



INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS

---

Gender, History and Memory: The Invention of Women's Past in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Author(s): Billie Melman

Source: *History and Memory*, Spring - Summer, 1993, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring - Summer, 1993), pp. 5-41

Published by: Indiana University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25618641>

#### REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/25618641?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/25618641?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents)

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Indiana University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *History and Memory*

JSTOR

Billie Melman

**Gender, History and Memory: The Invention  
of Women's Past in the Nineteenth and  
Early Twentieth Centuries\***

*All histories are against you.*

Jane Austen, *Persuasion*

*I learnt history as unquestionably as I did geography, without ever  
dreaming that there could be more than one view of past events.*

Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*

Over the last few decades the significance of women's history and, more generally, studies on gender has become quite evident. It has been recognized that the "angel of history," unlike angels in Christian theology, is neither androgynous nor genderless;<sup>1</sup> that the cultural construction of sexual identities and of differences between the sexes has been a potent agent of change, as potent as, or perhaps more powerful than, class, nationality and ethnicity; that the recapitulation of a female experience has changed our optics of the past and helped us re-vision it.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the relationship between the construction of gender and memory and their combined influence on the evolution of historical record and narratives should be further probed. The very locus of women's history is difficult to demarcate. How has it related to traditional history? How has it referred to historical authority and that accumulation of data which Natalie Davis has aptly described as "historical succession"?<sup>3</sup> How did neglected groups (like women) come to be remembered? What kinds of narratives have been invented to include them in the collective memory – the national memory or the memory of elites or social classes – from which they

had been excluded? And how did the construction of “imagined” historical female communities, to paraphrase on Benedict Anderson’s well-known term, respond to mutations in gender ideology and to shifts in notions of female identity and in the social and political roles of women?<sup>4</sup> Finally, did the remembrance of women mean their “membership,” a belonging to and participation in communities from which they had been excluded?

6

This article is about the historicization of women and their construction as active agents of change. The concept of the historicity of women is quite novel. It was alien to historiography and to Western historical thought and political tradition. Hence the very emergence, around the middle of the nineteenth century, of the female historical subject and its incorporation in collective memory brought about the evolution of a discourse that challenged the hegemonic language of history and politics, both the Whig-Liberal idiom, dominant throughout the nineteenth century, and the “scientific” language of the new, seemingly value-free history developing on the Continent in the mid-century and later spreading to Britain and the United States. To focus the discussion I concentrate on the attempts, between the 1840s and 1940s, to recapitulate the past experience of women and on the implications of these attempts for contemporary notions of history and memory. For the first century of women’s history – what I call classical women’s history and distinguish from the new feminist historiography – saw the rise of “history” as an autonomous field of study and teaching, a *Wissenschaft*, a civic science designed to educate citizens, and a potent political tool. And the two developments may be causally related.

The status of the classical corpus of writings, both within traditional historiography *and* in feminist history after the 1970s, presents a curious example of authority and succession and of the scholarly recapitulation of tradition. For the classical women’s history has been mis-remembered and dis-remembered. It has been habitually omitted from standard works on historiography, notably from the surveys of fields like social and economic history, in which women were very active

and which experimented in the inquiry of a female experience of the past.<sup>5</sup> In feminist historiography and theory the older “tradition” has been regarded quite equivocally. True, there are quite a few studies of “women’s contribution to history and historiography,” which relate the historicization of women to the rise of feminism, but they are preliminary and taxonomic or socially oriented and focus on the status of women historians and their work in institutions, scholarly networks and hierarchies. While the work of Bonnie Smith, Maxine Berg and, most notably, Joan Scott on gender, politics and history is indispensable and has hugely informed my own, they hardly touch on the significance, for history and for the construction of collective memory, of a female historical discourse, or on the early feminist language of gender, class and nationality, on the critical terms it used and the plots of history it developed.<sup>6</sup> With a very few exceptions (notably Natalie Davis’s and Christina Crosby’s) there are no studies on memory, genre and gender or on the related construction of historical and sexual identities. And these studies draw on a limited canon of authors, from before the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

My own study, which by no means exhausts the writings on women’s history, is limited to works in English and is based on the writings of 66 women historians who, amongst them, produced 782 histories. Of these writers, 51, born between 1800 and 1900 and active between 1840 and the outbreak of World War II (publishing 731 works), were selected for close reading.<sup>8</sup> The terms “history” or “histories” are used here inclusively, in a rather catholic manner, and extended to the work of “men of letters,” amateurs of both sexes, writing popular works on women. A tradition of history as a branch of literature remained strong long after its professionalization and academization, particularly in Britain and the United States. Subsequently borderlines between the professional and the amateur are difficult to draw, especially in the case of women who practiced history inside *and* outside the academe, from which they had been excluded till the late nineteenth century (the 1870s in Britain and the early 1900s in Germany). To avoid a separation between text and context,

histories proper are located in the discourse on gender and juxtaposed with historical novels, a genre popularly regarded as interchangeable with “history,” and with the publications of national historical organizations, such as the British Historical Association.<sup>9</sup> Thus an intertextual meaning of the related subjects of gender and historical memory may be recapitulated.

8

I proceed chronologically and according to theme. In the first part of the article I consider the hegemonic, androcentric nineteenth-century notion of the past and the commemoration of “world-historical man.” Concepts of public history and private life and memory are considered as reflections of the gendered notions of the political and domestic spheres, conceived by contemporaries as “masculine” and “feminine.” In the second part I discuss the emergence of a feminized version of the national memory and of history alongside the traditional nationalist and liberal historiography of the mid-nineteenth century. To focus the discussion, one generic form, characteristic of the period, is selected: the female historical biography. In the last part of the article, I examine the construction of “women” as a historical group and the related historicization of sexuality in the experimental social and economic history. In overall historiographical terms these are genres that practically invented women as a historical community. Their novel approach to their subject matter is examined in relation to the attitudes characteristic of popular didactic publications for non-specialist audiences. As will be shown later, the structural study of groups replaced the more traditional biography, or the linear “outline” narrative of women’s past. However, the new narrative did not supplant the older one and there is a great deal of overlapping between the two historiographical traditions and kinds of memory they sought to recapitulate.

### **I. Historical Man and His “Other”: Gender and the Hegemonic Notions of History and Memory**

The nineteenth century has been justifiably described as the “historical century.” Following the process of secularization

and the Enlightenment, man was perceived as a historical being and history as the human condition. But history was not only an ontological principle, offering a secular explanation of the state of humanity, but also “the true fountain of knowledge.” “We do nothing but enact history, we say nothing but recite it,” argued Carlyle in 1829. “For strictly considered, what is all Knowledge but Recorded experience?”<sup>10</sup> The Carlylean notion of historical memory lived on in the new scientific discipline which developed in the 1880s. Thus the editor of the *English Historical Review*, the first professional historical periodical in the English language, stresses the importance of history as “the central study among human studies, capable of illuminating and enriching the rest.”<sup>11</sup> Of course, as virtually every student of Victorian historical myths has noted, past experience was not remembered and recorded merely for its pastness, but precisely for its value for the present. History like memory was characterized by its *presentism*. The commemoration and narration of events in the progress of nations and their institutions were remembered as *exempla*, models for contemporary politics, thus preserving the classical Ciceronian concept of the study of the past. The writing of history and its reading were not meant merely to provide information, but to educate citizens and apprentice them in a useful life of active civic service. In the words of Bishop Stubbs, Britain’s first professional historian and its foremost Victorian medievalist, history was “a science that teaches us lessons that are applicable to present politics.”<sup>12</sup>

Hence the very notion of history, both of history as a *res gestae* – of the things that happened – and as *historicum rerum gestarum* – the commemoration and recording of these things – was gendered. The subject of the record was those public actions and events which bore on the lives of majorities, but which were carried on by individual “world-historical men,” acting as the agents of change. Characteristically, nineteenth-century histories focused on the public and dramatic events in the national memory and on the progress of the liberal nation-state. Historians recapitulated national wars and those wars (like the Civil War in Britain or the North American war for independence) that unified the national experience, the

development of the national churches and the evolution of ideas and high culture, what Carlyle defined as “Reasoning and belief, no less than Action and Passion.”<sup>13</sup>

