

THE HOUSES OF HISTORY

A critical reader
in twentieth-century history and theory

selected and introduced by
ANNA GREEN & KATHLEEN TROUP



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recognise the political ambiguity of a museum in which little boys clamber over tanks and want to grow up to be soldiers.

Fred's memory still has a radical cutting edge. He still condemns the artificial patriotism of Anzac Day and carries his war medals on Palm Sunday peace rallies, using the new interest in the Anzacs to make his own criticism of war and Australian society. But he doesn't direct that critique at the Anzac writers and film makers who are the most powerful mythmakers of our time. The effectiveness of the 1980s Anzac legend is that it convinces even radical diggers like Fred that their story is being told, while subtly reworking the conservative sense of the war, national character and Australian history into an appropriate form for the 1980s. This 'hegemonic' process seems similar to that undergone by the diggers who did join the RSSILA and Anzac Day back in the 20s. On each occasion individuals are included and their memories selectively affirmed by the public rituals and meanings of remembrance. That affirmation may be essential for individual peace of mind, but in the process contradictory and challenging memories are displaced or repressed.

Fred Farrell's case study highlights the dynamic relationship between individual memory and national myth, and suggests ways in which oral history can be more than just the 'voice of the past'. Oral history can help us to understand how and why national mythologies work (and don't work) for individuals, and in our society generally. It can also reveal the possibilities, and difficulties, of developing and sustaining oppositional memories. These understandings can enable us to participate more effectively as historians and in collective struggle for more democratic and radical versions of our past and of what we can become.

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Gender and history

Gender history arose from women's dissatisfaction with their historical invisibility, but subsequently expanded its scope to investigate specifically masculine history as well.¹ While historians such as Alice Clark, Ivy Pinchbeck, Eileen Power and Mary Beard had been researching women's lives from early this century, it was during the 1960s' women's liberation movement that women began actively working to redress the absence of their lives and experience from most historical writing. Lerner pointed out that '[w]omen's history is indispensable and essential to the emancipation of women'.² Indeed, '[t]o be without history is to be trapped in a present where oppressive social relations appear natural and inevitable. Knowledge of history is knowledge that things have changed and do change.'³ This chapter concentrates on the analysis of women and the development of feminine identities in history. While it is fair to say that gender historians have mainly written from a woman-centred perspective, a considerable proportion of the research to date deals with both women and men, and the relationship between the two. Nevertheless, only recently has masculinity been addressed as a topic in its own right. We aim here to outline the main theoretical directions taken by gender history, and to show the huge diversity of research mainly concerning women in the past.

One traditional category used to divide humanity is sex, that is, the biological difference between women and men. Since sex is only rarely subject to change, it is not a useful concept for most historians. 'Gender' has proved to be central, however, in its two major definitions: 'the cultural definitions of behaviour defined as appropriate to the sexes in a given society at a given time', and 'a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and . . . a primary way of signifying relationships of power'.⁴ If gender is a social construction, then gender has a history and we

can ask the questions: who makes gender and by what means, and how does it endure and change? Including a dimension of power relations is also important, since history writing has long involved discussions of power, whether in terms of movers in the political sphere or concerning the participants in struggles over class and race. These definitions of gender, and the male/female and sex/gender dichotomies thus constituted, led to two strands of feminist analysis.

One thread of gender history reflects the course of the feminist movement in general. In the United States, activists lobbied for equal rights and historians tended to focus on examining women's status and experience in the past, sometimes writing about famous women. Labarge, for example, attempted 'to bring to light the not inconsiderable achievements of a number of women from all levels of medieval society in Western Europe between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries'.⁵ Other investigations proposed a radical re-working of the historical process, including the periodization traditionally used. Joan Kelly described her initial brush with Gerda Lerner and women's history which resulted in her essay 'Did Women Have a Renaissance?' In this ground-breaking work, Kelly examined the notion that 'events that further the historical development of men, liberating them from natural, social or ideological constraints, have quite different, even opposite, effects upon women'. She went on to argue that 'there was no renaissance for women – at least, not during the Renaissance'.⁶ The historical analysis of patriarchy gave a political edge to the writing of women's history, and 'raised the consciousness' of the historical profession regarding the status of women's history and women historians.⁷

In Britain, the Marxist backgrounds of many early historians of women meant that they attempted to combine a gender dimension with an existing class analysis. Sheila Rowbotham's *Hidden from History*, for example, asks 'in what conditions have women produced and reproduced their lives, both through their labour and through procreation?'⁸ In a wonderful essay, Sally Alexander discussed the sexual division of labour in relation to the class struggle and demonstrated the difference that a feminist perspective could make to analyses of the industrial revolution, long the stage of the working-class man.⁹ Attempts to examine gender and class simultaneously, however, proved problematic: it seemed that some aspects of oppression and experience were common to women of all ranks despite the differences in their lives. And this oppression could be

attributed to men, rather than to the specific economic system under which the women lived.

Radical feminism sought to explain the subordination of women by pointing to male control over women's sexuality, including reproduction, often arguing that all human oppression is rooted in the biological heterosexual family. From an historian's viewpoint, this can lead to a sense of gender relations as static across time, an ahistorical patriarchy. Bennett discusses the problems as well as the advantages she sees in the use of 'patriarchy', suggesting that to avoid this term is to depoliticize feminist history to an unacceptable degree.¹⁰

These early, generally North American approaches were mainly based on the premise that all women were essentially the same, and, that in effect, they shared the concerns of white middle-class women.¹¹ In retrospect this essentialism is manifestly incorrect, and was vociferously criticized from the late 1970s by women of colour. bell hooks, for example, wrote that '[t]here is much evidence substantiating the reality that race and class identity creates differences in quality of life, social status, and lifestyle that take precedence over the common experience women share – differences which are rarely transcended'.¹² Jones demonstrates the overwhelming importance of race to gender history in *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*. Her chapter on black women's work during slavery picks apart the differences between black and white, women and men, and status differences in all these groups, setting them in an economic and cultural background, and showing how black women in their multiple working roles were agents in preserving their own culture against enormous odds.¹³ Vron Ware and Catherine Hall have also examined the role of racial difference in the construction of white femininity.¹⁴

In a second set of approaches, the historical dichotomy between women and men has drawn attention to the analytic potential of a variety of other dichotomies: nature/culture, work/family and public/private.¹⁵ For example, among the Carolingian aristocracy, running the domestic activities of a household was the wife's business, while a husband was often occupied with matters of state or war: thus some sense of separation of public and private seemed to exist. Nevertheless, when household management included its economy, a wife could exercise considerable power. A Carolingian queen, for instance, was in charge of the royal treasury, a 'domestic trifle' in the king's eyes. Similarly, much research concerning the sexual division of labour has shown that the value of women's work decreased when the

workplace became separated from the home. Then men were seen as 'workers' while women were merely concerned with the family, an activity not labelled 'work'. Investigating nature and culture, Natalie Davis discussed how, in early modern France, women's disorderliness was thought to be rooted in their nature, while male transgressions related to nurture, that is, the culture in which they were raised or lived. Since women could not help their 'unruly' natures, men bent upon sedition and riot would often disguise themselves as females.¹⁶ In the main, however, historians have found these dichotomies, mainly developed by early feminist anthropologists, restrictive: the Carolingian example shows how problematic is the assumed correlation between male/female, public/private and power/domesticity.¹⁷

Problems with the two approaches so far discussed led historians to seek more incisive theories. Even despite the addition of race as a category of investigation, using the 'Big Three', that is, liberal, socialist/Marxist and radical feminism, to describe feminist thinking and the writing of women's history seemed to have lost its usefulness. Maynard argues that such labelling leads to the stereotyping and homogenizing of theoretical positions, and the exclusion of research that does not fit into a category. In addition, theories tend to remain simple and have no space to change over time: that is, their historical dimension is missing. Maynard maintains that theory is most usefully formulated in conjunction with empirical research and feminist history can only benefit if theory is permitted its evolutionary nature.¹⁸ As historians have become aware of the simplistic nature of the notion of 'women' implicit in these early theories, we have moved to de-essentialize 'woman' in two major ways.

Firstly, since the divisions of gender, class and race seem inadequate, historians have begun to categorize women of the past as well in terms of ethnicity, sexual orientations, age, marital status, religious affiliation, and mental and physical disability. We have thus studied more diverse groups of women. Strobel, for example, examined the intersection of religion, class and gender, ethnicity and the effects of colonialism on women in Mombasa. Judith Brown situated the life of Benedetta Carlini in the context of religious and social attitudes to lesbianism in Renaissance Italy.¹⁹ Despite the proliferation of categories of women in a social and historical sense, the political assumption that all women can be represented by 'women' still remains.²⁰ Historians, therefore, are now moving to examine how feminism has historically constructed 'women'.

Secondly, theorists have suggested that an essential category 'woman' (singular) does not exist due to the fragmentary nature of identity: each woman's subjectivity is divided and conflicting. Psychoanalysis offers tools for uncovering and interpreting subjectivity, which can be viewed as made up of unconscious ideas, partly the internalized givens of our (patriarchal) society, coupled with experience. A psychoanalytic feminist historian like Sally Alexander argues that '[p]schoanalytic offers a reading of sexual difference rooted not in the sexual division of labour (which nevertheless organizes that difference), nor within nature, but through the unconscious and language', and that it is 'psychic processes which give a political movement its emotional power'. Thus psychoanalysis contributes to the understanding of power relations in society. She uses an emphasis, in part derived from the work of the psychoanalyst Lacan, on the power of language to examine, for example, the role of femininity and masculinity in working class language in the nineteenth century, and to show that women could not speak within the terms of radical popular speech. This in turn helps her to offer a coherent explanation of the background to the emergence of nineteenth-century feminism. More recently Alexander has discussed the features in common between psychoanalysis and feminism, especially feminist history.²¹

Alexander also points out the movement away from a psychoanalytic understanding of sexual difference in the work of a theorist like Joan Scott. Scott takes a deconstructive approach which, like psychoanalysis, focuses on language and discourse. So, for example, she examines discourses (ways of speaking and writing) concerning women workers in the writings of nineteenth-century French political economists.²² In these texts, the women 'served at once as an object of study and a means of representing ideas about social order and social organization'.²³ Here not the women but discourses concerning them are the object of Scott's study. We cannot know about the reality of women's work through these discourses because they construct women's situation (as marginalized) at the same time as they describe them. All we can do is examine the workings of the discourses. Since the subjects of the discourses (the authors) are divided and changing (as all selves are), the subjects are decentred (they possess no unitary self) and thus there can be no omniscient authorial voice. While this is problematic for historians, in that experience becomes obsolete, it is useful for feminist historians since the rational man producing these discourses is fragmented and can be deconstructed. Thus the power

inherent in his apparently rational knowledge can be defused. Female subjects are similarly decentred in this approach, but Canning suggests that this can be dangerous from a political viewpoint, since the female subject is still being recovered and made visible in history. One may argue, however, that recovering a multiplicity of female identities can only enrich our history.²⁴

Maynard and Canning suggest that deconstruction can be useful to feminist historians as long as the notion of hierarchies of power is not totally removed, and the idea of the real is not abandoned. Experience is thus important and can show the interaction of cultural discourses and material processes. Canning, therefore, in examining social reform in Germany in the late nineteenth century, investigates the emergence of discourses (not only the hegemonic) and their material and ideological consequences, thence restoring the voices of both the subjects and objects of reform. She found that women's embodied experience 'opened the way for the transformations of consciousness and subjectivities'.²⁵ Thus recent directions in feminist history offer exciting ways both of reading and politicizing research.

One of the recent debates in women's history concerns the issues of continuity and change, a 'tension' which Bennett labels 'perhaps the oldest and most productive of historical themes'.²⁶ She argues that women's historians have tended to focus on moments of change, usually fitting women into the traditional periodization of history, even if they have demonstrated, with Kelly, that the effects of change were different for men and women. Using women's work as an example, Bennett suggests that although there has been considerable change in women's experience since, say, 1200, the overall structure of women's work in relation to men's is still similar. Therefore, it could be useful to discuss women's history in terms of this paradigm: 'there has been much *change* in women's lives, but little *transformation* in women's status in relation to men'.²⁷ By this means, women's history could keep its political edge as part of the fight to achieve transformation.

This challenge provoked differing responses. Greene showed how dealing with the complex relationship of continuity and change had enriched African women's history almost from the start. Often, however, argued that while Bennett's view might be an appropriate model for pre-industrial women's history, it did not work for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Her final sentence does point up the pervasive nature of the problem: 'the many changes for the better that have marked most women's lives even in the last 50 years tend to

make us . . . very impatient with the necessity to confront continuity in women's history'.²⁸ Lerner tended to side with Bennett, citing her own experience of arguing for long-term patriarchy in the face of accusations of ahistoricity. She suggested that we need to analyse both continuity and change in a holistic framework, to 'refine and complicate our analysis by noticing that different aspects or structures in society change at a different pace and with different effects'.²⁹

This debate over continuity and change in some respects echoes the arguments between Scott and her critics concerning the prioritization of analyses of discourses over discussion of what happened in a more material sense. Bennett wants to focus on the continuities of discourses of patriarchy, arguing that these are at least as basic to women's history as is material evidence of changing experience. It may be that the illusion of transformation produced by material change is part of the discourse itself. Her project is then perhaps along the lines of Canning's work, discussed earlier.

The move away from theorizing an essential feminine and the fragmenting of the subject has convinced some gender historians of the necessity of studying men and masculinity. Baron argues that 'gender is present even when women are not', and that if we only investigate women, then 'man' remains the universal subject against which women are defined in their particularity'.³⁰ Tosh also remarks that encouraging a history of masculinity is a subversive act: '[m]aking men visible as gendered subjects has major implications for all the historian's established themes: for family, labour and business, class and national identities, religion, education, and . . . for institutional politics too'.³¹ While the issue of the power of men over women sorely needs addressing in terms of masculinity, Baron reminds us that power differentials between men also deserve attention.³²

The first work on men's history concerned gay men, and historians demonstrated that homosexual and heterosexual identities have changed over time.³³ The preoccupations and definitions of masculinity have also altered. We can now, for example, compare medieval European masculinity with that of nineteenth-century Britain and America.³⁴

A recent article demonstrates the possibilities of a truly gendered history, combining ideas both of the feminine and the masculine. Who ran the dairies in Sweden between 1850 and 1950 turned on the degree of mechanization and consequent masculinization

in contrast to the links made between milk and dairy maids previously seen as 'natural'. In this project, Sommestad links gender, labour and cultural history using a variety of methods to produce a subtle interpretation of the dairy industry.³⁵ Broad vistas open from such research.

Like many British feminist historians of her generation, Catherine Hall came to women's history through an earlier engagement with issues of Marxist history. Her work, moving from a study of the housewife to issues of gender interwoven with those of the working classes, is broadly in line with the development of British feminism, with her investigation of masculinity as part of gender and her inclusion of an important focus on race and ethnicity. Hall's article, which follows, demonstrates a number of the themes in gender history which we have discussed. She links class, femininity and masculinity, and the separation between the sexes by examining economics, politics and society, and the ideological framework of nineteenth-century Birmingham.

What historiographical gaps led Hall to write on this subject? Why, in her opinion, did these gaps exist? Hall argues that gender 'played an important part in unifying the middle classes'. What examples does she give to back up this view? Much of the argument in this article is structured around the public/private dichotomy. What does this tell us in practice about women's experience? How useful, in your opinion, is this dichotomy as an analytical tool? What other areas of gendered experience might Hall have examined?

Notes

- 1 Bennett discusses the implications of using the terms 'gender history', 'feminist history' and 'women's history', in Judith M. Bennett, 'Feminism and History', *Gender and History*, 1 (1989), pp. 251–72.
- 2 Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford, 1986), p. 3.
- 3 Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon, *Cultural Politics: Class, Gender, Race and the Postmodern World* (Oxford, 1995), p. 187.
- 4 Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, p. 238; Joan Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *American Historical Review*, 19 (1986), p. 1067.
- 5 Margaret Wade Labarge, *A Small Sound of the Trumpet: Women in Medieval Life* (Boston, 1986), p. xiv.
- 6 Joan Kelly, *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago, 1984), pp. xii–xiii, 19.
- 7 Joan Scott, 'Women's History', in Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 46.
- 8 Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It* (3rd edn, London, 1977), p. ix.

- 9 Sally Alexander, 'Women's Work in Nineteenth-century London: A Study of the Years 1820–50', in Juliet Mitchell and Anne Oakley (eds), *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* (Harmondsworth, 1976), pp. 59–111.
- 10 Bennett, 'Feminism and History', p. 259 ff.
- 11 Note, however, the British Marxist feminists' careful attention to issues of class.
- 12 bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre* (Boston, 1984), p. 4. See also Catherine Hall's discussion and references in *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 18–21. Note, however, exceptions to this exclusion, such as Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York, 1972), a very early collection, and those mentioned by Hall.
- 13 Jacqueline Jones, 'My Mother Was Much of a Woman', in *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York, 1985), pp. 11–43.
- 14 Von Ware, *Beyond the Pole: White Women, Racism and History* (London, 1992); see Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*.
- 15 See Gisela Bock, 'Challenging Dichotomies: Perspectives on Women's History', in K. Offen, R. R. Pierson and J. Rendall (eds), *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives* (Bloomington, 1991), pp. 1–5.
- 16 Suzanne Foney Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister 500–900* (Philadelphia, 1981), pp. 97–9; see, for example, essays in Mary Prior (ed.), *Women in English Society, 1500–1800* (London, 1985); Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Women on Top', in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, 1975), pp. 124–51.
- 17 This is not to say that any of the examples given are unannounced in this way.
- 18 Mary Maynard, 'Beyond the "Big Three": The Development of Feminist Theory into the 1990s', *Women's History Review*, 4 (1995), pp. 261–7, 276.
- 19 Margaret Strobel, *Muslim Women in Mombasa, 1890–1975* (New Haven, 1979); Judith C. Brown, *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* (New York, 1986).
- 20 See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990), pp. 1–6. Note that the dichotomy between sex and gender is also now seen as a problematic division: *ibid.*, pp. 6–7, 106–11; Henrietta L. Moore, *A Passion for Difference: Essays in Anthropology and Gender* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 8–72. I am indebted to Catherine Kingfisher for the latter reference.
- 21 Sally Alexander, 'Women, Class and Sexual Difference', *History Workshop*, 17 (1984), pp. 125–49, and 'Feminist History and Psychoanalysis', *History Workshop*, 32 (1991), pp. 128–33. See also the useful discussion of recent works on psychoanalysis and feminism by Judith Kegan Gardiner and Michele Barrett in *Signs*, 17 (1992), pp. 435–66.
- 22 Note that 'discourse' has been defined in different ways. Foucault, for example, views discourse as including the parameters of what can be said, and the conditions under which it can be said. See the following chapter on poststructuralism for more detail.
- 23 Joan Scott, 'L'ouvrière! Mot imple, sordide...', in *Women Workers in the Discourse of French Political Economy, 1840–1860*, in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), pp. 139–63.
- 24 The preceding discussion is drawn from Maynard, 'The Big Three', pp. 269–81 and Kathleen Canning, 'Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience', *Signs*, 19 (1994), pp. 368–404.
- 25 Canning, 'Feminist History'.
- 26 Bennett, 'Confronting Continuity', *Journal of Women's History*, 9, 3 (1997), p. 73. See p. 89, n. 4, for earlier debate on this issue.
- 27 *Ibid.*, pp. 73–94, esp. p. 88.
- 28 Sandra E. Greene, 'A Perspective from African Women's History: Comment on "Confronting Continuity"', and Karen Offen, 'A Comparative European Perspective: Comment on "Confronting Continuity"', *Journal of Women's History*, 9, 3 (1997), pp. 95–104, 105–13.

