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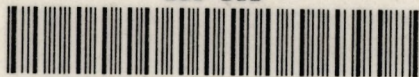
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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND CIVILIZATION

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On Writing Women's Work*

When women's history reemerged so noisily in the 1970s it was guided by an initial quest for the most oppressed of the oppressed - the working-class woman. For the most part highly educated and in that sense privileged women made this gesture toward the poor or working woman as a way of finding the most authentic representative of womanhood. As we know, a voluminous literature resulted, but it was not unprecedented. Barely a century earlier, similarly privileged, usually feminist women in Europe and the United States had charted a similar course and turned toward poor mothers and working women to provide them with subject matter for their investigations. They too hoped to find something authentic in the working woman, especially in her utterances about work, motherhood, and life. Surprisingly enough, poor women responded to this gesture with budgets, daily reports of their comings and goings, and even a large autobiographical literature. Once she started writing, however, the working woman or poor mother became a suspicious figure, and even in some eyes, lost her class identity. Speaking, but particularly writing, made her lose what was so desirable. A way with words, the interpretation goes, is unworkably. As for the middle-class historian-investigator-feminist, her connection with workers is seen as a tissue of inauthenticity and one riddled with manipulation, duplicity, and bad faith - no term could be too pejorative to describe the relationship. Working with words only rigidified her positioning as middle-class. Such canonical formulations - and such they have become - demand a new look in this age of questioning canons. This essay tries to reconstruct the early print encounters between poor women and their researchers.

The move to engage the poor woman historically or scientifically was new for writing women in the late nineteenth century. For generations women's histories had hardly borne a trace of either their poverty or their working lives. Rather the abundant scholarly literature followed a paradigm set in the writing of Christine de Pisan where the search for worthy and accomplished women shaped historical concerns. Even when male writers in the first half of the nineteenth century turned to the investigation of social problems - in other words, the poor - women were slow to follow. For instance, among some three hundred German studies of the plight of the working-class written before 1848, only one was by a woman - Bettina von Arnim. Both her first book about poverty addressed to the king and her unpublished *Armenbuch*, however, featured the poor in general rather than women.⁽¹⁾ Most scholarly writers continued the story of worthy women, of courts and culture, and of the woman genius.⁽²⁾

Scholarship and study focusing on worthy, important women had a great power of its own, for it arose from an intense and crucial dialogue with men. Christine claimed the literary origins of the *Book of the City of Ladies* to be a treatise by a famous male writer. The writer's general reputation has inspired her to read it, but only after several starts at the book - starts interrupted because of dinner, because of fatigue and so on - does she take up the work in earnest. In this heightened state of curiosity what does she discover but that the important male author has little use for women and in fact finds them generally worthless. Depressed and even temporarily paralyzed by the opinion of such a great man, Christine initiates her own book in response and shapes it to refute his claims. Women's scholarship tended to follow this concern for proving female worth by searching out great women and trying to reclaim a past that was always lacking and disputed.⁽³⁾ In the long-lived dialogue that ensued, poor women could hardly prove women's importance in history, but rather served to mark absence, negativity, and silence.

Male writing about women shifted this dialogue to a somewhat different register in the nineteenth century. By that time epistemology had come sharply to distinguish between the real and the literary or between the scientific and the metaphorical. These sets of binary oppositions also served to mark out the male from the female. Popular artistic

and literary types relentlessly set women in the metaphorical register, for instance the well-known "angel in the house" characterization of the middle-class woman or the metonymical figuration of Marianne or Germania as substitutes for the nation. As in the case of Marianne, working women entered the picture as ripe for this metaphorical treatment. Some of the most well-known instances appear in the work of Jules Michelet. For instance, *Women and the French Revolution* (1854) highlighted the hands of working women in political crowds - hands that dripped with blood as they plunged into the entrails of victims. Extending the equation of women and blood, Michelet's *La femme* describes women metonymically by menstruation and wounds. Finally, *La femme* proclaims this metaphorical status in an opening sentence ("L'ouvrière mot impie") where the woman worker herself is but a word or sign. We can discover other metonymies in similarly minded French authors. Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet's studies combine prostitutes and sewers while Jules Simon explained the working woman by her would-be envelopment in finery, lace, and baubles.(4)

