ideals, which helped them preserve a sense of interior worth and integrity in the face of surgeons' knives and physical assaults.

Students of Victorian middle-class women's autobiographies have argued that, with rare exceptions, their accounts followed an ancillary or "relational" pattern: they defined themselves primarily in terms of their domestic ties with their families and friends.⁵⁶ Fewer working-class women's autobiographies fit this essentially tranquil pattern. Storie and Prince cherished their social bonds, but it was the rupture of those ideals which preoccupied

them: in Storie's case, the brutal denial of a more satisfying life she might have had; and in Prince's, the loss of her family, her vestiges of autonomy, and the affection of a husband from whom she was forcibly separated.

As in any good narrative, one could also discern something of the writers' temperaments in what they wrote—Storie's fierce determination to tilt at institutional structures, and Prince's self-respect and longing for a "relational" and "domestic" life she never had. And each, finally, ended her story—for us at least—in *medias res*, and evinced a keen awareness of the simple gifts she had lost.

Georges Gusdorf has characterized life-writings as attempts "to elucidate [one's] past in order to draw out the structure of [one's] being in time."⁵⁷ This sounds more like "emotion recollected in tranquility" than an account of the suffering these life-writers endured, but it may be an accurate description of a "structure of . . . being in time" they would have *liked* to have had. As it was, Storie's and Prince's memoirs bore eloquent witness to the complexities and perversities of the actual social order in which they lived, and their acts of resistance have deepened and extended our notions of the range of nineteenth-century working-class writing.

NOTES

- 1 David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (London: Methuen, 1981), 203.
- 2 Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom*, 8. Vincent mentions six memoirs by women, by Catherine Horne, Janet Bathgate, Lucy Luck, Mrs. Burrows, Mary Smith, and Elspeth Clark, but there were many others. See also the introduction to David Vincent, John Burnett, and David Mayall, *The Autobiography of the Working Class: An Annotated Critical Bibliography*, vol. 1, 1790–1900 (New York: U. Press, 1984); Penny Kanner, *Women in Context: Two Hundred Years of British Women Autobiographers, A Reference Guide and Reader* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1997); Nan Hackett, *Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Autobiographies: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: AMS Press, 1985); John Burnett, *The Annals of Labour: Autobiographies of British Working-Class People 1820–1920* (Indiana U. Press, 1974); and Julia Swindells, *Victorian Writing and Working-Women: The Other Side of Silence* (U. Minnesota Press, 1985).
- 3 David Vincent, *The Rise of Mass Literacy: Reading and Writing in Modern Europe* (Oxford: Polity, 2000), 9–10.
- 4 Florence Boos, "Education and Work: Women and the Education Acts," *A Cultural History of Women in the Age of Empire*, ed. Teresa Mangum (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2013), 141–60, 224–28.