- 29 Lerner, 'A Perspective from European and U. S. Women's History: Comment on "Confronting Continuity"', *Journal of Women's History*, 9, 3 (1997), pp. 114-18.
- 30 Ava Baron, 'On Looking at Men: Masculinity and the Making of a Gendered Working-Class History', in Ann-Louise Shapiro (ed.), *Feminists Revision History* (New Brunswick, 1994), pp. 148-50.
- 31 John Tosh, 'What Should Historians do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-century Britain', *History Workshop Journal*, 38 (1994), pp. 179-80; Michael Roper and John Tosh (eds), 'Introduction: Historians and the Politics of Masculinity', in *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London, 1991), p. 1.
- 32 Baron, 'On Looking at Men', pp. 154-7.
- 33 See, for example, John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago, 1980).
- 34 Clare A. Lees (ed.), *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, 1994), Roper and Tosh, *Manful Assertions*, and Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago, 1990).
- 35 Lena Sommestad, 'Gendering Work, Interpreting Gender: The Masculinization of Dairy Work in Sweden, 1850-1950', *History Workshop Journal*, 37 (1994), pp. 57-75.

Additional reading

- Alexander, Sally, 'Feminist History and Psychoanalysis', *History Workshop Journal*, 32 (1991), pp. 128-33.
- Burton, Antoinette, '"History" is Now: Feminist Theory and the Production of Historical Feminisms', *Women's History Review*, 1 (1992), pp. 25-38.
- Jones, Jacqueline, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York, 1985).
- Kelly, Joan, *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago, 1984).
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- Maynard, Steven, 'Rough Work and Rugged Men: The Social Construction of Masculinity in Working-class History', *Labour/Le Travail*, 23 (1989), pp. 159-69.
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- Stansell, Christine, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana, 1986).

GENDER DIVISIONS AND CLASS FORMATION IN THE BIRMINGHAM MIDDLE CLASS, 1780-1850

Catherine Hall

The flowering of socialist historiography in the last fifteen years, of which the History Workshop is of course one very important instance, has seen an enormous development in working-class and people's history. This development has not been complemented by an equivalent amount of research going on into the dominant classes; the emphasis for socialist historians has been on cultures of opposition and resistance and on the mechanisms of control and subordination, rather than on the culture of the ruling class. The same point can be made about feminist history, which in England has been profoundly influenced by the particular way in which social history has developed. The vast majority of the work done so far has been on working-class women and the working-class family. This is entirely understandable, particularly in a period when the importance of our struggle has been stressed politically, as it has been, for example, in the women's movement. For most socialists it is clearly more attractive to work on material which offers some assertion and celebration of resistance rather than on material which documents the continuing power, albeit often challenged, of the bourgeoisie. This does leave us, however, with a somewhat unbalanced historiography. Any discussion on the 'making of the English middle class' for example, is infinitely less well documented and theorised than it is on the working class. John Foster's work on the bourgeoisie in the *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution* provides us with a starting point, but there is little else that is easily available.

The work that is available on the 'making of the middle class' in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is not for the most part placed within a socialist framework (for example Briggs or McCord)¹ but it also faces us with a second problem—the absence of gender. The middle class is treated as male and the account of the formation of middle-class consciousness is structured around a series of public events in which women played no part: the imposition of

¹ N. McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League 1836-1848*, London 1958.

income tax, the reaction to the Orders in Council, the Queen Caroline affair, the 1832 reform agitation and the Anti-Corn Law League are usually seen as the seminal moments in the emergence of the middle class as a powerful and self-confident class. Yet when we come to descriptions of the Victorian family much emphasis is placed on the part which domesticity played in middle-class culture and on the social importance of the home. That is to say the class once formed is seen as sexually divided but that process of division is taken as given. Since eighteenth-century middle-class women did not, as far as we can tell, lead the sheltered and domestically defined lives of their Victorian counterparts it seems important to explore the relation between the process of class formation and gender division. Was 'the separation of spheres' and the division between the public and the private a given or was it constructed as an integral part of middle-class culture and self-identity? The development of the middle class between 1780–1850 must be thought of as gendered; the ideals of masculinity and femininity are important to the middle-class sense of self and the ideology of separate spheres played a crucial part in the construction of a specifically middle-class culture—separating them off from both the aristocracy and gentry above them and the working class below them.

Gender divisions appear also to have played an important part in unifying the middle class. The class is significantly divided, as Marx pointed out, between the bourgeoisie and the petit bourgeoisie. Foster uses this division and helps to extend its meaning as does R. J. Morris in his work.² The two groups are divided economically, socially and politically, and much of the political history of the period is concerned with the shifting alliances between these two factions and other classes—as for example in Birmingham over the reform agitation and the movement into Chartism. But one of the ways in which the middle class was held together, despite the many divisive factors, was by their ideas about masculinity and femininity. Men came to share a sense of what constituted masculinity and women a sense of what constituted femininity. One central opposition was that masculinity meant having dependants, femininity meant being dependent. Clearly the available ideals were not always ones which could be acted upon—petit-bourgeois men would often need their wives to work in the business, but they would often also

aspire for that not to be so. Clearly, looking at gender divisions as having a unifying theme within the middle class is only one way of approaching the subject; it would be equally possible to examine the way in which it unites men across classes, or the way in which it creates contradictions within the middle class which led to the emergence of bourgeois feminism in the second half of the nineteenth century. For the moment it seems important to stress the class-specific nature of masculinity and femininity in this period; the idea of a universal womanhood is weak in comparison with the idea of certain types of sexual differentiation being a necessary part of class identity. This may help to explain the relative absence and weakness of feminism in the first half of the nineteenth century—*Jane Eyre*, for example, provides us with a very sensitive account of the limitations of middle-class femininity which leaves little space for the possibility of a cross-class alliance.

This general theme of the importance of a sharpened division between men and women, between the public and the private, and its relation to class formation can be illustrated by looking at the development of the Birmingham middle class between 1780–1850. The account that is being offered here is extremely sketchy, but can perhaps provide a framework for further discussion. Birmingham was a fast growing industrial town by the late eighteenth century—its population of only 40,000 in 1780 had grown to 250,000 by 1850. Its wealth was built on the metal industries and had been made possible by its strategic position in relation to coal and iron. The town has usually been taken, following Briggs, as one dominated by small masters with workshops but recent work, particularly that of Clive Behagg, has somewhat modified this view and suggested that factory production was better established by the 1830s and 1840s than has usually been thought. Although Birmingham had been gradually expanding since the seventeenth century the impression by the end of the eighteenth century is that the middle class within the town are only gradually coming to realise their potential strength and power. Consequently, Birmingham offers us a relatively uncomplicated account of the emergence of the middle class—uncomplicated by factors such as the struggle between the well-established merchant class of the eighteenth century and the new manufacturers, which took place in Leeds.

We can briefly examine the separation between the sexes as it took place in Birmingham in this period at three levels—that of the economic, the political and social, and the ideological. If we look first

² R. J. Morris, 'The making of the British middle class', unpublished paper delivered at the University of Birmingham Social History seminar 1979.

at the economic level it is important to stress from the beginning that the ideology of separate spheres has an economic effectivity. Clearly, the crucial problem which faces us is the question of what the relation is between the emergence of separate spheres and the development of industrial capitalism. Is there any relation at all? At this point it is only possible to say that women seem to be increasingly defined as economically dependent in our period, and that this economic dependence has important consequences for the ways in which industrial capitalism developed. That is to say, we cannot argue that industrial capitalism would not have developed without sexual divisions, but that the increasingly polarised form which sexual divisions took affected the forms of capitalist social relations and of capitalist accumulation.

The legal framework for this is provided by the centrality of the notion of dependence in marriage—Blackstone's famous dictum that the husband and wife are one person and that person is the husband. Married women's property passed automatically to their husbands unless a settlement had been made in the courts of equity. Married women had no right to sue or be sued or to make contracts. For working-class families the idea of the family wage came to encapsulate the idea of economic dependence—though we know that in reality few working-class families were in a position to afford to do without the earnings which a wife could bring in. For middle-class families there is no equivalent concept, since the men do not earn wages, but still the economic dependence of the wife and children was assumed. Amongst the aristocracy and gentry patrilineal rights to property had been established for a very long time, but although the middle class broke with their 'betters' at many other points the connection between masculinity and property rights was not broken. Two inter-related points need to be made here: first, the importance of marriage settlements in capital accumulation and second, the sexual specificity of inheritance practices. Neither of these are new developments—making an advantageous marriage had long been a crucial way of getting on in the world but whereas in the past the gentry and aristocracy had for the most part used money so acquired to enlarge their houses or consolidate their estates, small producers were now using it to build up their businesses. Archibald Kenrick, for example, a Birmingham buckle maker in the late 1780s who was caught up in the decline of the buckle trade, got married in 1790 and used his wife's marriage settlement to set up in business as an iron founder in 1791. Sometimes the capital would come from a mother

rather than a wife, for amongst the wealthier bourgeoisie it was common practice to have a marriage settlement which protected the wife's property whereas amongst the petit bourgeoisie this would have been very unusual.³ Richard and George Cadbury both inherited a substantial amount from their mother Candia Barrow at a time when the family business was doing rather badly and used the capital to re-organise and re-vitalise the business.⁴ Marx noted that the bourgeoisie practised partible inheritance rather than primogeniture and widows and daughters were not disinherited, but the forms of female inheritance tended increasingly to be linked to dependence. In general boys would receive an education and training to enter a business or profession and then would be given either a share in the existing family business or capital to invest in another business. Thomas Southall, for example, who came to Birmingham in 1820 to set up in business as a chemist, had been educated and apprenticed by his father who had a mixed retailing business himself and set up each of his sons in one aspect—one as a draper, one as a vintner and one as a chemist.⁵ Daughters, on the other hand, would either be given a lump sum as a marriage settlement (though it should be noted that as Freer has demonstrated they were sometimes not allowed to marry because of the impossibility of removing capital from the business) or they would be left money in trust, usually under the aegis of a male relative, to provide an income for them together with their widowed mothers. The money in trust would then often be available for the male relatives to invest as they pleased. It should be pointed out, however, that widows amongst the petit bourgeoisie often were left the business to manage—it might be a shop, for example—and this different pattern of inheritance marks an important division between the two groups in the middle class. Right of dower were finally abolished in 1833 but long before that it was accepted that men had a right to leave their property as they liked. Life insurance developed in the late eighteenth century as a way of providing for dependants, and this provides another instance of the ways in which sexual divisions structure the forms of capitalist development—insurance companies became important sources of capital accumulation which could not have existed without the notion of dependants.

³ R. A. Church, *Kenricks in Hardware. A family business 1791–1966*, Newton Abbot 1969.

⁴ A. G. Gardiner, *Life of George Cadbury*, London 1923.

⁵ C. Southall, *Records of the Southall Family*, London, private circulation, 1932.

Meanwhile the kinds of businesses which women were running seem to have altered. An examination of the Birmingham Directories reveals women working in surprising trades throughout our period; only in very small numbers it is true, but still they survived. To take a few examples, there were women brass founders at the end of the eighteenth century, a bedscrew maker and a coach maker in 1803, several women engaged in aspects of the gun trade in 1812, an engine cutter and an iron and steel merchant in 1821, plumbers and painters in the 1830s and 1840s, burnishers and brushmakers in the 1850s. There are certain trades in which women never seem to appear as the owners—awl-blade making, for example, or iron founders. But although the percentage of women to men engaged in business goes up rather than down in the early nineteenth century, at least according to the evidence provided by the directories, there seems to be a significant shift towards the concentration of women in certain trades. In the late eighteenth century women were well represented among the button makers, and button making was one of the staple trades of Birmingham. Sketchley's Directory of 1767 described the button trade as

very extensive and distinguished under the following heads viz. Gilt, Plated, Silvered, Lacquered, and Pinchbeck, the beautiful new Manufactures Platina, Inlaid, Glass, Horn, Ivory, and Pearl: Metal Buttons such as Bath, Hard and Soft White etc. there is likewise made Link Buttons in most of the above Metals, as well as of Paste, Stones, etc. in short the vast variety of sorts in both Branches is really amazing, and we may with Truth aver that this is the cheapest Market in the world for these Articles.

But by the 1830s and 1840s women were concentrated in what became traditional women's trades—in dressmaking, millinery, school teaching and the retail trade. Women were no longer engaged as employers in the central productive trades of the town in any number, they were marginalised into the servicing sector, though, of course, it should be clear that many working-class women continued as employers in, for example, the metal trades. G. J. Holyoake described in his own autobiography his mother's disappearance from business:

In those days horn buttons were made in Birmingham, and my mother had a workshop attached to the house, in which she conducted a business herself, employing several hands. She had the business before her marriage. She received the orders; made the purchases of materials; superintended the making of the goods; made out the accounts; and received the money; besides taking care of her growing family. There were no Rights

of Women' thought of in her day, but she was an entirely self-acting, managing mistress. . . . The button business died out while I was young, and from the remarks which came from merchants, I learned that my mother was the last maker of that kind of button in the town.⁶

It is worth remarking that his mother became a keen attender at Carr's Lane Chapel where, as we shall see, John Angell James taught the domestic subordination of women from the pulpit for fifty years. Women increasingly did not have the necessary forms of knowledge and expertise to enter many businesses—jobs were being redefined as managerial or skilled and, therefore, masculine. For instance, as Michael Ignatieff points out, women gaolers were actually excluded by statute as not fitted to the job.⁷ Women could manage the family and the household but not the workshop of the factory. Furthermore, a whole series of new financial institutions were being developed in this period which also specifically excluded women—trusts, for example, and forms of partnership. Ivy Pinchbeck has argued that women were gradually being excluded from a sphere which they had previously occupied; it appears that in addition they were never allowed into a whole new economic sphere.

The separation of work from home obviously played an important part in this process of demarcation between men's work and women's work. That separation has often been thought of as the material basis of separate spheres. But once the enormous variety of types of middle-class housing has been established that argument can no longer be maintained. Separating work from home was one way of concretising the division between the sexes, but since it was often not possible it cannot be seen as the crucial factor in establishing domesticity. The many other ways in which the division was established have to be remembered. For doctors there could often be no separation, whereas for ironfounders the separation was almost automatic. In some trades the question of scale was vital—in the Birmingham metal trades some workshops had houses attached but in many cases they were separated. Sometimes there is a house attached and yet the chief employee lived there rather than the family. James Luckcock, for example, a Birmingham jeweller, when he was just starting up in business on his own not only lived next to his workshop but also used the labour of his wife and children. As soon as he

⁶ G. S. Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, London 1900.

⁷ M. Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The penitentiary in the industrial revolution 1750-1850*, London 1978.

could afford it he moved out, moved his manager into the house and his wife stopped working in the business.⁸ Shopkeepers moving out from their premises and establishing a separate home for their families obviously lost the assistance of wives and daughters in the shop—Mrs Cadbury and her daughters all helped in the shop until the family moved out to Edgbaston.

So far I have tried to suggest that the economic basis for the expansion of the middle class is underpinned by assumptions of male superiority and female dependence. When we turn to the level of the political and social we can see the construction in our period of a whole new public world in which women have no part. That world is built on the basis of those who are defined as individuals—men with property. The Birmingham middle class had developed very little in the way of institutions or organisations by the mid-eighteenth century, but by the end of the century a whole new range had appeared. In the voluntary societies which sprang up in the town the male middle class learnt the skills of local government and established their rights to political leadership. These societies placed women on the periphery, if they placed them at all. Dorothy Thompson has argued in her piece on working-class women in radical politics that as organisations became more formal so women were increasingly marginalised. This process took place earlier for the middle class since their formal organisations were being established from the mid-eighteenth century. As in all other towns and cities Birmingham societies covered an extraordinarily wide range of activities through religion, philanthropy, trade, finance and politics. The personnel of these societies were often the same people who were finding their way onto the boards of local banks, insurance companies and municipal trusts. In Birmingham there were a series of political struggles between the governing classes and the middle class in our period which resulted in the formation of political organisations; to take one example, the Chamber of Commerce first founded in 1785 was the first attempt to bring manufacturers together to protect their interests and had no place for women. The Birmingham Political Union, the Complete Suffrage Union, the dissenting organisations to fight the established church, the organisations which worked for municipal incorporation and the Anti-Corn Law League were all male bodies. It is interesting to note that the BPU made provision for the wives of artisans in the Female Political Union, but

⁸ J. Luckcock, *Sequel to Memoirs in Humble Life*, Birmingham 1825.

there was no equivalent provision for middle-class ladies. Women were not defined by the middle class as political—they could play a supportive role, for example fund-raising for the Anti-Corn Law League, but that marked the limit. The only political organisation where they did play an important part was the Anti-Slavery movement where separate ladies' auxiliary committees were set up after considerable argument within the movement, but even here their real contribution was seen as a moral one. Women were appealed to as mothers to save their 'dusky sisters' from having their children torn from them, but the activities which women could engage in to achieve this end were strictly limited. It was often the very weakness of women which was called upon—as God's poorest creatures perhaps their prayers would be heard.

Similarly the relationship of women to new social organisations and institutions was strictly limited. They could not be full members of the libraries and reading rooms, or of the literary and philosophical societies, even the concerts and assemblies were organised by male committees. When we look at the huge range of philanthropic societies again the pattern is that men hold all the positions of power—more specifically the bourgeoisie provide the governors and managing committees while the petit bourgeoisie sit on the committees of the less prestigious institutions and do much of the work of day-to-day maintenance. Women are used by some societies as visitors, or tract distributors, or collectors of money, but they are never, formally at least, the decision-makers. Even in an institution like the Protestant Dissenting Charity School which was a girls' school in Birmingham, there was a ladies' committee involved with the daily maintenance of the school, but any decision of any importance had to be taken to the men's managing committee and membership of the ladies' committee was achieved by recommendation from the men. Ladies could be subscribers to the charity but their subscriptions did not carry the same rights as it did for the men—for example, ladies could only sponsor girls to be taken into the school by proxy. The ladies' committee had no formal status and relied on informal contact with the men—often taking the form of a wife promising that she would pass some point onto her husband who would then raise it with the men. The constitution of most kinds of society, whether political or cultural, usually either formally excluded women from full membership by detailing the partial forms of membership they could enjoy, or never even thought the question worth discussing. Women never became officers, they never spoke in large

meetings, indeed they could not attend most meetings either because they were formally excluded or because the informal exclusion mechanisms were so powerful—for example, having meetings which were centred around a dinner in an hotel, a place where ladies were clearly not expected to be. Nor did women sign the letters and petitions which frequently appeared in the press.