10

The emphasis on public memory as the one significant memory *ipso facto* excluded women from the historical narrative. The subject of history and its agent was the male citizen. Women had no place in the public and political history *because* they had been denied a part in political life and citizenship. They were to receive political citizenship only after World War I. And under both the Anglo-American Common Law and continental codification, they were denied an autonomous legal identity that was the basis of political citizenship. Official Christianity too, though it acknowledged the spiritual equality between the genders, divested women of public functions in the church. Thus, law and custom and religion excluded them from the sphere that had traditionally been seen as historical and from historical spaces that were male: the state, embodied in its representative institutions; the Church, the law courts and the battlefields. Furthermore, the gendered notion of history as public politics was bolstered by a long androcentric tradition in Western thought which had naturalized women and placed them outside history. As Clifford Geertz, James Clifford, Susan Moller-Okin and Christina Crosby, among many others, have noted, in Western discourse the term “man” was not universal and did not signify “human being,” but the Western, propertied male citizen. After the Enlightenment “world-historical man” was literally the active and public male citizen.<sup>14</sup> The epic histories of Carlyle and Macaulay, of Edward Freeman, John R. Green, John R. Seeley and Francis Parkman, as well as the Romantic national sagas of Augustin Thierry and Jules Michelet, had no place in them for women perceived as historical agents.<sup>15</sup>

Women did appear in history books. But they were essentialized and represented as symbols of transhistorical femininity, or as emblems of womanly virtues, and their lives as “lessons.” Plutarch, Giovanni Boccaccio, Giovanni Philippo Froseti and Christine de Pisan made women their subject, but decontextualized them. Later studies of the lives of queens or saints, written during the Enlightenment, like Marie Thiroux

d'Arconville's *Life of Marie de Médicis* (1774) or George Ballard's *British Ladies... Celebrated for Their Writings* (1752), were polemical treatises which discoursed on the theme of women's nature and the importance of female education. In the early nineteenth century Romanticism and nationalist historiography, which did so much to pluralize the Enlightenment concept of a universal history, paradoxically delegitimized historical interest in women. As George Mosse and Susan Mosher Stuard have shown, Romantic culture emphasized gender roles and behavior.<sup>16</sup> Michelet's treatment of women in his histories of the French people is an exemplar of the nationalist, Romantic approach. They are not treated as active agents of change, but rather as embodiments of the eternal (and non-historical) feminine, as the helpmates paired with "world-historical men." And women, even in political contexts, were relegated to the private memory and identified with the private sphere.<sup>17</sup>

11

The political and public notion of history encouraged the belief that women were devoid of a historical imagination, indeed that they were incapable of historical thinking. Gender qualities and confinement to the domestic sphere hindered them from general and abstract thought, in terms of "principles," rather than mere details. According to Macaulay, women, like the members of the lower classes, like children, criminals and non-Europeans (he gives the example of the Mohawk Indians), have a concrete way of thinking which contracts the mind and makes it unable to reason historically.<sup>18</sup> Women were sometimes described as incapable of a historical memory. Thus Thackeray presents the female historian as an anomaly, a virtual amnesiac engaged in the recapitulation of a past she cannot, may not, remember. In his little-known satire on nationalist historiography, originally written for *Punch* and reissued in the *Book of Snobs* as "Miss Tickletohy's Lectures on English History," Clio, the muse of history and memory, is resurrected as a shriveled harridan who abuses her pupils by forcing them to memorize the names of public persons, battles and victories. Being a female she is of course incapable of remembering the names of kings or of figuring the simplest arithmetics of periods and years, let



alone recapitulating the great events.<sup>19</sup> The “Lectures” are a venomous attack on the very tradition of political and public history, whose value Thackeray seriously doubted. Like other historical novelists after Walter Scott, he sought to domesticate the past and bridge between the memory of the heroic and that of the personal, *human* and feminine. In *The History of Henry Esmond Esq.*, a personal memoir of the aftermath of the revolution of 1688 and the Settlement of the English Constitution, Thackeray calls for a “History familiar rather than heroic.” “The Muse of history,” he argues, “has encumbered itself with ceremony as well as her sister the theatre. She too wears the mask and cothurns, and speaks to measure. She too, in our age busies herself with the affairs only of kings: waiting on them obsequiously and stately as if she were but a mistress of ceremony.”<sup>20</sup> The domestic version of the constitutional and religious history of the seventeenth century unsettled contemporaries. They perceived it as “effeminate” and “womanly” and as threatening to social norms and to history as a profession.<sup>21</sup> Similar fears of the emasculation of history echo in later criticisms of the work of “masculine” historical novelists like Bulwer Lytton, who created role models for women in the genre known as the “Anglo-Saxon novel,” which reconstructed the earlier political history of Britain.<sup>22</sup>

## II. Historical Women: National Memory and the Feminization of Political Biography

Significantly, the challenge to the model of the “world-historical man” and to traditional role models is to be found not in domestic, generically “feminine” novels, but in that historical genre which most successfully and most popularly constructed public, political history: historical biography. The new “lives” of illustrious women, or “women worthies,” as Davis has described them, served to de-essentialize them.<sup>23</sup> At the same time these biographies dehomogenized political memory and revised dominant definitions of the public and private, masculine and feminine. The earlier “lives,” or fragments of lives, attacked the androcentric model, but did

not offer a new pattern of narrative. Examples include Mary Hays's *Female Biography* (1803) in six volumes, which comprises 300 entries on distinguished women in the past, and Mary Pilkington's *Memoirs of Celebrated Females* (1804). Jane Austen's experimental *History of England*, written in 1791, is quite different from these popular biographical dictionaries. The *History* subverts the Whig version of the national past and the Burkean idea of "descent" or continuity and, no less significant, the authority of historians as the custodians of a unified memory of the past. Austen's survey of "the history of England from the reign of Henry the 4th to the Death of Charles 1st" is written by a "partial, prejudiced and ignorant Historian."<sup>24</sup> Only her frankly partisan attitudes are not Whig and Protestant, but Catholic (and that despite the fact that Austen was a devout Anglican) and Tory. This is particularly evident in the satirical portrayal of Elizabeth I, whom Austen represents as "a murderess" and "a pest to society," and in the sympathetic portrayal of Mary Queen of Scots, whose vindication had been the main purpose of the historical vignettes.<sup>25</sup>

In contradistinction to the early dictionaries and pastiches, the biographies proper, despite their appeal to large, heterogeneous audiences, stress the need for scholarly work on women. They combine an attempt to historicize individual women and integrate them in the public memory, with a new notion of the relation between the public and the domestic. Furthermore, the biographies emphasize a sense of a female tradition, of a succession of empowered women and a feminized version of the concept of descent. This is particularly manifest in the genre of serial female biography, collections of the lives of women worthies, queens for example. The *Lives of the Queens of England* by the biographer sisters Agnes and Elizabeth Strickland was to become the blueprint for the collective biography, indeed for the classical female historical biography. The two sisters, extraordinarily prolific even by Victorian standards, produced a number of meticulously researched group biographies, based on archive work in Britain and France. The twelve volumes of *Lives* (1840–48) was followed by *Lives of the Queens of Scotland* (1850–

59), *Lives of the Tudor Princesses* (1867) and a number of other biographical works. Agnes Strickland, the dominant party in the team, wrote several historical novels as well.

