

Introduction

*Why do we like these **stories** so? Why do we tell them over and over? Why do we make a folk **hero** of a man who is the antithesis of all our official heroes ...? But then we have always done that. Our favorite people and our **favorite stories** become so not by any inherent virtue, but because they illustrate something deep in the grain, **something unadmitted**.'*

Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*

*In many ways, **likability** is a very elaborate lie, **a performance**, a code of **conduct** dictating the proper way to be. Characters who don't follow this code become **unlikable**. [...] Why are we so concerned with whether, in fact or fiction, someone is likable? Unlikable is a fluid designation that can be applied to any character who doesn't behave in a way the reader finds palatable. Lionel Shriver notes, in an essay for the Financial Times, that 'this "liking" business has two components: **moral approval and affection**'. [...] When women are unlikable, it becomes a point of **obsession** in critical conversations.'*

Roxane Gay, *Bad Feminist*

*So that is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, **over and over** again, and that is what they become. ... **Power** is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the **definitive story** of that person. ... The single story creates **stereotypes**, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are **incomplete**. They make one story become the only story.'*

Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi, 'The Danger of a Single Story'

THE THREE QUOTATIONS ABOVE circle around themes at the heart of this book: life stories, the creation of heroes, transgression, performance, propriety, moral approval, affection, gender, likability, power, repetition and identity. They remind us that the stories we write and repeat about real people from history, or what I will refer to as *life writing*, have profound cultural resonance. These stories matter now, as in the nineteenth century, for the values they represent and the identities they validate, for their ability to uphold or

explode stereotypes. They matter not only for the changes they effect in the public status of their individual subjects but also for their power to shape the models and mythologies that govern our ideas of selfhood and that strengthen or resist norms of gender, race, class, nationality and sexuality.

Each of the chapters in this volume features one woman writer whose published life narrative(s) challenged standards of morality, likability and/or literary convention, with irrevocable effects for her reputation either in her life or 'afterlife'. These texts offered unprecedented access to the personal lives of their subjects, inviting readers to learn intimate details about these women and to identify with them in new ways. In doing so, they made private lives into public commodities for sale in a rapidly expanding literary marketplace, a risky but profitable business. The works considered here – whether diary, correspondence, travelogue, biography, memoir, autobiographical fiction, group biography or otherwise – contested prevailing standards in literature, gender and morality, not only through their contents but also through their varied and often hybrid forms. As Patricia Meyer Spacks reminds us, 'To say new things, one needs new techniques.'⁴ All the authors considered in this book experimented with structure, style and voice. They not only published in several genres but also blended different ones together, forging hybrid works that suited their experiences and aims but blurred traditional lines of classification between, for example, fact and fiction, private and public, the respectable and the scandalous.

This study focuses on Frances Burney, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Robinson and Mary Hays, four writers who authored and/or inspired works of life writing in the Romantic period. I have selected these four particular women because their life writing was explicitly situated within debates about authorship and reputation (their own or that of others), because they wrote and were written about in formally innovative texts, and because the publication of these texts affected each of these writers' cultural status, and not always in predictable ways. Of course, other women also engaged in life writing at this time: Charlotte Smith, Hester Thrale Piozzi, Helen Maria Williams and Dorothy Wordsworth, to name some of the most well-known.⁵

However, each of the four women examined here produced and elicited enough material to substantiate chapter-length studies, and also, taken together, these four figures have allowed me to explore a variety of life writing that goes beyond the standard categories of auto/biography and gives an indication of the generic diversity and novelty present in women's writing published in the period. What follows is a set of detailed case studies that examine the effects of life writing on the reputations of individual women and trace the contributions of these life writers to genre formation and innovation. The study begins in the late eighteenth century, when all four writers came to prominence, and ends in the early twentieth century with a coda on a writer greatly influenced by her Romantic predecessors: Virginia Woolf. Woolf has been included as a fitting endpoint to a study focused on women writers who discussed authorship from a gendered perspective and sought to influence their own reputations through their work. The biographical portraits and personal essays that populate Woolf's *Common Reader* collections reflect on the work and lives of Romantic women writers in ways that demonstrate their individual legacies as well as the ongoing significance of life writing to literary reputation.

