

*N*ames AND *S*tories



EMILIA DILKE AND VICTORIAN CULTURE

Kali Israel

NAMES AND STORIES



Emilia Dilke, by Hubert von Herkomer, 1887. By courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

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and
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KALI ISRAEL

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To Arthur Lee Potts
and to Paul Israel

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NAMES AND STORIES

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INTRODUCTION

Genres of Life-Writing

Life Stories

After her death in October 1904, Emilia Dilke was memorialized as an “exceptional woman” by diverse mourners. Involved with the Women’s Trade Union League from its foundation in 1874, Dilke had been its president from 1886 until her death; accordingly, the *Women’s Trade Union Review*, the League’s journal, grieved as “her colleagues in the work to which she devoted the larger part of her life and the choicest powers of her fine intellect,” regretting the loss of “one . . . fitted, as few human beings . . . to fill the post of leader in a crusade against the tyranny of social tradition and the callousness of social indifference.” Her funeral was attended by representatives of the Trades Union Congress and the Miners’ Federation and by such trade-union luminaries as Mary Macarthur and Ben Tillett. Their testimonials spoke of trade-unionism as “[her life’s] chief enthusiasm, its ruling aim and purpose.” The *Review* printed letters of mourning from dozens of individuals and organizations in the labor movement along with plans for a memorial fund to support the League’s work.¹ But a year after her death, an anonymous article entitled “The Art-Work of Lady Dilke” appeared in the *Quarterly Review*.² The writer intersperses a discussion of Dilke’s eight volumes of art history with long laments that she had spent her energy on anything else. She had “sacrificed precious hours and months of a too brief life to a benevolent mission which might have been fulfilled by others,” neglecting her “unique vocation.”³ Her trade-unionist and feminist work are positioned by this writer as an unfortunate distraction from more exalted intellectual labors.

Organized labor and this admirer of Dilke’s art history agree on one thing: the fullness of the life. Similarly, in his “Memoir” of Emilia Dilke, her widower, Charles

Dilke, evokes a woman of wide interests and activities, although he does not represent them as conflicting.⁴ Virtually on her deathbed, Emilia Dilke chats about politics as she opens a letter “from Tokio, thank[ing] her for . . . [her work] for the Japanese wounded, and widows and orphans,” then “jot[s] down notes on some tapestries” recently seen, referring occasionally to thick reference books.⁵ Unlike those who perceived only one aspect of Emilia Dilke, Charles Dilke contends that this life was whole, offering as evidence others’ words: “She had it all—beauty, bounty of heart, high intelligence, simplicity. How could anyone not cherish this special woman, so absolutely complete and unique.”⁶ Emilia Dilke’s greatness encompasses her femininity, her exemplary wifehood, and her public activities in politics and scholarship. Charles Dilke’s memoir argues for Emilia Dilke’s place in these canonical and intimate histories and contends that her multifaceted consistency was itself extraordinary: despite her “apparently distinct spheres of activity . . . [her] lives were one.”⁷ Charles Dilke rests his claim for the value of Emilia Dilke’s life—and the value of his “Memoir”—on her status as a thoroughgoing and unified “exceptional woman.” His emphasis on this rare creature’s love for and happiness with him also renders Dilke an “exceptional man” by association; he proclaims, “I alone shared both lives and knew all the friends, and thus of necessity the duty [of writing her life] has fallen to me.”⁸

Charles Dilke’s text is not only privileged but privileging; in reading, it covertly suggests, we too can survey the whole life and gain a comprehension of Emilia Dilke. But Charles Dilke’s memoir’s stress on the continuity of Emilia Dilke’s character contains the possibilities of narrative even as it tells its story. In its paradigmatically biographical logic, the “Memoir” insists that all the subject’s qualities were visible from her childhood and youth, and that while “no influence ever ended,” events and changes were subordinated to an ongoing inner being. All Emilia Dilke’s activities were marked by her qualities of “overmastering sense of duty, and an unfailing courage—little short of sublime.”⁹ This continuous, unified, life story is morally and aesthetically uplifting, but among the letters Charles Dilke received on the publication of the “Memoir,” reiterating commiserations on his loss of such a “noble,” “learned,” “really unique” woman, one noted his account’s tendency to stasis. Reading Dilke’s memoir had been like “looking at certain Greek Statues.”¹⁰

Fixing the subject, especially in a heroic position, is generic to obituaries and family memoirs, but Dilke’s “Memoir” reminds us that conventions shape biographical writing more broadly, including the obvious and highly Victorian instance of the *Dictionary of National Biography*.¹¹ The DNB overtly privileges the events of a life in the “public realm,” but private events or emotionally revealing passages are often smuggled in, to be savored all the more for the whiff of transgression. As it happens, Emilia Dilke is among the relatively few women included in the DNB, and her entry suggests how uneasy may be the fit between the generic conventions of genre and imaginable stories, and it also signals Emilia Dilke’s location in both official histories and other enticingly emotional, intimate, and gendered narratives. Dilke’s entry, by Sidney Lee, is a *mélange* of births, marriages, deaths, friendships with Great Men—Ruskin, Browning, Prince Leopold, William Morris—and references to scandalous marriages.¹² From 1861 to 1885, Emilia Dilke had been Mrs. Mark Pattison, wife of the much older and famously embittered Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford, who was much older than she; she then married Sir Charles Dilke, a Liberal parliamentary star, just

as his career was radically reorganized by a lurid sex scandal in 1885. The status of “Lady Dilke” in the cultural imagination derives from these marriages as much as from her political and scholarly work; Lee’s essay wavers between slightly disreputable gossip, claims for her importance by association with famous men, and a catalogue of her contributions to knowledge and the public weal, which come across as laudable but slightly dull. Her volumes of French art history are dutifully listed but the judgment that “her critical powers were inferior to her industry” appears as if one fact among others, sandwiched between publication dates. Her fiction—two and a half volumes of short stories—is granted brief notice for “originality,” while her social reform activities serve to demonstrate the fineness of her moral character. But if Lee’s sketch easily, even glibly, demonstrates how tenuous are distinctions between fact and interpretation, its exclusions and incoherences—like the obituarists’ and grieving widower’s text—make visible the partiality of reading and writing lives.

These memorial texts—obituaries, DNB entries, and memoirs—share another feature, both banal and provocative: they must name their subject, settling on a signifier that allows easy reference in alphabetical lists. But for Emilia Dilke, names seem less to stabilize a subject than to dramatize the mobility of identity. David Lodge, writing about novels, suggests, “[f]or an author to openly change his mind about the name of a character, in mid-text, is a particularly blatant admission that the whole story is ‘made up,’ something readers know but usually suppress, as religious believers suppress their doubts. . . . One may hesitate and agonize about the choice of a name, but once made, it becomes inseparable from the character, and to question it seems to throw the whole project *en abyme*, as the deconstructionists say.” Lodge claims writers assume the meaningfulness of names; while it is not “customary for novelists to explain the connotations of the names they give to their characters . . . such suggestions are supposed to work subliminally on the reader’s consciousness.”¹³ Yet if the public name under which the subject of this book died—Lady Dilke—is a rich signifier of class and gender meanings, it is also wholly inadequate. “Emilia Dilke” preserved the initial of her patronymic name—an “S.” at the middle of her signature—through her marriages, according to Charles Dilke, in order to “mark her wish for some recognition of the independent existence of the woman, and in some resistance to the old English doctrine of complete merger in the husband.”¹⁴ In this narrative, a name (or at least its trace) establishes the continuity and autonomy of the self, but Lodge suggests that while names are crucial to the making of stories, naming continually threatens to give away the fictionality of stories in which readers are meant to believe. Names can be changed by choice and imagination, in secret decisions and intimate texts as well as by marital contracts, and they bear meanings beyond their legal status.