14

The 34 biographies of queens-regnant, spouses of monarchs and the mothers of minor kings, serving as regents, appear to be a “conservative” document, upholding traditional notions of history and gender. However, by the very inclusion of women in public memory, the *Lives* blurs accepted distinctions between it and the private, or feminine, memory and feminizes notions of power and politics. The Stricklands accept the Whig notion of descent, of an evolving representative constitution embodying the unified historical nation. They regard their effort as a “national venture.”<sup>26</sup> The challenge to the collective national memory is that the idea of a common, unified heritage and of legitimate political power is embodied in the private and public acts of women rulers. Domestic and political history become inseparable. This reinterpretation of the relations between the spheres is particularly manifest in the narrative of the lives of the spouses of powerful kings, in which the writers abandon the binary model of gender relations in traditional history. In the life of Mathilda of Normandy, wife of William the Conqueror and co-foundress of the Angevine dynasty, the first “English queen” is represented as a wife, a mother and a pious and cultured woman, all apparently traditional feminine characteristics. Moreover, the legal restrictions on her power are well demonstrated in a close reading of documents, such as the queen’s will. However, Mathilda is a public figure and an articulate interpreter of the historical events of her time, exactly like the historians who recapitulate her memory. The Stricklands devote part of the biography to a detailed description of the Bayeux tapestry, which in the mid-nineteenth century still hung in the cathedral of that city, and whose creation and production they attribute to the queen and her Norman companions. The tapestry, commemorating the collapse of the Saxon kingdom, the Battle of Hastings and the Normanization of Anglo-Saxon England – events grafted on the collective memory – is itself a feminine interpretation of history. It is, at the same time, an example of a traditional female artefact

(weaving and embroidery), identified with the privacy of the home, and a text of a public character in which “the events of the period have been faithfully presented to us,”<sup>27</sup> for it narrates heroic and political events and has been displayed publicly in a cathedral, a place in which women could be present only as spectators. In a footnote, which almost exceeds the text, male historians like Montfaucon, Thierry, Ducel and Taylor, who had doubted the female authorship of the “text,” are criticized. Indeed their very authority is doubted:

15

With due deference to the judgement of the lords of creation, on all subjects connected with policy and science, we venture to think our learned friends, the archaeologists and antiquaries, would do well to direct their intellectual powers to more masculine objects of inquiry and leave the question of the Bayeux tapestry ... to the decision of the ladies, to whose province it particularly belongs.<sup>28</sup>

Female power *and* the authority of the female historian are legitimized on the basis of difference, not of equality, between the genders. However, the emphasis on a different and gender-specific experience of the past warrants the inclusion of women in the national memory in active roles. The Stricklands redefine traditional notions of public action and civil virtue. Since classical times public *virtus* had been perceived as *sui generis* masculine and political. In the British context political virtue had been characterized as Protestant. As Linda Colley has demonstrated, the Catholic past and Catholics had been carefully eradicated from official memory and from popular literature of remembrance, such as calendars, almanacs and popular histories. Like women, Catholics had been written out of history.<sup>29</sup> In the Stricklands' version, as in Austen's earlier one, Catholic queens like Mary Tudor, Mary Queen of Scots and Henrietta Maria are depicted in neutral and even favorable terms, and paragons of Protestant virtue such as Elizabeth I or Lady Jane Gray are ruthlessly demythologized. The analogy between women and

religious minorities is structural and will reappear in later works on gender studied in the third part of this article.

Later works, emulating the format of collective biography, further dehomogenized the Whig-Protestant version of the past and feminized political and religious history. Examples may include the successful works of Anna Jameson (1794–1860), Julia Kavanagh (1824–1877) and Julia Sophia Pardoe (1806–1862). Some of the titles capitalize on the notion of “memory” as a literary genre that, according to George Duby, commemorates not only the private but also the public. Lucy Aikin’s *Memoirs of the Court of Elizabeth I* and *Memoirs of the Courts of Elizabeth, James I and Charles I*, in six volumes, appeared between 1818 and 1833. Anna Jameson’s *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Sovereigns* was issued in 1831 and was followed in 1837 by *Memoirs of Women Celebrated by the Poets*. Pardoe’s *Life and Memoirs of Marie de Medici*, first published in 1852, went into several editions.

In other works the notion of public action by women is expanded outside politics, as in Grace Aguilar’s *Women of Israel* (1845) and Kavanagh’s *Women in France during the Eighteenth Century* (1850), *Women of Christianity* (1852) and *English Women of Letters* (1863). In the first of these works Kavanagh remarks that power was held by women during the eighteenth century, but that “historians of that period have never fully or willingly acknowledged its existence. Their silence cannot efface that which has been.”<sup>30</sup> Her account of women’s power and authority is subtle and leads her to develop wider reflections on the distribution of authority in France of the *ancien régime*. She is particularly perceptive on informal, female networks of power in the French court and the Paris salons. *Women of Christianity*, published two years later, further develops the notion of the negotiability of the spheres of gendered power. Kavanagh challenges the idea that female piety restricted women to the home. “Not professing to include those women whose virtues went not beyond the circle of home and whose piety was limited to worship,” she presents Christianity as a means by which women could exercise public authority and indirectly feminize secular politics.<sup>31</sup>

Notwithstanding its significance for the collective memory and national historiography, the classical female biography did not historicize women as a group. Exceptional individuals became the subjects of historical inquiry not because they had been “typical” or because their lives had in any way represented the fortunes of women as a social or cultural construct, but precisely because as “great women” they had been different from the rest of their gender. Their status in secular memory is superficially analogous with that of the Virgin Mary and the female saints in theology and popular religion after the thirteenth century. “Alone of their sex,” the saints had been desexualized and freed of women’s part in the original sin. Dissociated from nature, they became empowered. Yet they were not historicized.<sup>32</sup> The secular biography treated some women as “world-historical men,” but implicitly acknowledged that women as such were outside history and that, as a group, they had no place in the collective memory.

17

### **III. Remembrance and Dis-Membering: Gender, Memory and the Classical Women’s History, 1870–1940**

The historicization of women was to become complete only with their construction as a collectivity with a historical identity, changing through time and according to place and itself activating change. And the acknowledgement that women were active historical agents was probably one of the most significant changes in the historical imagination and in historical writings between, say, the 1870s and the outbreak of World War II. There is during that period a swing from the remembrance of heroic individuals towards the recapitulation of the experience of majorities of women. This swing involved a perceptible change in the ways in which experience was defined, recorded and emplotted. The biography and the linear historical epic of the mid-nineteenth century, constructed along the “great lines” of history and commemorating a unified story of progress, were now supplanted by a “concentric history” of women, based on research and analysis of select periods and subjects. Of course the female biography did not disappear altogether. There was

a market for popular biographies till the 1940s, but there is no doubt that the generic form characteristic of the new experimental history was the history of a group or a collectivity.<sup>33</sup>

18

The shifts in the historiography and the historical imagination were related to a growing awareness of the “woman question,” more specifically to the emergence of the first wave of feminism between the 1870s and the aftermath of World War I. As Maxine Berg and I have demonstrated, a significant number of women historians were active in reformist and feminist networks at precisely the same period.<sup>34</sup> However, the reconceptualization of the female historical subject could not have taken place without the apparatus of the new scientific history and the critical tools it put at the disposal of historians.

The transformation of history, from literature to a *Wissenschaft* based on *Quellenkritik*, from the Carlylean to the Rankean model, from the pursuit of an amateur to an academic profession, have received ample attention.<sup>35</sup> Suffice it to say here that before its complete academization, after World War II, developments within the new field encouraged interest in, and the study of, women’s history. Furthermore, the presence of women historians in experimental fields like social and economic history was quite impressive. My quantitative analysis of publications in the periodical historical press and of active participation in British historical societies clearly shows that women had a high rate of representation, from about a third in conservative professional societies like the Royal Historical Society to an astonishing 90% in the Historical Association. Comparable analyses of membership in the American Historical Association show a much lower rate of participation (about 12%).<sup>36</sup>

The growing awareness of the new historians and of traditionalists that women were in history and of it, rather than its “other,” made it necessary to redefine the relationship between memory and gender. The Macaulayan notion of the historical mind as a masculine mind, capable of abstraction and generalization, was being supplanted by a new notion of historical study and of memory. In other words, the

recapitulation of past experience and its very memorization were seen as gender-related, rather than gender-specific, activities: women and men, girls and boys, remembered the past and learnt its lessons differently. The reconceptualization of the impact of gender on history and memory undoubtedly had to do with the role played by women historians in the new fields of economic and social history. The work of Eileen Power (1889–1940), Lilian Knowles (d. 1926), Bertha Phillpotts (1880–1932), M. Dorothy George (b. 1878) and Helen Maud Cam (1885–1968) and of Americans Nellie Neilson (1873–1947) and Bertha Putnam (1872–1960) was highly regarded by their contemporaries. The new kind of woman historian, university educated and characteristically politically committed, produced work which was seen as professional.