Though the book focuses most heavily on the Romantic period, it has a long nineteenth-century time frame that allows continuities and longer-term reading and response patterns to emerge, but it stops before the arrival of cinema and mass media changes the landscape of print culture and (literary) celebrity beyond recognition. The divisions between the Romantic and Victorian (not to mention Edwardian and Modernist) periods have tended to obscure longer-term patterns in women writers' posthumous reputations. As will be shown in Chapter 1, for example, the cultural status of Frances Burney may seem to have declined if our analysis concludes with her *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* (1832) and its tepid reception at the end of the Romantic period. However, if we trace her legacy into the 1840s with the publication of her *Diary and Letters* and continue to look at responses to and reprints of her work through the remainder of the Victorian and Edwardian periods, a different picture emerges: she appears as a figure whose life writing and fiction continued to

be favourably read and widely reviewed, despite a blip in the 1830s. The 'long'-nineteenth-century scope of this book therefore helps to minimise the misinterpretation of, or overemphasis on, individual instances of reception and instead makes room for the long-term vicissitudes in women's reputations to become visible.

Life writing in the Romantic period

In this study, I use the term *life writing* to refer to any text that has one or more historical lives as its subject, whether the work is first-person or third-person, prose or verse, non-fiction or fiction. I use the term more broadly than Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson,⁶ as I include not only memoir and autobiography but also biography in its remit. In this, I follow the lead of Amy Culley and David Cook and, like them, I prefer *life writing* to *life-writing*, an older term used, for example, by James Olney.⁷ Traditionally, life writing meant only biography and autobiography 'proper', that is, retrospective narratives concerning real individuals that trace the development of personality and reveal an essential self that unfolds over time.⁸ Implicit in this narrower conception of auto/biography were assumptions that only certain (male, white, exceptional) people and certain (realist, unified, developmental) forms were appropriate material for life writing, or at least for the kind of life writing worthy of study. In recent decades, the work of Patricia Meyer Spacks, Lynda Thompson, Felicity Nussbaum, Anne Mellor, Liz Stanley, Laura Marcus, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, Daniel Cook, Amy Culley and many others has helped to interrogate definitions of, and introduce new interpretative frameworks for, life writing. The full range of self writing that existed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which included not only the linear, retrospective auto/biography emphasised by theorists like Philippe Lejeune but also travelogues, memoirs, diaries, journals, collective biographies, essays, letters, autobiographical fiction and histories, for example, has begun to receive the attention it deserves. As Daniel Cook and Amy Culley have argued, this increase in scholarship not only sheds new light on women's contributions to literary history and to the practice of Romantic auto/biography but

also has 'broader implications for our understanding of literary genres, constructions of gender, the relationship between manuscript and print culture, the mechanisms of publicity and celebrity, and models of authorship in the period'.⁹

The production, consumption and discussion of life writing flourished in the Romantic period, and readers were fascinated by tales of the private lives of men and women alike. Despite the longstanding emphasis of critics like Samuel Johnson on the moral utility of life narratives, their robust sales also derived from more prurient impulses. The growing appetite for and supply of life writing was also fuelled by the expansion of the literary marketplace and the periodical press, increases in literacy rates and technologies of publication and dissemination and a burgeoning modern celebrity culture. It was at this time that biography and *autobiography*, a term which appeared in 1797 and gradually replaced the earlier designation of *self-biography*, grew into separate categories. It was also at this time that debates proliferated over the respectability of writing and reading life narratives, and according to Eugene Stelzig, it was only at the end of the Romantic period that life writing emerged as a fully 'literary' form.¹⁰ Women's and men's life writing circulated in and was purchased by the same reading public; it responded to the same literary precursors and intertexts; it was evaluated by the same reviewers. For men and women alike, the publication of private lives involved a contradictory mixture of exposure and power: Life writing posed not only a reputational risk but also an affirmation of individual identity.