“Emilia Dilke” was christened Emily Francis Strong and known by her middle name through her childhood as the daughter of an army officer-cum-bank-manager in Iffley, near Oxford, and her days as an art student in London. Then, in her first marriage, she was Francis Pattison or Mrs. Mark Pattison, while her published works of art history and criticism were neutrally signed E. F. S. Pattison. More: in the 1870s she privately changed her first name to Emilia, a renomination made public when she remarried in 1885; by that marriage she also became Lady Dilke. Compounding and emphasizing this knot of naming and narrating, private names, pet names, nicknames,

and past names continued to circulate within specific relationships even after they had been formally or publicly eschewed. Nomination and narration combine and contend: each name did work—denoted a subject in a story of professional activities, marriage, and politics—and masked other names and narratives.¹⁵

Names and stories constitute a character by significations and by evasions. Like her names, the partial and conflicting stories of Emilia Dilke's life freeze her and reveal her mobility. Emilia Dilke's names can be inserted into many stories: the histories of women, feminists, intellectuals, trade unionists, Liberals and Labour politicians, Oxonians, happily and unhappily married people, good and bad parents, writers, artists, students, critics, art historians, and actors in Victorian sexual scandals. All of these histories are important; they often intersect. In some of these stories, her character is active and "significant"; in others, she appears marginal, wrong-headed, atypical, or odd. Moreover, besides this heteronomous movement through diverse historical narratives, Emilia Dilke circulated in a variety of fictional stories during and after her lifetime. Stories were told about her as a person who had been made into a character. That is, a number of overtly fictional works were said to contain characters based on her. The most famous and controversial of these attributions is the character of Dorothea in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, but other novels include Rhoda Broughton's *Belinda* (1883); Andrew Lang alluded to the story of the two novels' purported sharing of models by writing a series of fictional letters between the protagonists of *Middlemarch* and *Belinda*. W. H. Mallock's *The New Republic: Or Culture, Faith, and Philosophy in an English Country-house* (1877), Mrs. Humphry Ward's *Robert Elsmere* (1888), and perhaps her *Lady Connie* (1888) also contain characters associated with Francis Pattison, and the Pattison marriage has been suggested as an inspiration for a poem by Robert Browning. In at least one case, Emilia Dilke actively collaborated with a novelist, in Hector Malot's *Vices Français* (1887). In the twentieth century Robert Liddell's *The Almond Tree* (1938) and Betty Askwith's *The Tangled Web* (1960) tell stories that intersect with Emilia Dilke's two marriages. Michael Dyne-Bradley placed Emilia Dilke on stage in his play *The Right Honourable Gentleman*.¹⁶ Nor did Emilia Dilke just allegedly pose for others; she wrote short stories, a disguised memoir in an essay on positivism, art history and criticism, essays on women's participation in and exclusion from economic and political life, and she participated in making paintings and photographs. In Emilia Dilke's circulation as both a cultural figure and a cultural actor, the distinction between the two grows unclear. Her public attitude to the works in which others saw her ranged from amusement to studied indifference (she claimed not to have read *Middlemarch*—an assertion even Charles Dilke doubted—and regarded allusions to it as "an unpardonable offense"), but at least one contemporary suspected a culpable process of self-imagination: Margaret Oliphant remarked caustically after a visit to Oxford that Francis Pattison "considers herself the model of Dorothea."¹⁷

More stories: J. E. C. Bodley, Charles Dilke's one-time private secretary and a possible author of the *Quarterly Review* essay on Emilia Dilke's art-historical writing, criticized Charles Dilke's memoir for including too much emphasis on "her labours—writing & public engagements." Charles's emphasis on Emilia Dilke's achievements was a distraction from her essence—which could be better portrayed through the inclusion of descriptions of their houses and such pathetic touches as the mourning of her dog after her death; Charles Dilke had, in Bodley's view, "let her be seen

almost solely ‘*en representation*.’”¹⁸ Bodley’s diminishment of Emilia Dilke’s public and professional activities was inflected by his own politics, but it also attests a faith in the severability of Emilia Dilke’s life *en representation* from her real—private, emotional, feminine—life, which was for Bodley the real ground of her exceptionality. Charles Dilke’s memoir also drew criticism from Maria Theresa Earle, an old friend of Emilia Dilke. For Earle, Dilke’s memoir failed as a “psychological study,” not only as a natural effect of his love for his late wife but because Charles had failed to capture the “strangeness” of Emilia Dilke’s life.¹⁹ More recently, while writing this book, I spoke to a noted British feminist historian of working-class women, families, the state, and labor. She told me a story: when she was a graduate student, she was asked by a well-known art historian and critic what she was “working on.” He agreed that her studies of working-class women were important and valuable but suggested she might enjoy a topic with “passion” (and, by implication, romance and sex) “like Lady Dilke.” Setting aside the assumption that writing the history of working-class women is an unpassionate business, the ironies of this story remain dizzying. Emilia Dilke’s role as a feminist trade unionist complicates the separation of “topics” presumed by the art historian’s suggestion, while the suggestion that the history of women could be a gratifyingly exciting making of stories about exceptional characters echoes Bodley’s and Earle’s objections to Charles Dilke’s memoir.²⁰

My project will not satisfy the interlocutors in these stories. I am interested in the resources of stories—how they create, contain, extend, multiply, and make lives. The life of the woman who became Emilia Dilke was strange, or, put differently, exceptional. But I approach Emilia Dilke neither as a story of a remarkable individual nor as a set of representations to be “read through” for the revelation of a real self, but as exceptionally useful material for considering the relationships between lives, images, and stories. Emilia Dilke resided and survives in representations. Her life offers an extreme occasion for thinking about how a life may be caught up in texts—those that explicitly name and rename her and in imagined associations with fiction.

My work converges with several recent innovative life studies of exceptional women by feminist literary critics, especially the works of Biddy Martin on Lou Andreas-Salome, Jacqueline Rose on Sylvia Plath, and Toril Moi on Simone de Beauvoir.²¹ Rose, Martin, and Moi refuse to separate “works” from “lives” and insist that their subjects cannot be severed from the texts that surround them, comment on them, criticize them, and make them into objects of knowledge.²² These scholars also demonstrate that reading texts closely for multiple and subterranean meanings enriches intellectual history, as writings come to be understood as generated, enabled, and disabled by writers’ positions in powerful institutions and discourses.²³ My overriding goal, however, is not to locate Emilia Dilke in a critical pantheon alongside other famous women, but to use her as a site for analysis of nineteenth-century Britain. I show that the texts of her life are interesting and useful for multiple modes of historical scholarship, not because they should be canonical but because they allow us to read across public and private, political and intellectual, aesthetic and autobiographical histories.

Emilia Dilke offers a series of specifically Victorian nexes to generate understanding of Victorian culture. For example, Charles Dilke’s account of Francis Strong Pattison’s religious development need not be read only as a true or false account of an individ-

ual's spiritual subjectivity but can be considered in relation to other stories he tells about faith and doubt, women, intellect, and love, stories that participate in wider historical projects of constructing cultural and political efficacies for bourgeois men. Other scholars have examined the circulation of images of and around Victorian "public" women like Florence Nightingale, Ellen Terry, Alice Liddell, or the Queen, whose lives were continuously refracted through multiple mirrors of contemporary texts, artworks, and fields of representation.²⁴ Like such women, Emilia Dilke was never "representative," but her status as representation is nearly paradigmatic because of her specificity and her fictionality, her elusiveness and scattering.²⁵

Throughout this book, I write not about what people felt or thought but about what they said and wrote and did, and I write about stories about feelings and thoughts. For example, I read Emilia Dilke's stories about marriage as narratives that reveal competing and incomplete ways of representing, undertaking, or escaping marriage in nineteenth-century Britain, rather than as deposits to be excavated for truths about a specific marriage. I read and write stories of visions, angels, madness, furniture, missionaries, gin, and walls, and stories in which class, gender, nation, and empire offer violence and everyday pleasures. I do not force these texts into alignment, whether to construct a story of a singular self or to attain closure in a unified history. Rather, Emilia Dilke is a point of entry into a range of historical and contemporary issues and an incitement to consider the relations—contradictions and reversals as well as homologies and importations—of diverse political, intellectual, social, and aesthetic histories.²⁶