But more significant, history was seen as a part of the political and public *Bildung* of women. The memory and study of events in the past still had meanings beyond “pure learning.” Women, like men, it was thought, could be educated to be citizens and initiated in civic values. Such an education would benefit not only the individual, but the empire-state, or a class or gender. The idea that history was part of a gender-specific *Bildung* reflected changes in the position of women, particularly middle-class women, during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Following the reforms in secondary education for girls in the 1860s and the admission of women to the old universities and the newer civic ones, there was a need to redefine their relation to the public and civic space, outside the domain of the traditionally defined home. The educational and political value of the study of history was related to concepts of citizenship. Women were seen as citizens, albeit not in the traditional *political* sense of this term (until 1928 they did not have the vote). Female citizenship, as Jane Lewis has pointed out, was defined as social and civic, rather than political, and involved different kinds of social action that were carried on in an intermediary space between the domestic sphere and that sphere occupied by the state (what Antonio Gramsci would have identified with the sphere of civil society).<sup>37</sup>



Educators, historians and politicians were quick to grasp the new potential of the study of history for the new kind of citizen. The Historical Association constantly debated the issue of civic education *versus* that of scientific inquiry, as the primary trajectory of the new history. The Association, initially a teachers' organization, came to absorb virtually all of Britain's professional historians. By 1921 it was feminized, with 91% women members. In the debates on the nature and trajectory of history, the focus was on methods of teaching that actively developed a collective *national* memory, albeit a gendered one. "The purpose of history," argued S. A. Burstall in 1911, "was not that pupils [girls] should learn history but should receive training in the citizenship."<sup>38</sup> Burstall was headmistress of the Manchester Girls' High School which prepared scholars for University Examinations. But more interestingly, professional historian Winifred Mercier, who from 1913 to 1915 was Director of History at Girton College, Cambridge, the institution that trained the majority of Britain's classical feminist historians, expressed similar views:

Teachers of history should interpret the national character: the national ideals and educate their pupils in the topos of their own race. Nations no less than individuals, can afford to dispense with their peculiar characteristics.<sup>39</sup>

Burstall's and Mercier's remarks are quite typical and may be interchanged with numerous others. Equally typical is the notion that the national memory is gendered. Traditionalists maintained that girls should be encouraged to remember the great lines of history and memorize the deeds of great individuals, rather than learn "concentric" history and specialize in periods or "problems" as in the universities. Formative times in the evolution of the nation, for example the times of the Anglo-Saxons, should be specially studied.<sup>40</sup> To represent the past, Mercier used the famous history charts which outlined the national chronology with the aid of illustrations, thus helping pupils to memorize it and to internalize a canonized collective memory. The charts were

repeatedly reproduced in the Association's cheap pamphlets and utilized by schoolteachers. Re-membrance, then, had two meanings. Women, hitherto seen as non-citizens and therefore excluded from the study of history, were now encouraged to practice it. By memorizing a version of the past that was sanctioned by the historical profession, or by a part of it, they too could become citizens, members of the nation and supporters of the Empire. This relationship between identity and memory is captured by George Orwell in his *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), in which memory is perceptively connected to gender and class. Dorothy Hare, teaching at a grim, fourth-rate suburban school for the daughters of shopkeepers and the lower class of clerks, realizes:

how hard it is for children who came from poor homes to have even the conception of what history means. Every high-class person ... grows up with some notion of history: he can visualize a Roman centurion, a medieval knight, an eighteenth-century nobleman; the terms of Antiquity, the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Industrial Revolution evoke some meaning.... But these children ... came from parents who would have laughed at the notion that the past has any meaning for the present.

Her solution is to make her pupils remember the past by creating chronological charts; thus they remember history by "making" its outlines and enacting events and characters. Significantly, she uses male models. The only women to appear on the charts are Queen Elizabeth I and the legendary Boadicea, queen of the rebelling Britons.<sup>41</sup>

Lest we consider the attempts to teach women history as indoctrination by the state or a missionary middle class, we should be wary that the inclusion of women in the national memory was far from being a one-sided attempt at colonization, imposed by a national education system on passive receptacles. As the records of the Historical Association clearly show, inside that system women were active participants in the construction of national myths and the inclusion of women in the past. Indeed, inclusion may be described as a

process of negotiation between individuals – teachers, authors and their readers – and the state. Nor were participation and negotiation limited to national educational organizations or to the state system. As Berg has shown, some of the most experimental and innovative studies of the past experience of women were inspired by reformist politics, whether the politics of Social Liberalism (and more specifically Fabianism), with its emphasis on statist unity, or Labor politics, with its stress on the homogenizing memory of class.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the recapitulation of the experience of groups of women and its analysis were regarded as the basis for an explanatory model of their position in society and the industrial state at the present.

In overall historiographical terms, the cultivation of a female memory, whether conservatively or “radically” motivated, served to de-unify the past and subvert sanctioned historical myths and narratives. Put differently, the very recovery of the past experience of women, its remembrance and recording, resulted in a dis-membering of history. These two related phenomena took place both in the experimental, structural histories *and* in the seemingly traditionalist popular histories focusing on women.

In the new social and economic histories the emphasis was on *difference* in human experience, rather than on unity and homogeneity. As Jane Allen Harrison, Cambridge classicist, historical anthropologist and historian, put it, the study of the humanities should be based on “sympathy with infinite difference.”<sup>43</sup> However, according to Harrison, a female experience of the past and a female notion of history were relative to, rather than completely different from, a “male” historical experience, precisely because of the common humanity of women and men.<sup>44</sup> Significantly, within the new experimental history “experience” and “memory” were perceived first and foremost as material and were represented in scientific terms, in “evidence” and “facts.” The past was described not literarily but “empirically.” The materialism of the classical feminist historians and antiquarians, indeed their emphasis on a pristine, accurate “experience” of women, independent of prejudice, speculation and theory, undoubtedly manifests their professional and political allegiances. The

majority of these historians forcefully stressed the need to remember the different experiences of men and women, which were based on different social and economic conditions, rather than on natural inequality or an unaltering and universal construct of patriarchalism. Of the 204 works published between 1900 and 1930 by the cohort of historians born between 1875 and 1900, 49, or a little over 23%, the largest single category, were on women's work; 64% were on subjects related to social and economic history in general. Examples may be multiplied and include: Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (1919); Mable Atkinson, *The Economic Foundations of the Women's Movement* (1914); the parts on women's work and female immigration in M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (1926); equivalent parts in John Lawrence and Barbara Lucy Hammond's trilogy, *The Town Laborer, Skilled Laborer and Rise of Modern Industry* (1917; 1919; 1925); Barbara L. Hutchins, *Women in Modern Industry* (1915); Barbara Drake, *Women and the Trade Unions* (1918); and Ivy Pinchbeck's still irreplaceable *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution* (1930). This is not to say that non-material dimensions in women's history were dis-remembered. They were not. But they were carefully attached to empirical enquiry.