So far I hope that I have succeeded in establishing that at both the economic and political level middle-class women were increasingly being defined as subordinate and marginal; anything to do with the public world was not their sphere. At the same time a whole range of new activities was opening up for men, and men had the freedom to move between the public and the private. It is at the level of the ideological that we find the articulation of separate spheres which informed many of the developments we have looked at. The period 1780–1850 saw a constant stream of pamphlets and books—the best known authors of which are probably Hannah More and Mrs Ellis—telling middle-class women how to behave. But domesticity was a local issue as well as a national one, and the activities of the Birmingham clergy in our period give us plenty of evidence of the way in which congregations were left in no uncertain state as to the relative positions of men and women. John Angell James has already been referred to. He was the minister of the most important Independent church in the town from 1805–57 and was recognised as a great preacher and prolific writer. Carr's Lane had a large membership drawn from both the bourgeoisie and the petit bourgeoisie whilst several hundred working-class children attended the Sunday schools. James' books sold extremely well and his series on the family—*Female Piety*, *The Young Man's Friend and Guide Through Life to Immortality* and *The Family Monitor*, or *a Help to Domestic Happiness*—were long-term best-sellers.⁹ James believed that women were naturally subordinate to men—it was decreed in the Scriptures.

Every family, when directed as it should be, has a sacred character, inasmuch as the head of it acts the part of both the prophet and the priest of his household, in instructing them in the knowledge, and leading them in the worship, of God; and, at the same time, he discharges the duty of a king, by supporting a system of order, subordination and discipline.

⁹ J. A. James, *Female Piety or the Young Woman's Friend and Guide Through Life to Immortality*, 5th edn, London 1856; *The Young Man's Friend and Guide Through Life to Immortality*, London 1851; *The Family Monitor, or a Help to Domestic Happiness*, London 1828.

Furthermore home was the woman's proper sphere:

In general, it is for the benefit of a family that a married woman should devote her time and attention almost exclusively to the ways of her household: her place is in the centre of domestic cares. What is gained by her in the shop is oftentimes lost in the house, for want of the judicious superintendence of a mother and a mistress. Comforts and order, as well as money, are domestic wealth; and can these be rationally expected in the absence of female management? The children always want a mother's eye and hand, and should always have them. Let the husband, then, have the care of providing for the necessities of the family, and the wife that of personally superintending it: for this is the rule both of reason and of revelation.¹⁰

James' ideas were not simply spoken from the pulpit; the domination of such ideas was reflected in the organisation of his church and in the way in which church societies were established. Nor were such ideas limited to the Independents. The Quakers and the Unitarians were both important groups in Birmingham—many of the most influential families in the town were in one of these two groups. Both Quakers and Unitarians inherited a fairly radical view of the relations between the sexes but the Quakers in the late eighteenth century were moving towards a more formal subordination of women, introducing, for example, separate seating for men and women. However, the Quakers still offered women the opportunity to preach and thus guaranteed the maintenance of a spiritual significance for women. The Unitarians, though believing in some education for women, maintained strict lines of demarcation as has already been mentioned in connection with the Protestant Dissenting Charity School which was a Unitarian foundation. But it should not be thought that it was left to Nonconformists to lead the way on questions relating to the divisions between the sexes. Birmingham saw a considerable Evangelical revival from the late 1820s, associated with the influence of the Evangelical Bishop Ryder in Coventry and Lichfield. There is substantial evidence of the particular interest which Evangelicals took in the importance of a proper home and family life, and the belief they had in the centrality of the religious household in the struggle to reconstruct a properly Christian community. Christ Church, a large Anglican church in the town centre, was occupied by an enthu-

¹⁰ J. A. James, *The Family Monitor in The Works of John Angell James*, ed. by T. F. James, Birmingham 1860, pp. 17 and 56.

stastic Evangelical in the 1830s who inaugurated separate benches for men and women; this led to a popular rhyme—

The churches in general we everywhere find,
Are places where men to the women are joined;
But at *Christ Church*, it seems, they are more cruel hearted,
For men and their wives are brought here to be parted.¹¹

The Rev. John Casebow Barrett, the Rector of St Mary's from the late 1830s and a much liked and admired preacher in the town, maintained a similar stance from his pulpit as in his sermon in memory of Adelaide Queen Dowager in 1849 where he extolled her virtues as an ordinary wife and mother:

As a *wife*, her conduct was unexceptionable; and her devotedness, her untiring watchfulness to her royal consort during his last illness, stands forth as a bright model, which the wives of England will do well to imitate. Here, in her husband's sick chamber, by day and by night, she—then the Queen of this mighty Empire—proved herself the fond and loving wife, the meek and feeling woman, the careful and uncomplaining nurse. *Her* eye watched the royal sufferer: *her* hand administered the medicine and smoothed the pillow: *her* feet hastened to give relief by changing the position: *her* voice was heard in prayer, or in the reading of the words of eternal life. And the character she then exhibited won for her—which we believe in her estimation was more precious than the crown she wore—the deep respect, the high approval, the honest, truthful love of an entire nation, which, whatever its other faults may be, is not insensible to those charities and affections, which give a bright and transcendent charm to the circle of every home.¹²

Domesticity often seems to have an important religious component, but it was not always expressed in religious terms. The local papers often carried poems with a heavily idealised domestic content and the ideology of separate spheres seems to have gained very wide usage. James Luckcock, a Birmingham jeweller who has already been mentioned, was deeply attached to the domestic ideal. He was a political Radical, a great friend of George Edmonds, and was very active in the Birmingham Political Union. There seems to be no evidence that an attachment to domesticity had anything to do with political allegiances—it appears to have cut cleanly across party lines. Luckcock loved the idea of both his home and garden—

particularly the home which he built for his wife and himself for his retirement in leaty Edgbaston. His relationship with his two sons seems in reality to have been fraught with tension but he continued to celebrate poetically the joys of domestic bliss. At one point when he was seriously ill and thought he might die he composed a poem for his wife about himself; it was entitled *My Husband* and catalogued his thoughtfulness and caring qualities as a husband and father:

Who first inspir'd my virgin breast,
With tumults not to be express'd,
And gave to life unwonted zest?
My husband.
Who told me that his gains were small,
But that whatever might befall,
To me he'd gladly yield them all?
My husband.
Who shun'd the giddy town's turmoil,
To share with me the garden's toil,
And joy with labour reconcile?
My husband.
Whose arduous struggles long maintain'd
Adversity's cold hand restrain'd
And competence at length attain'd?
My husband's.¹³

Unfortunately we do not even know the name of James Luckcock's wife, much less her reaction to this poem!

In this brief and introductory paper I have tried to suggest how central gender divisions were to the middle class in the period 1780–1850. Definitions of masculinity and femininity played an important part in marking out the middle class, separating it off from other classes and creating strong links between disparate groups within that class—Nonconformists and Anglicans, Radicals and conservatives, the richer bourgeoisie and the petit bourgeoisie. The separation between the sexes was marked out at every level within the society—in manufacturing, the retail trades and the professions, in public life of all kinds, in the churches, in the press and in the home. The separation of spheres was one of the fundamental organising characteristics of middle-class society in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century England.

¹¹ W. Bates, *A Pictorial Guide to Birmingham*, Birmingham 1849, p. 46.

¹² Rev. J. C. Barrett, *Sermon in Memory of Adelaide Queen Dowager*, Birmingham 1849, p. 11.

¹³ Luckcock, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

Further reading

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11

Postcolonial perspectives

In this chapter we look at the work and perspectives of historians in the field of postcolonial history. The period since the Second World War has often been described as the age of decolonization. During the past fifty years the European powers have either granted independence to, or been forced out of, colonies acquired over the previous three centuries. The magnitude of European imperial expansion may be measured both by its unprecedented geographic spread, and the millions of human beings whose lives and cultures were irretrievably altered. It is estimated that 'more than three-quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism': 'Imperialism disrupted (or manipulated) traditional patterns of authority within indigenous cultures, created nation-states and integrated colonies into global capitalist production, primarily as sources of raw materials for the imperial power. The great majority of European colonies have acquired political independence, but in economic terms the colonized peoples remain among the most impoverished in the world.'

Colonialism sanctioned the spread of Europeans throughout the world on both economic and cultural grounds. The imperial powers justified the migration of settlers into the lands under their control for a variety of reasons: security of strategic trade routes or resources, religious beliefs or overpopulation – the dispersal of unwanted people. The conquest of existing cultures and peoples was also legitimated by the strength of evolutionary thought during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Drawing upon Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) scholars in a wide variety of disciplines drew analogies between the stages of development evident in the natural world, governed by the 'survival of the fittest', and human society. In the white settler states, a term used to describe America, Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, New Zealand, South Africa and Uruguay,

settlers pushed aside the indigenous population, frequently asserting that the land they found was empty or unused.² The following inscription from a memorial plaque, dedicated to a Cornish farming family on Great Barrier Island, New Zealand, illustrates this popular belief: 'The pioneer Medland family loved this district, where they, finding waste, produced worth.'³

Postcolonial historical writing began when the experience of imperialism and colonialism began to be questioned, and this process invariably entailed the revision or rejection of previous historical accounts which narrated European expansion as largely unproblematic. Postcolonial histories include the perspectives of the colonized and often revise the understanding of their experiences. The colonized peoples may be placed at the centre of the historical process. The continuing impact of colonialism is also central to postcolonial accounts of the past. Western narratives which focus upon modernization, the building of the nation-state and economic development in the old colonies have been challenged by alternative perspectives emphasizing the culture and agency of the colonized peoples. The empire is, indeed, writing back.⁴

The term postcolonial is relatively new, and is not without its critics.⁵ Is it possible to characterize the historical experiences of so many different peoples under one label? The Australian aboriginal writer, Bobbi Sykes, pin-pointed one difference:

Postcolonial . . . ? What!
Did I miss something?
Have they gone?⁶

In the white settler states the Europeans never went home. This has led the Australian historian Richard Nile to argue that 'these colonies of white settlement are not post-colonial in any sense other than that posited by a strict periodisation between pre-independence and post-independence. In every other respect they are instances of a continuing colonisation, in which the descendants of the original colonists remain dominant over the colonised indigenous peoples.'⁷ It is possible to argue that excluding the 'white settler' states implies a static state of affairs in which the changing balance of power between colonized and colonizer does not receive recognition. In Australia, New Zealand and Canada, Aboriginal, Maori and First Nations' peoples are currently engaged in complex negotiations with their respective governments over the return of land and natural resources. Historians

in these countries play a key role in reconstructing the historical process of land alienation.

Confining the term postcolonial to those nations from which the Europeans physically departed is also problematic in another respect: the imperial power does not have to be present to continue to exert considerable influence over its old dominions. Indeed, the colonial encounter may live on as either a dynamic or oppressive cultural and economic force long after the physical presence has gone.⁸ Many politically independent countries remain economically dependent on, and culturally dominated by, the departed imperial power. While the British may have left India, they left behind intellectual, as well as physical, traces of their occupation: 'mind tracks' as well as train tracks. Among these are the European narratives of modernization, which Dipesh Chakrabarty argues dominate third-world histories.⁹

One of the most powerful critiques of imperialism and colonialism came from the pen of a French doctor, Frantz Fanon. First published in French in 1952, *Black Skin, White Masks* directly confronted both European racism and its corrosive effects upon the colonized peoples. Working in Algeria, then a French colony, Fanon came to empathize deeply with the Algerian independence movement and in 1961 published *The Wretched of the Earth*, 'a revolutionary manifesto of decolonization'.¹⁰ The book is a passionate critique of European religious proselytizing and violent conquest:

Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, and in all the corners of the globe. For centuries they have stifled almost the whole of humanity in the name of a so-called spiritual experience.¹¹

Fanon hoped that after liberation, 'nationalist consciousness [would] convert itself into a new social consciousness'. His hopes were not to be fulfilled; in many of the newly independent countries dictatorships or neo-colonial regimes took power. Indeed, there are many postcolonial scholars who have had to go into opposition, culturally and intellectually as well as politically, against their own leadership.¹² Seventeen years later Edward Said wrote a searing indictment of the way in which French and British writers, in politics, literature and history, had characterized the different peoples conquered by Europeans. In *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Said examined the production of knowledge about 'the orient' by European scholars. The precise geographical boundaries of the Orient have

varied from inclusion of the whole of Asia to a more restricted focus upon those peoples closest to the 'imaginary boundary' between East and West, the Middle East and North Africa.¹³ Said describes the Orient as 'not only adjacent to Europe, it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies . . . and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the *Other*'.¹⁴ His critical examination of scholarly writing on the Orient has transformed the term orientalism from 'a more or less neutral denotation for "oriental scholarship"' to one with a distinctly 'pejorative connotation'.¹⁵

Said makes two fundamental arguments. First of all, he suggests that European scholars constructed an essentialist representation of non-Europeans, for whom he uses the term, the 'other'. By the term essentialist, Said means that a set of indispensable characteristics were ascribed to the Orient: politically, as unchanging/despotic or socially, as sensual and cruel. A binary opposition was established between East and West, in which inferior and antagonistic characteristics were enshrined in the concept of the Orient. This is the core of what Clifford has described as 'the key theoretical issue raised by *Orientalism* [which] concerns the status of all forms of thought and representation for dealing with the alien. Can one ultimately escape procedures of dichotomizing, restructuring and textualizing in the making of interpretative statements about foreign cultures and traditions?'¹⁶

The second major argument made by Said concerns the relationship between the representation of the Orient by Western scholars and imperialism. He argues that the fundamental tenets of orientalism became a 'science of imperialism', which justified the exploitation and domination by European powers. In this sense Said perceives 'orientalism' as a discourse in the terms understood by poststructuralists, in which knowledge was created and actively deployed in the exercise of imperial power. More recently Said has reiterated that 'no more glaring parallel exists between power and knowledge in the modern history of philology than in the case of Orientalism. Much of the information and knowledge about Islam and the Orient that was used by the colonial powers to justify their colonialism derived from Orientalist scholarship'.¹⁷

There are, of course, criticisms of Said's characterization of 'orientalism', many of which take the position that the European literature about the Orient was much more diverse and oppositional than Said allows.¹⁸ Leaving this aside, Robert Young has also drawn our attention to a contradictory aspect of Said's overall argument. Said

defines the discourse of 'orientalism' as a representation with little relationship to any reality, while also arguing that the knowledge generated by scholars of the Orient was actively employed by colonial administrators. In other words, 'at a certain moment Orientalism as representation did have to encounter the "actual" conditions of what was there, and . . . it showed itself effective at a material level as a form of power and control. How then can Said argue that the "Orient" is just a representation, if he also wants to claim that "Orientalism" provided the necessary knowledge for actual colonial conquest?'¹⁹

Postcolonial historical writing in the past twenty years has developed these two critiques of imperialism and colonialism by deconstructing colonialist discourses, and reconstructing the appalling scale of loss experienced by colonized and indigenous peoples. In many cases the European grand narratives of modernization, which place colonialism within a global trajectory of capitalist development, have been rejected and replaced by a history celebrating 'the virtues of the fragmentary, the local, and the subjugated'.²⁰ Arif Dirlik has concluded that 'the goal, indeed, is no less than to abolish all distinctions between center and periphery as well as all other "binarisms" that are allegedly a legacy of colonial(ist) ways of thinking and to reveal societies globally in their complex heterogeneity and contingency'.²¹

In this introduction we will look at two examples of postcolonial history, the first from Hawaii and the second, the 'subaltern studies' school of Indian history. These represent the two ends of a spectrum of postcolonial perspectives suggested by Indian historian Gyan Prakash. Looking at Indian history, Prakash locates the first challenge to Western historiography in the anti-imperial nationalist consciousness of the 1920s and 1930s: '[i]t was important for this historiography to claim that everything good in India – spirituality, Aryan origins, political ideas, art – had completely indigenous origins'.²² The indigenous nationalist perspective on Hawaiian history, written by Lilikala Kame'eleihiwa, reflects this aspect of the postcolonial spectrum.

The question animating Kame'eleihiwa's study is how and why indigenous Hawaiians lost their land and 'slipped to the bottom of society'.²³ She identifies the key event which led to the dispossession of indigenous Hawaiians in the 1848 Māhele, which legally transformed the Hawaiian system of land tenure from communal to private ownership. In an attempt to understand why the chiefly leadership allowed this to happen, Kame'eleihiwa interprets the sequence of events through three metaphors which, she argues,

successfully governed Hawaiian society over the preceding centuries. The three metaphors: 'cherishing the land', that 'everyone has their proper place' (defined specifically in the separation of the sexes and chiefly authority over the people), and 'a metaphor of incest', provide a model through which she seeks to understand the decisions of the paramount chief, the Mo'i'i, and the four Ali'i Nui (the political council).

There are many difficulties with this type of postcolonial history. In the course of the book, Kame'eleihiwa appears to argue the immutability of cultural inheritance and adopts the very essentialism rejected by Said. She concludes that only through the adoption of these traditional principles can the Hawaiian indigenous people once again live *pono* (in balance). Kame'eleihiwa's invocation of the past as the proper basis for contemporary society may also be perceived as a means to buttress the power of traditional indigenous elites.²⁴ Finally, Kame'eleihiwa argues that her comprehension of the metaphors implicit within the Hawaiian language enables her to assess more accurately the actions of the paramount chief. But it may be argued that she is still an 'outsider' in terms of time.²⁵

Kame'eleihiwa's book also raises the controversial issue concerning who should write indigenous or postcolonial histories. Should the historical experiences of indigenous peoples and the 'subaltern' be reconstructed only by indigenous scholars? Does an emic perspective (that of an cultural insider) have greater merit than an etic perspective (that of an outsider)? In the early 1980s Edward Said warned against this 'kind of possessive exclusivism'.²⁶ The 'subaltern studies' historians have rejected the concept that postcolonial history can and should only be written by descendants of the colonized, subjugated peoples.²⁷ However, the indigenous peoples of the United States and the Pacific have been far less comfortable with the expropriation of tribal history by academic outsiders, and frequently seek to retain control over the transmission of fundamental cultural beliefs. The scholarly community in the Pacific has been riven by sharp debates on the issue.²⁸

At the other end of the postcolonial spectrum of historical writing are the subaltern studies historians of India who employ contemporary methodology and theory to re-interpret the experience of colonialism. The fundamental perspective of subaltern studies is very simple: 'that hitherto Indian history had been written from a colonialist and elitist point of view, whereas a large part of Indian history has been made by the subaltern classes'. The defining concept of the subaltern classes is

derived from the influential twentieth-century Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci.²⁹ The subaltern are those of inferior rank, whether of class, caste, age, gender or in any other way. Arguing that Indian history had largely been written from the perspective of the elite, the subaltern studies historians reject the conventional nationalist history of India which 'seeks to replicate in its own history the history of the modern state in Europe'.³⁰ From 1982 onwards a group of historians, led by Ranajit Guha, published several volumes of essays attempting to answer the question 'why, given numerical advantage, the justice of their cause, the great duration of their struggle, the Indian people were subaltern, why they were suppressed'.³¹

Ranjit Guha has addressed this question in a major study of peasant insurgency in India.³² His aim is to reconstruct the Indian peasant consciousness from descriptions of 117 uprisings over less than a century of British rule. In this sense, Guha shares many of the same concerns as 'historians from below'. The peasant uprisings, Guha argues, were the major source of unrelenting resistance to British rule, and he concludes that 'Indian nationalism... derived much of its striking power from a subaltern tradition'.³³ In this he challenges those interpretations of Indian history from both right and left-wing perspectives that relegate peasant uprisings to the status of spontaneous uprisings, pre-history for either the nationalist or socialist/communist movements.