One text by the woman who became Emilia Dilke struggles to represent a life that inhabits and confounds "aesthetic" and "political" categories; like Charles Dilke's "Mémorial" (and many more recent biographies of diverse figures), it does so by emphasizing personal exceptionality. E. F. S. Pattison's 1879 *Renaissance of Art in France* concludes with a gripping account of the Renaissance ceramicist Bernard Palissy. A hero, emblem, site of mourning and loss, and figure in many histories, Pattison's Palissy is "artist and Huguenot" as well as scientist and political thinker; "the same spring of initiative energy" leads him to engage in a "search after the secrets of nature and art" and "the secrets of social and political life." Palissy brings "the same uncompromising determination" and desire to "push to the innermost centre" to spiritual, political, and artistic pursuits. As with Lady Dilke in Charles Dilke's "Memoirs", Palissy's ability to move across fields is grounded in his own character—"opinaître," "strong," "self-reliant," "outspoken," "self-confident," he is never "servile" to tradition or place. Yet Pattison's Palissy is doubly historically indicative: he is an embodiment of "national" character and, when he dies of "want, misery, and ill-treatment" at the age of eighty, persecuted and imprisoned, an epochal story ends. The brutal throwing of his body to dogs is the end of Pattison's French Renaissance.²⁷

I both refuse and follow the leads given by E. F. S. Pattison's account of her polymathic Palissy. I do not attempt a comprehensive study of the works of Pattison/Dilke nor produce her as a subject whose works across genres are unified by the power of a personality. My goal is not to reconcile, to abolish differences or contradictions, nor to offer a synecdoche of a nation, era, or "Victorian women." Yet, as E. F. S. Pattison's story of Palissy provocatively ranges across genres and histories while arguing that threads of commonality surface and submerge, I move across Pattison/

Dilke's works, traversing genres—from trade-unionist speeches, to art-critical essays, to private love letters. Following these changing names offers traces of many productive and partial pasts, but Dilke's dispersal also prompts the development of a model of historical writing that foregrounds representation, narrative, figuration, and intertextual analysis. Emilia Dilke's stories offer spaces to grapple with widely troubling, as well as historically specific, questions about writing, lives, and historical knowledge, and to think about life-reading and life-writing as the examination of the stories that make up lives.²⁸

Recursions and Mutations

The large structure of this book is its constant attention to stories—produced, enacted, written, circulated, recounted, read, retold, believed, and doubted. Within this frame, as in the double helix of a DNA molecule, elements recur in varied combinations, producing both repetition and mutation in twisting lines. France and Oxford; gender and class, childhood and families; pictures and ekphrasis; names and places; education, work, art, institutions, and politics; violence and pleasure; marriage, adultery, and death; style and performance—these terms and others combine and recombine, interlocking and sometimes surprising as they move across contexts and carry accumulated associations across different discourses and genres.

In 1913, Elizabeth Robins impatiently contended,

[The] Exceptional Woman is one of our chief obstacles . . . because *she is a Drug in the Market!* I can scarcely find one of my sex whom someone has not been ready to persuade of her Exceptionalness! . . . Those who were "great ladies" by the accident of birth, or the chance of marriage; those who were successful artists, able to command a hearing—practically all who had some measure of liberty, seem to have lived in the fog of this old illusion. They were "Exceptions," not merely in opportunity or in gifts, but in the essentials which lie behind these things.²⁹

The first three chapters of this book engage with "exceptional" children and young people, taking up Robins's challenge to include the production of exceptionality while also attending to the making of stories. These chapters tell family stories. Chapter 1, "On Not Being an Orphan," reads the stories about families that circulate around Francis Strong's childhood and considers the ways in which those who wrote about Francis Strong both provide stories of family heritages and separate her from her sisters and mother to endow her with the status of exceptional child. This chapter also examines Emilia Dilke's later political deployments of personal narratives about class, empire, and family life; Dilke's texts claim that such large categories are both constitutive of and escapable through individual subjectivity and adult politics. I then consider Francis Strong's and her sisters' educations. I argue that Francis's exceptionality resides in her privilege, but I also raise an elusive possibility by considering stories of uncanny psychological and physiological peculiarities and experiences, stories that enticingly gesture toward irrecoverable narratives of gender and pain.

In chapter 2, "Pictures and Lessons," I consider stories about Francis Strong making

and being made into pictures and raise several themes that will recur: style, aestheticization, and women's places in institutions that both included and marginalized them. I begin by showing more fully Francis Strong's position of privilege in local communities, placing her childhood education in art in a wider cultural history of local Oxford art culture, especially Oxford's privileged relation to Pre-Raphaelitism. I then move to London for another set of stories about access to artistic resources, beginning with another family story. I read Charles Dilke's family culture as both highly privileged and as a condensation of wider developments in gender and modernity, especially the construction of a modern metropolitan masculinity that blended politics with high culture and aesthetic sensitivity, privileged heterosociality, offered resources to some women, and maintained gendered divisions. I then examine the institutions of art and education in which Charles Dilke and Francis Strong met, especially the South Kensington Art School, to map art education as a site of conflict about gender, class, and access to state resources, knowledge about bodies, and professional careers. I consider women's status as artists and their circulation as figures of art by looking at accounts that depict Francis Strong as an art student as a vivid visual and aesthetic object, an object of male patronage, and a woman artist producing female figures. Yet I conclude by considering another exceptional woman's disappearance.

Chapter 3, "Making a Marriage," while continuing the exploration of narratives of exceptionality, is also the first of two chapters organized around marriage stories. *Middlemarch* haunts this chapter, as a story by which some contemporaries thought they could make sense of the 1860 marriage of Mark Pattison and Francis Strong, as the story from which some of Mark Pattison's life writers have sought to rescue him, and as an instance of a wider genre of stories about young women marrying for knowledge. But this chapter begins with more family stories, this time in the register of Gothic horror. I recount some stories about the Pattison family in Yorkshire and Oxford, and read these tales of patriarchal madness, violence, faith, and the ends of education through the lenses of gender and class. The stories of Mark Pattison's marriage to Francis Strong are thus placed in a longer set of family stories, not simply in order to produce a longer psychological history for Mark Pattison but to argue that seemingly extreme stories condense more normative violences. I move from accounts of the gendered privileges and pains of education in the Pattison family to the gendered institutions of knowledge in Oxford and argue that marriage in Oxford was peculiar, exceptional, extreme, and illuminative of the structure of Victorian marriage more generally. These examinations of the local organizations of gender and knowledge form a framework for understanding the Pattison marriage beyond exceptionality, despite its notorious inscriptions in novels. But the final section of this chapter returns to fiction by examining Charles Dilke's use of *Middlemarch* as an intertextual guarantor of his own tales and by reading Emilia Dilke's fictional stories of seductions and of marriage as a Faustian bargain by idealistic and doomed women. I read these Dilke stories as instances in a wider genre of happy and unhappy stories about women entering unequal marriages as a route to knowledge, rather than as encryptions of the "truth" of the Pattison marriage. Throughout this chapter, education, and the lives it makes possible, is a terrain of desire in which men and women, but especially women, risk violence and death. Reading the murder in Emilia Dilke's stories of Oxford

does not supercede reading caginess or confidence in other stories Dilke told about women's agency in the institutions they inhabit. Or vice versa.

Chapter 4, "Bodies," focuses on stories about bodies and bodies of stories, again moving through three sections: first, an examination of Francis Pattison/Emilia Dilke's texts about sex in marriage; second, a reading of the "adulterous" texts and tales by and around Francis Pattison's relationship with Charles Dilke and Mark Pattison's relationship with Meta Bradley; and third, a discussion of stories about Mark Pattison's death. Francis Pattison's letters to Mark Pattison narrate conjugal sexuality as an area of deep conflict, but conflict is also waged within these letters between rhetorics of self-assertion and self-punishment. In fictional stories by Emilia Dilke, too, female bodies are both vulnerable stakes and grounds of resistance. I argue that these texts suggest the usability of the language of sexual bodies in combats about gender in public and private institutions. In the second section, I consider the adulterous narratives into which two relationships were inscribed; I explore them not in order to resolve questions of sexual conduct and sexual culpability but to argue that possibly adulterous relationships were not concealed but constituted by uneven and unequal movement between rhetorics of familial relations, pedagogy, politics, comradeship, spirituality, and friendship as well as eros. The third set of stories I tell circle the dying body of Mark Pattison: Francis Pattison's texts about Mark's death; Emilia Pattison's attempts to use Mark Pattison's will to open new narrative possibilities for women; and Emilia Dilke's fictional stories about the deaths of male scholars. Although this chapter tells many stories about bodily pains as they circulated in texts, it has a comic coda: a narrative of arguments about bodies of texts, as the stories of the Pattison marriage were fought over, censored, locked up, unlocked, and made into fiction's fodder long after the sexual and mortal bodies of all concerned had been buried or burnt.