Women's life writing therefore did not comprise an intrinsically separate tradition. However, this book takes women's life writing as its focus, because the standards by which women and their work were judged, and the ways in which this work influenced its subjects' reputations, were complicated in ways different from, or at least more pronounced than, those governing men's life writing of the period. Debates about the moral respectability and literary merit of auto/biography were intensified and complicated by the issue of gender. Women's sexual lives were held to different standards than men's, and they faced the added pressures of balancing literary labour with

the cultural expectations of femininity. Moreover, personal attacks could be especially damaging to women whose dependent economic positions left them heavily reliant on literary work for their livelihoods. As Felicity Nussbaum reminds us, 'Women's real lives are made or irremediably ruined because of their public construction. ... A complex relationship develops between a woman's entry into the public sphere, through publication, publicity, and sexual representation'.¹¹ Women also had to negotiate the long-standing association, solidified by the scandalous memoirs of the eighteenth century, between fame and shame. Moreover, women's life writing remains a relatively understudied genre within Romanticism, though recent volumes such as Daniel Cook and Amy Culley's edited collection *Women's Life Writing, 1700–1850* (2012) and Amy Culley's *British Women's Life Writing, 1760–1840: Friendship, Community, and Collaboration* (2014) have begun to rectify this neglect. Cook and Culley's essay collection showcases the diversity of women's contributions to the genre as well as their strategies for negotiating hostilities to the publication of life writing. Culley's monograph focuses on the collaborative and relational aspects of women's self writing, in both print and manuscript, looking at texts by female Methodist preachers, courtesans and radical women, in turn, to show how social contexts of production and alternative affiliations are embedded in the work. *Romantic Women's Life Writing* builds on the work of Cook and Culley, retaining their focus on gender and genre but looking at a later time period and paying attention to the interplay of life writing and authorial afterlives.

Scholars such as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, Felicity Nussbaum and Tom Mole have recognised the significance of life writing, not only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but also, more broadly speaking, in the cultural production of knowledge,¹² the formation of subjectivities of gender and class¹³ and the history of selfhood.¹⁴ However, little scholarship exists on the specific impact(s) of life writing, that is, the ways that it was read and responded to, the ways that these readings and responses changed over time and the implications of these changes for the status of its subjects and/or writers. William St Clair has pointed out that text-based approaches are locked in a 'closed system' that either ignores readers or infers

readers from texts and is therefore insufficient to understand ‘the meanings that readers historically did construct’.¹⁵ He thus advocates a ‘systems approach’ in which texts are understood not only for their intrinsic qualities but also for the ways that they were received. James Treadwell stresses the importance of this kind of approach to the study of life writing in particular: ‘An attempt to write the history of autobiography in the period ... would have to be a history of reading, writing, and publishing practices; the “primary texts” would occupy a small part of its attention, because the formation and development of genre mainly takes place elsewhere.’¹⁶ Text-based approaches also tend, as Laura Marcus notes, to overlook issues of production and circulation, isolating the individual as the ‘sole producer of the life-history’ and reinforcing the myth ‘that authorial identity is not determined by the marketplace but is rather a function of conditions internal to the self’.¹⁷ This book addresses these interpretive gaps by looking not only at primary life writing texts but also at the ways they were read, reviewed, responded to, reprinted and redacted over time.

Gauging reputation

The methodological challenges of this approach are numerous and well documented. Published reviews, infamous for the inclusion of puffs, the espousal of the journal’s house style and political persuasion and the unrepresentative demographic of their writers, are problematic as an index of reception. They do not always correlate with sales figures or with the opinions of readers.¹⁸ Still, Treadwell suggests: ‘Only in the major review periodicals can we see the genre being read and written about with any consistency, and they are thus the best available window on to the encounter between the world of letters and specific autobiographical acts, despite all the factors limiting the way they imagined such texts to be read.’¹⁹ Individual reports of reading from other works of life writing, such as diaries, journals or letters, can also be useful, as can retrospective comments written at a later period.²⁰ However, these sources are not always reliable, nor are they necessarily representative of wider reading constituencies. Such anecdotal accounts can help us to gauge readerly

expectations, interpretive frameworks and terms of debate, but they cannot be used to say, definitively, how a text was read. St Clair recommends the use, wherever possible, of quantitative information about the publication and dissemination of texts, including print runs, circulation figures, price and reprinting patterns, for example.