The tendency to de-ideologize and to empiricize particularly evinces itself in those studies devoted to such subjects as women's religion and culture. One salient example is Eileen Power's classic *Medieval English Nunneries*, a social history of religion before the Reformation. Despite her extensive use of literary sources and a pioneering resort to Freud, to interpret sexuality in celibate female communities, she stresses the daily aspects of women's life and their material conditions, rather than what she terms their "spiritual aspect." Overemphasis on "ideas," like the preoccupation with politics, distorted the memory of women's past.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, in the *Nunneries* the entire connection between women and religion is de-spiritualized and de-essentialized.

The novelty of the new experimental history is not its materialism, but the fact that the materialist approach (which supplanted the essentialism of traditional history) involved a

critique of theories of subordination and subjection in contemporary historiography and political thought. Liberal social and Marxist interpretations of women's history usually wrote women out of the historical memory. When these histories did touch on the issue of gender difference, they subsumed it in the topic of class, or labor, and assumed that the woman's problem would be solved together with that of class. Olive Schreiner's enormously influential *Women and Labor* (1911) rejects the subsumption of the material history of women in the economic and social history of the laboring class. The concepts of labor, modernization and industrialization adopted by the disciples of Marx are, according to her, androcentric. Labor and industry mean totally different things to men and women.<sup>46</sup> Following in her footsteps, Alice Clark recovers the forgotten women's experience of capitalism and proto-industrialism during the seventeenth century:

Hitherto the historian has paid little attention to the circumstances of women's lives, for women had been regarded as a static factor in social developments, a factor which remaining itself essentially the same, might be expected to exercise a constant and unvarying influence on society.

But women, as a group, are not only changed by *material* conditions, but themselves activate change. Most important, Clark historicizes aspects of femininity which history and memory essentialized. "Even the most elemental sexual and maternal instincts are subject to modification."<sup>47</sup>

Clark and numerous other historians were careful not to exchange one unifying memory of the past for another. They were sensitive to the problematics of "women" as an analytical historical term *and* as a defining category designating a historical community. Both Schreiner and Clark point out that women have always been different from other superficially comparable collectivities such as the working class, ethnic minorities or communities of slaves, precisely because of the sexual and psychological aspects of their relations to men,

which made gender hierarchies so unique.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the apparent unity of the history of women discloses several disunities: of class and social location, of geography, of religion, of nationality and ethnicity.

The female experience was pluralized and dehomogenized. Its narration ultimately relativized the very notion of women as a collectivity. Pinchbeck, in her novel interpretation of the industrial revolution, in which she genders the notions of work and industry, is at pains to show that women's experience of industrialization and modernization varied enormously. Her study appears to represent a unified picture of the industrial revolution, which is optimistic and which appreciates its benefits for women of all classes. However, this homogeneity is belied by the diversity of experience of different groups of workers: Lancashire mill-hands, Yorkshire coal-miners, Sussex agricultural gang-laborers, Shropshire cheese- and cider-makers, etc. The picture she draws is made all the less unified by a cross-study of gender and class: women of the merchant classes are studied alongside farmers, cottagers, paupers and vagabonds, handloom-weavers and factory laborers.<sup>49</sup>

25

Medievalists like Power, Lina Eckenstein, Rotha Mary Clag, Rose Graham and Alice Gardiner dis-membered the memory of the group even further. They all focused on religious communities of women, communities which virtually all the early feminist medievalists saw as sisterhoods that had offered women degrees of autonomy outside marriage and the family. However, sorority did not necessarily imply solidarity, quite the contrary. Power selects a very small minority within a minority: the 2,000 or so nuns scattered in 138 religious houses on the eve of the English Reformation. And this minority is separated from, then compared with, women of the feudal elite (from which the houses drew most of their inmates) and the urban and peasant classes, then with men within the first two orders, then finally with male religious communities. Nevertheless, what appears to be their double marginality (as women and nuns) does not obliterate the pre-Reformation nuns from memory. They are selected to be remembered precisely because through the prism of their experience medieval

society and culture can be appreciated anew. Even more significantly, Power, like other students of medieval female communalism, focuses on a memory that in historical tradition and writing had been related to the private rather than public sphere and hence relegated outside historical memory. For the nuns she studies were subject to the Benedictine *regula* which, together with communalism, poverty and celibacy, commended the contemplative life for religious women, thus confining them to separate communities, cut off from the secular political “world.” Yet *Medieval English Nunneries* amply demonstrates how flexible the categories and notions of private and public were in a society that had not yet developed a sense of privacy. With rich detail, collected from diocesan lists of visitation, Power describes the public freedoms enjoyed by religious women. The literary models of the worldly abbess and the female pilgrim, immortalized in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, are emulated in her portrayal of peripatetic nuns. Furthermore, the lack of feminine solidarity in the religious communities is emphasized time and again.<sup>50</sup>

What is clear from the aforesaid is that although the new history elevated women to a historical community, sharing a common material experience, it did not treat them as a monolith, nor as a collective bound by a sense of an essentially and naturally feminine identity. Thus, the very process of remembering women and historicizing them involved their “dis-memberment.”

The new pluralist and relativist approach to the past had potentially divisive effects on the very notion of a unified history. National history was dissected, “dis-membered” as it were, into several equally valid memories or stories: the memory of class or gender, for example. Dissection is of course typical of social and economic history in general. However, as implied in the foregoing, the dehomogenizing effect of women’s history was more subversive than that of the new history, which did not deal with gender. As already mentioned, the women historians criticized the category of “class” as they did the notion of “man.” More significant culturally, these historians challenged current concepts of nationalism, culture and ethnicity, which the social-liberal

(Fabian) historiography did not seriously tackle or ignored altogether. In the majority of the histories discussed here, “nation,” especially in its imperialist and racial context, and “culture” were dissolved and used in a relative manner.

The nation-state, which was the subject of the female biography and of course of nineteenth-century liberal historiography, disappears from the experimental women’s history, together with the feminized historical biography. Publications on “women worthies” shrank from 33.3% between 1850 and 1875 to a not very significant 1% in the 1920s. More important, the emergence of the unified national state and the progress of its institutions were dis-remembered by most historians. It is more than mere coincidence that the High Middle Ages and the era before the Reformation, together with the early eighteenth century, received much greater attention than the sixteenth and seventeenth “political” and “national” centuries. Leading women medievalists such as Power, Phillipotts, Cam, Eckenstein and Graham, and popularizers such as Annie Abram and Georgina Hill saw prenational medieval communities as more favorable to women. According to them, the post-Reformation nation-state (traditionally regarded as the highest point in the evolution of England) divested women of all classes of diverse autonomies and freedoms. As Eckenstein points out, the career open to women before the abolition of the monasteries “both in England and on the Continent was greater than any other ever thrown open to women in the course of modern European history.”<sup>51</sup>

27

The comparative study of women’s experience further facilitated the development of the relativist approach to national and Western culture. A number of historians expanded beyond the national state, choosing to investigate communities of women with comparable ethnic minorities, or by studying the former cross-culturally. The result of this experimentation was the development of a truly relative sense of culture and gender.