Such figuration had consequences beyond the literary world. In particular, as national tensions and intense international competition generated imperial struggles after the mid-nineteenth century, governments looked at women as the sign of decline, disease, and deficiency. Poor, prostituted, infertile, and incompetent women would and did drag a nation down. Anna Davin has described the central role working women played in plans for rebuilding the working class and thus national power and prestige. Governments looked to women to make the bodies of their sons, brothers, and husbands stronger, while politicians and reformers called on them to bear and raise fitter children.(5) The body of the working-class woman aroused the special attention of social scientists and scientists alike. She seemed real now, the object of a mission, except that her condition stood once again for the condition of the race. What, in a misplaced gesture, was called the white man's burden amounted to the responsibility of millions of poor women to clean up themselves and their children, to make themselves and their families strong and fit, to cut down on infant mortality and disease, to get themselves out of poverty, to improve diet, housing and clothing.

This embodiment of the working woman, on the one hand as the symbol of lack and deficiency but on the other as a source of national power, did not fail to catch the attention of feminists, historians, and other investigators. These middle-class women saw the possibility of claiming the privileges of scientific study by examining the working woman, who suddenly seemed so real. She had secrets to reveal, as Virginia Woolf put it somewhat later in an introduction to working women's autobiographies, to those middle-class women with "little knowledge of what it pleases them to call 'reality'."(6) Second, they saw, along with politicians, the power in the working woman's maternal body - a reproductive power that might indeed be aligned to their own cause as well as serving the nation. Finally, an engagement with working women offered an opportunity to shift the ground of writing from male-dominated conversations or dialogues to those among women, directed this time by middle-class women. Although the first moves in this direction came from men, the shift in the direction of women's written concerns toward the poor woman marked a major breakthrough.

The first problem in setting up this dialogue was how to start a relationship in language or in scientific discourse. "Of all the social functions," wrote French activist Nelly Roussel early in the twentieth century, "the premier, the most magnificent, the most arduous, and the most necessary, is the only one that has never received a wage." Maternity, Roussel continued, which among bees made one a queen, among humans women accomplished "without noise."(7) The dilemma historians and investigators faced as they sought to bring out the poor woman was that the powerful female body which both worked and reproduced, generated no words of its own. There was no language of the poor woman or of the mother as there was, say, of politics. As political economists were developing their own discursive realm in the nineteenth century, so

women investigators needed to organize the scientific discourse on motherhood and women's poverty.

This is not to say that women lacked an expressive mode. Early in the 1790s Mary Wollstonecraft had recognized the carnivalesque kinds of behavior upper-class women used in doomed attempts at gaining power.(8) Bakhtin's brief insight that the carnivalesque moved into the home comes alive when we consider the corsets, bustles, hoops, pads, and so on that adorned and distorted the middle-class body into a grotesque mockery of sexuality and reproduction.(9) As for working-class women, their bodies displayed sexuality in volatile gaits, visible menstruation around which social mockery exploded, and excessive childbirth.(10) In their case the carnivalesque resided in bodily expressions of the sexual and reproductive. As for the middle-class woman, her home's infusion with goods, color, and celebration challenged the sobriety of bourgeois purpose. While the capitalist saved, his wife spent. Insofar as the carnivalesque as a mode of expression depended on reproductive, sexual, and bodily display, women employed it and in so doing carved out a space (in many cases unwittingly) where they both affirmed their difference from those who wielded official kinds of speech and power and also showed how transgressive of middle-class order the feminine could be. By the end of the nineteenth century feminists had tried to counteract the powerlessness at the root of this kind of speech with property and marital reform as well as the drive to education. In addition, they tamed the communicative power of the body with sober, utilitarian dress and turned their attention to empowering themselves and working-class workers and mothers with scientific language.