Chapter 5, "The Resources of Style," again reads scandalous Oxford stories, doubling back to stories told about Francis Pattison in Oxford and to the issues of figuration raised in chapter 2. Francis Pattison was depicted in a variety of Oxford texts as transgressive, provocative, and memorable, her "femininity" written in highly visual language. I consider these representations as emblems of tensions around the increasing heterosociality of Oxford and examine the ways in which Mrs. Pattison's figure was marked as extravagant, sexual, artificial, and evasive of local assignments of status and identity. I draw on poststructuralist feminist and queer-theoretical analyses of gender as performance in order to suggest the scandalousness of Francis Pattison's ultrafeminine enactments, but I also argue for a historically specific understanding of the uses of sexual and aesthetic style. I read the texts that depict Francis Pattison's "otherness" in Oxford in terms of class, nation, aristocracy, in relation to British constructions of France, the specific theatrical context of Oxford University, and instabilities in Oxonian economies of gender, sexuality, and prestige. Yet, after doubling back in the first half of this chapter to issues raised earlier, I look forward by considering the ways in which Francis Pattison's enactments of femininity, intellectuality, Frenchness, and aristocracy could be recuperated into conservative discourses of gender and class. I then explore the limitations on access to the resources of style in Emilia Dilke's own feminism, reading some of Dilke's texts on trade unionism and her practices of educating other women.

Chapter 6, “French Vices,” continues the themes of performance, France, and scandal, and the work of femininity in narratives of class that I explored in chapter 5, while also returning to the construction of adulterous narratives and stories about sex. The widowed Emilia Pattison married Charles Dilke in 1885, just as he was named as corespondent in one of the most spectacular divorce cases of the late nineteenth century. The “case” of Virginia Crawford and Charles Dilke has been repeatedly told, worried over, and staged in a variety of texts and media ever since, but my consideration of possible adulteries again forswears attempts to solve questions of sexual culpability and emphasizes the proliferation of stories. I discuss the stories told between and by Charles and Emilia, before and after their marriage, but then focus on the public competition of narratives by Dilkes and Crawfords, judges and newspaper writers, feminists and Liberals. I analyze the ways diverse texts construct plausibility and agency, sexual pleasure and sexual danger, and make claims about their audiences. Anxieties and hatreds of class, nation, and religion, as well as gender and sexuality, circulated through the case’s stories, and each plotting of the case struggled both to contain and to draw upon crosscutting social, cultural, and political categories. I move, however, from the competition of narratives within the case to a reconsideration of the case’s significance by looking at the continued political careers of both Dilkes and especially the deployments of the figure of Emilia Dilke as a victim, accomplice, heroine, or fool. As in chapter 4, I emphasize the *usability* of sex, this time in the production and enactment of virtuous politics in the public sphere. I conclude by examining another marriage story: Gertrude Tuckwell’s account of Emilia and Charles Dilke’s marriage makes the Dilke household an institution, a site of labor and pleasure, a setting for aesthetic and political activity, and above all, a happy ending that underwrites a politics of the future. I suggest that Tuckwell’s story of the Dilkes also smuggles in a “marriage” story of her own in which politics and eros are joined.

The final chapter, “Renaissances,” is a microcosm of the book as a whole. I read across Pattison/Dilke’s art-writings to follow some crucial terms and place them in relation to works in other genres, focusing on Francis Pattison/Emilia Dilke’s stories of the Renaissance as an object of historical knowledge and a site of contemporary political meanings. Pattison/Dilke’s history of art is a history of institutions that enable and confine, and her texts repeatedly thematize violence, pleasure, nature, and desire, and represent “the self” as a site of boundless knowledge. Her Renaissance’s mobility and its repetitions suggest that we understand these texts as intersecting, riven, fruitful, and symptomatic, rather than concocting a figure of a unified feminist intellectual, weighing the adequacy of Dilke’s art-historical scholarship, or appraising the consistency of her social thought. Endings are frequent and ambiguous in Emilia Dilke’s past and projected histories and the stories told around her—and in my text as well.

Claims and Refusals

This book engages a number of ongoing historiographies, including the history of nineteenth-century feminism, the history of art discourses, and the history of Oxford. Some of my analyses—for example, of the impossible position of Victorian women

intellectuals in Oxford or the competition of sexual stories in public political debates—may illuminate questions about “the economy of intellectual prestige” with obvious continuing relevance.³⁰ But I also hope to model historical and analytic practices usable and translatable to other places and projects, not the model of life-writing but an example of writing about the historically variable modes and materials of figuring selves and writing lives. “Emilia Dilke” is both a figure in a variety of Victorian histories and a figure of possibilities. Because this book participates in a larger scholarly conversation, I want to briefly expand on my theoretical framework, enabling readers to understand the choices I seek to enact.³¹

This book rests upon both contentions and refusals. It is not a biography or a “life” of Emilia Dilke but an examination of the stories and texts that constitute her.³² I do not sort through texts to judge them as more or less truthful reflections of a “real” and retrievable person, but to delineate multiple representations of Emilia Dilke in their relations to each other; to Emilia Dilke’s own texts; to texts in which she wrote of others’ readings of her; to facts that constrain interpretation and revision; and to other contemporary and historical stories. These multiplex texts are not temporary refractions of an original person who can be reconstructed separate from the stories she inhabited.³³ Texts are not just something to read through in order to see history on the other side; what texts—novels, newspapers, memoirs, histories, criticism, and library records—do is history. Historians can read stories and past readings (including women’s readings of stories about them) to understand figuration and narration as constitutive historical processes.³⁴

In considering the texts that claim Emilia Dilke, including her own and mine, as complex narratives blending fact and fiction, I heed Liz Stanley’s call for feminist biographers to enable readers to make visible in their text their “acts of understanding” and foreground interpretive choices.³⁵ I also discuss the partiality and provisionality of texts and the ways in which “evidence” was made—preserved selectively, guarded, lost, and found in institutions and discourses. No document or artifact can be considered “raw,” unprocessed and unmodified by time and human agency, and I provide readers with information about the circumstances that have shaped the survival and form of my evidence and the erasures and *oubliettes* of archival histories.³⁶ The most vivid example of editorial cooking is the case of Charles Dilke’s engagement books: as correspondent in a sensational divorce trial, Dilke made a notoriously bad impression by presenting in evidence diaries in which many pages were topped and tailed, had jagged edges, or even had holes cut out of the middle. He excised names and engagements, and claimed that he did so in order to “reduce the bulk” of the books. Yet if Dilke was concealing incriminating information, he did so astonishingly publicly, sometimes sitting in the House of Commons library chopping out bits of his diary and dropping the debris into the upturned hat at his feet.³⁷ Such performances of discretion are extreme but many of the archival materials safely housed in the Bodleian and British Libraries have been at least as deliberately transformed—letters and diaries meticulously mutilated with scissors and eraser.³⁸ As in obituaries and other retrospectively tactful accounts, readers may detect ghosts and undercurrents that eluded the control of their authors; we can fill in some gaps and *rasurae* in these pillaged texts and discern patterns of deletion, rhetorics of erasure

and denial that, like photographic negatives offer historical evidence, but the contingency of textual creation and preservation are part of my analysis. Fragmented, motivated, and accidental texts make up Emilia Dilke's life.

I stress the textuality—the metaphoricity, linguistic complexity, and especially the narrativity—of the materials I read. Many scholars have noted the pervasiveness and importance of narrative as it shapes historical writing, autobiography, and biography, but my method surmises that source texts too—including “primary sources” as well as previous historical accounts—participate in and evoke larger narratives, albeit often incompletely.³⁹ I view diaries and private letters as sites of story making just as much as published novels or historical accounts, rather than assuming that “private” texts are more truthful or offer more immediate access to “experience” than “public” ones. In attending to narrative, I also join scholars across disciplines who argue that the powers of narrative are not limited to making textual meanings. Stories and the historically varying shapes within which stories can be told attempt “to seduce their readers into thinking and desiring in textually specified ways.”⁴⁰ That is, stories are not just post hoc accounts within which we construct meaning afterward; they organize perception and delineate possible ways of thinking, acting, and being.⁴¹ As Alan Sinfield says, “They make sense for us—of us—because we have been and are in them . . . we come to consciousness in their terms . . . certain interpretations of experience strike us as plausible because they fit with what we have experienced already.”⁴² “No narrative is finally capable of determining its reading subjects or of controlling precisely how it will be read,” but stories offer limited and historically variable possibilities for being and action, repertoires of persons to be as well as things to think, multiple but finite “plausible” means of understanding and acting, subject positions and trajectories.⁴³ People enact as well as write stories they inherit, learn, are imprisoned by, recast, and renew. Most of all, stories do not arise from unfettered imagination but through powerful social institutions; narratives are not reducible to authorial intention.