Although typical of the experimental historiography, the challenge to dominant concepts of the nation and to imperialist culture was by no means limited to it. Popular



histories which touched on the history of women challenged nationalist culture implicitly and explicitly. One example is the writing of the Irish feminist historian Alice Stopford Green (1847–1929), which has so far received very little attention. She is doubly interesting because of her personal and professional allegiances to traditional liberal history and to the new academic establishment, as well as to the Suffrage and Irish nationalist movements. The wife of the best-selling medievalist John R. Green and his co-author, Stopford Green edited a number of his linear popular histories of the nationalization of England, notably the best-selling *Short History of the English People*. After his death she identified herself with the movement for Irish cultural revivalism and sympathized with (and extended help to) the Irish Volunteers. She was also a supporter of university education for women and a suffragist.<sup>32</sup> Her work on Irish history, comprising researches on Irish women, is subversive in more than one sense. In previous historical works, as well as in contemporary ones, the Irish, indeed the Celts as a group, were marginalized, if not altogether written out of the national history. In that sense, they, like women, had no place in public memory and in politics and hence had been obliterated from an official version of history, which during the nineteenth century had become markedly “English” and “Saxonist.” The Saxonist approach to the national past, emphasizing an ethnic purity and a Germanic identity, underlay histories of Ireland which recorded its integration into the nation-state. Stopford Green, on the other hand, completely reverses the relationship between an ethnic and political majority and a minority, between English and Irish, Saxon and Celt, as well as between the colonizer as “civilized” and the occupied “savage,” and, most relevant here, between men and women. Her histories uncover the Celtic past and emphasize the existence of a cultural nationalism in a forgotten material and literary culture. At the same time she prefers to ignore the military aspects of tribal Gallic society. In the non-military culture women, such as the completely forgotten Margaret, daughter of O’Caroll, Lord of Ely, and wife of Calvagh O’Connor, a fifteenth-century chieftain, held special positions. Her own

history is worth remembering because it is entangled with the public memory of the military occupation of central Ireland by the Lancastrian kings, which Stopford Green regards as a barbaric demonstration of force. Elsewhere she remarks that “the civilization of a people is marked by the place of its women, a rule by which the Irish stand high,”<sup>53</sup> implying that their contemporary English were less civilized. Her contemporary, medievalist Annie Abram, is not as outspoken on English culture, yet manages to deliver a similar message: “The comparison of the status of women in different countries, at different times may furnish us with the causes of their advance or retrogression and with light on the institutions and the national characteristics of the countries in question.”<sup>54</sup> Stopford Green’s subject, Margaret O’Connor, like many Irish women of her class, was a patron of the arts and a transmitter of the national culture:

There was a good deal ... that Dublin [the center of the English administration] did not know or care to know. In the midst of this desolating war the story of Margaret ... gives us a glimpse into the life of the Irish clans behind the fastness that screened them from the English view of history.”<sup>55</sup>

In the new social and economic histories comparison is used structurally, as in contemporary anthropology, rather than polemically. Examples are legion. M. G. Jones’s classic *The Charity School Movements: A Study of Eighteenth Century Puritanism* is probably the first study on philanthropy to extend beyond England to the Welsh and Irish periphery. Dorothy George’s social histories of London in the eighteenth century (still in print) combine research on women’s work and female immigration with the study of religious and ethnic minorities in London at the onset of industrialization, like the Irish, Sephardic Jews, Mulattos and Blacks of the West Indies. Women, maintains George, were particularly prone to suffer from the consequences of proto-industrialization. However, they were active agents in the processes of change in the labor-market, as well as their victims.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, by

representing the central subject of the study, London, as a feminized and multiracial place, rather than as a national metropolitan city, George challenges notions of the center and the margins, the political and the domestic, of the national and the foreign. A decade earlier than George, Harrison's work on Greek rituals and Phillpotts' writing on Icelandic mythology and on kindred and the family in the later Middle Ages combine the comparative study of texts in different languages, representing a diversity of cultures, with comparative philology (Harrison, Phillpotts) and anthropology (Harrison).<sup>57</sup>

Comparison was the most subversive when extended to cultures and societies outside Europe. The status of European women in the past and present, indeed their very experience, could be compared with those of non-European women, sometimes to the disadvantage of the former *and* of Western culture. Cross-cultural comparison and analogy challenged some of the very basic premises of modern historiography, not least its Eurocentrism and androcentric bias. The sense of a cultural superiority, based on the notion of "progress" and modernity, became relative when examined cross-culturally and through the prism of gender relations. Thus, in a number of studies "subjection," "patriarchy," "progress" and "civilization" are no longer used as absolute and universal terms that are applicable cross-culturally. Stopford Green's and Abram's statement, that the position of women was the litmus test of the degree of evolution of a civilization (a statement that of course echoes Charles Fourier), was reversed in the more radical comparative writings. For it appeared that in colonized areas in which women were sequestered and had no access to politics and the political world, they in fact had been active throughout history and enjoyed degrees of freedom. This message is quite clear in Power's various works on the Far East, notably her writing on India and Java, which she toured during her year as Albert Khan Travelling Fellow in 1921. Her report to the Trustees of the Khan Foundation, as well as the four volumes of her unpublished journal entitled "Tour du monde," provide an abundance of examples of the use made by the historian of anthropological material

collected on the spot, mainly from women, and combined, with the aid of analogy, with historical evidence.

Power's use of analogy may seem quite conservative, for she appears to follow the tradition of comparison between the historic West and a contemporary (and unchanging) East, common in Victorian ethnography. The journals swarm with allusions to similarities between medieval Europe and contemporary India. The Indian peasant community is like the medieval village organization; Indian economy is like the market economy during the High Middle Ages; tax assessment for the Indian Land Revenue is exactly like taxation at the times of the Domesday Book, and Hindu and Muslim oral culture replicates the poetic tradition of the North and England: the Icelandic Edda and the Poem of Beowulf are like the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. Most striking, however, is the apparent similarity between the position of Indian and medieval European women:

31

The Chinese tied up their feet and the West their minds; the Indian put them into purdah and the Middle Ages put them on a pedestal – in practice the difference is not always a great one for the ideals displayed in medieval books of deportment for women are the ideals of harem. Moreover the official dogma as to the position of women was enunciated by an all-powerful Church ... ever more ready to regard her as Eve, the betrayer of Adam, than as Mary the mother of Christ.... For these reasons the position of women is superficially one of the most striking differences between East and West to-day.<sup>58</sup>

Thus it is here, in the analysis of gender relations, that Power departs from traditional notions of progress, power and subordination. These notions are stripped of their evolutionary and racial connotations and are exposed as Eurocentric and androcentric. The seclusion of women does not mean powerlessness. The private sphere may be extended to the political, as in the case of the Indian nationalist movement, in which women were quite active. Power works out a new and

rather radical interpretation of the relationship among the notion of historical agency, memory and gender. Like Stopford Green and Phillpotts, she entrusts women with the preservation of an idiosyncratic native culture, which is clearly seen as female. Power, however, goes one step farther than her contemporaries in that she attributes to Asian women the role of preserving the memory of the past and relating it to the present. It is, needless to say, a nationalist and fiercely anti-imperialist memory. Significantly, it is not only female, but oral and popular, rather than literary and scholarly. The journals comprise a number of descriptions of ritual dances by women, which enact events in precolonial history, *publicly* re-narrating it: the dance of the Nauch girls (or professional prostitutes) in the province of Arwall in India and the dance of the royal Srimpis in the court of the Sultan of Djojakarta in Java. Significantly, these “narratives,” in which historical events are enacted, are represented to male audiences, usually with Power herself as the only female spectator. The description in her journal of the Javanese women’s ritual dance, which is published here for the first time, is an indictment of the West, of Western culture and of contemporary notions of history:

... every gesture has behind it a whole world of meaning, yet their movements were too heavy with significance. I never saw a dance which gave so strong an impression that it was a climax of a great and old civilization. Only long ages of culture could have wrought themselves unto a thing so perfect.... As I sat there by the Dutch resident and his fellow officials, with their heavy wives and looked from their faces to those of the ... women of [this] race, I was overborne by a sense of tragic irony. We were barbarians sitting there.<sup>59</sup>

\*

The interest in women as the subject of history *and* as a historical group faded in the later 1930s. Individual historians and historical novelists continued to produce work on women, but that work was sporadic and isolated and cannot be

regarded as part of the tradition examined here. As already mentioned, outside studies on gender and genre, feminist historiography and criticism of the last three decades are in more than one way discontinuous with the earlier tradition, breaking as it were with their own history. The reasons for the discontinuity in historiography and memory are beyond the scope of this article and have been discussed by me elsewhere.<sup>60</sup> Enough to say that they were only partly political, to do with the demise of feminism after World War I. Mostly, the silence of historians registered changes in the concept of history and memory before and after World War II, as well as mutations in history as a profession, which, together, precipitated the exclusion of women from the historical profession and their omission from the memory of historians.