Producing this transformative conversation which scholars directed and which would lead them to that "other" who was not (they thought) metaphorical but real, involved the first step of opening up working women's lives to regular scientific scrutiny. In the 1860s and 1870s Lina Morgenstern began her network of schools for household science in Germany, while a little later in France Augusta Moll-Weiss started the same kind of institution. Both bourgeois and working-class women attended these schools and learned not only household crafts but how to isolate, classify, and talk about household procedures in new ways. For instance, Moll-Weiss in her *Cuisine rationnelle* attacked the foolishness of the traditional bourgeois home, with its irrational recipes for paté of hare en gelée or for mousseline of herring roe. Instead she focused on albumen and vitamins and taught her pupils to follow her lead. Investigators who actually entered the home would instill this same interest in nutrition and attempt to break working-class weddedness to tea, bread, and marge instead of vegetables.

This endeavour aroused heated opposition. Moll-Weiss noted that proponents of the carnivalesque home found the schools of household science "inelegant", while advocates of traditional household secrecy and hierarchies maintained that this new way of thinking constituted a dangerous and irreverent "trespassing" on the family.(11) Even as late as 1930 Alice Solomon in her introduction to *Das Familienleben in der Gegenwart* deplored the general tendency toward immunizing the household to this communication of knowledge whether on the part of the investigator or on the part of the working woman and mother.(12) Such a criticism in fact exposed just how aptly investigators had hit their mark. The interaction that developed late in the nineteenth century in fact constituted a major political and hermeneutical breakthrough. In the first place social science shattered the moral economy of charity work in which the poor women maintained their hierarchical place through demonstrations of gratitude, obedience, and silence. In the second, it challenged the construction or discourse of privacy created by such bodies of law as the French Civil or Napoleonic Code. Finally, the work of investigators, reformers, and historians and the dialogue they created with working women showed that the locus of female knowledge was not centered on the Elysée Palace, the Quirinale or any such focal point, but rather dispersed in the home and neighborhood and spread throughout kin networks, workshops, pawnshops, and in fact the entire social space. The dialogue that began in the late nineteenth century involved talk about how one ate, cleaned, cooked, paid bills, received pay, saved for

funerals. It broke what researchers construed as silence, negativity, and powerlessness in favor of scientific writing, reality, and empowerment.

These conversations thus started to acquire their true shape as researchers entered the home and the factory from the late nineteenth century on to get knowledge, to urge working women to speech and writing, and to produce a body of literature. In this endeavor to transform the poverty of the home into a powerful scientific writing, hundreds of studies appeared that went right to the heart, it was supposed, of the working woman and poor mother's reality: *Round About a Pound a Week* by Magdalen Pember Reeves, *Married Women's Work* by Clementina Black, *Working-Class Wives* by Margery Spring Rice, *Enquête sur le travail à domicile dans l'industrie de la fleur artificielle* by Caroline Milhaud, *Le travail à domicile, ses misères, ses dangers, les moyens d'y remédier* by Gabrielle Duchêne, the work of Marie Louise Rochebillard and Odette Laguerre; in Germany the investigation by Rose Otto, the numerous ones of Kaethe Schirmacher (especially *Die Frauenarbeit im Hause, ihre ökonomische, rechtliche und soziale Wertung* of 1905), of Marie Bernays, of Rosa Kempf beginning with *Das Leben der jungen Fabrikmädchen in München - die soziale und wirtschaftliche Lage ihrer Familie, ihr Berufsleben und ihre persönlichen Verhältnisse* (1911), the work of Marie Baum from *Drei Klassen von Lohnarbeiterinnen in Industrie und Handel der Stadt Karlsruhe* (1906) to *Der Einfluss der gewerblichen Arbeit auf das persönliche Leben der Frau* (1910), and culminating in 1930 and 1931 with *Das Familienleben in der Gegenwart und Rhythmus des Familienlebens*. Finally Kaethe Leichter completed a range of investigations in Vienna late in the 1920s, but died in Ravensbruck concentration camp at the age of 46 before she had really completed her life's work. Many of these studies came from collectives such as the Fabian Women's Group, the Section d'études féminines of the Musée social, or the Deutsche Akademie für soziale und pädagogische Frauenarbeit.⁽¹³⁾ They were joined by dozens of historical classics of women and working-class households, the best known of which are Alice Clark's *The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* and Ivy Pinchbeck's *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution* (1930).