- 5 Florence Boos, *Working-Class Women Poets of Victorian Britain: An Anthology* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2008). Examples of such editors included Alexander Campbell (Ellen Johnston), George Gilfillan (Elizabeth Campbell), William Jerdan (Eliza Cook), Eliza Cook and Mary and William Howitt (Marie), John Cassell (Janet Hamilton and Ruth Wills), and Robert Blatchford (Ethel Carnie).
- 6 *Records of Girlhood: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Women's Childhoods*, ed. Valerie Sanders (London: Ashgate, 2000), 9.
- 7 In addition to those discussed here, other autobiographies by women published before 1870 included Mary Ann Ashford, *Life of a Licensed Victualler's Daughter, Written by Herself* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1844); Jane Jowitt, *Memoirs of Jane Jowitt, the Poor Poetess, Aged 74 Years, Written by Herself* (Sheffield: J. Pearce, Jun., 1844); Janet Hamilton, *Poems of Purpose and Sketches in Prose of Scottish Peasant Life and Character in Auld Langsyne, Sketches of Local Scenes and Characters, with a Glossary* (Glasgow: Thomas Murray and Son, 1865); and Barbara H. Parquhar, *The Pearl of Days: or, The Advantages of the Sabbath to the Working Classes, by a Labourer's Daughter. With a Sketch of the Author's Life, by Herself, and a Preface by an American Clergyman* (New York: Samuel Hueston, 1849).
- 8 Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom*, 203.
- 9 Caroline Brearshears, "The Appeal Memoir: Genre and Female Literary Tradition in Eighteenth-Century England," *Modern Philology* 107.4 (2010): 607–31.
- 10 Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832–1920* (Oxford U. Press, 1991), 43.
- 11 Compare traditional accounts of autobiography as a form of emotion recollected in tranquility—compare, e.g., Wilhelm Dilthey: "Autobiography is merely the literary expression of a person's reflection on the course of his life," in *Pattern and Meaning in History: Thoughts on History and Society*, ed. and intro. H. P. Rickman (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 86; and Roy Pascal's remark that "Autobiography must always include, as a decisive element, . . . the meaning an event acquires when viewed in the perspective of a whole life," in *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Harvard U. Press, 1960), 17.
- 12 Linda Peterson has called middle-class counterparts of such complexity "hybridity"—a disposition to draw "on many genres of life-writing—biography, diary, family history, domestic memoir, *Bildungsroman*, *Künstlerroman*, as well as classic spiritual autobiography"; Linda H. Peterson, preface to *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography: The Poetics and Politics of Life Writing* (U. of Virginia Press, 1999), x.
- 13 Pascal: "[a]utobiography is not just reconstruction of the past, but interpretation" (*Design and Truth*, 19).
- 14 Richard Stobbs, South Portland Street. Page numbers in parentheses refer to this edition.
- 15 Possibly "nettle-rash," or hives, an itchy skin rash.
- 16 As Storie explains this particular wind of Scottish law, "The general reader may not know that the Act of Sederunt affords a parishioner aid in a just cause. The minister and elders of a parish are herein empowered to enforce a case on the Green Table for litigation" (76).

- 17 George Stephenson (1781–1848), English mechanical engineer and inventor born in humble circumstances, who drafted plans for the first railroad utilizing steam engines, completed in 1825. He was often cited as a model of self-education and perseverance.
- 18 The twenty-six pages of documents relating to this trial alone (30–56) include, in addition to the statements of six medical witnesses who testified to her affliction and its probable cause, the reports of twelve family friends described as Mary Duncan, relict of Robert Duncan, Weaver; Catherine Wylie, wife of Robert MacArthur, Weaver; Robert McArthur, Weaver; Catherine Turner, wife of Murdoch Morrison; John M. Micken Pagan; Mrs. Ann Clelland or Angus, widow of Alexander Angus; John Campbell, Weaver; James Milligan; James Headifin; John Johnstone; Mrs. Jane Barron or Gillan; and Janet Ballantyne or Allan, spouse of Richard Allan. Several of the testimonies merely attest to what the speakers had heard from Storie's parents at the time; their inclusion seems to embody a view that their truth had been verified by preservation in a legal record.
- 19 Another name on the list is that of Alexander Watson, the minister who had earlier suspended her, and against whose actions she had petitioned the Synod; either this is another Alexander Watson, or he seems to have felt impelled to seem well-disposed to his parishioner.
- 20 Lawyers employed in the matter seem to have included John Kerr (whom she found dishonest) and against whom she later brought a suit, David Campbell, Mr. Macqueen, S.S.C., Edinburgh, Richard Arthur, S.S.C., and Charles Scott, an Edinburgh advocate (62, 113), in addition to an official "agent for the poor" (135).
- 21 That their opinions of her character would affect her livelihood seems the implication of the statement in her petition to be reinstated as a communicant that she is "a poor female supporting herself by needlework to the utmost of her ability, with nothing to sustain her exertions but her moral integrity" (93).
- 22 Regenia Gagnier has argued that autobiographers can only sustain a sense of self to the extent that they share a kindred language and values with their intended audience (*Subjectivities*, 167).
- 23 Another attestation occurs in the letter from an elder of St. Matthew's Church, with two supporting signatures, confirming that "Elizabeth Storie has been a member of St. Matthew's Church for some years. She has, during all that time, been in very poor health. She supported herself by dressmaking, and was very industrious; and I believe, always well-behaved" (84).
- 24 *Glasgow Herald*, 22 March 1898. I am grateful to Steve van Dulken of the British Library for providing this information. However, none of the other twenty-four Scottish Elizabeth Stories whose deaths were recorded after 1859 matched her likely location and/or age of birth.
- 25 *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself*, ed. and intro. Moira Ferguson, rev. ed. (Ann Arbor: U. Michigan Press, 1997). Citations from this edition are represented by page numbers in parentheses after the quotation. See also *The History of Mary Prince*, ed. Sara Salih (London: Penguin, 2004).
- 26 Now Turks Island, part of the British overseas territory of Turks and Caicos Islands.
- 27 Ferguson has identified Captain I. as a Captain Ingham (*History of Mary Prince*, 36).