Both Guha's study of peasant insurgency and Kame'eleihiwa's *Native Land and Foreign Desires* illustrate one of the major problems facing postcolonial historians. Many of the subordinate classes and indigenous peoples have left few written records, and their voice must be reconstructed through the official reports of the colonizer. Kame'eleihiwa utilizes the descriptions of encounters with the Mo'i'i (paramount chief) and Ali'i Nui (political council) written by European travellers, missionaries and anthropologists relatively uncritically. This is not the case with Ranajit Guha, who utilizes the tools of poststructural analysis (see following chapter) to find the voice of the 'subaltern' in the British reports on peasant insurgency. He comments ironically that the 'fear which haunts all authority based on force, made careful archivists of them'.³⁴ Within these copious records Guha suggests that the 'mutually contradictory perceptions' of elite and subaltern are so firmly entrenched that 'it should be possible, by reversing their values, to derive the implicit terms of the other. When, therefore, an official document speaks of badmashes as participants in rural disturbances,

this does not mean (going by the normal sense of that Urdu word) any ordinary collection of rascals but peasants involved in a militant agrarian struggle.³⁵

It is clear from both these examples that problems of representation have not vanished, and that postcolonial historians face a difficult task in reconstructing the asymmetrical European/indigenous encounter and the continuing consequences of colonialism without recourse to binary or essentialist interpretations of culture. Furthermore, it has been argued that the postcolonial rejection of European grand narratives, particularly that of capitalist expansion, may obscure the strongest single historical narrative relevant to the contemporary plight of indigenous and subaltern peoples.³⁶ Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests that the way forward for postcolonial historians does not lie in cultural relativism, nativist histories or the rejection of modernity, but in critical engagement with the concepts and ideas that underpin and legitimize the nation-state:

I ask for a history that deliberately makes visible, within the very structure of its narrative forms, its own repressive strategies and practices, the part it plays in collusion with the narratives of citizenships in assimilating to the projects of the modern state all other possibilities of human solidarity.³⁷

This book began with empiricism, a theory of history largely employed in documenting the rise and growth of the nation-state. Some postcolonial historians now suggest that the modernizing narrative of the nation-state has become global and oppressive, denying the legitimacy of alternative and heterogeneous versions of the past. But one of the difficulties faced by postcolonial scholars seeking to reinterpret the experience of colonialism from an indigenous perspective is combining Western epistemology, partly dictated by the nature of written sources, with radically different cosmologies of indigenous oral cultures.³⁸ This difficulty is evident in a study of Aboriginal murder and dispossession in Western Australia during the 1890s. Howard Pedersen was invited by Banjo Woornmura to write a history of the resistance by the Bunaba people, and the leader Jandamarra, to white colonization and the loss of their lands. The account was to draw on both the Bunaba people's oral history and the colonizer's written documents. Pedersen concluded that he was unable to write the book from an Aboriginal perspective:

I quickly realised that a white historian could not reflect in writing the essence of the Bunaba stories. Jandamarra was magic – a supernatural being who could not be destroyed by police or settler bullets. He could only be

challenged by an Aboriginal man who also possessed these powers. Much of the Bunaba story is about the spiritual significance of land and the law which flows from it. The integration of these stories into a western historical narrative is highly problematic. Much of the information is secret and cannot be written for general public consumption. Also Aboriginal perceptions of the past and explanations about why certain events occurred do not sit easily within western historical chronology and its understandings of cause and effect.³⁹

The reading which follows is by Henrietta Whiteman, a professor in the Native American Studies programme at the University of Montana, whose research has examined the 'forced assimilation' of the Cheyenne-Arapaho through the system of education.⁴⁰ In this essay, Whiteman describes an alternative history, based upon the cosmology of the Cheyenne and the story of her great-grandmother, White Buffalo Woman. Can you identify the differences between the cosmology of mainstream empirical histories, and that of the Cheyenne? What are the dynamic factors of change in Cheyenne history, and how do these differ from those commonly espoused by empirical historians? Whiteman includes both an emic and etic perspective in her historical interpretation; do you think that she is able to combine them successfully? She concludes that the 'Cheyenne sense of history is one of power, majesty, mystery, and awe'. Does this differ from 'Western' historical narratives, and if so, in what ways? Finally, what is your response to her challenge: is the Cheyenne version of the past 'authentic history'?

Notes

- 1 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London, 1989), p. 1.
- 2 See Donald Denoon, *Settler Capitalism: The Dynamics of Dependent Development in the Southern Hemisphere* (Oxford, 1983). For discussion concerning the inclusion of the United States see Amy Kaplan, 'Left Alone with America: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture', in Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease (eds), *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham, 1993), pp. 3–21; Gesa Mackenthun, 'Adding Empire to the Study of American Culture', *Journal of American Studies*, 30 (1996), pp. 263–9.
- 3 Grace M. Medland, *Great Barrier Calls* (Auckland, 1969), p. 119.
- 4 Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*. The term postcolonial is certainly present in the historical discourse, but it has a longer history and is better established in critical literary theory. However, the literary definition of postcolonial writing employed by the authors above is very wide, and includes all writing 'affected by imperialism'.
- 5 For discussion of the conceptual problems, see Anne McClintock, 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Postcolonialism"', in Francis Barker et al. (eds), *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory* (Manchester, 1994); Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London, 1997), pp. 5–33.

- 6 Cited in Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Editorial, *Access: Contemporary Themes in Educational Inquiry*, 11, 2 (1992), p. 1. I am grateful to Joan Gibbons for this reference.
- 7 Richard Nile (ed.), *Australian Civilisation* (Melbourne, 1994), p. 223.
- 8 McClintock, 'The Angel of Progress', p. 259, argues that the term postcolonial 'actively obscures the continuities and discontinuities of US power around the globe'.
- 9 Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?', *Representations*, 37 (1992), pp. 4-5. See also Jonathan White (ed.), *Recasting the World: Writing after Colonialism* (Baltimore, 1993), pp. 3-16.
- 10 Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London, 1990), pp. 119-20.
- 11 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London, 1961), p. 251.
- 12 Edward Said, foreword to Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds), *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Delhi, 1988), p. ix.
- 13 Urfkree Freitag, 'The Critique of Orientalism', in Michael Bentley (ed.), *Companion to Historiography* (London, 1997), p. 621.
- 14 Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New York, 1978), p. 1. The Orient is not precisely defined, but appears to include India and the Bible-lands: see p. 4.
- 15 Freitag, 'The Critique of Orientalism', pp. 620-1.
- 16 J. Clifford, 'Orientalism', *History and Theory*, 19, 2 (1980), pp. 209-10.
- 17 Edward Said, 'East Isn't East: The Impending End of the Age of Orientalism', *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 February 1995, p. 4.
- 18 See Ernest Gallner, 'The Mightier Pen? Edward Said and the Double Standards of Inside-out Colonialism', *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 February 1993, pp. 3-4; C. A. Bayly, 'The Indian Empire and the British Imagination', *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 July 1996, p. 29.
- 19 Young, *White Mythologies*, p. 129.
- 20 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, 1993), p. xi.
- 21 Arif Dirlik, 'The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism', *Critical Inquiry*, 20, 2 (Winter 1994), p. 329.
- 22 Gyan Prakash, 'Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 32 (1990), pp. 388-9.
- 23 Lilikala Kame'eleihiwa, *Native Land and Foreign Desires/Pehea Lā E Pono Ai?* (Honolulu, 1992), p. 15.
- 24 See Roger Keeling, 'Creating the Past: Custom and Identity in the Contemporary Pacific', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 1, 1 and 2 (Spring and Fall 1989), pp. 19-42; Epeli Hau'ofa, 'The New South Pacific Society: Integration and Independence', in Antony Hooper et al., *Class and Culture in the South Pacific* (Auckland, 1987), pp. 2-3.
- 25 See the discussion in Frederic Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia* (Lincoln, Neb., 1997), pp. 7-8.
- 26 Edward W. Said, 'Orientalism Reconsidered', in Francis Barker et al., *Literature, Politics and Theory* (London, 1986), p. 229.
- 27 See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Questions of Multi-culturalism', in Sarah Harasym (ed.), *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (New York, 1990), pp. 62-3.
- 28 See Haunani-Kay Trask, 'Natives and Anthropologists: The Colonial Struggle', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 3 (1991), pp. 159-67; Kara Puketapu and Ken Kaa 'He taonga nui, te tupato', *The New Zealand Listener*, 24 September 1983, p. 98.
- 29 From the foreword by Said, in Guha and Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies*, pp. v-vi.
- 30 See Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, p. 5.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. vii.

- 32 Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi, 1983).
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 335.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 36 Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook, 'After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism and Politics in the Third World', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34 (1992), p. 166; see also Dirlik, 'The Postcolonial Aura', pp. 348-56.
- 37 Chakrabarty, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History', p. 23.
- 38 See Calvin Martin, 'The Metaphysics of Writing Indian-White History', in Calvin Martin (ed.), *The American Indian and the Problem of History* (New York, 1987), pp. 27-34.
- 39 Howard Pedersen and Banjo Woorunmura, *Jandamorra and the Burnaba Resistance* (Broome, 1995), p. xiii.
- 40 Colin G. Calloway, *New Directions in American Indian History* (Oklahoma, 1988), p. 89.

Additional reading

- Chakrabarty, Dipesh, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for Indian Pasts?', *Representations*, 37 (1992), pp. 1-26.
- Dirlik, Arif, 'The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism', *Critical Inquiry*, 20, 2 (Winter 1994), pp. 328-56.
- Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London, [1961] 1965).
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WHITE BUFFALO WOMAN

Henrietta Whiteman

The Grandfather of all grandfathers has existed for all time in all space. He created a universe filled with life and His creation was characterized by beauty, harmony, balance, and interdependence. He considered the Earth Woman to be His most beautiful creation and He intensely loved the human beings. He had made a good world in which His beloved children, the human beings, were to live in a sacred manner.

The Cheyenne Keepers of knowledge, traditions, language, and the spiritual ways maintain a detailed form of this creation story in their oral history. They have taught numerous generations of their children the story of their sacred beginnings. American Indian tribal histories begin with the act of creation. Their unique tribal origins are deeply rooted in the land and in creation, which took place long ago. Unfortunately, the ancient oral histories of these culturally disparate people have been excluded from American history.

To rectify gross historical distortion, White Buffalo Woman and her great-granddaughter will present an oral history and Cheyenne view of history. Their story will cover the important historical events of Cheyennes on their road of life around this island world, which they have walked for thousands of years.

White Buffalo Woman, my great-grandmother, was taught through the oral tradition, just as her mother and grandmothers had been taught. Although White Buffalo Woman began her journey with the people in 1852, she was knowledgeable about their collective tribal experiences beginning with creation. In the way of her people, she, too, understood that the past lives in Cheyenne history. She learned about Sweet Medicine and Erect Horns, the two great compassionate prophets. They had brought the transcendently powerful Sacred Arrows and the Sacred Buffalo Hat and their accompanying ceremonies, the Arrow Renewal and the Sun Dance (Medicine Lodge), as blessings from their Grandfather.

She was taught that the spiritual center of the world was Bear Butte, the lone mountain located near present Sturgis, South Dakota, which is a part of the Black Hills. Cheyennes translate their name for Bear Butte into English as 'the hill that gives,' or 'the giving hill.' They call it that because Sweet Medicine brought their Sacred Arrows

and way of life from this holy mountain. Throughout time, many individuals have fasted there or made pilgrimages just to experience its sacredness or to receive the blessings that flow from within it.

Cheyenne sacred history dominates all of life. The act of creation is preserved in their two major ceremonies, the Arrow Renewal and the Sun Dance. The teachings of their prophets are made spiritually manifest in these ceremonies. The Keeper of Sacred Arrows, who represents Sweet Medicine, and who is the highest spiritual leader of the tribe, has said that Cheyennes keep this earth alive through their ceremonies.

Tribal historians divide Cheyenne history into four broad periods and remember each period by an outstanding event rather than by dates. They refer to their earliest experiences as the ancient time when they lived in the far northeast. They believe they lived in Canada in the area between the Great Lakes on the south and Hudson Bay on the north. The historian-elders say they lived there for a long time but were decimated by a terrible epidemic, which left many of them orphans.

The grieving survivors moved south, into their second period of history, which Cheyennes say was the time of the dogs. They tamed the huge part-wolf dogs and, thereafter, walked with them on their road of life. After some time, they entered their third historical period, which the aged wise ones refer to as the time of the buffalo. Compared to earlier times, this was a time of abundance, with the buffalo becoming the people's economic base. The tribe pursued this animal deep into the interior of the Plains.

Finally, on the vast northern Plains the Cheyennes entered into the time of the horse, the last period of history. Long before, Sweet Medicine had described a horse to them. He said they would come to an animal with large flashing eyes and a long tail. It would carry them and their arrows on its back to distant places and they, the people, would become as restless as the animals they rode. Within a brief quarter of a century after acquiring the horse, Cheyennes developed into the classic equestrian hunters of American history. Both the horse and buffalo had a strong impact upon their lives.

Sweet Medicine had predicted that white-skinned strangers would cause even more drastic changes in their way of life. He said they would meet them in the direction from where the sun rises, and he described the unfortunate effects of acculturation, primarily the result of education. He told them that these people would make life easier with many good and wonderful things, such as guns and other

items made of steel. Tragically, however, the strangers would attempt to superimpose their values of aggressiveness, materialism, rapacity, and egoism, which would cause cultural disorientation among many Cheyenne youth.

The prophet advised them to be cautious in their association with these people, whom they would call *we?ho?e*. Thus, white people eventually came to be known by Sweet Medicine's name for them, the same Cheyenne term that means spider. Some elders also say their name is a form of the tribal word that means to be wrapped or confined in something, which is based upon the white strangers' tight-fitting clothing. The connotations are noteworthy from a Cheyenne viewpoint. If white people are wrapped up, they are often narrowly exclusive, insular, and illiberal. If they are not liberal, they are often prejudiced, bigoted, and intolerant. If they are intolerant, they limit other people's freedom. The words and actions of *we?ho?e* are consistent in that white people have been generally intolerant of everything Cheyenne or everything different, as evidenced by the absence of Indians from American history. White egoism has taken precedence over the presentation of authentic Indian history.

Perhaps because of the trauma and disruption to their lives, only fragments of the initial Cheyenne-white contact have been transmitted in tribal oral history. The Cheyennes were divided into ten bands and came together only for their ceremonies. Consequently, each band must have been contacted at different times under different circumstances. White Buffalo Woman stated that many Cheyennes used to flee from white people and the strange odor they had about them. From a pragmatic point of view, this odor, which had the same effect as a murderer's stench, caused game to avoid the Cheyennes, which threatened their survival as a people. More important, however, from a cultural perspective, they remembered the warning of Sweet Medicine and wished to avoid the misfortune that association with whites assuredly would bring.

White Buffalo Woman's daughter, Crooked Nose Woman, who was born in 1887, did not know the exact details of contact. She stated, however, that when some Cheyenne men saw their first white men, a Cheyenne went up to one of them in a spirit of friendship, shook his hand, and using the male greeting for hello, said, 'Haahel Englishman.' She also observed that this took place far to the east, on the opposite shore of a big river, which the Cheyennes had to cross in round boats, using sticks as oars. This was probably the Mississippi River, which they refer to as 'The Big River.' White historians

agree that initial Cheyenne-white contact occurred in 1680 in the vicinity of present-day Peoria, Illinois, at Fort Crèvecoeur, La Salle's post near the Mississippi River.

Oral history is a living history in that the learners are involved with the historian on a personal level. They hear, listen, remember, and memorize events expressed in the flowing, soft sounds of their own language, describing the collective experiences of the people just as if they happened only the moment before. Their history is more than cold, impersonal words on pieces of paper. Even today, removed by four generations, I know much of what my great-grandmother White Buffalo Woman knew. I, however, have studied white American history, thereby complementing my oral history background.

Tribal history has no memory as to where White Buffalo Woman was born. We know that she was born in 1852, a year after some of the northern Plains tribes, including the Cheyennes, signed the Fort Laramie Treaty. It has been said that she was a beautiful child, with light brown, naturally curly hair, who matured into a phenomenally beautiful lady. Those who knew her have often lamented that none of her many descendants inherited her striking beauty.

The period around the time of White Buffalo Woman's birth was critical. For several years white emigrants had been streaming across Cheyenne hunting grounds on their way west, carrying strange diseases for which the people had developed no natural immunity. In their rush to find gold they spread the 'big cramps' among the Cheyennes, which was so devastating that the band structure was virtually destroyed. It is said that half the tribe died of cholera in 1849.

Disease was only one of the lethal and disorienting results of Cheyenne contact with whites. The *we?ho?e* acted as Sweet Medicine had predicted, and White Buffalo Woman witnessed their destructive aggressiveness. White land greed rapidly eroded their once vast land holdings, which became smaller with each successive treaty. The southern bands of Cheyennes and Arapahoes signed the Treaty of Fort Wise on February 28, 1861, in which they agreed to live on a small reservation in southwestern Colorado Territory.

Black Kettle led the band to which White Buffalo Woman belonged, and the band included a large number of mixed-blood Cheyennes and Lakotas. In response to Governor Evans's proclamation, they had declared themselves to be friendly by surrendering at Fort Lyons in Colorado Territory. Black Kettle's Cheyennes and Left

Hand's band of Arapahoes were camped along Sand Creek, assuming they were there under military protection.