"How many words must lurk in those women's vocabularies that have faded from ours! How many scenes must lie dormant in their eye which are unseen by ours!"⁽¹⁴⁾ Such were the expectations with which middle-class women opened their relationship with the working class. Confirming that insight about the locus of words, scenes, and vocabularies, a range of working women suddenly entered the middle-class world of print. Such collections of letters as *Maternity* (1915) and *Life As We Have Known It* (1931) by the Women's Co-operative Guild, edited by Margaret Llewelyn Davies, the Arbeiterinnensekretariat of the Deutscher Textilarbeiterverband's *Mein Arbeitstag - Mein Wochenende* (1930) or individual works such as Austrian socialist Adelheid Popp's *Die Jugendgeschichte einer Arbeiterin* (1909) or Jeanne Bouvier's *Mes mémoires* (1936) and a host of works from servants, factory women, seamstresses, and housewives made this substantial dialogue a reality.

At first the middle-class investigator and historian set the terms for and directed writing about women's work and poverty. Indeed, they justified their own role by pointing to working women's ignorance of scientific methods, their problems with writing, and the incapacity of people situated in the heart of the sentimental family for objective judgment. As Alice Salomon put it: "Often a stranger can understand substantially deeper the relations between family members."⁽¹⁵⁾ Moreover, investigators taught poor women the categories for speaking about themselves and their poverty. For example to construct Pember Reeves' *Round About a Pound a Week* the Fabian Women's Committee had selected a neighborhood by a baby health center and had then chosen pre-parturient women with a weekly family income of 18 to 30 shillings to investigate. As in most other studies (for instance those of lingerie workers, of families on certain streets in representative cities) random women were inappropriate for study.⁽¹⁶⁾ So were random observations: "It was found to be necessary, in order to secure the success of the investigation, to inaugurate a system of accurate accounts. In no case were these

accounts already in being, and it was therefore the task of the [representatives of the Fabian Society] to teach each woman in turn ...”(17) In short, the first task involved instructing working wives how to report their lives in an observant and self-classificatory way. Not the *vécu*, but the organized, scrutinized, classifiable experience drove the Fabian Women's search for dialogue. It took work, as one sees from the resistance to directed writing that fills the study. The housewives of Lambeth rebelled, forgot, and forced the visitors to compulsive methods. Or sometimes they were illiterate or too old: “The older women, and those who had had no reason to use a pencil after leaving school, had completely lost the power of connecting knowledge which might be in their minds with marks made by their hands on a piece of paper.”(18)

Social investigators and historians produced an accounting of women's lives in terms of amount spent for food and food allocation, fertility and infant mortality, household income, hours spent in different household tasks and hours different family members spent with each other and in different tasks, composition of neighborhoods, and per capita room distribution. Illnesses and length thereof, household budgets in general, income from different household members, sleeping arrangements, numbers or descriptions of kitchen utensils, appliances, furniture and dishes, and information about other kin and migration also fill the books about poor women. In this way a scientific portrait of the poor woman took shape and one in which little was in fact left of the charity worker's moral judgment. In fact, women scholars championed poor women and took up their cause in the face of criticism - for example that they should not work, that they should look more attractive, or that they should provide their families with perfectly nutritious meals. The detailed picture amounted to an encapsulation of women in scientific knowledge, but an encapsulation all writers took for an improvement. Through classifying and writing scientific writers had pruned the excesses from life in a properly middle-class way.

Yet despite the concerted effort to build a picture of poverty and to describe the face of want, the effort failed to utter the whole truth. While Alice Clark described the deterioration of competence and skill in household matters or Caroline Milhaud the absent wages and weeks without money, what was actually happening remained only inferential. In the long run it becomes clear that respectable working-class women and often their children were fairly consistently starved in a system that allocated food and other resources inequitably along gender lines. Laboring incessantly and ingeniously - this much is clear - to make their families survive, poor women additionally lacked medical care, proper shelter, heat and clothing. The failure to provide a direct statement on the deliberately starved and in some cases battered body marked the gap between the researcher and the poor woman and showed that science in the long run (or at least in these cases) amounted to euphemism, constructed of its own verbal insufficiency.

