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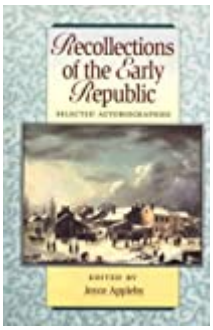

Joyce Appleby, ed. *Recollections of the Early Republic: Select Autobiographies.* Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997. xxv + 276 pp. $28.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-55553-301-4; $47.50 (library), ISBN 978-1-55553-302-1.

Reviewed by Ronald J. Zboray (Georgia State University)

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After providing historians with broadly interpretive works on the ideology of early capitalism, Jeffersonianism, and early American liberalism, Joyce Appleby has produced a book of modest proportions which peers through the grand sweep of Western intellectual development to hone in upon the small, the personal, and the material. Having decidedly no "ism" in its title, *Recollections of the Early Republic: Selected Autobiographies* eschews direct engagement with products of "great minds" to explore the mindset of common people who lived through the first decades of the new nation. Their uncelebrated, but nonetheless remarkable, legacy in the form of autobiographies eloquently evokes everyday life in the early republic. But, according to Appleby, the autobiographies also represent values that became firmly rooted during that time period: "The easy access to opportunity, the just reward of virtue, the irrepressible pluck in the face of adversity–so simply depicted in these first-person accounts," Appleby explains, "sank deep into public consciousness to become the qualities that defined America" (p. xxi).

Recollections presents transcribed excerpts of ten autobiographies Appleby selected out of about three hundred written by a cohort of Americans born between 1783 and 1800.[1] The ten writers include men and women of various regions and occupations, including schoolteachers, rural laborers (one of them a slave who struggled for freedom), a seaman, and a clockmaker. To characterize any one of these autobiographers by occupation, class, or locality, however, would be misleading, for they often worked different jobs within a lifetime and they experienced much horizontal and vertical mobility. Appleby locates the commonality within the diversity as such: all "achieved something of value," "witnessed great changes," "lived long enough to reach the stage of life when one looks back and ruminates about the past," and had others persuading them to write their life stories (p. xix).

Recollections, as its title conveys, is essentially about memory. Apart from one manuscript autobiography, the pieces included were published well after the early 1800s (in fact, all but one after 1859) and all hearken back to much earlier epochs in the writers' lives. Thus, unlike diaries, in which one can follow a life in the making, perceived and digested in bits and pieces by a diarist unaware of what the next day will bring, these autobiographies feature experience recalled, digested, embellished, and given shape by the time in which they were written. As deliberate self-representations, they resemble oral histories, but with the polish, editing, and packaging of publication. They, like many mid-nineteenth century texts, occasionally betray traces of prior or bor-

rowed narrativization, story-telling techniques aimed to hold the readers' attention and to stimulate their emotions. As such, they tell much about ideas and values that endured beyond the early republic, as well as the manner in which these are transmitted, altered over time, and blended with unfolding literary conventions. Each of these autobiographies is thus a stream running, so to speak, toward the ocean of collective memory. Of course, they represent the constructed "memories" of people fortunate enough to win a publisher's favor. It is telling that the sole manuscript memoir included here is relatively uneventful, unpolished, and more attentive to genealogy.

Although the autobiographers' memories have been filtered through decades of time and hundreds (sometimes thousands) of miles of space, they have much to offer anyone interested in first-hand experiential accounts, especially concerning everyday life. For example, the experience of reading (a subject of interest to these two reviewers) is highlighted in ways that locate the meaning of printed materials within the longer life trajectory, not just the moment of engagement. David Vincent's *Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom* has already tapped into the autobiographical genre for recapturing British workingclass reading habits.[2] Other oft-overlooked cultural phenomena such as foodways are accented in these autobiographies as well. It is hard to imagine today being so craving of something as simple as buttermilk, yet the subjective experience is replayed by Daniel Drake with such painful focus of memory (p. 43), that it is, after reading the account, difficult to think of the drink as anything other than a luxury. And some selections capture women's political consciousness, a subject increasingly of interest for historians of the early republic. In this vein, Julia Hieronymus Tevis hilariously recounts girlhood partisan warfare (p. 75), as well as her more sublime engagement with the "Star Spangled Banner" (pp. 76-77).