Unfortunately, Coloradans operated on other assumptions. They were anticipating statehood, and wanted to extinguish Indian title to Colorado lands by forcing the removal of all the Indians from the territory. They also feared an Indian uprising. Individuals like John Milton Chivington, a former Methodist minister, had political ambitions. He had become a military officer, and on the morning of November 29, 1864, he led his men in a surprise attack upon the sleeping camp of Cheyennes and Arapahoes at Sand Creek. Black Kettle attempted to stop the soldiers by tying an American flag and a white flag to a long lodgepole.

The ruthless slaughter and savage mutilation of the dead continued unabated, however. When it was over, 137 Cheyennes and Arapahoes lay dead. Only twenty-eight of them were men, the rest women and children. White Buffalo Woman somehow managed to escape. Congressional and military investigations were conducted and, although Chivington and other officers were found guilty, no one was ever punished.

Immediately following the massacre at Sand Creek, Black Kettle took his band south. He hoped to avoid further conflict and, thereby, remain at peace. White Buffalo Woman and her family were among the approximately four hundred Cheyennes, representing about eighty lodges, who followed their peaceable chief south.

Treaty-making intensified. The southern Cheyennes and Arapahoes subsequently signed the Treaty of Little Arkansas on October 14, 1865, agreeing to settle on a reservation in Kansas and the Indian Territory (Oklahoma). Three years later, on October 28, 1867, the tribes negotiated the Treaty at Medicine Lodge, the last they signed with the United States Government. They once again agreed to live in peace, made even more land cessions, and consented to live on a reservation in the Indian Territory. Black Kettle signed both treaties.

Believing they were finally at peace, Black Kettle's band was camped along the Washita River in present southwestern Oklahoma. On the morning of November 27, 1868, the nightmare of Sand Creek was repeated. Lieutenant-Colonel George Armstrong Custer and his men attacked the sleeping camp while the military band played 'Garry Owen.' Although Custer estimated 103 dead Cheyennes, later figures place the number between twenty-seven and sixty, most of them woman and children. Black Kettle was among the dead. All he

had wanted was to be at peace with the whites—the people who killed him.

Again White Buffalo Woman survived. Within her lifetime she had seen the once large island home of her people become very small. On August 10, 1869, President Ulysses S. Grant created by executive order a new reservation for the southern Cheyennes and Arapahoes. It was on that reservation that White Buffalo Woman and her husband, Big White Man, reared their children. One of them, Spotted Horse Fred Mann, was born in 1890. He later married Lucy White Bear and they had two children, the younger, a son named Holy Bird Henry Mann, born in 1915. Henry's mother died when he was seven or nine months old, and White Buffalo Woman reared him and his sister Mariam. Henry married Day Woman Lenora Wolftrougue, another full-blooded Cheyenne. In 1934 I became their first child.

White Buffalo Woman told her grandson Henry that her prayers had been answered in getting to see me, her great-grandchild, and that she could now complete her journey on earth happy in the knowledge that I had come to join the Cheyenne people on their road of life. I have been told that just as she had done for many other infants, my aged great-grandmother lovingly took my tiny body in her hands and, using it as one would a pipe, solemnly pointed me headfirst to each of the six sacred directions of the universe. She thus introduced me to the sacred powers of the world, offered me in prayer as one of the people, and microcosmically traced my life journey on earth with the Cheyennes on their road of life.

Through the ritual my great-grandmother acknowledged my life and charged me with contributing to the good ways of the people. Although we were born in different centuries, our cultural foundation was alike in that we were Cheyenne. Our experiences differed, however. White Buffalo Woman was traditional, and Cheyenne-white history in her time was tragic and sad, but the people were sustained by their strong spirituality. I am bicultural, and tribal history in my time has been generally ignored by white America. Cheyenne history, and for that matter Indian history, has been a story of assimilation, unsuccessfully enforced through 'civilization,' religion, and education.

In 1936 White Buffalo Woman completed her life journey on earth. She taught that understanding was a wonderful thing, and she understood white motivation. She was not cynical but sought only to find the good in people, in the world about her, and in all life.

She and I shared two happy years with the people. Nearly half a century later, I only now understand my great-grandmother's death song: 'Nothing is hard, only death, for love and memories linger on.'

The reservation history of the southern Cheyennes is one of oppression, hunger, broken promises, and rapid environmental degradation. They live solely because of a sheer will to survive. The world in which they once lived in dignity and total self-sufficiency disappeared with the buffalo. Just as Sweet Medicine had predicted, and because of treaty commitments made by their leaders, the Cheyennes as a tribe consented to place their children in the white man's schools in 1876.

From that point on Cheyennes have been subjected to a multiplicity of educational systems. Initially, federally-subsidized schools were operated by the Quakers. The Fort Marion exiles incarcerated in the old Spanish fortress at St. Augustine, Florida, because of their participation in the Red River War of 1874-75, constituted the first Cheyenne adult education class. Lieutenant Richard Henry Pratt was their jailer, and some of them were among his students when he opened the first off-reservation boarding school at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in 1879. Mennonite mission schools also operated on the reservation, as did federal boarding schools. Their curriculum consisted of industrial training, religion, and academics. Through the Johnson-O'Malley Act of 1934, the Secretary of the Interior was authorized to contract with states for the education of Indian children. With this, Cheyenne children were thrust into the public school system.

Under the provisions of the Indian Allotment Act of 1887, the Cheyenne and Arapaho reservation was allotted in 1891 and was opened to white homesteading in 1892. The Cheyennes' island home was further diminished into 160-acre tracts of individual allotments, checkerboarded throughout seven counties in southwestern Oklahoma. The tribes' traditional forms of governance were supplanted by the adoption of a white form of government in 1937. The Cheyenne-Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma organized under the provisions of the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act of 1936, which, like the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, allowed them to organize for tribal self-government.

In the midst of great environmental, social, political, and educational change, Cheyenne spiritual ways and ceremonies have provided the stability necessary to maintain their uniqueness as a people. Today, just as in earlier times, the Keepers reverently safe-

guard the Sacred Arrows and the Sacred Buffalo Hat. The Arrow Renewal and Sun Dance are still conducted as they were in the past. Their genesis as a people and the essence of Cheyennesness are preserved in these ceremonies.

This powerful ceremonial life sets the Cheyennes apart as a distinct people with a unique spiritual history. Though their historical genesis extends thousands upon thousands of years back in time, their history is compressed, so that the act of creation is immediate, being preserved in their two major ceremonials. Sweet Medicine and Erect Horns taught them the ceremonies when they brought the transcendently holy tribal symbols to the people as blessings from their Creator. The good teachings of the prophets provide the tribal direction as the people walk their road of life in an historically timeless pilgrimage, following a migration route that extends from the northeastern woodlands of Canada to both the southern and the northern Plains.

In brief, Cheyenne history is a continuum of sacred experiences rooted into the American landscape, with Bear Butte their most sacred and most powerful place. Their continuity as a people requires that they maintain their way of life. Specifically, they must maintain their traditions, beliefs, spiritual life, and, through their ceremonies, maintain their sacred mission to keep the earth alive.

The Cheyenne sense of history is one of power, majesty, mystery, and awe. It is a sacred history, which has been well-preserved in the oral tradition. The people's history and personal history are intertwined in experience. White Buffalo Woman's personal experiences meld into Cheyenne history. Life did not pass her by, nor did history. Her experiences at Sand Creek, the Washita, and at the Little Big Horn all become immediate, personalized history. More important, it is an authentic history, one that reflects her world of personal experiences while simultaneously reflecting the Cheyenne world of sacred experiences.

Cheyenne history is but one tribal perspective. There are many others, all of them constituting authentic American history. Indian history reflects a unique human, spiritual, timeless cosmology. It stands in stark contrast to scientific, secular, dehumanized Anglo-American history. The experiences of Indians and whites reflect two different cosmologies with different missions. As an example, White Buffalo Woman personally suffered the most tragic experiences a people had to tolerate in American history. Yet she maintained her spirituality and did not abandon her sense of history and sacred

mission. In the twilight of her life she transmitted this unique sense of history to me as a small child, charging me to keep it alive for the generations of as-yet unborn Cheyennes.

Cheyenne history, and by extension Indian history, in all probability will never be incorporated into American history, because it is holistic, human, personal, and sacred. Though it is equally as valid as Anglo-American history it is destined to remain complementary to white secular American history. In a brief five centuries, Anglo-American experiences have become a secular, scientific history without a soul or direction. The collective stream of American Indian tribal experiences has become a spiritual history with the sacred mission of keeping the Earth Grandmother alive. American Indian history has 25,000- to 40,000-year-old roots in this sacred land. It cannot suddenly be assimilated into American history. Every Indian's personalized experiences today constitute American Indian history of the twenty-first century, just as White Buffalo Woman's history is preserved for all time.

My great-grandmother was a remarkable individual whose life was an historic one and for whom history was life. Our lives together span one hundred thirty years, and being Cheyenne—one of the people—has shaped my distinctive, non-Western view of history. Our history as American Indians is beautiful, rich, valid, and sacred. The challenge lies in understanding and appreciating it as authentic history. The challenge is yours.

12 The challenge of poststructuralism/postmodernism

Currently controversies around history and postmodernism, and history and poststructuralism rage. There seem to be two reasons for this. Firstly, the concepts themselves are relatively new, arising from the 1960s. Historians in the main have been slow to grapple with these ideas, partly because they first developed in a mainly literary milieu. Secondly, while historians have theorized about poststructuralist ideas, there are still few works of historical research that might be labelled poststructuralist. Some reasons for this are examined below.

Before discussing the main ideas of poststructuralism, some definitions are in order. As Caplan pointed out, the terms postmodern, poststructural and deconstruction have been used almost as synonyms by some writers, and conflicting definitions abound. Joyce, following McLennan, for example, describes postmodernism thus:

it can be characterized as a critique of the 'four sins' of modernist (social) theory: reductionism (seeing a complex whole in terms of its – more basic – parts); functionalism (seeing elements or parts as the expression of a more complex whole); essentialism (assuming that things or structures have one set of characteristics which is basic, or in a cognate sense 'foundational'); and universalism (presuming that theories are unconditional or transhistorical, as opposed to the 'local knowledges' favoured by postmodernism).¹

When historians first began to discuss the kinds of history suggested by the work of Derrida, Foucault and Lacan, we spoke of poststructuralism. Thirty years on, it is more common to refer to postmodernism. Often, however, the unexplained conflation of these terms leads to confusion. Here, then, following Caplan, we use postmodern as an 'historical description ... of an age', poststructural as 'a ... bundle of theories and intellectual practices, that derives from a creative engagement with its "predecessor", structuralism', and deconstruction as 'a method of reading'.² In this chapter, therefore, we focus on poststructuralism.³

Poststructuralism arose from an engagement with and critique of the tenets of structuralism, a model originating in Saussure's study of language and brought to the social sciences in particular by the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss. Saussure studied language as a system whose properties did not rely on external referents. What was important were the relationships between elements of language or signs. A sign was made up of a signifier or sound pattern and the signified, the concept triggered by the signifier. Signs were distinguished by their difference from others in the set of signs, and signs are arbitrary.⁴ While meaning in language derives from the internal system, nevertheless language is a representation of an external reality. Structuralist thinkers extrapolated from structural linguistics to analyse the deep universal mental structures represented by any system of signification; culture and history can also be investigated by this means.

Structuralism posits a closed system (of signification) which can be observed and understood by an external observer. This is similar to the position adopted by the majority of historians with regard to the past. There is a truth back there, which we could discover if only we had all the information, or were examining it from the correct vantage point. Each historian, while not able alone to see the full picture, both due to lack of evidence and an inevitably subjective interpretation, contributes her brick. Eventually the house will be finished, and the person lucky enough to add the paint to the front door knob can stand back and see the completed whole.

A poststructuralist might argue that the house is still only visible from one side; for all the observer can tell, the far wall may be unfinished; as the observer walks to the back door, the front porch may collapse. Maintenance will be necessary and structural alterations are always possible. The system is not closed and never can be. For an historian, this lack of closure implies that there can be no meta-narratives, no overarching explanation of the passage of human history from past to future.

Historians have commonly based their analyses on material artifacts – documents, art and architecture, archaeological remains – and we might label these sources 'texts', collections of signs which conform to some internal system. Through an extension of the idea of language as a system of signification, poststructuralists have enlarged the field known as textual to include other material and non-material texts. For example, Roberta Gilchrist examines the meanings of various

arrangements of space in the medieval world: here space is a text. The 'body' is another text commonly used.⁵ We can also examine systems of thought as texts: the ideal of feminine slimness, or liberal humanism, for instance. Poststructuralists treat texts of all kinds as systems of signification, whose meanings can be ascertained in part by deconstruction, a method of liberating multiple meanings within the text.

Deconstruction is a method of reading made famous by the French philosopher Derrida in the late 1960s. While for Saussure, the signifier related directly to the signified, this is not so for Derrida. Incorporated in Derrida's sign is always what is absent and what is other. Many words, for example, when deconstructed are found to contain their binary opposite. 'Man' is that which is not 'woman'; when we see 'man' in a text, 'woman' is absent and/or other. However, since 'man' is defined partly by its opposite, even if the sign 'woman' is not mentioned in a text, 'woman' is nevertheless present – at some level we are aware of 'woman', so 'woman' is both present and absent. 'Man' is a necessary word in the text, but at the same time is inadequate to carry its full meaning. Meaning therefore cannot be immediately clear to us.⁶

While the structuralist's system of signification represented an external reality, poststructuralists see a system or text as self-referential, not necessarily and certainly not entirely taking its meaning from the context in which it was produced or from authorial intent. Historians are accustomed to questioning the apparent or stated reasons for a text's production but we frequently do this through a discussion of the circumstances in which it was apparently produced, or by reference to similar texts. Now we are left only with a text, which Derrida tells us is full of opposed and unstable meanings. Furthermore, over time, the text has been read and interpreted differently by various readers, so that our own readings are conditioned by past interpretations as well as our present conditions.⁷

If the meaning of a text is necessarily uncertain, how much more problematic are the historical facts constructed from that text. Facts cannot be independent, and representative of an external reality: they are already historicized, their 'truth' indeterminable.⁸ Thus it is not possible to verify another historian's interpretation by reference to the facts; all we can do is re-read an (open) text.

Each text's lack of closure and of an external referent leads us to a multiplicity of histories, and voices from the past, in theory at least as

many as there are readers of that text. Poststructuralist historians have tried to represent this multiplicity in various ways. Price, for example, presents a history in four voices, each with its own type-face, so that we hear concurrently the voice of eighteenth-century black slaves (as transmitted by their descendants), the Dutch administrators, the Moravian missionaries, and the historian.⁹ Schama has mixed 'fact' and 'fiction' to point out that all historical constructions and interpretations can be regarded as fictions.¹⁰

For historians researching those marginalized due to their class, race, gender, sexuality, age, the structuralist idea that a sign is distinguished by its difference, by what it is not, by what is 'other', has been helpful. The other, while often implicit, is exposed by the inconsistencies in a set of meanings within a text, so that another meaning is produced by this *différance*, a term referring to absence and difference.¹¹ For feminist historians, for example, the possibility of reading against the grain of a text to uncover meaning is useful in a world where the majority of historical texts have been produced by men and about men.

Poststructuralists argue that language, as well as representing the world, creates the world. Language, and texts, as collections of signs, are thus reconceived as a social and political force, for which entity the term language is insufficient. 'Language' in its multiple meanings has therefore been replaced in poststructuralist parlance by 'discourse', 'a linguistic unity or group of statements which constitutes and delimits a specific area of concern, governed by its own rules of formation with its own modes of distinguishing truth from falsity'.¹² Analysing the multiplicity of discourses in existence in any one place and time also, of course, produces multiple historical readings.

Various aspects of poststructuralist thought, therefore, result in plural, mutable readings and interpretations, and much of the criticism of poststructuralist incursions into traditional historical practice revolves around this issue. Most basically, poststructuralism supports a relativist position and destroys any claim to historical objectivity. Not only are multiple and sometimes mutually exclusive interpretations possible, they are inevitable, and the truth of an interpretation cannot be verified. All histories are equally representative of reality and therefore equally fictitious. Taken to an extreme, total relativism can result in a nihilism where everything is equally meaningless. How can one be a working, as well as a theoretical, historian under these conditions? Certainly one interpretation cannot be privileged over another, and it

can be argued that those interpretations which have been thus privileged in the past owe their position to their conformity to one or another discourse of power. Many theorists believe, however, that this extreme position is unnecessary.

The other issue upon which historians engage poststructuralists and vice versa concerns the use of text and context. If the importance of an historically situated authorial consciousness is denied, critics argue that the text is thus dehistoricized. Since signs (the elements in the text) do not refer to anything material, a text cannot refer to a past reality. Spiegel, who is not dismissive of poststructuralism, points out that 'a historically grounded view of literary and cultural production is extremely difficult to theorize in the wake of the semiotic challenge', but that literary critics have discovered the need for a known history against which to measure their interpretations. She goes on to argue that the controversy around text and context is based on

'incommensurabilities between the objects, tasks and goals facing historians and literary scholars'. While a text is a given, 'the object of historical study must be constituted by the historian' before its meaning can be examined.¹³ The historian both constructs (the object of study) and deconstructs (the text) in the present, so that it is hard to reach the past. She also suggests, though more tentatively, that literary critics will be more interested in aesthetics and emotions, whereas an historian focuses on the ideological functions of a text. Spiegel argues that if we view texts as 'situated uses of language' then their full meanings can only be determined by an examination of the social context within which they were produced, even if there is no reference to that context within the text.¹⁴

Part of the problem for historians struggling to come to grips with poststructuralist practice, we suggest, is that there are few models and examples. Historians have critiqued and theorized poststructuralism for over twenty years, but are only slowly writing from this stance. Perhaps as various solutions to the text/context problem are suggested in writing, some resolution will become possible.

For historians, many poststructuralist topics and methods of investigation are a legacy of the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault studied what he termed the 'history of systems of thought', wanting to discover who we are in the present and how we got to be that way. In Weeks's words, '[t]he central concern of Foucault has been with the rules that govern the emergence and reproduction of such systems, structures of the mind which categorise social life and then

present the result to us as truth'.¹⁵ While it is difficult to summarize Foucault's diverse work, we note several issues which have affected historians.

All of Foucault's work examined the workings of power in its various forms.¹⁶ While the operation of power within societies tends to reinforce the dominant discourse of that society, power does not operate from above through a single agency (such as 'the government') but works diffusely, locally; resistance occurs similarly, in a series of local disruptive struggles rather than in a mighty dialectical engagement.¹⁷ Foucault was interested in the control of populations in the present and therefore charted the development of disciplinary practices such as the incarceration of criminals or the insane. *Madness and Civilization* was not a history of psychiatry but an investigation of the conditions which made the development of the discipline possible.¹⁸

Much of Foucault's work engaged with the marginalized groups in society (though noticeably not women). He paid attention to the marginalized knowledges of these groups, believing that the work of intellectuals was not to mastermind revolutions, but to uncover such discourses. Significantly, he saw knowledge and power as inextricably connected. In particular, there are no 'truths' but only official or dominant knowledges which impart power to those who know and speak them.