In my efforts to assess the impact of these women's life writing on both the development of the genre and the cultural status of its subjects, I draw on all of the above types of evidence, including quantitative data, published reviews and individual accounts of reading. I also include within my remit fictionalised character portraits, responses and rewritings in novels, poetic responses, group biographies and biographical dictionaries, essays in the periodical press, illustrated serial fiction and the paratexts, reviews and reception of later reprints and scholarly volumes. This wide range of sources, most of which have received very little critical attention to date, lends originality to my approach. It also means there are, necessarily, some disparities among my chapters, with each case study harnessing different types of evidence in its analysis and favouring different moments within the long nineteenth century. However, this variety is appropriate to the unique contours of each woman's authorial career and afterlife. Furthermore, in assembling the fullest possible picture of the effects of life writing on reputation, I have found it necessary to consider any and all potential indicators of reception, evaluation or reaction, despite (though taking into consideration) their potential for bias, unreliability or generic limitation.

Each chapter discusses the authorial career of one Romantic writer, looking at how her reputation shifted after the publication of one or more key works of life writing. My case studies also attend to the ways these women attempted to shape their own public images, for example, through the strategic use of their own names, pseudonyms or anonymity; paratexts like prefaces and advertisements; the careful modulation of voice and style across their writing; and decisions about how and where to publish, price and market their work. Each chapter also analyses a range of responses to these women's public personae and to the works themselves. By looking at these women's negotiation of and reception within the literary marketplace, this book sits within

the recent wave of feminist criticism that emphasises the reputations and afterlives of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women writers. Monographs such as Ben P. Robertson's *Elizabeth Inchbald's Reputation: A Publishing and Reception History* (2013), which examines the public response to Inchbald as well as her response to the public, and Andrew McInnes's *Wollstonecraft's Ghost: The Fate of the Female Philosopher in the Romantic Period* (2017), which analyses female philosopher figures in early nineteenth-century fiction as evidence of Wollstonecraft's legacy, share my interest in using non-canonical, popular or otherwise neglected material in gauging 'reception'. Edited collections like Brenda Ayers's *Biographical Misrepresentations of British Women Writers: A Hall of Mirrors and the Long Nineteenth Century* (2017) and Amber K. Regis and Deborah Wynne's *Charlotte Brontë: Legacies and Afterlives* (2017) likewise explore reception from new angles, suggesting the ways that biography – with its distortions, biases and political or cultural agendas – as well as adaptations and/or transmediations can affect the posthumous status of women writers. However, these volumes, like most reception studies, tend to focus on a single author, whereas my book allows for the comparison of four different writers. Moreover, my chapters are not straightforward reception studies but rather seek to address more specific questions about the impact and development of life writing within the long nineteenth century.

Canvassing a wide variety of sources which are seen as not only reflecting but also influencing reputation, this study is interested in determining the effects of life writing in the three-way encounter between reader, writer and public-sphere print culture. As such, this book also fits more broadly into the trend of scholarship that interrogates Romanticism through attention to the relationship between mass market print culture, reception, public image and/or literary afterlife. It joins studies such as Andrew Bennett's *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (1999), Lucy Newlyn's *Reading, Writing and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (2000), Claire Brock's *The Feminization of Fame, 1750–1830* (2006), and Tom Mole's edited collection *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture: 1750–1850* (2012). Brock and Mole, in particular, point to the Romantic period as a time of transition in which the authorial persona became central

to the reception of a text and in which celebrity culture as we now understand it began to take shape. Both scholars pay attention to the role of public figures in the construction of gender norms, with Brock arguing that 'women were actively embracing the new forms of public self-representation' and Mole reminding us that female celebrities in the Romantic period had to negotiate the 'inherent contradiction between the norms of femininity and the experience of celebrity'.²¹ My book also draws on recent work by Mary Waters, Betty A. Schellenberg, Linda Peterson and Jennie Batchelor on the professionalisation of women writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²² Batchelor's *Women's Work: Labour, Gender, Authorship, 1750–1830* (2010), for instance, rethinks previous assumptions about the relationship of women and literary work, and argues that although women 'register ... tensions between propriety and professionalism, and between domesticity and labour ... they find in these conflicting imperatives not only a subject for their writing but ... a matrix within which to theorize and justify their authorial practice'.²³ My analysis builds on this premise, homing in on the importance of life writing to constructions of professionalisation, authorship and reputation. My arguments are also indebted to ground-breaking archival research, such as Peter Garside, James Raven and Rainer Schöwerling's *The English Novel 1770–1829* (2000) and William St Clair's *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (2004), volumes which provide data invaluable for any attempt to gauge or compare authorial reputations in the nineteenth century.