It is therefore all the more tempting to describe the period between the 1840s and the 1940s in cyclical terms: centuries of silence were followed by a sonorous discourse on women which then faded to a whisper just before World War II and revived during the late 1960s with the emergence of the second wave of feminism. Periods in which women were obliterated from memory alternated with times when they were incorporated in a collective and inclusive history or made the subject of a gender-specific memory, and then again became subjected to scholarly amnesia. It is equally tempting to represent the relationship between women's history and memory in dichotomous, oppositional terms, to juxtapose an amateur and essentially conservative view of the past, which is attuned to shifts in the collective memory, to a divisive memory typical of avant-garde, experimental history. We should be wary of such appositions. Lilian Knowles, eminent scholar, Professor of Economic History at the London School of Economics and probably the first woman in the West to hold a chair in economic history, wrote a number of outline histories celebrating Britain's rise as a commercial and financial empire. And it is evident that she saw her work as a healthy antidote to the concentric studies produced by reformist and Radical women historians. On the other hand, popular historians and writers such as Stopford Green and historical essayist and novelist Vernon Lee (Violet Page), both

critical of the new history, challenged any notion of an official national memory. In her anti-nationalist tract *The Ballet of Nations*, published in the midst of World War I, Lee lampooned the corruption of Clio, who was turning into the goddess of petty research on economics, yet, at the same time, dissected the unified histories based on the study of wars and high diplomacy.<sup>61</sup>

34

What emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century was a dialogue between two histories, or two modes of remembrance: an integrative memory of the past, seeking to incorporate women in the national history, or the history of a class, and educate them as citizens of the empire-state, and the relativist women's history, which emphasized the specificity of gendered experience in history and which had rejected the nationalist framework altogether. However, regardless of their filiation with historical and historiographical tradition and their political and professional affiliations, the historians examined here have a few common characteristics. First, their work assumes the historicity of women (some women, or women as a group), thus de-centering the Western notion of the historical man-citizen. Second, the classical women's history radically changes the notions of the private and the public and, subsequently, the very concept of history and memory, on the one hand, and dominant perceptions of gender, on the other. As shown in the first part of this article, the female biography and the "feminine" historical novel feminized politics and blurred the distinction between the historical and therefore memorable experience of the citizen, and the non-historical private and domestic experience. Of course, this change was not isolated. Its significance was that it took place at a time of what Davidoff and Hall, and recently Colley, have described as "negotiability" between the spheres and a redefinition of gender roles in middle-class ideology.<sup>62</sup> The newer history of collectivities broke away from the mid-century notion of the public and private altogether. For the historians of collectivities, recapitulating the experience of majorities of women (and men) wrote out the political, concentrating instead on the intermediate sphere between the "home" and the state. Their typical subjects of investigation

were neither the intimate, domestic sphere, identified as “feminine” and “human” (as in the work of Thackeray or the Stricklands) nor the sphere of politics and the law. Work, community, charity and religious life belonged to that expanding and alternating space between the state and the individual citizen.

The third and probably most important characteristic has to do with the relationship between history, as a construction of memory, and politics. The third part of the article clearly shows how memory could be utilized by individuals and political groups. The remembrance of the past was recognized as a potent tool in the politicization of groups which had not been considered political before the beginning of the twentieth century, such as women and the working classes. With the spread of education and its institutionalization through a national system, women too were regarded as capable of historical study. Undoubtedly, memory had an integrating and inclusive function. But it also had another. My argument throughout has been that the recapitulation of women’s past was double-edged and served two purposes. Memory could mean membership: in the citizen-state, in the national empire. But the recapitulation of a female experience could also precipitate the dis-remembrance of the history of the wider group and the dis-membering of its past.



## Notes

36

- \* Early versions of this article were read to the Tel Aviv University Wiener Seminar in Advanced Studies and at the Wiener Conference on “Women, the Construction of Gender and the Great War” in March 1992. I am grateful to colleagues and to my students for their helpful suggestions. I am particularly indebted to Maxine Berg, Margaret Higgonet, Jane Lewis, Alon Kadish, Shulamit Shahar, Gareth Stedman-Jones, Anne Summers, David Trotter and Martha Vicinus. Kate Perry, Archivist at Girton College, Cambridge, and Elizabeth van Houst, Librarian at Newnham College, Cambridge, helped with invaluable details on the Cambridge women medievalists and Jane Allen Harrison, respectively. Special thanks go to Lady Cynthia Postan for allowing me to use and quote from Eileen Power’s personal records and the Power journals.
- 1 As in Walter Benjamin’s famous description in his “Theses on History,” in Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1985), 257–58.
  - 2 There is a vast literature on the significance for historiography of women’s history and the history of gender. A short list should include: Jane Kelley, *Women, History and Theory* (Chicago, 1986); Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988); Gisela Bock, “Women’s History and Gender History,” *Gender and History* 1 (1988): 11–15, and “Challenging Dichotomies: Perspectives on Women’s History,” in Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson and Jane Rendall, eds., *Writing Women’s History: International Perspectives* (London, 1991), 1–25.
  - 3 Natalie Davis, “History’s Two Bodies,” *American Historical Review* 93 (1988): 1–30.
  - 4 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London, 1991).
  - 5 None of the following general surveys mentions the activity of women historians or the classical feminist historiography: Theodore Hamerow, *Reflections on History and Historians* (Madison,

- 1987); Alon Kadish, *Historians, Economists and Economic History* (London, 1987) and *The Oxford Economists in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1982); David Cannadine, "The Past and the Present in the English Industrial Revolution," *Past and Present* 103 (1984): 149–58.
- 6 Bonnie G. Smith, "The Contribution of Women to Modern Historiography in Great Britain, France and the United States," *American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 308–29; Kathryn Kish Sklar, "American Women Historians in Context, 1770–1930," *Feminist Studies* 3 (Fall 1975): 171–84; Scott, "American Women Historians, 1884–1984," in idem, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 178–231. For the European women's history, consult Susan Mosher Stuard, *Women in Medieval History and Historiography* (Philadelphia, 1987); Maxine Berg, "The First Women Economic Historians," *Economic History Review* 45, no. 2 (1992): 308–29.
- 7 Davis, "History's Two Bodies," and her "Gender and Genre: Women as Historical Writers, 1400–1820," in Patricia H. Labalme, ed., *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past* (New York, 1981), 153–82; Gianna Pomata, "Storia particolare e storia universale: in margine ad alcuni manuali di storia delle donne," *Quadri Storici* 74 (Aug. 1990): 341–87; and Christina Crosby, *The Ends of History: Victorians and the Woman Question* (London, 1991). An exemplary monograph is Jane Lewis and Miranda Chaytor, "Introduction," in Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1981).
- 8 The 66 historians born between 1750 and 1900 were divided into 6 cohorts of 25 years, according to their year of birth (1750–1775; 1775–1800; 1800–1825; 1825–1850; 1850–1875; 1875–1900). Cohorts 3–6 are directly relevant to this article and include 5, 4, 13 and 29 historians respectively. Among those historians closely studied are biographers Mary Hays (1760–1803), Agnes Strickland (1796–1874) and Elizabeth Strickland (1794–1875), Anna Jameson (1794–1860), Julia Sophia Pardoe (1806–1862), Grace Aguilar (1816–1847) and Julia Kavanagh (1824–1877); and professional historians Jane Allen Harrison (1850–1928), Bertha Phillpotts (1880–1932), Lina Eckenstein (n.d.), Ella Armitage (1841–1931), Alice Clark (1874–1934), Eileen Edna lePoer Power (1889–1940), Helen Cam (1885–1968), M. Dorothy George (1878–n.d.), M. G. Jones (1880–n.d.), Barbara Drake (1876–1963) and Alice Stopford Green (1847–1929).
- 9 For the status and function of the historical novel and its interchangeability with histories "proper," see Arron Fleishman,