From this we see that history writing can be a form of power: we use our knowledge to control and domesticate the past, although it is only one past. Since all history must be present-centred, we create the way in which people think about the present through our creative fictions (for they can be no other) concerning the past. This is a powerful position. Because the subject of this discourse, the historian, is not external to it, however, she does not in fact create the discourse, nor is it intelligible to her. When one is operating within this exercise of knowledge/power, one cannot understand one's own repression.

Foucault broke from earlier histories in his rejection of meta-narratives, overarching theories of human development through time, and of historical continuity. Instead he discussed a series of discontinuous epistemes (historical periods characterized by the dominance of a particular system of thought). Historical change was therefore not cumulative or progressive, seamless or rational, nor guided by a fixed underlying principle.

Not surprisingly, Foucault's ideas have provoked considerable controversy and even outrage. His rejection of meta-narratives and his refusal to totalize his position by showing connections between the development of diverse phenomena have been disconcerting, especially to those influenced by Marx.¹⁹ Young suggests, however, that conventional historiography has done almost nothing but account for epistemic shifts, and has therefore avoided recognizing 'otherness' in the past. We prefer to seek the similarities and continuities with the present, and thereby dehistoricize the past.²⁰

Foucault has also been widely criticized for historical inaccuracies.²¹ His arguments are wide-ranging and lateral, but he cites circumstances, events and interpretations for which there is no contemporary source material. In addition, it is difficult to know what to make of an historian who argues that all history is fiction. Most of us believe that our interpretations have some basis in reality, as presumably did Foucault himself, since he supported his arguments with historical evidence. Megill argued, however, that Foucault 'should not be taken seriously as a historian', but 'most emphatically should be taken seriously as an indication of where history now stands'.²²

A frequent criticism attacks Foucault's apolitical stance. As well as challenging the traditional notion of an intellectual as the 'advance guard of progress and revolution', he jettisons power hierarchies. He does not distinguish between discourses which lead to domination and those that assist liberation, and thus does not address the power effects of his own discourse. Certainly, if we all participate in the discourses of power, it is hard to speak of domination and liberation as diametrically opposed. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that some individuals have less access to power and freedom than others, that some discourses have a monopoly over certain forms of constraint.²³

What use have historians made of Foucault's legacy? There are two groups which employ poststructuralist notions, although they differ from poststructuralism in significant ways. Roger Chartier, a well-known cultural historian, aims 'to note how, in different times and places, a specific social reality was constructed, how people conceived of it and how they interpreted it to others'. Specific cultural forms create 'imaginative works built out of social materials'. Text and context are thus both discursively produced.²⁴ Bynum, for example, examines women's use of food as symbol to construct and communicate a sense of holiness through asceticism.²⁵

While cultural historians study the production of culture, new historicists examine texts as historically specific artifacts. They share Foucault's belief in the 'heterogeneous, contradictory, fragmented, and discontinuous nature of textuality' and, unlike cultural historians, seek 'to disembed the artifact from any process to the present and from any present unifying category'.²⁶ New historicists therefore seek to exhibit the strangeness and thus the historicity of the past, often presenting microhistories.²⁷ Natalie Zemon Davis recently produced a study comprising three biographies of very different seventeenth-century women, thus showing the discontinuities as well as the similarities in their stories. In her imaginary conversations with her subjects, she 'asked what advantages you had by being on the margins' and enjoyed the adventure of 'following you three to so many different climes'.²⁸

Another version of the deconstructionist approach to history is Diane Purkiss's *The Witch in History*.²⁹ Purkiss examines stories about witchcraft, those told by both early modern and twentieth-century people, by men and women, by misogynists and feminists, by historians, witches and their neighbours. Some of these stories are or were apparently true, others were fantasy or fictionalized. All help to construct the multi-faceted meaning of 'witch' for us. Purkiss uses close reading and psychoanalytic interpretations to show 'how the witch acts as a carrier for the fears, desires and fantasies of women and men both now and in the early modern period'. Both explicitly and implicitly Purkiss also addresses the problems of writing history in a postmodern world:

early modern assumptions about supernatural signs were less an articulate system than a set of half-formulated working rules. Buried beneath the surface of witch-narratives, they rarely manifest themselves even as an articulate subtext, and the historian's attempt to piece them together is itself a falsification, since it is in the nature of such beliefs that they remain unexamined. It is equally hard for us not to despise people with such beliefs and so to assume that they are all transparent and honest, forthcoming with the truth at all times, incapable of vested interests and theatrical self-fashioning. On the other hand, we may become paralysed by our own scepticism, too cynical to try any longer. Sometimes we are taking stories too seriously, sometimes not seriously enough. Can we ever know about even one story?³⁰

While Purkiss, perhaps for polemical purposes, underestimates many historians, the difficulties she outlines are common. To write history, we need to disinter and re-tell histories.

Overall, Foucault's work has pointed to many new historical topics: the histories of marginal people and various institutions, of madness and medicine, of the body (including the body politic), of systems of thought. Studies of these kinds abound. Somewhat ironically, given Foucault's disinterest, feminist poststructuralism is a growing field. For example, *The Gaze* discusses the construction of class and sexuality in nineteenth-century Australia. On a contrasting topic, Donzelot traces the rise of the social and its effect on the family.³¹

From a methodological viewpoint, deconstruction has already shown itself to be an extremely useful historical tool. We have not yet mapped out what a 'poststructuralist history' looks like, nor should we. In Munslow's words, '[p]ostmodern or deconstructionist history converges no longer on the past as such, but on the disjuncture between pastness and presentness'.³² More fruitful, we suggest, is to speak of a poststructuralist *approach* to history. For Berkhofer, this entails remaking ourselves as readers and reviewers, as well as writers and teachers.³³ Poststructuralist theory, therefore, gives us both the technical and mental tools to develop new histories appropriate to the postmodern age.

City of Dreadful Delight and Judith Walkowitz's earlier book, *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (1980), examine the sexual culture of Victorian England. Walkowitz acknowledges the influence of Foucault, and also that of feminist debates, for example, those concerning pornography. The extract below, from *City of Dreadful Delight*, is characteristic of poststructuralist history. The avoidance of incarceration for insanity by Mrs Weldon, the protagonist of the story, shows the intersection of knowledge and power, and the subversive and contradictory nature of popular discourse.

Foucault argued that power is not purely hierarchical with rules imposed from above: rather it operates diffusely and locally. How is this paradigm of power visible in the story of Mrs Weldon? Do you find it a convincing method of interpretation in this specific case? In what ways can Mrs Weldon herself be seen at the intersection of several discourses about power and powerlessness in Victorian society? Walkowitz argued that '[b]oth sides engaged in a symbolic struggle, in a dialectical battle of words and images, often subverting the same metaphorical language as their opponents'. Find examples of this practice in the extract. Walkowitz also suggests that the 'séance reversed the usual sexual hierarchy of knowledge and power'. In what ways was Mrs Weldon empowered by her experiences?

Do we know the true story of the Weldons' battle? Can we? In what ways does Walkowitz as an historian leave this narrative open, and how does her practice differ from that of some other historians?

Notes

- 1 Patrick Joyce, 'The Return of History: Postmodernism and the Politics of Academic History in Britain', *Past and Present*, 158 (1998), p. 212, n. 18.
- 2 Jane Caplan, 'Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, and Deconstruction: Notes for Historians', *Central European History*, 22 (1989), pp. 262–8; for another definition, Thomas C. Patterson, 'Post-structuralism, Post-modernism: Implications for Historians', *Social History*, 14 (1989), pp. 83–8.
- 3 It should be noted, however, that other writers might define this same set of theories as postmodern.
- 4 Howard Gardner, *The Quest for Mind: Piaget, Lévi-Strauss and the Structuralist Movement* (New York, 1972), pp. 44–5; F. Saussure, 'Nature of the Linguistic Sign', in David Lodge (ed.), *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (London, 1988), pp. 10–12.
- 5 Roberta Gilchrist, 'Medieval Bodies in the Material World: Gender, Stigma and the Body', in Sarah Kay and Mini Rubin (eds), *Framing Medieval Bodies* (Manchester, 1994), pp. 43–61.
- 6 This discussion is derived from Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism* (2nd edn, New York, 1993), p. 33. For more detail, see Chapter 2, 'Derrida and Deconstruction'.
- 7 Patterson, 'Post-structuralism', p. 84.
- 8 Keith Jenkins, *The Postmodern History Reader* (London, 1997), p. 19.
- 9 Richard Price, *Alabi's World* (Baltimore, 1990). See Peter Burke, 'History of Events and the Revival of Narrative', in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 239, for a more extended discussion.
- 10 Simon Schama, *Dead Certainties (Unwarranted Speculations)* (London, 1991).
- 11 Caplan, 'Postmodernism', p. 267.
- 12 Jeffrey Weeks, 'Foucault for Historians', *History Workshop Journal*, 14 (1982), p. 111.
- 13 The construction of the object of historical enquiry was also mentioned in the discussion of Hayden White in Chapter 8.
- 14 Gabrielle M. Spiegel, 'History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 65 (1990), pp. 73–8. See the debate sparked by this article, in *Past and Present*, nos 131, 133, 135, reprinted in Jenkins, *Postmodern History Reader*.
- 15 Weeks, 'Foucault', p. 107.
- 16 For a more detailed but clear discussion, see Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace, *A Foucault Primer: Discourse, Power and the Subject* (Melbourne, 1993), ch. 3. See the bibliography for a list of Foucault's works.
- 17 Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London, 1990), p. 87.
- 18 Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London, [1961] 1967).
- 19 See, for example, Mark Poster, 'Foucault and History', *Social Research*, 49 (1982), pp. 116–22.
- 20 Young, *White Mythologies*, p. 75.
- 21 H. C. Erik Midelfort, 'Madness and Civilization in Early Modern Europe: A Reappraisal of Michel Foucault', in Peter Burke (ed.), *Critical Essays on Michel Foucault* (Aldershot, 1992), pp. 28–41.
- 22 Allan Megill, 'Foucault, Structuralism, and the Ends of History', *Journal of Modern History*, 51 (1979), p. 502.
- 23 Poster, 'Foucault and History', pp. 138–40; Weeks, 'Foucault', p. 117.

- 24 Roger Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge, 1988), p. 4; Spiegel, 'History', pp. 65–8.
- 25 Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, 1987).
- 26 David D. Roberts, *Nothing but History: Reconstruction and Extremity after Metaphysics* (Berkeley, 1995), pp. 271–2; Spiegel, 'History', p. 71.
- 27 See, for example, Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-century Miller* (London, [1976] 1992).
- 28 Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-century Lives* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), p. 4.
- 29 Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London, 1996).
- 30 *Ibid.*, frontispiece, p. 62.
- 31 Lynette Finch, *Sexuality, Class and Surveillance* (Sydney, 1993); Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1979).
- 32 Alan Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London, 1997), p. 165.
- 33 Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), pp. 281–3.

Additional reading

- Berkhofer, Robert F., Jr., *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995).
- Caplan, Jane, 'Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, and Deconstruction: Notes for Historians', *Central European History*, 22 (1989), pp. 262–8.
- Carter, Paul, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (Chicago, 1989).
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SCIENCE AND THE SÉANCE: TRANSGRESSIONS OF GENDER

AND GENRE
Judith R. Walkowitz

The *Daily Telegraph's* marriage correspondence was only one of many media extravaganzas exposing the plight of wives in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Another cause célèbre was Georgina Weldon's highly advertised campaign against her husband, Henry, and a mad-doctor alienist, L. Forbes Winslow, for conspiring to intern her in an insane asylum because she was a spiritualist. At the height of her fame, when headlines of the half-penny newspapers constantly broadcasted 'Mrs. Weldon again,' the indomitable Georgina Weldon was reputed by one newsclipping service to have commanded as many newspaper columns as a cabinet minister. Mrs. Weldon was a great favorite of W. T. Stead, who admired her pluck, her canny manipulation of publicity, her populist defense of the 'liberty of the subject,' and her struggle against materialist science in the name of female spirituality. On all these counts, she would have provoked a very different response from Stead's contemporary, Karl Pearson, who had little sympathy for a 'woman of the market' such as Mrs. Weldon who used the commercial spaces of the city to parody and campaign against male professionalism.¹

Mrs. Weldon's 'woman in the city' story celebrates the possibilities of metropolitan life in the 1880s for enterprising middle-class women like herself. Moving comfortably and speedily across the social spaces of London, refashioning different versions of herself, Georgina Weldon was able to publicize her situation and expose the private male plot that failed. Between 1878 and 1885, Mrs. Weldon played out her story in the newspapers and the medical journals, amplified it in street advertisements and processions, extended it to the lecture circuit, the law courts, and ultimately, that premier com-

¹ This is a revised version of 'Science and the Séance: Transgressions of Gender and Genre in Late-Victorian London,' *Representations* 22 (Spring 1988): 3-29, © 1988 by the Regents of the University of California. On the marriage debates, see Lucy Bland, 'Marriage Laid Bare: Middle-Class women and Marital Sex, c. 1880-1914,' in Jane Lewis, ed., *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family, 1820-1940* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 123-48; Philip Trehearne, *A Plaintiff in Person* (London: William Heinemann, 1923), p. 97.

mercial space of the 1880s, the music halls. Combining courage, virtuosity, and slapstick comedy, Mrs. Weldon's campaign of revenge vastly amused the educated reading public, yet it pressed an open nerve about fears of madness and of wrongful confinement, thereby continuing a melodramatic narrative of family-medical conspiracy that Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade had popularized in their sensational novels of the 1860s.²

Spiritualism and the mad doctors

Mrs. Weldon was a target of lunacy confinement because her husband tried to use a public controversy between doctors and spiritualists to further his private designs—that is, to rid himself of a nuisance wife. Medical men, alarmed by the growing popularity of spiritualism among the educated classes, had themselves instigated this larger conflict.³ They caricatured spiritualists as crazy women and feminized men engaged in superstitious, popular, and fraudulent practices. Spiritualists responded by elaborating an iconography of male medical evil, imagining the doctor as a trader in lunacy and as a sexually dangerous man, a divided personality, whose science made him cruel, bloodthirsty, and hypermasculine, because it suppressed his feminine, spiritual part. Both sides engaged in a symbolic struggle, in a dialectical battle of words and images, often inverting the same metaphoric language as their opponents. In so doing, spiritualists and their adversaries took up positions already marked out by feminists and doctors in the campaign against the state regulation of prostitution and echoed contemporaneously in the antivaccination and antivivisection movements.⁴

² Peter McCandless, 'Dangerous to Themselves and Others: The Victorian Debate over the Prevention of Wrongful Confinement,' *Journal of British Studies* 23 (Fall 1983): 84-104; idem, 'Liberty and Lunacy: The Victorians and Wrongful Confinement,' *Journal of Social History* 11 (1978): 366-86.

³ Attendance at séances became a popular craze for the well-heeled in the late 1860s and 1870s, when even Charles Darwin and Francis Galton participated in drawing-room sessions. See Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychological Research in England, 1850-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1983); Alex Owen, 'The Other Voice: Women, Children, and Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism,' in Carolyn Steedman et al., eds., *Language, Gender, and Childhood* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 31-73; S. E. D. Shortt, 'Physicians and Psychics: The Anglo-American Medical Response to Spiritualism, 1870-90,' *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 39 (1984): 339-55.

⁴ Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), chaps. 4, 5; R. D. French, *Antivivisection*

The men who organized the attack on spiritualism were mostly specialists in neuropsychology and psychiatry. They entered the fray after some of their most eminent colleagues, such as Sir William Crookes and Alfred Russel Wallace, had lent their name and reputation to spiritualism.⁵ Adversaries of spiritualists believed their own materialist scientific culture was under attack and, as experts in 'morbid' and 'abnormal' states of the brain, they wanted to assert an 'epistemological sovereignty' over the discussion.⁶ The brain, insisted William Clifford, the noted physiologist, 'is made of atoms and ether, and there is no room in it for ghosts.'⁷

Throughout the late 1870s, William Carpenter, a professor of zoology, and E. Ray Lankester, a young biologist, waged an unremitting campaign against the 'Epidemic of Delusions.' The extraordinary claims of spiritualists, Carpenter insisted, required extraordinary tests; they must be subjected to the clinical eye of dispassionate observers, not casually verified by their loyal adherents.⁸ Lankester intensified the campaign in 1876 by exposing the writing medium, Henry Slade, as a fraud, and, with Horatio Donkin, a Harley Street doctor and later member of the Men and Women's Club, filed suit against Slade under the Vagrancy Acts for being a trickster.⁹

Hostile scientists further repudiated spiritualists as maniacs.¹⁰ Medical critics denounced the trance as a form of hysteria, an 'anomalous state of the brain,' to which women, given their inherently unstable reproductive physiology, were peculiarly liable: wherever

and *Medical Science in Victorian Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), chap. 9; R. M. McLeod, 'Law, Medicine and Public Opinion: The Resistance to Compulsory Health Legislation 1870-1901,' *Public Law* (1967): 189-211. F. B. Smith, *The People's Health 1830-1910* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979), pp. 158-68.

⁵ Crookes, for example, extended his patronage to an attractive young test medium (provoking considerable gossip) and published findings that, he claimed, verified the physical phenomena produced by mediums. See Brandon, *The Spiritualists*, pp. 113-26; Oppenheim, *The Other World*, pp. 16-21.

⁶ Shortt, 'Physicians and Psychics,' pp. 345, 354.

⁷ William Clifford, quoted in Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p. 240; 'Spiritualism and Science,' *Lancet* 2 (1876): 431-33.

⁸ Carpenter published a scathing critique of Crookes, 'Some Recent Converts to Spiritualism,' *Quarterly Review* 131 (October 1871): 301; *Lancet* 2 (1876): 832.

⁹ He claimed to have snatched a slate away from Slade with a spirit message written on it even before the spirit communication had begun. Mr. Flowers, the police-court magistrate, sentenced Slade to three months' hard labor. The decision was overturned because of a technicality, but Slade fled the country anyway. Oppenheim, *The Other World*, pp. 23, 241; *Lancet* 2 (1876): 474.