In its focus on the contours of women writers' reputations, and in seeking to understand how these reputations were formed and transformed over time, this book sits closely alongside recent monographs by Michael Gamer, Tom Mole and H. J. Jackson. Gamer's *Romanticism, Self-Canonization, and the Business of Poetry* (2017), which assesses how authors sought to modify their reputations and shape their afterlives through reproductions of earlier works (called 'recollections'), shares my concern with highlighting a more dynamic interaction between reader and writer that goes beyond the initial moment of textual publication. In *What the Victorians Made of Romanticism: Material Artifacts, Cultural Practices, and Reception History*

(2017), Tom Mole has likewise moved past initial composition and publication (what he terms ‘punctual historicism’) to emphasise a ‘web of reception’ that takes in later re-interpretation and remediation of texts.²⁴ Mole’s cross-period, multi-media approach allows for a more accurate evaluation of how authorial reputations fared over time and demonstrates that ‘[a]uthors’ reputations never simply endure ... and their works do not simply survive: either they are renewed or they are forgotten’.²⁵ Similarly, H. J. Jackson, whose *Those Who Write for Immortality: Romantic Reputations and the Dream of Lasting Fame* (2015) compares the posthumous reputations of several groups of Romantic writers to determine what contributes to the long-term literary survival of one author over another, argues that ‘[m]erit is only part of the reason – arguably quite a small part’.²⁶ According to Jackson, many other factors such as ‘attract[ing] multiple audiences and bear[ing] diverse (even contradictory) meanings’, the activity and effectiveness of champions or mediators working on the author’s behalf (often posthumously) and ‘successful remediation’ remain equally significant.²⁷ Indeed, in Jackson’s ‘Scorecard’ – a list of twenty-two categories affecting posthumous fame arranged in order of importance – biography not only ranks fourth but is starred as an essential factor.²⁸ My book follows on from the conclusions of Mole and Jackson in particular, but it focuses on investigating how and why not only biography but also life writing more generally affects the reputations of writers. Using a similarly wide-angled lens and considering a range of sources that goes beyond canonical materials like literary reviews and critical histories, my analysis nevertheless differs from theirs in its specific emphasis on life writing and the attention it pays to gender.

Reputation itself remains a slippery entity. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as ‘the general opinion or estimate of a person’s character or other qualities; the relative esteem in which a person or thing is held’.²⁹ In the literary sphere, it might refer to the beliefs held about a writer’s work; and in the private sphere, the beliefs held about an individual’s moral, or perhaps sexual, character. Ben P. Robertson, for example, suggests that Elizabeth Inchbald’s reputation rested on her successful management of these ‘two distinct, yet

intimately connected aspects of the idea': 'her personal reputation', which centred on 'sexual chastity', and the 'professional persona that she projected as an actor and a writer'.³⁰ For women, whose private lives and sexual conduct have been more heavily emphasised and regulated than men's, the professional and personal dimensions of reputation are almost always linked, if not conflated. H. J. Jackson defines reputation a little differently, using it to refer to 'posthumous fame', in contrast to 'renown', by which she designates present fame (xiii). However, Jackson's sense of reputation as 'a substitute for personal immortality' and a condition in which 'the name lives on and is carried around the world' is useful.³¹ In the Romantic period, critics like William Hazlitt contrasted enduring 'fame' with its ephemeral counterpart, 'popularity': 'Fame is the recompense not of the living, but of the dead ... for fame is not popularity, the shout of the multitude, the idle buzz of fashion, the venal puff, the soothing flattery of favour of friendship; but it is the spirit of a man surviving himself in the minds and thoughts of other men.'³² Hazlitt's distinction here is gendered, with 'popularity' in the present representing an inferior, feminised version of a masculine, posthumous 'fame' that persists over time. According to Andrew Bennett, the 'textual afterlife', or the ability of a work of art to survive beyond the death of its creator, became a new point of obsession in the Romantic period, as posthumous fame and contemporary popularity came to be seen as mutually exclusive.³³ For Bennett, this fascination with and desire for a future audience remains 'a specifically masculine phenomenon'.³⁴