Attention to narratives as a form of historical enquiry can find precedents in Victorian discourses. In an essay on her former drawing teacher, William Mulready, Emilia Dilke suggested that among the lessons she learned from Mulready was a theory of history and subjectivity. Her essay retells a scene in which Mulready narrated himself as confined and mutilated by his time:

I think he felt that . . . a fresh tide had set in, bringing wider possibilities to English art and an encouraging stimulus of general interest unknown to the days of his youth. There were traces, too, of unexpressed regret that so much should have been missed, and of the thought that if things had been other than they were in his own time he might have come nearer to the fulfilment of his own aspirations, and those aspirations themselves might have found a wider outlook.⁴⁴

Dilke's Mulready teaches, alongside a theory that individuals possess inherent traits, a suggestion that the shape of desires themselves may be made by the social and cultural order. Victorian concepts of selfhood were not unified, and diverse theories and rhetorics of selfhood coexisted; Victorian cultural discourses illuminatingly display tensions about the relations between selves and stories. Anthony Trollope said, “In our lives we are always weaving novels, and we manage to keep the different tales

distinct.”⁴⁵ *Middlemarch* itself begins with a complex prelude on the satisfactions, limitations, and necessity of stories for lives:

Theresa's passionate, ideal nature demanded an epic life: what were many-volumed romances of chivalry and the social conquests of a brilliant girl to her? . . . Many Theresas have been born who found for themselves no epic life wherein there was a constant unfolding of far-resonant action; perhaps only a life of mistakes . . . perhaps a tragic failure which found no sacred poet and sank unwept into oblivion.⁴⁶

In *Adam Bede*, too, Eliot wrote of the necessity of stories to make desires: “Hetty had never read a novel. How, then, could she find a shape for her expectations?”⁴⁷ Or, as Virginia Woolf suggested, “women and fiction might mean . . . women and what they are like; or it might mean women and the fiction that is written about them; or it might mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together.”⁴⁸

The fields of narrative within which Emilia Dilke and other historical actors were emplotted—the stories they told and the stories they enacted—were not monolithic; they include, to borrow Raymond Williams's categories, hegemonic, oppositional, alternative, and residual narratives.⁴⁹ Because they are social, narratives collide and conflict as well as reinforce and reiterate each other; some are authorized and others are not, some prestigious and others marginal.⁵⁰ Michel Foucault warned that disciplinary discourses, especially psychology or sociology but perhaps history as well, may produce life-stories in order to lay them alongside of and ratify larger narratives that are then, conversely, “proven” by the life.⁵¹ Crudely “symptomatic” lives are the obverse of stories of exceptionality; they recall Virginia Woolf's comment when she was contemplating writing a novel about Byron: “wanting to build up my imaginary figure with every scrap I could find . . . suddenly the figure turns to merely one of the usual dead.”⁵² Although I place Emilia Dilke in larger narratives, for example, of class or gender, I also attend to the ways in which lives may cut athwart or be oblique to normalizing structures.⁵³ But the complexity and continual reformulation of hegemonic discourses do not mean their absence; as Foucault also argued, the constitutive power of discourses includes shaping resistances and counternarratives.⁵⁴

My emphasis on narrative as a site of historical enquiry is thus different from the use of narrative in some other feminist writing, especially from the trope of self-creation.⁵⁵ Phyllis Rose has sweepingly represented all selfhood as a process of literary self-construction that follows the conventions of the realist novel to achieve greater or lesser aesthetic completeness: “Each of us, influenced perhaps by one ideology or another, generates our own plot.”⁵⁶ Life-writing, for Rose, is therefore a matter of discerning the actions of an agency-laden self making its story, and biography is a form of aesthetic criticism: lives are to be judged by the degree to which they emulate *Bildungsromane*.⁵⁷ Rose's position is extreme, but narratives of self-making are common in feminist biographical writing. Such stories covertly posit a hidden but choice-laden self, constrained but not constituted by history, who constructs “the” self. This hidden agent is the woman behind the curtain even as the reader's attention is directed toward the visual and narrative pleasures of the Emerald City.

My aim is not to produce a story of a successful project of “self-creation” in Emilia Dilke's life but to explore the continuous, shifting, and temporary process of *figuration*—the ways in which historically specific discourses construct selves and stories.⁵⁸

I offer not an account of a subject's self-production but a series of accounts of the production of a subject in sentences, stories, and accounts—acting, acted on, heroic or victimized, thinking, feeling, embracing, refusing, colluding, despairing, desiring—but not stably locatable outside of sentences and stories, not covertly exercising control or free choice, not continuous across texts and readerships. Moreover, an array of material constraints—not reducible to access to cash—limits access to stories and produces discontinuities in lives. Multiple and contradictory subject positions are made by social, economic, and political structures, and people have uneven access to narrative resources. Victorian culture was constituted and fractured by divisions, fascinated by and hostile to differences, in life and fiction. Eschewing the quest for continuity allows attention to how dis-solutions, dis-integrations, and aporias in life stories expose historical contradictions.⁵⁹

In reading the texts of Emilia Dilke's life in a number of specific histories—the institutions of Victorian intellectual life, the tense historical relations of feminism and labor movements, debates about the relationships between art and the state, and others—I move freely across genres and discourses even while stressing textuality. I locate texts in their genres and sometimes argue that particular genres generate particular costs or effects, and I show that some discourses are more powerful than others. But I subordinate structural to intertextual analysis, tracing the movement of plot elements across genres and discourses. Emphasizing the mobility of tropes and themes, I also refuse to force judgments about priority. Rather than arguing that one discourse creates or “in the last analysis” determines another (e.g., when we notice homologues between works of art history and letters between lovers, the question to be settled is whether the “private” life shaped the scholarly or whether intellectual commitments organized intimate ties), I draw attention to historically overlapping vocabularies and textual mirrorings.

A final clarification again takes the form of a refusal. As scholars understand life-writing as selective, constructed, and textual, some follow this awareness with a foregrounded presentation of themselves, narrating their responses to their “subject”; personal and autobiographical writing has become especially prominent in recent feminist literary studies.⁶⁰ Despite my emphases on partiality and the active work of interpretation, I will not produce such a personal narrative. A modern response to an 1873 text by E. F. S. Pattison may illuminate some reasons. Pattison's review of Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* was critical of Pater's scholarship (his polished phrases “are not history nor are they ever to be relied upon for accurate statements of simple matters of fact”), against which charge John J. Conlon argues that Pattison did not understand that Pater did not intend to give accurate “dates, facts, and events” but to “transform the presentation of history by writing his interpretation of it, what it means to him.”⁶¹ Setting aside the problem of knowing Pater's intentions, Conlon's elision of the foregrounding of interpretation with representing the writer's subjectivity is not logically necessary, any more than attention to the process of interpretation entails the abandonment of factual accuracy. I am less interested in the psychological processes of reading and writing life-stories than in their ideological, epistemological, and historical construction.

My reasons for refusing personal narrative are also connected to my refusal of biography. I share widely held suspicions about how “traditional” biography tends

to both assume and produce its subject—the individual in the title—as exceptional.⁶² I am also critical of how the appeal of biography seems to reside in—indeed, to be motivated by—a logic of identification and a claim to knowledge. Although feminist scholarship and politics explore women's diversity and sometimes conflicting histories and interests, many feminist biographies contain the implications of historical difference by constructing narratives in which historical women may be heartrendingly or inspiringly or exotically different but are nonetheless available for vicarious "experience" and knowledge through reading.⁶³ Life-stories of women who survive to be "known" offer reassurance of the stability of individual subjects; they also offer a chance to avoid theoretical debates about the social construction of subjectivity, representation, and narrative.⁶⁴ Kathryn Hughes's review of a recent work on the life of Virginia Woolf endorses this epistemological conservatism:

As fiction has broken down over the past few years into fictions—slight, partial stories that make no claim to see beyond their own borders—biography has stepped forward to satisfy a lingering desire for a solid world peopled by knowable characters . . .