Yet for all their failings, middle-class women did succeed in setting the initial standard for writing by those poor and working women who wrote up their lives. So many similarities, but also so many supplemental qualities, shape the abundant autobiographies and memoirs. First, and not surprisingly, working women often, but not always, produced writing that began with accounts of relentless misery. Austrian Social Democrat, Adelheid Popp, wrote that most people remembered their youth with longing. “I face the recollection of my childhood with other feelings.” Instead, “I knew no point of brightness, no ray of sunshine, nothing of a comfortable home in which motherly love guided my childhood.”(19) Hers begins appropriately as a chronicle of negativity from which writing and the middle-class scholar had figuratively pulled her. In Budapest Elena Elek begged regularly at the turn of the century,(20) while Adelheid Popp followed funeral convoys for the same reason. Often parents were also absent figures, and fathers were the worst - as investigators and poor women never failed to point out. Popp's father returned home drunk on Christmas eve and hacked the only Christmas tree she ever had. “I can't remember his ever saying a word to me and I never spoke a word to him.”(21) Working women emphasized that conversation and

words were initially not part of their lives; rather they depended on rituals and gestures of begging and obedience. Dwelling on their early silence, the autobiographies indicate the hovering presence of a middle-class conversant. Jeanne Bouvier, born in the mid-nineteenth century, some fifty years after the fact recorded in detail her budget as a young seamstress: "My expenses went as follows: Bouillion and beef: .50 francs. Wine: .20 francs. Bread: .15 francs...[etc.] My weekly expenses for food were 8.40 francs, which made, with linens and lodging 15.15 francs." (22) These strict accountings and the chronicle of misery could hardly have served a working-class audience familiar with such details. Instead they acknowledged a pre-verbal condition and a coming to writing first in a social scientific field. In the case of Jeanne Bouvier's budget, neither Maud Pember Reeves nor Caroline Milhaud could have asked for more.

Then working women's narrative becomes startling, even to the writers themselves. "At a conference of textile workers," *Mein Arbeitstag - Mein Wochenende* begins, "the speech of a working woman surprised us." (23) The autobiographies quickly become obsessed with words, not just poverty and work, as a single textile worker evokes across a three-paged account of her factory day the quest for air "just to breath a little fresh air," and her endurance of "warm stuffy air," and later "our brains searched for air, for fresh air," and soon the factory was filled with "bad air," until there were "only two more hours in hazy and dusty air." (24) The editors of this collection indeed set a goal of avoiding monotony and repetitious words, but they also acknowledged that verbal monotony captured the tenor of their lives. Meanwhile, former seamstress, Jeanne Bouvier exulted when her first manuscript ended up too long and had to be cut. "I who thought myself unable to write a book because I didn't know with what words to compose it, I had passed the page limit." (25)

In fact poor women's writing soon became noisy and crowded. Theoretically silent, their world was full of conversation and transgressive noise. Popp, who didn't talk to her father, nonetheless screamed when a boarder attempted rape, quit when a supervisor promised a higher wage for sex, refused a similar offer by a wealthy passerby. In Popp's life the conversations were generally refusals, and ones not expected from working-class people. Louise Delétang, impoverished seamstress and woman of all work in World War I Paris, has comradely conversations with any range of friends and appreciates constant verbal exchange except for the unwelcome lecture by a social service worker and intellectual who "bases one's moral value on the degree of scientific knowledge." (26) In *Mein Arbeitstag - Mein Wochenende* women talk to one another in an ongoing dialogue virtually unaccounted for in early social science and in many histories. They make clear that in fact silence is a pose or a positioning.