¹⁰ 'Mesmeric visions and prophecies, clairvoyances, spirit rappings, tableturnings and liftings,' declared Sir Henry Holland, could best be explained as 'morbid or anomalous states of the brain.' Quoted in Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p. 244.

there were 'strange manifestations,' asserted Dr. George Savage, the director of Bethlehem Hospital, there was 'sure to be found a girl with hysterical symptoms.' Spiritualism, declared Henry Maudsley, ought to have a place among the causes of mental malady. Following the lead of medical scientists, psychiatrists translated spiritualist communications into the esoteric language of materialist science, representing them as local lesions of the brain or unconscious cerebration.¹¹

One alienist who enthusiastically joined in the public attack was Dr. L. Forbes Winslow, the operator of two private asylums in Hammersmith. Winslow's own family history was intimately linked to the history of British psychiatry. His father, Forbes Winslow, the great pioneer of psychological medicine, was personally responsible for the legal acceptance of the insanity plea in the 1840s. The son, L. Forbes, was educated at Rugby and Cambridge and groomed to follow in his father's footsteps and take over the family business. Throughout his professional career, the younger Winslow continued to live in his father's shadow: he 'lacked the original powers of his father' and made no 'noteworthy contribution' to his specialty. The medical establishment tended to regard him with some condescension, at best as an undistinguished asylum keeper unconnected to the higher status specialty of neurology, at worst as a 'trader' in lunacy, soiled by his connection to the market.¹²

Part of Winslow's difficulty lay in the declining status of asylum psychiatry since his father's time, and of private asylum-keeping in particular. Asylum treatment manifested little connection to the new organic theories expounded to professionalize and modernize psychiatry. Alienists still based their diagnosis on behavioral symptoms and other social indicators, which were unconnected to demonstrable lesions of the brain. Somatic theories offered little in the way of cure, and alienists failed to reverse the tendency towards the

¹¹ George Savage, quoted in Jane Marcus, 'Mothering, Madness and Music,' in Elaine K. Ginsberg and Laura Moss Gottlieb, *Virginia Woolf: Centennial Essays* (Troy, N.Y.: Whitston, 1983), p. 33; Alexandra Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late-Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1989), pp. 144-46.

¹² L. Forbes Winslow, *Recollections of Forty Years* (London: John Ouseley, 1910); *Obituary*, *Lancet* 1 (1913): 1704; *Obituary*, *BMJ* 1 (1913): 1302; Dr. A. L. Wyman, 'Why Winslow?' *The Winslows of Sussex House*, *Charing Cross Hospital Gazette* 64 (1966-67): 143-46. The *Lancet's* obituary coldly described him as one 'who was well known in lay circles as an alienist,' while the *British Medical Journal* perceptively dismissed him as a publicity hound: 'His opinion in any case that happened to interest the public was apparently highly valued by some newspapers, but with his own profession it carried less weight.' Quoted in Wyman, 'Why Winslow?'

'sitting up' of institutions with chronic patients in the late nineteenth century. As long as alienists were connected with asylums, they were tainted by association with low-status patients, enjoyed very limited access to research and hospital appointments, and were essentially trapped in a dead-end specialty.¹³

An enterprising man nonetheless, L. Forbes Winslow seems to have compensated for unimpressive professional credentials by pursuing a career as expert witness and medical publicist. By his own account, he testified at 'practically every major murder trial of criminal insanity'; and he further enhanced his reputation in lay circles by producing a number of popular texts on forensic psychiatry.¹⁴

Following the lead of E. Ray Lankester, Winslow became an enthusiastic 'ghost grabber,' who exposed a public medium as a fraud in 1877 by squirting red ink at his 'spirit face.'¹⁵ In *Spiritualist Madness* (1877) he identified spiritualism as the principal cause of the increase of insanity in England, particularly among 'weak-minded hysterical women' (psychiatrists like Maudsley had merely listed it among significant causes), and he claimed that upwards of forty thousand spiritualists were interned in American asylums.¹⁶ Winslow's pamphlet generated a wave of anxiety among spiritualists;¹⁷ it also

¹³ L. S. Jacyna, 'Somatic Theories of Mind and the Interests of Medicine in Britain, 1850-1879', *Medical History* 26 (1982): 233-58; Michael Clark, 'The Rejection of Psychological Approaches to Mental Disorder in Late Nineteenth-Century British Psychiatry', in Andrew Scull, ed., *Madhouses, Mad-Doctors, and Madmen: The Social History of Psychiatry in the Victorian Era* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), pp. 271-312; Shortt, 'Physicians and Psychics', p. 353; W. E. Bynum, 'Themes in British Psychiatry: J. C. Pritchard (1786-1918) to Henry Maudsley (1835-1918)', in Michael Ruse, ed., *Nature Animated* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983), pp. 225-42.

¹⁴ Winslow's record was to testify at three murder trials in a week (*Recollections*, p. 139). L. Forbes Winslow, *Fasting and Feeding Psychologically Considered* (London: Balliere, Tindall and Cox, 1881); idem, *Insanity of Passion and Crime, with 43 Photographic Reproductions of Celebrated Cases* (London: John Ouseley, 1912), p. 205. His writings claimed a somatic basis for disease yet identified the signs of criminal insanity in terms of behavioural symptoms: 'external signs of speech behavior and acts,' a failure of the rational will, that displayed a want of 'prudence and foresight.' Winslow also presented himself as an expert on 'the borderlands,' that newly identified twilight region where personal eccentricities shaded off into mental disorder. Winslow had a penchant for alarmist prediction of a 'Mad Humanity': 'Insanity is advancing by progressive leaps,' he wrote in 1912, as 'is shown by the official annual reports during the last fifty years,' *Insanity of Passion*, p. 205.

¹⁵ Winslow, *Recollections*, p. 60.

¹⁶ L. Forbes Winslow, *Spiritualistic Madness* (London: n.p., 1877), p. 32. He coupled this 'sensationalist' with a scientific explanation of spiritualist madness as a 'physiological' condition of the 'nervous system,' once again following the lead of more prestigious scientists like Lankester and Maudsley.

¹⁷ In response, spiritualists organized defense funds and stepped up their own campaign against the lunacy laws. Owen, 'Subversive Spirit', chaps. 5, 6; S. E. Gay, *Spiritual-*

brought him to the attention of Henry Weldon, who asked him to interview his wife and then find an asylum for her. Winslow clearly regarded Weldon's request as routine.¹⁸ As lunacy certification required the signature of two doctors (independent of the asylum operator) who had conducted separate examinations of the prospective patient, Winslow concocted a scheme to interview Mrs. Weldon: he and his medical colleagues would visit her, under the guise of interested philanthropists inquiring about her orphanage. After these interviews were completed, he suggested a companion for Mrs. Weldon; when told by Mr. Weldon that would not be 'practical,' he readily accepted her as a patient for an annual fee of £400.¹⁹ Unfortunately, both Weldon and Winslow had underestimated the ingenuity, determination, and performing skill of their adversary, Georgina Weldon.

The talented and beautiful daughter of a Welsh landed gentleman, Georgina Treherne had married the impecunious Henry Weldon against the wishes of her family in 1860.²⁰ Their 1860 marriage was a 'love match,' but also a way for Georgina to escape the control of her authoritarian father and gratify her desire for a theatrical career. Since Harry had only a small private income, she insisted that, as a condition of their marriage, he agree that she be permitted to 'go on the stage and make a fortune.'²¹

Georgina soon learned that a marriage contract—even with an inadequate breadwinner—was no ticket to the stage. Once married, Henry reneged on his promise and Georgina had to settle for amateur theatrics and charity musical-benefits. She kept the household afloat by observing the 'strictest economy' and by 'singing for her supper' at Society events.²² However, by the late 1860s, Georgina's popularity began to wane, and she herself found the role of performing amateur increasingly distasteful. Disillusioned with her childless marriage and fed up with 'singing for her supper,' she returned to

istic Sanity: A Reply to Dr. Forbes Winslow's 'Spiritualistic Madness' (London: Falmouth, 1879); 'A Vigilance Committee,' *The Spiritualist* (London) (10 Dec. 1880): 287.

¹⁸ Over 400 patients had been placed in his asylums through lunacy certification. *The Times* (London), 11 July 1884.

¹⁹ Winslow, quoted in *The Times*, 26 Nov. 1884.

²⁰ Treherne, *Plaintiff*; Edward Grierson, *Storm Bird: The Strange Life of Georgina Weldon* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1959); 'Mrs. Weldon's Orphanage,' *Spiritualist* (21 Sept. 1877).

²¹ Mrs. Weldon, quoted in Grierson, *Storm Bird*, pp. 26, 27.

²² She was a well-known figure in society circles, a frequent visitor to Little Holland House and friend of the pre-Raphaelites. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

teaching as a new avenue for fulfillment. In the ninth year of her marriage, she developed the idea of a National Training School to teach music to poor children in a 'naturalistic' mode.²³ She persisted in this plan, over the objections of her husband, who disliked her proposal to recruit 'dirty, diseased orphans' from the streets and place them 'beneath his roof to be fed, clothed and educated.'²⁴ As a result, Harry Weldon (who in the meantime had come into a comfortable inheritance) separated from his wife in 1875, giving over to her the lease to Tavistock House, their Bloomsbury townhouse, and a thousand pounds a year.

Mrs. Weldon's philanthropic scheme, coupled with her marital troubles, estranged her from genteel society and her own family.²⁵ Society was further shocked by the unconventional regime at Tavistock House. Mrs. Weldon's progressive methods thoroughly violated social and class decorum.²⁶ The children 'were taught to sing and recite from the earliest age, they were sent to the opera; they were brought up as vegetarians; they were not allowed to cry; they were permitted to go barefoot and yell for a quarter of an hour; they were not subjected to rigid rules nor were they trained up in a manner that would fit them for a menial station in life.'²⁷

Equally unconventional and indecorous were her advertising techniques on behalf of the orphanage. The children were carted around from one event to another in an advertising van, a retired horse van with 'Mrs. Weldon's Sociable Evenings' emblazoned on it in enormous letters—an object so 'outlandish' that her brother begged her to 'keep it from his door.' The sociable evenings themselves were only slightly less outlandish; frequently Mrs. Weldon combined musical

²³ Mrs. Weldon's Orphanage.'

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Mrs. Weldon was not an isolated pioneer in this kind of undertaking. During the 1860s and 1870s a number of women opened small, private, rescue homes for prostitutes; their 'personal style of philanthropy,' to quote Josephine Butler, was a self-conscious challenge to the impersonal and repressive regimes of evangelical penitentiaries that had been founded and administered by men in the early Victorian period. By and large, these female philanthropists were middle-class Quakers and nonconformists, not members of fashionable society. If they engaged in personal charity at all, society ladies of the 1870s generally restricted themselves to home-visiting of the poor, not importing 'street arabs' into their own residences. See Josephine Butler, *An Autobiographical Memoir*, ed. by G. W. Johnson and L. A. Johnson (Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1928), pp. 81–83.

²⁶ Middle-class Victorian conventions called for the rigid segregation of children from adults and their training in self-restraint rather than self-expression. Middle-class observers expected poor children to be even more regimented.

²⁷ Georgina Weldon, *The History of My Orphanage, or the Outpourings of an Alleged Lunatic* (London: Mrs. Weldon, 1878); Grierson, *Storm Bird*, pp. 147, 148.

entertainment with a reading of the history of her orphanage, and the entire evening culminated with a dramatic recitation of the 'Spider of the Period,' performed by Sapho-Katie, aged three.²⁸

Meanwhile, Mrs. Weldon plunged deeper and deeper into heterodox activities. She became an enthusiast for rational dress: 'I had simple tastes.... I did not take to crinolines when they were in fashion.... I wore my hair short....' She embraced a number of other 'eccentric' causes associated with radical politics and popular health: vegetarianism, mesmerism, the occult.²⁹

Spiritualism was a natural extension of her countercultural interests. Her progressive views on child-rearing were compatible with the innovative pedagogies of the spiritualist Progressive Lyceums, that featured, according to one historian, 'variety, learning-by-doing and dancing, no harshness.'³⁰ Mrs. Weldon also participated in the larger community of spiritualists: she won the praise of the spiritualist press as a 'keen and true friend' for her defense of the notorious Mr. Slade and for her gratuitous singing at spiritualist meetings.³¹ She even experimented in 'social levelling' within her own household by enlisting her maid and her orphans in spirit communication.³² Given her own marital difficulties, Mrs. Weldon may have also sympathized with the spiritualist critique of patriarchal sexual power within marriage and its insistence that women be the 'monarch of the marriage bed.'³³ Humble female mediums with marital problems frequently looked to the spiritualist lecture and séance circuit as a source of employment and refuge from unhappy homes. Before very long, Mrs. Weldon would herself appeal to spiritualists for collective protection and support against patriarchal plotting.

As a spiritual practice, spiritualism had particular appeal to women, who significantly outnumbered men as adherents and mediums. The private, homelike atmosphere of the séance, rein-

²⁸ Grierson, *Storm Bird*, p. 148.

²⁹ Georgina Weldon, *How I Escaped the Mad Doctors* (London: Mrs. Weldon, 1882), p. 6; Grierson, *Storm Bird*, p. 233.

³⁰ Logie Barrow, 'Socialism in Eternity: Plebian Spiritualists 1853–1913,' *History Workshop* 9 (Spring 1980): 56.

³¹ 'Printed Allegations against Mrs. Weldon,' *Spiritualist*, 19 April 1878; 'Notes and Comments,' *The Medium and Daybreak* (London), 17 Oct. 1879.

³² 'Topics of the Day be the Heroes of the Hour,' *Pell Mail Budget* (London), 21 March 1884. On social leveling and spiritualism, see Morell Theobald, *Spirit Workers in the Home Circle: An Autobiographic Narrative of Psychic Phenomena in Family Daily Life Extending over a Period of Twenty Years* (London: F. Fisher Unwin, 1887); Owen, 'The Other Voice,' pp. 55–57; *Light* (London), 26 March 1887.

³³ *Medium and Daybreak*, 24 Aug. 1888, 7 Sept. 1888.

forced by the familiar content of spirit communication with dead relatives, was a comfortable setting for women. The séance reversed the usual sexual hierarchy of knowledge and power: it shifted attention away from men and focused it on the female medium, the center of spiritual knowledge and insight. As the scene of popular 'hands on' female healing, the séance also constituted a female consumer challenge to orthodox allopathic medicine.³⁴

Equally important was the fact that spiritualism provided spectacular entertainment directed at all the senses. Most private séances featured trance or inspirational speaking, but a wide assortment of 'physical phenomena' was included in the repertoire of professional or 'test' mediums: table-tilting, floating furniture, musical instruments playing by themselves, the wafting of mysterious incense in the air.³⁵ Even more dramatic sexual displays and inversions were accomplished at materializations: a medium, usually an attractive young girl, would be placed in a cabinet, bound and gagged, while a fanciful spirit would issue forth, sometimes a red Indian, sometimes a swearing buccaneer, sometimes a lovely young female spirit in a diaphanous white gown who sat on the laps of her favorite gentlemen.³⁶

As other historians have noted, trance conditions legitimized a wide range of 'bad behavior' on the part of women by allowing them to engage in a subtle subversion—but not repudiation—of the 'separate sphere' construction of 'true womanhood.' Spiritualists deemed women particularly apt for mediumship because they were weak in the masculine attributes of will and intelligence, yet strong in the feminine qualities of passivity, chastity, and impressionability.³⁷ Female mediums were receptive vessels for other spirits—usually male spirits—who acted as the medium's control or 'guide' in the

spirit world.³⁸ This form of male impersonation reflected the contradictory dynamic operating around gender in spiritualist circles: women could authoritatively 'speak spirit' if they were controlled by others, notably men; their access to male authority was accomplished through the fragmentation of their own personality.³⁹ There was a further irony and danger: these special female powers also rendered female mediums vulnerable to special forms of female punishment, in particular, to medical labeling as hysterics and to lunacy confinement.

Mrs. Weldon undoubtedly found spiritualism's penchant for theatrically very appealing.⁴⁰ What most attracted her were the opportunities it offered women for vocal performance. As we have seen, ever since she was a young woman, Mrs. Weldon had tried to devise ways to perform in public, from amateur theatrics to charity benefits, to her sociable evenings. Not surprisingly, she was attracted to the séance, a home-based entertainment that featured women *speaking* rather than *being*.⁴¹

Mrs. Weldon first attended séances in France, but soon found that she was temperamentally unsuited for mediumship. Although she continued to experiment with other forms of spirit communication, her taste tended to run to the mystical (hence, her attraction to French spiritualism and to a heterodox Catholicism) and she herself had little interest in the physical phenomena of spiritualism. During her first séance in France, for example, when she 'desired ardently' to communicate with dead friends, 'scarcely any phenomena occurred.' When at the advice of the medium, 'she remained perfectly passive, marked manifestations of the table began.' But clearly Georgina Weldon was not the type to remain 'perfectly passive' for

³⁴ Miss March, a healing and trance medium, observed a lady in pain at her séance in 1887, 'brought her into the center of the room and placing her hand on her back and chest, indicated the whereabouts of her pains' to the woman's evident surprise. On other female healers, see also *Medium and Daybreak*, 7 Oct. 1887, 13 July 1888, Owen, *Darkened Room*, chap. 5.

³⁵ Mrs. Henry Sidgwick, 'Results of a Personal Investigation into the Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism,' *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 4 (1886-87): 45.

³⁶ Owen, 'The Other Voice,' pp. 45, 47; Florence Maryat, *There Is No Death* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1891), pp. 202-4; George Stowell, 'The editor of *The Times*, reprinted in *Spiritualist*, 16 Jan. 1880; R. Laurence Moore, 'The Spiritualist Medium: A Study of Female Professionalism in Victorian America,' *American Quarterly* 27 (1975): 207, 214.

³⁷ Moore, 'Spiritualist Medium,' p. 202.

³⁸ According to a spirit census conducted by psychical researchers in the 1880s, 58 percent of the mediums were women, while 63 percent of the spirit controls were male. Spiritualists explained the tendency of female mediums to be possessed by a 'masculine spirit force' on the grounds that men were most likely to experience a violent death, and these earthbound spirits were most likely to communicate at séances. Ostensibly a defense of individuality, since it insisted that spirits preserved their own identity even after death, spiritualism also demonstrated the fragility of the holistic, undivided self and of gendered subjectivity in particular. Vieda Skultans, 'Mediums, Controls and Eminent Men,' in Pat Holden, ed., *Women's Religious Experience* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), p. 17.

³⁹ Owen, 'The Other Voice,' pp. 37, 38, 67, 68.

⁴⁰ Mrs. Weldon first attended séances in France, at a fashionable drawing room, where she tried to communicate with dead friends and received some 'test messages' spelled out through rappings on the table. *Spiritualist*, 23 June 1876.