Biography, then, provides many of the pleasures associated with the classic novels of the 19th century. It has none of contemporary fiction's worry about its own instability or provisionality. It sidesteps many of the debates of modern criticism and reads texts as oblique but vivid representations of the [subject's] life.⁶⁵

Biographical texts become a refuge from postmodernity, a haven in an epistemologically unsettled world, offering a reassuring faith in the knowability of past subjective experience and the existence of unified, if mobile and adventurous, selves. Lives are discrete, long-running stories, and individuals are coherent and continuous subjects whose piquantly historical subjectivities are available for writers' and readers' retrieval. Biography offers historical narratives that deny history's weight.

I do not privilege identification or understand texts as offering access to subjectivities, and therefore I do not attempt to cajole readers into fantasies of knowledge about "me." Instead, this book takes seriously what scholars versed in the varieties of postmodernism claim to know: experience is constructed, meaning is not a hidden essence within texts but is produced by readers; surfaces, masquerades, metaphors, and images make as well as reveal meaning; selves are made and remade and unstable and discontinuous; culture matters deep down and immeasurably; we can talk neither to nor with the dead but only and imperfectly about them.⁶⁶ Taking these knowledges seriously means the reader will not end the book able to contend that she "knows" Emilia Dilke. Instead, she will know many stories about Emilia Dilke, she will know about the making and competition of stories, she will know that there is no knowledge that is not dependent on and enabled by partial and contingent readings of partial and contingent texts, by the historically variable limits of the sayable, tellable, writable, and thinkable.⁶⁷

To borrow Caroline Walker Bynum's eloquent words, "my understanding of the historian's task precludes wholeness. Historians, like the fishes of the sea, regurgitate fragments. Only supernatural power can reassemble fragments so completely that no particle of them is lost, or miraculously empower the part to be the whole."⁶⁸ The reader can possess many narratives, some efficacious, some occluded, during Emilia Dilke's lifetime, but these cannot be filtered clean from the conditions of their pro-

duction, circulation, survival, and re-presentation. Yet although I stress interpretation and problematize identification, reading this book need not be a bloodless and cold, if theoretically and intellectually proper, undertaking. Some of the texts and events I present were, in my reading, harrowing, infuriating, moving, funny, and inspiring. Recognizing how hundreds of partial, fragmentary, biased, ignorant, mutilated, motivated, and imaginative voices, and I, produce Emilia Dilke in words displays the powers of texts to unsettle, reorganize, damage, contain, and haunt. Moreover, this book aspires to be what Bynum calls “history in the comic mode”: historical writing that “know[s] there is, in actuality, no ending (happy or otherwise)—that doing history is, for the historian, telling a story that could be told in another way,” and “no one of us will ever read more than partially.” Such histories are not necessarily about pleasant or easy topics, but history in the comic mode refuses to forfeit the pleasurable knowledge of its own provisionality. It is history that *enjoys* the prospect of revision and continuation.⁶⁹

In a partly and covertly autobiographical essay, “The Idealist Movement and Positive Science. An Experience,” to which I will repeatedly return, Emilia Dilke warned against intellectual pursuits that attempt to “lay [truth] bare with the knife.”⁷⁰ Despite the risks Dilke’s text signals in conjunctions of knives and knowledge, I conclude this introduction with a metaphor for textually attentive and theoretically engaged reading that reiterates my emphasis on partiality and my claim to nonetheless produce historical understandings. It is possible to take a piece of fruit and carefully peel away a bit of skin, opening to view a bit of the flesh beneath, and to say, “here is what is not seen, here more is visible than the surface suggested.” Or one can cut in half lengthwise, exposing new surfaces, and then turn again, slice crossward, and perhaps again cut open each segment; each cut reminds us that the process is endless and that there is always unseen matter between surfaces.⁷¹ Crosswise and lengthwise cuts each display the grain, and each shows new faces and facets. Previously hidden centers and seeds come into view, perhaps hard and indigestible, perhaps with unexpected textures and colors. Each revelation of new surfaces and structures offers knowledge, but no knowledge annuls another: the whorled pit of the peach is not more true than the flesh just beneath the skin, or the caper-like seeds in the papaya more real than the yellow and green rind. This process of opening, exposing, and paying attention cannot end in reassembly, the object re-membered by invisible suturing into a whole. I undertake multiple openings and turnings of the texts of Emilia Dilke—not “her” but surviving and varied texts by and about her (including some in which we will find images of apples) and the many histories in which she is a figure. My reading and writing strive to keep visible the variety, as well as the relations, of surfaces and centers. Resisting false closure offers more, not less, knowledge and pleasure.⁷²

ON NOT BEING AN ORPHAN

Victorian novelists notoriously relied on orphanhood to foreshadow the exceptionality of a hero's or heroine's adult life; dead or missing parents often seem a prerequisite for an interesting plot.¹ The characters for which Francis Strong has been seen as a model in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and Rhoda Broughton's *Belinda* are orphans; Dorothea Brooke and Belinda Churchill are each under the nominal guardianship of loving but sometimes unwise older relatives and each has a single sister who is a loyal, commonsensical contrast to the imaginative exceptionality of the central character. But although the Strong family—and the Dilke and Pattison families discussed in the next two chapters—produced members whose stories have circulated in public texts and whose lives have been written as narratives of exceptional characters, neither Francis Strong nor the other “characters” whose childhoods I describe were orphaned as children.

Biographical writing often presents childhoods as preludes if not origins, but rather than orphaning the central figure, it tends to offer families as a backdrop for exceptionality, a fire in which subjectivity is forged or at least scorched, or a microcosm of “historical context.” But families are never just idiosyncratic psychic configurations or instances of ideal types within schemas of broad-based demographic trends. In-scribing lives into broader family stories should not mean taking an exceptional individual and locating her in an unmediated “real” by placing her in a family. Families too tell themselves through stories they do not fully control but which are constructed within generic conventions and available languages of natural and unnatural, healthy or deviant domesticities, just as they participate in larger historical stories of the material and ideological organization of family life. Some narratives of family life are valorized or normalized, while others are stigmatized or cast as exceptional.²

Politics, region, specificities of religious culture, and accounts of continuity or change in class shape family narratives. I attend therefore to the production of family stories as well as the stories of individuals.

Although I will return to Emilia Dilke's essay, "The Idealist Movement and Positive Science," a partial and partially autobiographical text, Francis Strong Pattison/Emilia Dilke did not write a narrative of her life across her several names, and only a few scraps of childhood writing have been preserved in public hands. The principal texts that include accounts of the Strong family are family stories: Charles Dilke's "Memoir" of Lady Dilke, a preface to a posthumous collection of Emilia Dilke's essays and short stories, *The Book of the Spiritual Life*, and Gertrude Tuckwell's account of her aunt "Fussie" in her unpublished typescript reminiscences in the Library of the Trades Union Congress. Paradoxically, these accounts by husband and niece are shaped by the overriding project of insisting that Emilia Dilke was from childhood marked by qualities of mind and spirit excessive to, rather than produced by, her family. Charles Dilke's account repeatedly establishes the differences that marked Francis Strong as a girl, as if covertly worrying that Emilia Dilke's achievements would be diminished by any intimation that she was formed by her environment; Dilke's text disavows any "hereditary determinants" of Francis's talents and describes her desires and interests as rebelliously cultivated in vague defiance of her family.³ This stress on Francis Strong's exceptionality may be read as Charles's own motivated claim to exceptionality by association, but he also participates in a multiauthored project in two senses. Dilke's texts incorporate and echoes other texts, including some by Emilia Dilke, and it collaborates with Gertrude Tuckwell's. Tuckwell's account was written long after the deaths of her aunt and uncle and perhaps was not meant for publication, but Dilke's "Memoir" and Tuckwell's "Reminiscences" overlap, even to the point of exact language.⁴ Despite differences, for example, the greater command of the materiality and domestic detail of the Strong household of Tuckwell's reminiscences, both texts share and ceaselessly reiterate a project of representing Emilia Dilke as exceptional.