However, the life writings covered in this book suggest otherwise. Though ideas about reputation – and even about fame itself – were certainly gendered, each of my case studies uncovers ways in which women writers imagined and sought to influence their reputations in their lives and afterlives. The power of life writing, like fiction perhaps, lies in the bond it forges between the reader and the subject (who is sometimes, but not always, the author). Life writing is especially effective for eliciting emotional responses. It therefore wields a particular influence on reputation because readers are encouraged to identify imaginatively with its subjects. For this reason, life writing has profound implications for models and myths of

authorship, authorial afterlives and canon formation. This book argues for the importance of Romantic women's life writing in shaping the reputations of its subjects. It sheds light on the dynamics underpinning the formation and evolution of these authorial reputations during the long nineteenth century. Tom Mole has urged scholars to 'move beyond individual celebrities to pay attention to the genres, media and discourses that enabled celebrity culture' in order to understand 'how the borders between celebrity and canonicity can be crossed'.³⁵ This book nominates life writing as one of these genres. The four women writers featured here offer case studies in the complicated and often unexpected effects of life writing on reputation and literary afterlife. They also showcase women's varied and innovative contributions to Romantic auto/biographical practice. As the remarks of Joan Didion, Roxane Gay and Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi at the beginning of this chapter remind us, life stories are still a powerful currency. It is my hope that an understanding of the complex encounter between life writing, reputation and literary reception in the long nineteenth century can help to empower writers of the current generation as well.

Chapter breakdown

The first chapter focuses on Frances Burney (1752–1840), a figure who has often been linked with feminine diffidence, disembodiment and authorial anxiety. However, her *Diary and Letters* (1842–46) tells a different story. Burney's *Diary* presented a model of female authorship that mixed a shrewd sense of her public position with a respectable and charming feminine persona. Though the publication of diaries was popular, their dubious moral and literary status made them a reputational risk. As the first woman's diary to be published in English, the *Diary and Letters* broke new ground in its contribution both to a literary afterlife and to the genre of life writing itself. This chapter reassesses Burney's career, examining its development (via print runs, publication and sales records, reviews, essays and anecdotal responses) alongside the representation of it in the *Diary*. It argues that Burney took an active and 'professional' approach to her writing,

from the self-fashioning in the paratexts of her anonymously published *Evelina* (1778) to the meticulous preparation for the posthumous publication of her *Diary and Letters* (1842–46). Moreover, although critics have lamented that the publication of her *Diary* undermined her reputation as a novelist, an analysis of Burney's afterlife in the long nineteenth century in literary reviews, periodical essays and scholarly and biographical material demonstrates that in fact it strengthened her literary status. What emerges is a reciprocal relationship by which the publication of her *Diary* fuelled and was fuelled by the enduring success of her fiction. By the end of the Victorian period, Burney held a robust position in the eighteenth-century canon. This chapter shows the potential of life writing to consolidate a woman's literary reputation and points to the importance of Burney's *Diary*, in particular, in bolstering the respectability of the genre itself.

The second chapter turns to Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97), who rose to fame with her reform-minded *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) but won over contemporaries across the political spectrum with *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1797). An examination of these texts and responses to them shows her strategic and skilful self-fashioning, which was terminated by the candid disclosures of her husband William Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798). Critics have traditionally seen this shocking biography as killing Wollstonecraft's reputation and silencing discussion of her for the best part of the next century. However, closer examination of Godwin's framing of Wollstonecraft in the *Memoirs*, and reactions to it in the century that followed, makes visible a complex affective response. This emotionally charged response coexisted with ongoing engagement with Wollstonecraft's political writing, which is traced here in the writing of Goodwyn and Catherine Barmby, William Thompson and Anna Wheeler and John Stuart and Harriet Taylor Mill. This chapter also considers a range of little-studied sources that reflect Wollstonecraft's afterlife in the long nineteenth century, including: Frances Burney's fictionalised portrayal of her as Elinor Joddrell in *The Wanderer* (1814); Percy Bysshe Shelley's allusion to her in *Laon and Cyntha* (1817); periodical essays