Certainly there is much here also to ignite inquiry into the nature of recoverable memory–what people chose to recall of the past and how they render it meaningful–in conjunction with a "burgeoning interest in exploring autobiographical material" among scientists of human memory.[3] Parting scenes in these lives of "fresh starts, [and] unexpected encounters" (p. xx) occasion the strongest recollections, but so do observations recalled in the form of striking images: Lucy Fletcher Kellogg, for example, remembered how her children's "little white feet contrasted with the black mud" (p. 154) during a westward river crossing, and Charles Ball reported "trembling in every joint, nerve, and muscle, like a dog lying upon a cake of ice" during one episode of escape from slavery (p. 123). No secondary description filtered through an historian's interpretive glaze can recapture these experiences with quite the same force.

Whether vivid or commonplace, these excerpts receive only a sprinkling of annotation from their editor. Each memoir has about three or four endnotes. These describe prominent figures (e.g., Lyman Beecher), legislation (the Alien and Sedition Acts), or events (the Webster-Hayne debate), or they fill in some gaps in the narratives. The citation of rudimentary facts suggests that Appleby intended this edition for a general readership or for use in undergraduate history courses. The paucity of citations may be attributed to this pedagogical aim, insofar it invites students to consult textbooks and other secondary sources for background or elucidation.

In keeping with her apparent mission (she is not specific about her target audience) to provide a heuristic device while letting the autobiographers speak for themselves to interested readers, Appleby seldom interjects her own interpretive voice into *Recollections*. Thus the narratives collectively receive only a short introduction from their editor in the form of a thirteen-page essay. Here Appleby sets her subjects within intellectual, social, and cultural trends that developed in the wake of the Revolution. She describes her writers operating in a world in which "Americans took natural rights literally" (p. xi), in which Jeffersonian ideology triumphed over Federalist elitism that decried the flow of power and information into popular hands, in which growing commerce afforded mobility, and where evangelical fervor and voluntary reform organizations opened new avenues for commoners to influence a growing nation. "Only in the United States did the creation of a new political order accompany the dramatic changes of the early industrial revolution," Appleby observes. "Only here did the decisions that individuals made about their personal lives play so large a part in shaping the character of public institutions" (p. xx).

Perhaps the essential ingredient to their success, however, was their willingness to move from their place of birth, leaving behind old ways of life. "The autobiographers served as models of innovation for a society losing a desire to replicate past ways," she writes. "Those Americans who entered the churning world of novelty left behind a settled way of life marked by limited horizons and prescribed rules" (p. xxi). These "writings about successful breaks with the past" justify their placement within this buoyant scenario by the very success that these selected autobiographers enjoyed (p. xxi). The introduc-

tion does not supply the needed commentary to balance off these success-through-mobility stories with some nod to the many folk who were less than successful, downright failures, or who simply died prematurely. Nor does the introduction offer a critical analysis of this genre that "may be truthful or mendacious."[4]

This introduction also sets out few editorial principles and procedures. We do not know if obvious typographical errors were silently corrected, for example, or what criteria of selection was applied in determining which of the three hundred texts to use. Are these autobiographies meant to be representative of the corpus of autobiographies, or of lives led by this cohort? Or, did these specific life stories better than others illustrate the liberalism Appleby has taken such pains to establish as central to the late eighteenth-century political economy?

The introduction is followed by a very selective three-page bibliography encompassing political, social, economic, religious, and intellectual developments with some attention to African Americans and women. The combination of brevity and breadth, however helpful to general readers, naturally creates opportunities for historians to point out omissions, but these are usually in the eye of the specialist beholder (for example, why cite Frank Luther Mott on magazines and not John Tebbel on book publishing?). Nevertheless, two missing categories of works would have assisted both specialist and general readers: 1) works that treat autobiography as a literary form and historical resource, such as Paul John Eakin's *American Autobiography*, Robert F. Sayre's *American Lives,* and Herbert Leibowitz's *Fabricating Lives* and 2) prior scholarly efforts to employ autobiographical materials with a tight yet critical subjective focus, such as Alfred F. Young's piece on George Robert Twelves Hewes.[5]