After the first acknowledgement many negative aspects of poverty move to the margins, appear in such refusals, or in metaphors. Concierge Madame Lucie refused to discuss the worst want of World War II: What difference would it make she asked, and who without experience would understand. (27) Such poverty had no approximations, so great the gap between her and her listener. Louise Delétang in *World War I* painted this picture of how much her world lacked just then: "*Eteintes les lampes à arcs des concerts, moulins à musique, beuglants, tavernes, boîtes à orgies, cinémas populaires, bals et terrasses. Sombres, les devantures des commerces luxueux, des grands cafés, des restaurants, des petits boutiques. Voilés, les milliers drapeaux des maisons aux multiples étages... Chacun doit fermer ses volets, tirer son rideaux - les tramways doivent baisser leurs stores - Les usines devront aussi dissimuler leur feux qui les font ressembler dans la nuit à des bouches d'enfer...*" (28) The Parisian world of abundance and pleasure fell dark and silent until people decided to transgress their situation. Instead of calming people, "naturally," Delétang wrote, "all these wise precautions only incited conversations." The middle-class women did indeed stimulate words, but not always of the intended kind. Working women proceeded to fill up their stories with things, people, and metaphors. Delétang's dark world overflows with accounts of what is in the market while she is starving - leeks, aubergines, greenbeans, abundant fruit. "White, fat, and round, like the bouquet of a country bride, cauliflower is a good buy

today.”(29) When she could get sewing, she worked on an array of pillowcases, mittens, shirts, underwear, and more pillowcases - all recalled according to fabric, color, texture. Her world was packed with friends, mother and sister, neighbors, officials, a cast of scrupulous and unscrupulous employers, middle-class feminists, social and volunteer workers, market women, lawyers, and police, and many individuals she saw as worse off than herself. Moreover, as in *Mein Arbeitstag - mein Wochenende* poor women rounded out even short accounts of their lives with conversations, smells, observations, incidents like sketching, and moments of tranquil sitting and thinking. In several tales the alarm clock’s dissonance crashes through the morning silence and signals the working life more than any statistical account.

The world of poverty took on new contours when told rather than analyzed. Ultimately only the middle-class historian would stake a claim to authenticity with an account book telling a stark tale of want in which the poor mother formed a true “Other” to her middle-class counterpart. In fact, writing outwards from the heart of poverty one portrayed a world of abundance and beauty. Even Adelheid Popp focussed inordinately long on a fleeting brush with a beautiful châtelaine, her dress, the books she gave the young girl, and so on. Popp portrayed her mother, bearer of many children, as full up of energy and determination to assure her youngest child a skill - at first it was begging - a situation, and health. Poverty meant just this energy, abundance, and determination in excess. The “weakness” and “delicacy” in Pember Reeves’ study failed to hit the mark in more ways than one, while poor women’s writing had a transformative logic of its own.

That logic is particularly apparent in the autobiography of Jeanne Bouvier, who only in her seventies broke into writing when a bourgeois intellectual, George Renard, professor of labor history at the Collège de France, asked her to contribute a volume on the *lingère* to his multivolumed *Bibliothèque sociale des métiers*. Bouvier had come to syndicalism in the same way - asked that is, by a middle-class client with connections to *La Fronde*. The earlier encounter with the feminist first introduced Bouvier to the world of middle-class culture, while the second opened that of libraries, archives, and writing. Producing several histories, she then embarked on her autobiography. It begins as a classic tale of need in which she works in a factory before reaching her teens to support her. Winning her struggle to survive, Bouvier sees herself as exceptional because she does not turn to prostitution or suicide. But her goal is common enough: to have a small house in the country where she will raise sufficient food to keep her always from hunger. Part two tells of days in the union, days when she fights the male leadership on moral and feminist principles. In particular she brings to light that union funds are going to support international trips for the mistress of one of them. As a result of this exposure, the leadership closes ranks and effectively silences Bouvier by gradually replacing her in her various offices.

In part three - her seventies - Bouvier emerges as a writer and finally seals the story of her survival. Of her book on the *lingère* in a series of others done by middle-class researchers she writes: “I am the only worker who was called on [to write].”(30) She took pride, nonetheless, in refusing help from academicians with these words: “When my manuscript is ready, I’ll bring it to you. If there are changes to be made, I will make them. I want to put my book together the way I think it should be.”(31) And she also marvelled at the manuscript’s excessive length. How distasteful Bouvier’s uncontrollable pride is as it spills over onto a text that should be humble! Contemporary scholars introducing Bouvier are happy to knock down this woman touting her own writing, in particular those who have introduced the reprinting of these memoirs have taken great pains to show that all her histories sold in miniscule numbers.(32) Yet Bouvier herself, writing away, seems strangely impervious to any such traps down the road. Instead she blissfully ends her book with a long description about an ongoing correspondence with Franklin Roosevelt, then President of the United States, about the declining quality of paper and its certain improvement if surplus cotton were used rather than burned. Writing for Bouvier has clearly become a workerly process and one