- 28 Ferguson, *History of Mary Prince*, 20.
- 29 Compare Henry Louis Gates's comments on the perceived need for attestation by twelve prominent colonial figures that Phillis Wheatley was indeed the author of her 1773 volume of verse, *Poems on Various Subjects*, ed. Henry Louis Gates in New York: (vii–x, 1988).
- 30 Pringle (1789–1834) was a Scottish writer, poet, and abolitionist. He emigrated to South Africa in 1820, teaching in a school and running two newspapers. When his criticisms of the South African government prompted the closure of both newspapers and the school, he returned to London and served as secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society from 1827 to 1834. He lived to see the passage of the 1833 law prohibiting slavery in British colonies, but not the law's implementation in 1838. His *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa*, 2 vols., appeared in 1834 and *The Poetical Works of Thomas Pringle* in 1838.
- 31 In her *Letters of a Lifetime*, Strickland describes her transcription of Prince's story as "from her own dictation and for her benefit adhering to her own simple story and language without deviating to the paths of flourish or romance" (cited in Ferguson, *History of Mary Prince*, 26).
- 32 Susanna Strickland Moodie (1803–85), abolitionist, poet, and memoirist, later moved to Canada and authored *Roughing It in the Bush, or, Life in Canada* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1852).
- 33 The court transcript identified Susan Brown as "a sister-in-law of Mary Prince" (Ferguson, *History of Mary Prince*, 148), an error for the sister-in-law of Thomas Pringle.
- 34 Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 130–32.
- 35 The case of Grace Jones, a former slave who had been forcibly returned to the Caribbean, was tried by Judge Stowell in 1827 (Fryer, *Staying Power*, 130–31).
- 36 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, November 1831, 751.
- 37 Pringle's friend Leigh Ritchie reported a letter from him dated 12 January 1832, in which he states that "The prosecution of Blackwood is not an affair of mine. I wished to have replied in print, and I will still do so in a fourth edition of the tract", *The Poetical Works of Thomas Pringle. With a Sketch of His Life by Leigh Ritchie* (London: Edward Moxon, 1838), 105, quoted in Ferguson, *History of Mary Prince*, 49. Pringle fell ill and died shortly afterward, and this fourth edition never appeared.
- 38 The nominal grounds for defeat was that Pringle was unable to produce witnesses from the West Indies to prove his allegations (perhaps he had not been given advance notice that these would be required).
- 39 *Royal Gazette* (Kingston, Jamaica), L/2 5–12 January 1828, Postscript, [17], quoted in Fryer, *Staying Power*, 131. The *Antigua Free Press* [no pun intended] pronounced that "Reason and equity have triumphed over cant and hypocrisy" (IV/174) 14 December 1827, [2], in Fryer, *Staying Power*, 131.
- 40 Ferguson reprints the transcript of "Wood v. Pringle," (*History of Mary Prince*, 140–49) and Salih an extract, (*Mary Prince*, 100–103).