- The English Historical Novel* (Baltimore, 1971); Andrew Sanders, *The Victorian Historical Novel, 1840–1880*; J. C. Simmons, "The Novelist as Historian: An Unexposed Tract of Victorian Historiography," *Victorian Studies* 14 (Mar. 1971): 293–305.
- 10 Quoted in Crosby, "The Ends of History," 3.
  - 11 *Ibid.*, 4.
  - 12 Quoted in Kadish, *Historians, Economists and Economic Historians*, 13; on Stubbs's view of history, see also *ibid.*, 52.
  - 13 Quoted in Crosby, *The Ends of History*, 3.
  - 14 See, for example, Susan Moller-Okin, *Women in Western Historical Thought* (Princeton, 1979).
  - 15 Edward A. Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest* (1867–1879) and *The Reign of William Rufus* (1882); John R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England in the Eighteenth Century* (1883); Francis Parkman, *France and England in the New World* (1865–1892), esp. the volume on *Pioneers of France and England in the New World*.
  - 16 See Mosher Stuard, "Fashion's Captives: Medieval Women in French Historiography," in *idem*, *Women in Medieval History and Historiography*, 59; George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality* (New York, 1985) for the naturalization of women in the Romantic national memory and mythology. See also my critique of Mosse in Melman, "Claiming the Nation's Past: The Invention of an Anglo-Saxon Tradition," *Journal of Contemporary History* 26 (1991): 575–95.
  - 17 Mosher Stuard, "Fashion's Captives."
  - 18 Quoted in Crosby, *The Ends of History*, 57.
  - 19 William Makepeace Thackeray, "Miss Tickletoby's Lectures on English History," "Edward the Confessor—Harold—William the Conqueror," in *Works* (London, 1886), 24:28.
  - 20 Quoted in Crosby, *The Ends of History*, 11.
  - 21 *Ibid.*, 47–50.
  - 22 Bulwer Lytton, *Harold, Last of the Saxon Kings* (New York, 1886), preface to the 3rd ed.
  - 23 Davis, "Gender and Genre."
  - 24 Jane Austen, *The Works*, vol. 6, *Minor Works* (London, 1972), 138, 144.
  - 25 *Ibid.*
  - 26 Agnes and Elizabeth Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England from the Norman Conquest; with Anecdotes of Their Courts* (Philadelphia, the 1850 ed.), 1:46.
  - 27 *Ibid.*
  - 28 *Ibid.*
  - 29 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven,

- 1992), 11–55.
- 30 Eleanor Langstaff and James Smith, “Julia Kavanagh,” in Janet Todd, ed., *Dictionary of British Women Writers* (London, 1991), 376–77.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 On possible analogies in nationalist mythologies between saints and extraordinary females, see Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of Female Form* (London, 1987); and Madge Dreiser, “Britannia,” in Raphael Samuel, ed., *Patriotism*, vol. 3 (London, 1989), 26–42.
- 33 The later biographies include Augusta T. Drane, *The History of Saint Catherine of Siena and Her Companions* (London, 1899); Nora Duff, *Mathilda of Tuscany* (London, 1909); A. Kemps Welch, *On Six Mediaeval Women* (London, 1915); J. M. Richard, *Mahaunt, Comtesse d’Artois et de Bretagne* (Paris, 1887); and the much later Marguerite Gastout, *Beatrix de Brabant* (Louvain, 1943).
- 34 Berg, “The First Women Economic Historians”; Melman, “The Angel of History Has a Gender: History, Historiography and Politics, 1800–1993” (in Hebrew), *Zmanim* (forthcoming, 1993).
- 35 On the transformation of history, see John W. Burrow, *The Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge, 1981). See also Kadish, *Historians, Economists and Economic Historians*.
- 36 On women’s participation, see Melman, “The Angel of History Has a Gender,” and Scott, “American Women Historians.”
- 37 Jane Lewis, *Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England* (London, 1991); Antonio Gramsci, “The Intellectuals,” in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, trans. Q. Hoare and G. Powell Smith (New York, 1971).
- 38 “Proceedings of the 5th Annual Meeting of the Historical Association,” *Historical Association Leaflets* 24 (Mar. 1911): 15.
- 39 Winifred Mercier, “An Experiment in the Teaching of History,” *ibid.* 17 (June 1909).
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 George Orwell, *A Clergyman’s Daughter* (Harmondsworth, 1985), 196.
- 42 Berg, “The First Women Economic Historians”; David Sutton, “Social Liberalism, Fabianism and Social History,” In Richard Johnson et al., eds., *Studies in History Writing and Politics* (London, 1982), 15–44.
- 43 Jessie Stewart, *Jane Allen Harrison* (London, 1959), 151.
- 44 Jane Allen Harrison, “‘Homo Sum’ Being a Letter to an Anti-Suffragist from an Anthropologist,” *Nuuss Leaflets* (London, 1915).

- 45 Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries* (Cambridge, 1921).
- 46 Olive Schreiner, *Women and Labor* (New York, 1911), 44, 48–59.
- 47 Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, preface.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750–1850* (1930; London, 1985), 7–27, 40–43, 59–62, 85–86, 185–96, 244–48.
- 50 Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, esp. 59–64, 81–89, 297–303. For the treatment of celibate communities of women, see Rose Graham and Rotha Mary Clag, *The Medieval Hospitals in England* (London, 1909); Lina Eckenstein, *Women under Monasticism* (Cambridge, 1986), conclusion.
- 51 Eckenstein, *Women under Monasticism*; Georgina Hill, *Women in English Life from Medieval to Modern Times*, 2 vols. (London, 1896). Hill emphasizes the extended roles of women in medieval society, but sees the culture of chivalry and the religious culture as hostile to women (vol. 1, x–xi).
- 52 For biographical details and her contribution to Irish historiography, see R. B. McDowell, *Alice Stopford Green: A Passionate Historian* (Dublin, 1967). In addition to some works co-authored with her husband, she wrote at least 7 histories of Ireland and numerous pamphlets. The histories include: *The Making of Ireland and Its History* (1908); *Irish National Tradition* (1917); and *History of the Irish State* (1925).
- 53 Stopford Green, “A Great Irish Lady,” in idem, *The Old Irish World* (London, 1912), 100–101.
- 54 Annie Abram, *English Life and Manners in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1913), 31.
- 55 Stopford Green, *The Old Irish World*, 101.
- 56 Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1925). On immigrants and the multinational character of the metropolis, see 119–50; on women, see also 161ff.
- 57 Bertha Surtees Phillpotts, *Edda and Saga* (London, 1931), esp. chap. 3, “The Eddic Poems: The World of Men”; and idem, *Kindred and Clan in the Middle Ages and After* (Cambridge, 1931); Harrison, “‘Homo Sum’,” and *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge, 1903).
- 58 Power, “Albert Khan Travelling Fellowships, Report to the Albert Khan Trustees,” Sept. 1920–Sept. 1921, 27–28.
- 59 Power, “Tour du monde,” an unpublished journal, vol. 3 (dates not clear).
- 60 See my article, “The Angel of History Has a Gender,” and my

- paper, "History's Two Bodies: Gender and History, Past and Present," delivered at the Wiener Seminar in Advanced Studies on "Women before, during and after World War I" (Tel Aviv University, Oct. 1991). On discontinuity in French historiography, see Mosher Stuard, "The Annales School and Feminist History: Opening Dialogue with the American Stepchild," *Signs* (Autumn 1981): 135–43.
- 61 Lilian C. A. Knowles, *The Industrial and Commercial Revolutions in Great Britain during the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1921). On her view of concentric history, see Berg, "The First Women Economic Historians: The LSE Connection" (unpublished paper, Oxford, 1989). For Vernon Lee's critique of nationalist histories, see her *The Ballet of Nations* (London, 1915), or in a later version *Satan the Waster* (London, 1921), 211.
- 62 Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (London, 1988); and Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*, 237–83.