by mid-Victorian critics such as George Eliot, Eliza Lynn Linton and Ann Mozley; entries in group biographies written by women such as Mary Pilkington, Mary Mathilda Betham and Anne Katharine Elwood; Charles Kegan Paul's book-length biography *William Godwin, His Friends and Contemporaries* (1876); *fin de siècle* reconsiderations of Wollstonecraft by Margaret Oliphant, Mathilde Blind and Elizabeth Robins Pennell; and first-wave feminist appropriations of her, such as that of Millicent Garrett Fawcett. Using this material, the chapter highlights unrecognised strands of Wollstonecraft's legacy and argues for Godwin's biography as an innovative contribution to Romantic life writing and a pivotal component in Wollstonecraft's affective and intellectual appeal in the nineteenth century.

The third case study looks at the actress, poet and royal mistress Mary Darby Robinson (1758–1800), who spent the bulk of her adult life transforming her public position from sex object to writing subject. Her *Memoirs of the Late Mrs Robinson, Written by Herself* (1801), edited by her daughter and published the year after her death, has been read as an apology for her life. Yet the jarring shifts in tone, gaps in narration and structural inconsistencies caused contemporary readers to doubt its veracity and have led modern critics to regard it as a flawed final attempt to rescue a tarnished reputation. However, this chapter suggests that the formal and rhetorical gaps in the *Memoirs* comprise a nuanced strategy of self-representation that allowed Robinson to straddle the contradictory identities of the victimised heroine of sensibility and the titillating actress. Through analysis of the *Memoirs*; comparison with a similar but lesser-known 'scandal memoir', *The Life of Mrs Gooch* (1792); and examination of Robinson's nineteenth-century afterlife, this chapter demonstrates that it may be the so-called failures of Robinson's *Memoirs* – its interruptions, omissions and contradictions – that made it so influential in shaping and preserving Robinson's posthumous reputation. This chapter makes use of a range of non-canonical sources for considering Robinson's posthumous reputation, including Romantic-period fictionalisations of Robinson's royal affair written by Sarah Green and Pierce Egan; coverage of Robinson in collective biographies by Mary Pilkington, Edward Robins and Mary Craven; periodical essays like Dutton Cook's

'Poor Perdita' (1865); later fictional versions of Robinson's life such as Stanley Makower's *Perdita: A Romance in Biography* (1908) and Elizabeth Barrington's *The Exquisite Perdita* (1926); responses to Robinson in the published work, private manuscripts and personal artefacts of women writers such as Charlotte Dacre, Maria Edgeworth and Violet Fane (the pseudonym of Mary Baroness Currie); and the paratexts of later reprints of the *Memoirs*. These sources show that although Robinson could not erase the scandal of her early years, she was able to reshape reactions to it by taking control of her own story.

The final case study considers Mary Hays (1759–1843), who, from the start of her career, struggled with the problem of writing as a woman. Too womanly, too scandalous or too ridiculous, Hays seemed unable to find a voice that was both authentic and acceptable. It has been suggested that by 1800, Hays had lost control of her reputation, retreated from her former radicalism and turned to didactic literature to support herself. However, this chapter contests the above narrative by examining a range of responses to Hays's early works as well as the creative ways she used fiction, essays and biography later in her career to intervene in her own reception while promoting her political, pedagogical and personal aims. The chapter first examines literary reviews, private responses to Hays in the correspondence of individuals within her Dissenting and radical networks and parodies of her such as can be found in Richard Polwhele's satirical poetry and the fiction of Charles Lloyd and Elizabeth Hamilton; it then turns to her second novel, *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799), *Monthly Magazine* contributions and biographical writings such as 'Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft' (1800) and *Female Biography* (1803). Detailed analysis of the structure and progressive content of *Female Biography* – along with attention to its reception and legacy in the little-known writing of her niece, Matilda Mary Hays (1820–97) – shows that Hays experimented with innovative modes of writing through which she defended her reputation; promoted long-held ideas about the representation, education, and advancement of women; and shaped the genre of life writing for decades to come.