- 41 Ferguson, *History of Mary Prince*, Appendix 6, "Court Case Involving Mary Prince," *Wood v. Pringle*, 1 March 1833, 140–49.
- 42 Her questioners seem to have demanded details which they found amusing but may have hurt the Society's case: "One night she found another woman in bed with the Captain [who had] pretended to be a friend of [the] witness. (Laughter) Witness licked her, and she was obliged to get out of bed. (A laugh). The captain laughed, and the woman said she had done it to plague witness. Witness took her next day to the Moravian black leader, when she denied it, and witness then licked her again. (A laugh). The woman then complained before a magistrate, Mr. Justice Dyett; [but] when the story was told, they all laughed, and the woman was informed that she must never come there again with such tales, or she would be put into the stocks" (Ferguson, *History of Mary Prince*, 147).
- 43 From Prince's testimony: "Witness was also before the justice about beating a female slave, respecting a pig. Witness did not beat the woman, but she was punished as though she did by the desire of Mr. and Mrs. Wood. She used to make a little money by selling small articles—such as coffee, yams, pigs, and c.; and she used to take in washing" (Ferguson, *History of Mary Prince*, 147).
- 44 *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave* (London: F. Westley and A. H. Davis, Stationers' Hall Court; and by Waugh & Innes, Edinburgh, and supplied at trade price to Anti-Slavery Associations by Joseph Phillips, 18, Aldermanbury. 1831). Twenty-three of the book's 41 pages consisted of Prince's narrative, to which Pringle's "Supplement" was appended.
- 45 *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, vols. 1–5, London: London Society for the Abolition of Slavery, 1825–36. The *Reporter* was founded and edited by Zachary Macaulay (1768–1838), and after a hiatus from 1837 to 1839, continued as the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* from 1840 to 1994.
- 46 *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 15 February 1831, 133.
- 47 Despite its documentary cast, the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* contains much cogent and shrewd polemical writing. Writers for the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* were not content to report a general litany of pain, but honed in with incisive sarcasm on those responsible. Of the trial of a Mr. Walley, for example, the commentator remarks, "His Lordship professed to feel deep horror of the inhuman and abominable conduct of his manager, Mr. Walley. He has not, however, explained to Lord Goderich, how he came to place, in that man's hands, the uncontrolled power over his slaves with which he appears to have been invested. . . . Nay, we find that so long ago as 1 May 1827, this very Mr. Walley . . . was actually indicted for the murder of a slave . . . and that the indictment was then, as now, thrown out by the grand jury. Now it does seem strange that Lord Combermere should have been unapprized of this transaction; or being apprized of it, that he should have suffered Mr. Walley to remain in charge of his slaves for about three years longer, until he had killed off nearly a fourth of them" (1831, 323). Modern readers will recognize "plausible deniability."
- 48 *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 15 February 1831, 139.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 133.

- 50 "The plaintiff's letter to the Secretary of the Governor of Antigua . . . stated that Mary Prince's moral character was very bad, as the police records would show, and charged her with an act of gross indecency as a proof of her immoral conduct" (Ferguson, *History of Mary Prince*, 148).
- 51 The Moravians, noted for their missionary efforts, were a German pietist movement founded by John Huss (Jan Hus) (ca. 1369–1415).
- 52 It is possible that Prince was able to return to Antigua after emancipation, though blindness would have rendered this more difficult. Although several Mary Princes appear in the London census for 1838 and years following, without knowing her address one cannot know if the former slave was among them.
- 53 Ferguson glosses this eloquent passage as follows: "Here in a sense is the resolution of her inevitable conflict in trying to say all the right things, of abiding by the prescriptions about how a 'female' should act, about determining what an ex-slave should say, yet remaining true to herself" (*History of Mary Prince*, 27).
- 54 Hackett, *Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiographies*, 10; Gagnier, *Subjectivities*, 148, 169–170.
- 55 In Ferguson's words, "Obliged to confine herself within the parameters of acceptable debate, Mary Prince undoubtedly encodes her discourse, using all the conventions at her disposal, to plead her unique self" (*History of Mary Prince*, 26).
- 56 Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography*, 22; Liz Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography* (Manchester U. Press, 1992), 14.
- 57 James Olney, ed. and trans., "Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie," *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton U. Press, 1980), 45.