Charles Dilke's and Gertrude Tuckwell's texts strive to delineate wholeness and argue for an enduring and exceptional self behind all the names and changes of Emily/Emilia Francis Strong Pattison Dilke. Linking truth and excess, Dilke's and Tuckwell's texts also capily flatter readers: by comprehending—knowing and containing—Francis Strong's continuous, consistent, and sublime character, we can show our own mirroring exceptionality, our abilities as readers to make parts into a whole. But rather than fusing Dilke's and Tuckwell's accounts with other scraps of evidence into a childhood story for Francis Strong and thereby continuing their project, I focus on reading texts at work, not only attending to the narratives they produce or covertly proffer but making their gaps and games visible. Dilke's and Tuckwell's texts, along with Emilia Dilke's own, contain many stories beyond those they explicitly tell. I will argue that the narrative effectivities of empire and class in these stories destabilize Dilke's and Tuckwell's projects of writing exceptionality by putting Francis Strong's childhood into larger histories while also drawing attention to the value of considering the production and reproduction of class and empire in family story-making. Conversely, both texts omit at least one highly interesting incident in Francis Strong's youth, which Emilia Dilke may have concealed, thereby provoking awareness that the limits of authors' knowledge are also unknowable.

Imperial Stories

The Strong family and Francis Strong's childhood could be represented as falling well within the parameters of respectable, comfortable, provincial, and unexceptional bourgeois life, less a shaping environment than a usefully subfusc backdrop for a childhood of exceptionality. Married in 1826, Henry and Emily Weedon Strong had had a son named Owen Henry and two daughters, Henrietta Frances ("Ness") and Rosa, before Emily Francis was born on 2 September 1840. Two more daughters, Marian and Ethel Rigaud, followed. Henry Strong was a retired army officer and amateur artist living in Ilfracombe, a small Devonshire resort (its population in 1841 was 3,679), albeit one offering the pleasures of fashionable society in the sea-bathing season; in the early century, Ilfracombe had had a vogue as a haunt of Romantic poets who proclaimed it the "English Switzerland" for its healthy climate and natural beauty.⁵ But by 1841, Henry Strong took up a position as manager of the newly founded London and County Bank in the High Street, Oxford, under the pressure of some financial reverses. Although a retired officer and an investor in the bank, Henry's social status as a salaried employee was roughly that of George Eliot's Mr. Bulstrode in *Middlemarch*.⁶ The Strong family settled in Iffley, just south of Oxford on the Thames, in a house called The Elms.⁷ Owen Henry was educated for the Army and Henrietta and Rosa married while Francis was still a child, but the three younger children were educated at home and Francis grew up in a household of several children.⁸

Despite Ilfracombe's periodic access as a resort to more metropolitan cultures, in Iffley the Strong family lived in more consistently, self-consciously, and institutionalized milieux of intellectual and cultural activity, during a period of increased movement of contemporary ideas and figures between London and Oxford. Yet when Emilia Dilke wrote an extended account of her family's background, she said little about her childhood. Instead, she constructed a more distinguished heritage than my account has offered. In "Samuel Strong and the Georgia Loyalists," written for the Toronto chapter of the United Empire Loyalists Association of Ontario in 1899, Emilia Dilke vigorously produces her paternal family as a geographically far-flung microcosm of the tumultuous history of British imperial possessions.⁹ Emilia Dilke's essay begins with a disavowal: she had been asked about her grandfather's connection with the American Revolution but had felt "inclined to say: 'Story, indeed, there is none to tell!'" It then flatters her immediate audience by claiming her narrative lacks "the heroic features which attract us to the annals" of the Canadian Loyalists. If her family's story is simply and plaintively one of "personal suffering and loss of fortune," Emilia Dilke's essay still goes on to recount it, disinterestedly rendering the historical record complete: "there is so little known concerning [the Southern Loyalists] . . . and so little attention has been paid to the situation of those who became 'Refugees' . . . that even the outline of one family history may have something of historical interest [and illustrate] an obscure phase of the great struggle" of empire. Dilke's essay repeats this oscillation between disavowal and assertion as it continues, positioning her as offering only fragments ("the little that I know of these things") while heaping up names and the results of obvious research.¹⁰

The imperialist ancestry Emilia Dilke recounts centers on her grandfather, Samuel Spry Strong (1749–1834) and his brother Thomas (1745–1811), who were American

colonists in Georgia; her grandfather and great-uncle died before Francis Strong's birth and Dilke's text emphasizes that her knowledge of them derives from her father. Henry, the youngest of eleven children of Samuel Strong and Sarah Earle Hartridge Strong—widow of another Georgia landowner before her marriage to Strong—was born in England in 1794 and was probably never in the United States. His own knowledge of the family's Georgia history was indirect and derived from his father's and uncle's accounts. But if Francis Strong's colonial heritage was highly mediated, Henry passed along to his daughter a family history both prestigious and slightly raffish. The Strong's, of "Scotch-Irish extraction," having "got into some political trouble and being attainted for treason" in Britain, settled in Massachusetts "shortly after the voyage of the Mayflower," and Henry Strong told his daughter, "we had the blood of some of the first settlers in our veins." A second politically motivated round of Strong immigration to the New World followed in the eighteenth century; some members of the family moved to Virginia after "being compromised" in the Jacobite uprisings of 1715 or 1745, although Emilia Dilke claims descent from the Massachusetts branch of the family. Moreover, her grandfather and great-uncle had had a brother, Richard, who "it is said" was in the Royal Navy but combined patriotism with a whiff of piracy as a successful privateer and looter of Spanish ships. If Emilia Dilke's family story is one of imperial service, she nevertheless endows her ancestors with a history of political and physical adventure.¹¹

The Strong family is more respectably loyal by the time of Francis's grandfather. Samuel and Thomas Strong "began life as land-surveyors, an occupation then followed by many wealthy men in the States," and Samuel was Deputy-Surveyor to the Crown by the time of the Revolution. Dilke repeatedly invokes the names of the wealthy Fairfax family of Virginia—William Fairfax "the early companion of George Washington," Thomas Fairfax "the sixth baron," and others—to endorse the gentlemanly status of surveying. She reiterates Samuel Strong's importance and genteel status; he "was not only an important public official" but a landowner, holding property in Augusta and a Crown grant in Savannah, and her text claims that the Strong family left permanent marks in Georgia history, through a place name in Savannah, as well as faithfully serving the Crown. This service reached its height during the American Revolution, when Samuel and Thomas Strong were "early marked out for hostility from the 'Whigs' "; Samuel Strong "never complained of having endured any maltreatment," but he suffered "a very heavy loss of fortune" and was forced to flee to England, via Canada, settling in London by 1786. Thomas Strong, however, was tarred and feathered for his views, including their publication in one or more Loyalist pamphlets, and developed a permanently nasty temper as a result. "The mere mention of America was enough to drive Thomas to fury" and his treatment was always "alluded to with a certain air of mystery and horror" and "resented as a personal disgrace" in family stories.¹²

Emilia Dilke's narrative arcs from slightly scandalous antecedents through loyal imperialism to personal suffering in the service of the Crown, but her account seems indecisive as to how to conclude. On the one hand, she emphasizes the hardships and losses borne by her family; "the sufferings of these unfortunate people . . . [were] severe" and Samuel Strong often "lamented the loss . . . of a great fortune." On the other hand, she repeatedly guards against the suggestion that her family had lost its

claims to gentility and public importance. Samuel was “never in the absolutely destitute condition of many of his fellow-sufferers . . . his means were never insufficient,” and his “situation as a refugee . . . [was] marked by exceptional features.” After the war, Samuel Strong returned to the United States to dispose of “a large portion of his property at Augusta, where he owned a large plantation and many slaves,” and his daughter Nancy and three of his stepchildren resettled in Georgia, Nancy receiving Samuel’s remaining Augusta property on her marriage. Emilia’s and Charles Dilke’s account of the Strong family history include assertions of the Strong’s and their Hartridge half-siblings’ continued importance and respectability in the United States; in later life Emilia Dilke was visited by cousins “who played a leading part in the public life of Georgia, South Carolina, and even of New York.”¹³ The Strong family sacrificed for their allegiance to the Tory side in the American Revolution but nonetheless preserved respectability in both countries in the Dilkes’ accounts. Henry Strong’s officer status and army pension gave him, at least, entrée into provincial bourgeois society and his family history of imperial service and “sacrifice” offered further guarantees of class status.¹⁴ But Emilia Dilke’s essay implies that the Strong family possessed not only the cachet of demonstrated loyalty to the Empire but some relationship to networks of aristocratic patronage, which may have bolstered their ability to recuperate their fortunes in England. “It is a curious coincidence,” she writes, that her grandfather settled for some time on a Fairfax property near Leeds Castle “where . . . he had previously no connection or interest.”¹⁵