predicated on good materials. Concern for the quality of paper has replaced concerns for the quality of cloth and tools, because one takes pride in one's work. Demonstrating her bleak origins, Bouvier proceeded to claim her difference and simultaneously the workerliness of writing when one was poor.

Other workers wondered if an engagement with writing might contaminate them. Right from the beginning of the project for *Mein Arbeitstag - Mein Wochenende* union members were suspicious and questioned whether words might undermine their status as workers. "Wouldn't they lie?" one asked. "Wasn't this kind of endeavor for the bourgeoisie?"(33) Ultimately the textile workers decided that writing their brief autobiographies would in fact cement a workerly persona - giving them their subjectivity. Their explicit faith in what writing could do coincided with the rhetoric of Bouvier's memoirs as a workerly project. Yet the initial impulse to question what writing would in fact do to workers - was it in fact a bourgeois condition? - came to plague the worker-investigator relationship. The minute workers started writing, authenticity became problematic for the bourgeoisie as well. Although encouraged to uncover the untainted, authentic worker, the appearance of their writing came to subvert the very quest. French philosopher Jacques Rancière has pointed to this problem in the case of labor historians who discount the words of worker-poets as being the words of poets, not workers.(34) Again, Virginia Woolf reminds us of what the worker meant for the middle-class world in which "the baker calls and we pay our bills with cheques, and our clothes are washed for us and we do not know the liver from the lights..." From this confinement in the unreal world the real woman would rescue the metaphorical one and receive in return - again in Woolf's words - "wit and detachment, learning and poetry."(35) No one considered what would happen, how powerful a sense of deception would arise when the working woman produced a poetry of her own, when her lyrical, serendipitous accounts proved to exceed the demands of an objective, scientific, and statistical reality proposed by her observers.

In a sense, then, the working-class women undid the scholarly project of discovery and called into question the existential status of authenticity. Yet the gap between these two types of accounts produced many insights and in fact worked some desired transformations. First the two literatures did allow women some control over their own metaphors, with investigators and historians approaching the scientific and "real" discourse they so desired and with workers turning to poetry. Moreover the gap between the two accounts of working women's lives restructured relationships among women. It shattered, for some, the narcissistic world of the household in which women and household merged and where no differentiation existed. Entering the world of scientific writing, women struck a preliminary blow at their narcissistic constructions. Then, a second division occurred as rich and poor women displayed in their writing a sense of division, opposition, and difference that undid the unitary construction of "womanhood". Without doubt both kinds of writing revealed the depths of female poverty and exploitation that the ornate home masked over while resisting functions of the carnivalesque. Science made the presence of poverty come to light? Finally and oddly enough, writing itself provided an unfolding sense of division in this struggle to objectify a poverty-stricken self on the one hand and on the other to give poetry to poverty. The activity of writing for both groups was highly - and here I can only use a French term - *contestataire* and contradictory, whether the rich woman wrote scientifically about the poor or whether the poor invaded the rich woman's literary domain. Although these efforts may seem insignificant because they exist merely in a written field, in fact they mark an important confrontation and moment of individuation, not only of middle-class women from men, but of mothers and women from one another. Looking for a way out of metaphor and poverty, they ended up in polyphony and indeterminacy. Once seen, poverty did not have a common, unitary face, and neither, so it became clear, did women or even mothers - except perhaps on the level of poetics. Such moments of individuation and separation, filled in only by words and books, is the predictable, clearly inevitable but important end to the perpetual desire for the authentic worker.