⁴¹ Owen, 'The Other Voice,' p. 35.

long, or to allow herself to become a transparent vessel for other spirits. She was insufficiently passive and impressionable. Her energy and determination would serve her well in her impending struggles against the 'plot that failed.'⁴²

The plot that failed

In 1878, Mrs. Weldon and her orphans were visiting a convent in France, when she had a premonition that she must return home. Perhaps she had heard rumors that her husband, grown dissatisfied with the terms of their separation, wanted to retrench and sell the lease of their Bloomsbury townhouse, Tavistock House. Leaving her orphans in the care of the convent nuns, she immediately crossed the Channel and returned to London. She soon became embroiled in a criminal charge against a servant who, she claimed, stole possessions from the house. During her cross-examination, the defense counsel tried to cast doubt on her testimony by claiming that she was suffering from delusions. Within a few days of this public accusation, Mrs. Weldon found herself visited by a series of mysterious strangers.⁴³

As she recounted her story—and what follows is a summary of her own account—Mrs. Weldon was dusting the music books in her library on 14 April 1878, when a servant announced that two visitors, Mr. Shell and Mr. Stewart, were in the hall. Thinking they were her music publishers, she had them admitted. Instead, they turned out to be two strangers, an older gentleman who sat 'on the middle of his spine' with his hands clasped on his stomach, and a younger one resembling a 'Christy minstrel,' 'all blinks, winks, and grins.' They introduced themselves as fellow spiritualists interested in her work on musical reform and children. She told them she was a 'firm believer in spiritualism.' After a half-hour conversation, they went away.⁴⁴

⁴² *Spiritualist*, 23 June 1876. Mrs. Weldon's spiritual taste reflected her class position. According to Logie Barrow, there were notable class differences in religious practice among spiritualists: 'plebeian spiritualists tended to be vehemently anti-Christian, less mystical, more empiricist and materialist than their middle-class counterparts. Treherne, *Plaintiff*, p. 208; Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), chap. 5.

⁴³ Weldon, *How I Escaped*, 'Printed Allegations'.

⁴⁴ Mrs. Weldon repeated her version of the 'plot that failed' (Treherne, *Plaintiff*, p. 58) in a wide array of articles, pamphlets, newspaper interviews, and courtroom testimonies. See for example, Mrs. Weldon, quoted in 'Some Medical Men at their Work,' *Spiritualist*, 17 May 1878; *The Times*, 15 March 1884.

At eight o'clock her servant announced that the visitors had returned. They rushed into the room, and to her surprise, they were another set of complete strangers, this time, a 'Tubby One' and a 'Tacturn One' with the aspect of a 'seedy dentist's assistant.' They too asked her about her spiritual communications; whether any of her children were mediums and whether she believed her animals possessed souls.⁴⁵

During these initial encounters, Mrs. Weldon answered their questions positively and directly. 'I did not think it strange; I suspected that it was all about some rich and mysterious orphans.' After they left, she gradually came to realize that the mystery pertained ominously to herself. Mrs. Weldon began to feel 'dreadful' and sensed 'some horrible trap.' She remembered there were rumors afoot about her suffering from delusions and began to suspect that this masquerade might be part of an attempt to confine her for lunacy. She told the servant to 'lock and bolt up the house.' Within twenty minutes a carriage arrived and the bell rang. 'Who's there?' 'A gentleman and two ladies to see Mrs. Weldon!' Bell, the caretaker spoke to them outside. Finally he shut the door in their faces; 'They knocked and they rang three times, but we turned out the gas; they got tired of waiting, and at last we heard the carriage drive off.'⁴⁶

'For the first time in my life I felt nervous.' '[S]omething I call my guardian angels, had given me a sign warning me I was in very immediate and grave danger.'⁴⁷ '[P]ale and trembling,' Mrs. Weldon posted letters to several friends to warn them of her predicament.⁴⁸ She sent one letter to W. H. Harrison, editor of the *Spiritualist*, who had published a series of letters from Mrs. Louisa Lowe. In her letters, Mrs. Lowe, a former inmate of a private asylum, had warned spiritualists of the dangers of wrongful confinement in lunatic asylums. Nothing in England, wrote Mrs. Lowe, 'was easier than to get a sane person into a lunatic asylum.'⁴⁹ 'None were more likely to be 'put away' without due cause than 'women in general' and 'wives in

⁴⁵ Mrs. Weldon, quoted in 'Some Medical Men.' The visitors took copious notes on her description of visions, including one featuring a shower of stars and Christ on the cross.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *How I Escaped*, p. 13.

⁴⁸ Mrs. Weldon, quoted in 'Some Medical Men.' Sir Charles Dilke and William Gladstone were among her correspondents.

⁴⁹ Louisa Lowe, quoted in Treherne, *Plaintiff*, p. 61. For other discussions of Mrs. Lowe's activities on behalf of lunacy law reform, see Peter McCandless, 'Build, Build: The Controversy over the Care of the Chronically Insane in England, 1855-70,' *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* (1979): 87; Owen, *Darkened Room*, chap. 7.

particular.⁵⁰ 'All the morning I was thinking,' wrote Mrs. Weldon, 'Oh that I dared to go out to Mrs. Lowe.'⁵¹

At 2 p.m. the following day, the 'bell rang again.' 'A note from Mrs. Harrison introducing who—but Mrs. Lowe!! The very woman I was longing and praying for.' Mrs. Weldon had begun to tell her story when the bell rang again. The caretaker appeared much agitated: 'Those three have come have pushed their way in and say they will wait till they come to see you.'⁵²

Mrs. Lowe took command of the situation and went off to fetch the police; when she arrived with 'two stalwart policemen,' a newly emboldened Mrs. Weldon confronted the 'trio' at door. The two women 'darted upon me and seized me.' Mrs. Weldon felt inclined to fetch a poker and break their heads, but Mrs. Lowe advised a more discreet course. 'Give them in charge for assaulting you,' said Mrs. Lowe. 'Policeman,' said I, 'take them in charge, they are assaulting me.' 'I might have spoken Hebrew or Chinese; they never moved, and I feel convinced they would have let me be carried off bodily.' On the advice of Mrs. Lowe, she barricaded herself in her room.⁵³

At last, a friendly policeman (who had been warned the evening before) arrived and forced the trio to produce the lunacy order, signed by her husband and a family friend, General de Bathe, who had briefly visited Mrs. Weldon the previous afternoon. 'They then left, I telegraphed to my husband to come and save me.' Mrs. Weldon insisted her husband's signature must be a forgery, but the cynical Mrs. Lowe responded, '[You] don't know how bad husbands [are]!' Both her servant and the kindly policeman supported Mrs. Lowe's advice to 'go' rather than to trust to her husband's benevolent intervention. '[S]o in greatest haste, I threw my cloak over my shoulders, my bonnet, without waiting to put on my boots, in a pair of wonderful old slippers ran down the square, the policeman stopped a cab ('I am not looking at the number!' he said) jumped into it, Mrs. Lowe took me to her house and I was...*SAVED!!!!*' When the 'madhouse-keeper' Winslow returned that night, he was furious to learn that his quarry had escaped. 'Mrs. Weldon is a dangerous lunatic! Where has she gone? A thousand pounds for any one who can find her.'⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Louisa Lowe, *The Bastilles of England: or the Lunacy Laws at Work* (London: Crookenden, 1883).

⁵¹ Mrs. Weldon, quoted in 'Some Medical Men.'

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*
⁵⁴ Weldon, *How I Escaped*, pp. 17, 19; *The Times*, 28 Nov. 1884; Winslow, quoted in Treherne, *Plaintiff*, p. 63.

Mrs. Weldon first accompanied Mrs. Lowe to her home and then went underground for the seven days that the lunacy order remained in effect. When she surfaced, she was determined to avenge herself on the parties responsible for the assault. Acting on her own behalf, she appeared before Mr. Flowers of the Bow Street Police Court. Mr. Flowers sympathized with her ordeal and condemned the action of Dr. Winslow as 'an unjustifiable design upon her liberty'; but he could offer no legal redress against the assault. Legal authorities were powerless to take up her case, he explained, unless she had been confined in a lunatic asylum; nor could she, a married woman, institute a civil suit against them.⁵⁵

Georgina had nonetheless won a moral victory. Mr. Flowers's statement of sympathy legitimated her case and quickly established her sanity, even to the medical press, who acknowledged her to be a 'lady abundantly capable of enjoying her liberty without harm to herself or others.'⁵⁶ Even though she had been debarred from pursuing her case in court, Mrs. Weldon proceeded to assail her enemies on all other fronts. Following the advice of Charles Reade, the novelist, she adopted an 'American' style of publicity.⁵⁷ She published her story in the spiritualist press, offered interviews to the daily newspapers, tried to provoke libel suits from the participants, stood on public platforms and embraced the cause of lunacy reform, hired sandwichmen to parade in front of Winslow's home with signs denouncing him as a 'bodysnatcher',⁵⁸ and launched a public concert career, as well as continuing her social events at home, where between musical performances she read her lecture 'How I Escaped the Mad Doctors.'⁵⁹

Mrs. Weldon's narration: a story retold

Mrs. Weldon survived her husband's conspiracy and proved herself a forceful antagonist to psychiatric medicine. She was able to elicit support and sympathy, even from unusual quarters like *The Times* and the medical press, for a number of reasons. Mrs. Weldon was a female rebel who retained the 'aura' of 'true womanhood.' Although

⁵⁵ Mr. Flowers, quoted in 'Mrs. Weldon and the Lunacy Laws,' *Spiritualist*, 18 Oct. 1878.

⁵⁶ *BMJ* 1 (1879): 39. 'Truth demanded a "searching inquiry" (quoted in *Spiritualist*, 18 Oct. 1878). The *British Medical Journal* further castigated Winslow for improperly trying to confine Mrs. Weldon in the hope of deriving pecuniary profits.

⁵⁷ Treherne, *Plaintiff*, p. 119.

⁵⁸ Weldon, quoted in 'Some Topics of the Day.'

⁵⁹ Grierson, *Storm Bird*, p. 176. In the early 1880s, Mrs. Weldon temporarily reconstituted her orphanage. By 1884, however, the orphanage was defunct and the children dispersed. Grierson, *Storm Bird*, p. 245.

the turmoil and drama of her life were the direct result of her determined resistance to the conventions of gender, she presented herself as a sweet, gracious lady with a feminine voice who led a 'quiet, domestic life.' In stretching but not repudiating the boundaries of 'separate spheres,' she adopted a strategy similar to other female spiritualists.

But in other ways, she manipulated her femininity very differently than did spiritualist performers. As Regenia Gagnier notes, she tended to parody those same female domestic virtues—from maternal feelings to musical soirées—that she claimed to uphold.⁶⁰ Moreover, the same 'unfeminine' qualities that made her temperamentally unsuited for mediumship—her strong personality and her active, restless temperament—enabled her to fight back in public, to break out of the controlling dynamics that rendered other female spiritualists, particularly mediums, more vulnerable to medical supervision. Even her spirit communications were of an intensely practical sort, counseling self-protection and decisive action.

Class and age also set Mrs. Weldon apart from the nubile, young women of artisanal and lower-middle-class background who performed materializations and became 'test mediums' under the patronage of some wealthy gentleman.⁶¹ With more resources at her disposal, Mrs. Weldon could choose a more independent means of public presentation. To be sure, there was some affinity between Mrs. Weldon and materializing mediums; in her search for employment, she would eventually turn her hand to commercial performances, and she too had a penchant for a certain linguistic cross-dressing. Instead of hypermasculine lower-class sailors or soldiers, her impersonations extended to authoritative, elite men of the law. Having experienced considerable difficulty with musical impresarios, Mrs. Weldon would dispense with male patronage altogether when she went public as a 'lunatic lawyer in petticoats.'

Differences of class, age, and temperament could not protect her from lunacy certification—they only enabled her to escape incarceration once threatened. When Mrs. Weldon finally read her lunacy order, she learned 'for the first time' that 'because I was a spiritualist they wished to examine the state of my brain.' More precisely, because she was a spiritualist *and* the estranged wife of a man who wanted to 'retrench,' her liberty was endangered. But her social posi-

tion was also her defense: well-connected and self-possessed, she was able to turn the tables on her enemies, the psychiatric 'body-snatchers,' and to seriously undermine their public credibility.⁶²

Mrs. Weldon was also a very good storyteller. As a campaigner and 'lunacy lawyer' she triumphed over her enemies because she was able to explain her plight in ways comprehensible to a reading public. As soon as she sensed her 'danger,' she recognized the outlines of a familiar plot. She immediately thought of Mrs. Lowe's letters in the spiritualist press, themselves derivative of Reade and Collins's sensational narratives of family intrigue and betrayal.⁶³ Like other sensational novelists of the 1860s, Collins and Reade had revised the representation of sexual danger enacted in traditional stage melodrama, to focus on middle-class marriage. For them, female powerlessness and vulnerability began at home; women were less endangered by illicit sexual encounters outside the family than by male sexual abuse within its circle. Marriage no longer resolved the female dilemma; it compounded it. The insane asylum simply amplified the danger of the domestic asylum; it was a supplementary patriarchal structure, a place of madness and sexuality where doctors substituted for tyrannical husbands as the keepers and tormenters of women.⁶⁴

In her public pamphlets, Mrs. Lowe had characterized her experience of the asylum in much the same way: as a place to stash away unwanted wives (or relatives) and as a place of sexual danger. She accused her husband of arranging for her incarceration after her spirit writing had exposed his adulterous activities. She described the lunatic asylums where she was confined as places of institutionalized irrationality, where the doctors were crazier than their patients and the whole atmosphere was suffused with an unrestrained sexuality and discipline designed to drive any rational person mad.⁶⁵

By drawing on the tradition of the sensational novel filtered through Mrs. Lowe's own 'history,' Mrs. Weldon retold an older

⁶² Mrs. Weldon, quoted in Trehearne, *Plaintiff*, p. 98; Lowe, *Bastilles of England*.

⁶³ Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (London, 1859–60); rpt., Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1974); Charles Reade, *Hard Cash: A Matter-of-Fact Romance* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1895; rpt., Collier, New York, 1970).

⁶⁴ Winifred Hughes, *Maniac in the Cellar* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

⁶⁵ Lowe, *Bastilles of England*; *My Outlawry: A Lecture Delivered in the Cavendish Room* (London, 1874); *My Story: Exemplifying the Injurious Working of the Lunacy Laws and the Undue Influence Possessed by Lunacy Experts* (London, 1878); Dr. Maudsley, testimony before the Select Committee on the Lunacy Laws, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1877 (373), 13, Q. 7328; Dr. Fox, Q.7642.

⁶⁰ See Regenia Gagnier, 'Mediums and the Media,' *Representations* 22 (Spring 1988).

⁶¹ Brandon, *Spiritualists*, pp. 113–26; Oppenheim, *The Other World*, pp. 16–21; Owen, *The Darkened Room*, chap. 3.

narrative of entrapment. In this story of male villainy and female victimization, Mrs. Weldon cast herself as an endangered heroine, who was assisted in the nick of time by Mrs. Lowe, another sister 'lunacy lawyer in petticoats.'⁶⁶ Together they were able to foil a patriarchal plot to deprive her of her liberty. Her first installment of this story, summarized above, included a full repertoire of melodramatic motifs and tropes: rapid action, the profusion of secrets, stereotyped, interchangeable villains who possessed no psychological depth, extreme states of being and danger, multiple disguises and impersonations, the operation of sinister forces directed by some unknown mastermind.⁶⁷ As in stage melodrama, servants and policemen embodied comic relief—they were sympathetic but impotent figures, powerless to repel the advances of menacing invaders. Only the courage and determination of Mrs. Weldon and Mrs. Lowe saved the day and turned the 'bloodhounds from the door.'⁶⁸ To escape incarceration, Mrs. Weldon had to flee her own domestic asylum, the safe and comfortable scene of daily life, and go disguised as an anonymous denizen of the city. Later she would resurface as a 'public' woman bent on vindicating her honor and sanity.

'Truth is stranger than fiction,' declared the *Medium and Daybreak*, commenting on the Weldon case. '[S]omething is radically wrong when a virtuous and highly-talented woman can with impunity be torn from her home and doomed to worse than penal servitude.'⁶⁹ But who was the ominous force behind these machinations?⁷⁰ Mr. Weldon's involvement remained obscure until the climax of the first scene, when the lunacy bill was finally read and his signature disclosed.⁷¹ Only then were the actions of the mad doctors unveiled as part of a 'little family conspiracy' and only then did Mrs. Weldon come to realize, in Mrs. Lowe's words, 'how bad husbands [are].'⁷²

Mrs. Weldon's melodramatic story of her 'escape' remained the same throughout its many recitations, with one important elabora-

⁶⁶ *Spiritualist*, 26 April 1878.

⁶⁷ For a discussion of melodramatic themes, see Hughes, *Maniac*, passim; Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Michael R. Booth, *English Melodrama* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965).

⁶⁸ Mrs. Georgina Weldon, *Medium and Daybreak*, 17 Oct. 1879.

⁶⁹ *Medium and Daybreak*, 22 Aug. 1879.

⁷⁰ Mystery was structured into Mrs. Weldon's narrative order. In her first account, she introduced her story *in media res*, making the invasion of the mad housekeeper and his assistants initially appear as a mysterious act of violence. See 'Some Medical Men.'

⁷¹ In stage dramas this climax would be visually fixed into a dramatic tableau.

⁷² Mrs. Georgina Weldon.

tion: the progressive sexualization of her story as her husband's involvement became clarified. Shortly after her escape, in an interview in the *London Figaro*, Mrs. Weldon accused her husband of conspiring with General de Bathe to get rid of her in order to marry de Bathe's young daughter; she further claimed that de Bathe had nurtured a long-standing grievance against her for having spurned his sexual advances when she was a girl.⁷³ Mrs. Weldon interpreted the male conspiracy of doctor-family friend-husband as a 'traffic in women,'⁷⁴ in which doctors colluded in the private sexual designs of men by defining female resistance as madness.⁷⁵ Contemporary observers, commenting on her story, further amplified and extended the theme of sexual danger. The spiritualists likened the actions of the 'mad doctors' to the sadistic pleasures of the hunt; while even the *British Medical Journal*, not commonly given to Gothic allusions, invoked the example of Rochester and Jane Eyre to illustrate how men might use lunacy confinement to further their sexual self-interest.⁷⁶

⁷³ *Spiritualist*, 4 July 1879. As a result of this interview, Mr. Weldon, who insisted the idea of marrying de Bathe's daughter never entered his head, successfully sued the *Figaro's* publisher, Mr. Mortimer, for libel. For our purposes, the veracity of her accusation is less important than her loyal adhesion to a conspiratorial representation of sexual danger.

⁷⁴ Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex,' in Rayna Reiter, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157-210.

⁷⁵ This triangular relationship echoed Freud's famous Dora case. See Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, eds. *In Dora's Case: Freud-Hysteria-Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

⁷⁶ The "'mad doctors'" method of hurting their prey is exciting and truly sportsmanlike, *Medium and Daybreak* observed sarcastically ('Mrs. Georgina Weldon'). For the response of the medical press, see 'Lunacy Law Reform: The Power of the Keys,' *BMJ* 1 (1879): 245. Notice that the spiritualists focus on the sexual perversions of the doctors, while the medical press concentrated on the husband.