The low profile of the editor has particular disadvantages for the reader trying simply to keep track of what is going on in the ten narratives. Granted, Appleby's decision to remain in the background gives the autobiographer's voice a platform from which to speak directly to the reader without an interpreter; yet, the reader needs help at times. While the short one thousand-word essays introducing each narrative point out some of the more salient aspects of the life, it is often difficult to follow, unaided, the flow of events as recounted by the storyteller. Often years drift by without dates and, worse still, the narratives occasionally jump back and forth in time. The stores are rendered even more confusing by ellipses signaling gaps in the text. Editorial interjection in the form of the occasional helpful explanation of events, places (the map on page xxv is too general to cover some of the smaller towns mentioned), and persons may have addressed most of these continuity problems.

Still, these quibbles aside, Appleby admirably fulfills the task of offering a forum for these often neglected weavers of memories to reach a modern audience. Scholarship on the stuff of everyday life in the early republic has been sometimes overshadowed by ideational investigations, or it has been dissected by quantitative studies that ironically abstract the quotidian processes they seek to describe; *Recollections* represents a refreshingly humanistic view from the ground level. But the book hardly panders to an anecdotal trivialization of history. Rather, its overall effect is that of ten microhistories, each an intimate world view in and of itself, yet each sharing traits in common with the others to form a composite that rises above the particular.

Although Appleby gives a sense of that composite image in her introduction, it is from the perspective of history on a grander scale and not necessarily as constructed from the ground up, that ground here being the subjective literary artifacts of ordinary Americans. Whether or not that is even possible (or desirable) is a question that is entertained by some historians of everyday life or microhistory.[6] Nevertheless, the reader, stimulated by the unique life stories, longs for an integrative interpretation at the end, one that will scoop up all the experiences into a whole and create new insights on the past directly from them. Perhaps it is Professor Appleby's intention to further contemplate the autobiographical form she so clearly finds so intriguing to give us more broad interpretations in the future, as she has done so well in the past, but which will incorporate subjectivity, self-representation, and personal memory.

Notes

[1]. Of course, these ten autobiographies are but the tip of an iceberg, for many others appear in full length or in repositories, as listed in Louis Kaplan, comp., *A Bibliography of American Autobiographies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961).

[2]. David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (London: Europa, 1981).

[3]. See, for example, Brian de Vries, James E. Birren, and Donna E. Deutchman, "Method and Uses of the Guided Autobiography," in _The Art and Science of Rem-

iniscing: Theory, Research, Methods, and Applications, ed. Barbara Haight and Jeffrey D. Webster (Washington, D.C.: Taylor and Francis, 1995), quote on p. 165.

[4]. Robert Folkenflik, "Introduction: The Institution of Autobiography" in *The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation,* ed. idem (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 13-14.

[5]. John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States*, 4 vols. (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1972-1981); Paul John Eakin, ed. *American Autobiography: Retrospect and Prospect* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Robert F. Sayre, ed., *American Lives: An Anthology of Autobiographical Writing (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994); Herbert Leibowitz,*Fabricating Lives: Explorations in American Autobiography *(New York: Knopf, 1989); Alfred F. Young, "George Robert Twelves Hewes (1742-1840): A Boston Shoemaker and the Memory of the American Revolution,"* William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser. 38 (Oct. 1981): 561-623. Among the many other works on autobiography, see William L. Andrews,* To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865 *(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Marcia Jacobson,* Being a Boy Again: Autobiography and the American Boy Book *(Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994); Linda H. Peterson,* Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self-Interpretation *(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); William C. Spengemann,* The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre_ (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

[6]. Some of those issues and relevant practitioners are explored in Florike Egmond and Peter Mason, *The Mammoth and the Mouse: Microhistory and Morphology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). The work of Carlo Ginzburg, Carlo Poni, Edward Muir, and Guido Ruggiero is particularly important to this approach. See also Barry Reay, *Microhistories: Demography, Society and Culture in Rural England, 1800-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and, the essays in Alf Ludtke, ed., *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, tr. William Templer (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

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