If all this seems too insubstantial, there is a different end to the story. The encounter with working women in writing sent ripples through the world of women scholars. Here an American illustration serves to show a profound transformation with very practical results. Born in 1857 in upstate New York, Lucy Maynard Salmon was trained in history at the University of Michigan and later worked with Woodrow Wilson, whom she found a sluggish scholar. After publishing a prize-winning study of the American presidency, she made a bizarre turn for a historian and in 1897 did a statistical study of domestic servants using a polyvocal method of questioning more than 1000 employers, 2000 servants, and adding in historical fact itself. Officially the project was branded unworthy, but it yielded, to Salmon's way of thinking, both massive information and even more confusion and indeterminacy. She could not get a clear understanding, for example, of why half the servants surveyed would easily leave service and why the other half would stay forever. "That which decides the question is not always the economic advantage, not always the personal treatment, but the subtle thing the woman calls *life*. 'Wages, hours, health, and morals' may all weigh in the scale in favor of domestic service, but life outweighs them all." (36) After *Domestic Service*, after, that is, her confrontation with those 2000 servants' answers on her questionnaires, Salmon went in pursuit of life, that "subtle" thing, and in so doing became a kind of intellectual outcast until her death in 1927. Using the language of science to reject one of her articles, the editor of the *Yale Review* said that it lacked "sufficient specific gravity." Indeed Salmon's work moved in many strange directions of which I will only chart one. Between 1900 and 1920 Salmon wrote such works as "On Beds and Bedding", "The Family Cook Book", "History in a Backyard", "On Economy", "Democracy in the Household", "Philosophy, Art and Sense for the Kitchen" and left the notes for a book-length work on the fan in history. In so doing, she furthered the hermeneutical drive toward the so-called private world but at the same time she approached its poetics. The housewife, she wrote in "The Family Cookbook," was to some extent "emancipated from the limitations of time and space" as she invented such recipes as "Birds on canapes, bird's-nest pudding, floating islands, apples in bloom, shadow potatoes, cheese aigrettes, apple snow, snowballs, gossamer gingerbread, fairy gingerbread, aurora sauce, moonlight cake, lily cake, lady fingers and amber pudding." Salmon, however, became herself absorbed in the reverie of the sign as she relentlessly pursued the images of cooking that recalled the family: "Aunt Hannah's loaf cake, Cousin Lizzie's waffles, Grandmother's cookies, Grandma Lyman's marble cake, Sister Sally's quince jelly, Mother's raspberry vinegar, Warren's cake, Jennie's gingerbread, Jack's oyster stew, Mercy's nasturtium pickles, Johnny cake, brown betty, and carolines..." Or she previewed the Proustian remembrance of place names: "Lady Baltimore cake, Philadelphia ice cream, Irving Park cake, Bangor pudding, Berkshire muffins, Boston brown bread, Saratoga chips, and Maryland chicken... Vienna coffee, Yorkshire pudding, Nuremburg cakes, Banbury tarts, Bavarian cream, Irish stew, Scotch broth, English muffins, and Hamburg steak..." (37) Salmon had entered the world of poetics, where as Bachelard puts it, the past, present, and future come together in the reverie provoked by the image alone. (38) Her history indeed became poetical by the early twentieth century for it eschewed cause and effect in favour of workerly reverberations and resonances. Other scholars sought out not just the scientific but the image or sigh - Eileen Power, for instance, as she speculated in a letter on whether peasants should be Bodo or Hodge or Piers Plowman. (39) These are a few results of contact with workers' writing, and they show how especially fruitful such contacts can be when writing itself is appreciated as practical and workerly, as authentic and poetic.

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- (2) See Bonnie G. Smith, "Women's Contribution to Modern Historical Scholarship, 1750-1940," *American Historical Review* 89 (June, 1984) 3:709-732 and my forthcoming "Aristocratic Women and the Counter-revolution in Historical Writing."
- (3) Christine de Pisan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, ed. and tr. Earl Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1982).
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- (5) Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," *History Workshop* 5 (Spring, 1978): 9-66.
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- (11) For general information on Augusta Moll-Weiss see Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand DOS MOL. Augusta Moll-Weiss, *Les écoles ménagères à l'étranger et en France* (Paris, 1908), xii.
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- (37) Lucy Maynard Salmon, "The Family Cook-Book," *Vassar College Quarterly*, 11 (March 1926): 101-111 passim.
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