The book ends with a Coda that draws together the analysis of the book's four case studies by turning briefly to Virginia Woolf's

Common Reader collections, published in 1925 and 1932. Like Samuel Johnson, whose ‘common reader’ becomes the central figure of these essays, Woolf envisaged reading as a conversation between reader and writer across the centuries. In these essays, Woolf’s dialogue with her predecessors is often most prominent when she engages with authors of emerging genres, that is, life writing. Woolf’s fascination with life writing is twofold: it allows us to be transported to another time and place, but it also encourages us to create this other world in our imagination. Offering both dissolution and affirmation of identity, life writing has an important place not only in the history of literature but in the history of women’s writing. This chapter uses Woolf’s dialogic engagement with past writers to reflect on the importance of women’s writing and on the interaction between gender, genre and reputation in the long nineteenth century.

Notes

- 1 Joan Didion, ‘7000 Romaine, Los Angeles 38’, in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1969), p. 71.
- 2 Roxane Gay, ‘Not Here to Make Friends’, in *Bad Feminist* (New York, NY: Harper, 2014), p. 85.
- 3 Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi, ‘The Danger of a Single Story’, *TED Global* (2009) www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story (accessed 5 May 2016).
- 4 Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 27.
- 5 Many other women engaged in life writing at this time. Lesser known life writers of the time might include bluestockings such as Mary Berry, court writers like Charlotte Bury, actresses like Sarah Siddons and Dora Jordan, scandal memoirists like Elizabeth Steele and Harriette Wilson or purveyors of spiritual autobiography like Mary Fletcher.
- 6 See Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd edn (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press, 2001).
- 7 See Daniel Cook and Amy Culley, ‘Introduction’, in *Women’s Life Writing, 1700–1850: Gender, Genre and Authorship*, ed. Daniel Cook and Amy Culley (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
- 8 Philippe Lejeune, ‘The Autobiographical Contract’, in *French Literary Theory Today: A Reader*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 193.
- 9 Cook and Culley, ‘Introduction’, p. 1.
- 10 Eugene Stelzig, ‘Introduction’, in *Romantic Autobiography in England*, ed. Eugene Stelzig (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 10.
- 11 Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 152.

- 12 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 25.
- 13 Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject*, p. xiii.
- 14 Tom Mole, 'Introduction', in *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750–1850*, ed. Tom Mole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 12.
- 15 William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 4.
- 16 James Treadwell, *Autobiographical Writing and British Literature, 1783–1834* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 9.
- 17 Laura Marcus, *Auto/Biographical Discourses: Criticism, Theory, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 4; Mary Jean Corbett, qtd in Marcus, *Auto/Biographical Discourses*, p. 29.
- 18 St Clair, for example, finds 'no correlation between reviews, reputations, and sales, or between contemporary and later reputations'. See *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 189.
- 19 Treadwell, *Autobiographical Writing and British Literature*, p. 62.
- 20 On the value of these kinds of sources, see Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject*, p. 25.
- 21 Claire Brock, *The Feminization of Fame, 1750–1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 2; Mole, 'Introduction', p. 11.
- 22 See Mary A. Waters, *British Women Writers and the Profession of Literary Criticism, 1789–1832* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Betty A. Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Linda Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Jennie Batchelor, *Women's Work: Labour, Gender, Authorship, 1750–1830* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).
- 23 Batchelor, *Women's Work*, p. 150.
- 24 Tom Mole, *What the Victorians Made of Romanticism: Material Artifacts, Cultural Practices, and Reception History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 3.
- 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.
- 26 Heather J. Jackson, *Those Who Write for Immortality: Romantic Reputations and the Dream of Lasting Fame* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 43.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 62; p. 106.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 111.
- 29 'Reputation, n', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2018.
- 30 Ben P. Robertson, *Elizabeth Inchbald's Reputation: A Publishing and Reception History* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), p. 3.
- 31 Jackson, *Those Who Write for Immortality*, p. 6.
- 32 William Hazlitt, 'On the Living Poets', qtd in Mole, 'Introduction', p. 2.
- 33 Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 2.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- 35 Tom Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 157.