Emilia Dilke’s essay forms the basis for Charles Dilke’s account of his wife’s ancestry in his memoir of her and in his own unpublished memoir. Charles Dilke’s redactions both disavow too much ancestral influence, periodically downplaying the Strong family’s place in English history to assert Emilia Dilke’s individual exceptionality (“Emilia’s genius was so little of an inheritance that I found she had no distinguished persons in her ancestry unless some dashing sailors should be so accounted”), and enunciate the importance of her familial connection to Britain’s imperial power.¹⁶ Charles Dilke elaborates on the continuing bonds between Emilia Dilke and her imperial family, claiming she was a living link to her family past for younger generations and an embodiment of the history of the empire: “Cousins [from Georgia, South Carolina, and New York] used to come in the Twentieth century to see Lady Dilke; but while they looked on her aunt as a remote ancestress . . . and were separated from [her] grandfather by nine to twelve generations, my wife with an acute remembrance of her father’s accounts of his father and with an elder sister living who remembered the grandfather himself, and with the portraits of the hunted Loyalists of 1774 hanging by her side, seemed to revive in living force the story of the War of Independence.” Charles repeatedly describes Emilia as proud of her colonial forbears; she preserved portraits and souvenirs “from the old home at Augusta, Georgia . . . with the most sacred pictures of those she loved” and she carried around family relics.¹⁷

Charles’s adumbration of the Strong family history endows Emilia Dilke with an honorable genealogy to set beside his own and aligns her with his own political passions for the Army and the Empire, but his text also cunningly appropriates the imperial and patriotic irreproachability of her grandfather’s politics for Emilia Dilke’s feminism and trade unionism. Charles Dilke claims Emilia resembled her grandfather Samuel Strong in features and “in her character [which held] a good deal of the

toughness of the fierce defenders of the lost cause of George III . . . their unconquerable physical and moral courage and their characteristic virtue of not allowing the largeness of a majority to convince her that she was wrong.”¹⁸ Emilia Dilke’s essay, however, reveals a less reputable or democratic political history without comment: her relatives’ retrieval of their family fortune depended on their continued participation in racial slavery. Her grandfather had been a slave-owner, the land on which Emilia Dilke’s “ancestral home” stood had been given to Nancy Strong “along with a great many negroes” by her father Samuel, and Nancy’s son was “Colonel Barrett, a well-known veteran of the Confederate army.” Emilia Dilke positions her family’s slave ownership as a sign of their continued wealth and respectability, and she details her Barrett relatives’ Confederate careers—Nancy Strong’s son and three of her grandsons were in the Confederate Army—as evidence of a tendency to courageous “devotion to lost political causes, which . . . has shown itself again and again” in the family.¹⁹

Feminists from Wollstonecraft forward have focused on the ways in which children acquire sexed and gendered subjectivities during infancy and childhood; more recently, Carolyn Steedman and others have eloquently argued that class also constitutes children’s subjectivities through disavowals and identifications, love and the need for difference, stories, violences, and seductions.²⁰ The texts that represent Francis Strong’s childhood remind us that racialized imperialism may also be a subjectivity acquired in childhood. Moreover, although the institutions of schooling and the ceremonies and spaces of public life were unquestionably central to the production of imperialist identities for children, the imperial and racialized subject positions increasingly produced and reproduced through the nineteenth century were not only constructed and enacted in the public sphere. For some children, imperialism was also a family story and a site of assumed identities and loyalties imbricated with other learned subjectivities of class and gender from an early age. Attention to the production of imperialist children therefore complements recent feminist scholarship on the ways white British women participated in, profited from, and shaped and were shaped by racist ideologies and imperial projects in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²¹

Charles Dilke represents the young Francis Strong as sometimes choosing her political positions in direct reaction against her family’s views—she “scandalized her family by praying publicly for the success of the Russian arms during the Crimean War, partly, I think, because everybody about her was agreed in ferocious anti-Russian opinion”—but the grown-up Emilia Dilke acknowledged the power of childhood “prejudices” even when claiming the possibility of grown-up transcendence.²² An 1889 essay by Emilia Dilke on missionary activity in India represents her as sharing in and eluding familial claims and implies that imperialist identifications were entangled with learned and loved models of class and gender. Family ties can “make us accept unquestioningly and hold tenaciously opinions for which we have not the slightest grounds”: “I remember, when war broke out betwixt North and South, how difficult it seemed to me to believe in the just cause and triumph of the North, simply because I possessed an unlimited number of relations in Georgia and South Carolina, and an aide-de-camp cousin was promptly shot.”²³ “The Great Missionary Success” narrates Emilia Dilke as moving from a position of dislike for missionaries produced by “the accidents of early association, the chances of relationship” and enmeshed

with a family rhetoric of class; in her family's imperial culture, antipathy to missionaries was expressed by "allusions . . . constantly made in [her] hearing to the impertinence of his pretensions, to his want of birth, or wit, or learning." Francis Strong developed a "prejudiced" view that "if a missionary could not be induced to stay at home, the sooner he fell in with cannibals the better."²⁴ The adult Emilia Dilke comes to see missionary efforts as valuable and selfless, and other texts by Emilia Dilke present the possibility of movement away from family loyalties and prejudices and suggestions. But Dilke's texts also suggest that such loyalties are tenacious because of their imbrication with gendered childhood experiences. During a trip to India, Emilia Dilke wrote, "I like . . . being with . . . officers its like my childish days I get on so well with them."²⁵ Masculinity, as represented by Francis Strong's father and other male relatives, was military in her earliest social world, and her second marriage to a prominent Liberal Imperialist, expert on Army reform, and advocate of "preparedness" renewed associations between intimate relations and British martial strength.²⁶

Emilia Dilke concluded "Samuel Strong and the Georgia Loyalists" with a listing of her male relatives' service to Empire in successive generations. Henry Strong was entered in the military academy at Addiscombe—probably owing something to patronage—and commissioned in the army; he joined his regiment in India in 1809 and served for sixteen years as a quartermaster, retiring while still a young man of thirty-one.²⁷ Henry's brother Thomas joined the Royal Navy and rose to the rank of commander; he was eventually lost at sea, perhaps in a mutiny. Francis's own brother Owen Henry is Lieutenant Colonel Strong, and of his three sons, one is "taking out troops to the Cape" on a ship of which he is Master, another is already in Kimberley, and the third is in charge of the Medical Staff Corps of the South Rhodesia Volunteers, en route, as she writes, to Mafeking.²⁸ Emilia Dilke thus recounted a masculine family history, linked to the fortunes of Britain's armies in the American colonies and in India in the past, and in Africa into the new century. Her own name paradoxically marks this masculine history. According to Charles Dilke, Francis was named for a military man, her godfather and "favourite friend" Francis Whiting, killed at Cawnpore in 1857.²⁹ Emilia Dilke did not put the imperial roles played by the women of her family into print. Her sister Henrietta married a Lieutenant Colonel W.A. Neale, with whom she went to India; Gertrude Tuckwell suggests that Henrietta understood her own role as an extender of Empire in the moral domain, as "young, attractive" and "eager to help," Henrietta engaged in volunteer nursing of poor Indians before fleeing back to Iffley with her three children during the Indian Uprising of 1857, in which her husband was killed.³⁰ Francis's younger sister, Marian, died of fever in Madras within a year of her marriage to another servant of empire.³¹ Emilia Dilke's published narrative of her family history is insistently patrilineal, if not wholly masculine, and it does not include stories of female distinction among either ancestors or nearer relatives.

Mothers and Margins

What are novels? What is the secret of the charm of every romance that ever was written? . . . the heroine has generally no family ties (almost invariably