the *Reader* conclude with "The es," the concluding section of *Printed Book*. The contrast in ap- ings illustrates the difference in the

WOMEN IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY NEW ENGLAND: A REVIEW ESSAY

Elfrieda McCauley

The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780–1835. By Nancy F. Cott. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977. xii, 225 pp. $12.50 cloth; $3.95 paper. ISBN 0-300-02023-6 (cloth); ISBN 0-300-02289-1 (paper).

The Factory Girls. Edited by Philip S. Foner. Urbana, Chicago, and London: University of Illinois Press, 1977. xxvii, 360 pp. $15.00. ISBN 0-252-00422-1.

Through the analysis of the lives, writings of, and writings about one hundred New England women of the period 1780 to 1835, Cott has made an effort, in her own words, "to make sense of women's lives in an era of social transformation in which we can recognize the outlines of our own time" (p. 18). Specifically, she has investigated the relationship of nineteenth-century feminism, which struggled against the subjugation of women, and what she describes as "the cult of domesticity," which exalted the role of women as keystone of home and family—and reinforced their subjugation. In the face of this paradox, Cott concludes that it was precisely this cult of domesticity that brought Victorian women to a sense of awareness of their womanhood as a class identification, and of their sisterhood as a bond of strength between women.

Whether or not one agrees with this conclusion, the supporting evidence marshaled under the chapter headings of "Work," "Domesticity," "Education," "Religion," and "Sisterhood" makes fascinating reading. The subjects under Cott's scrutiny were white women of English Protestant origins, married and unmarried, not leisured, but excluding the poor and illiterate. They came from middle to upper ranges of the population in the five New England states and were representative of farm, rural town, and city living. The documents for analysis were unpublished diaries and correspondence, ministers' sermons, biographies, and autobiographies—all meticulously footnoted.

According to Cott, the period 1780 to 1835 was a time of wide and deep-ranging transformation that affected the lives of women: rapid and intensive economic expansion, restructuring of the social

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classes, extension of the ballot and of universal public education. Most important, there emerged—encouraged by the evangelical churches and popular literature—the concept of a "woman's sphere" of work as a vocation peculiar to women and essential to the spiritual and moral fiber of society.

For women of the post-Revolutionary generation, industrial manufacturing brought about great changes. It diminished the need for spinning and weaving in the home and other household work traditionally performed by women. It created a demand for manufactured goods, and for money to buy them with. Unmarried daughters, underemployed in the home, looked for something to do to occupy their time. With few occupations open to them, they sought jobs as teachers of the summer session in the district school, or as seamstresses, or as hired help on a neighboring farm. Some stayed at home, earning money by contracting for "given out" labor plaiting straw for hats or binding shoes. After the cotton mills opened, they worked in increasing numbers as factory operatives. Or they enrolled in academies that mushroomed throughout New England during this period and opened their doors to women.

The cult of domesticity was fed by advocates of female education, such as George Emerson, who argued that the education of women would be beneficial to society, since it would make them better wives and mothers, and their homes would send forth strong and good men to reform the world. The evangelical Protestant churches also promoted female education in the belief that mental development and moral improvement went hand in hand. The churches provided vehicles for the socialization of women in prayer groups, Sabbath societies, Bible study groups, and moral reform and benevolent societies.

The increased literacy among women created a feminine market for books and journals which also stressed the woman's sphere of responsibility for creating a good home for her husband and the careful nurturing of her children. The press, the churches, and the prevailing philosophy of female education all combined to give women a sense of belonging to a female Christian community united for self-improvement and the improvement of society. The furthering of charitable and moral causes became the special domain of women. Reinforced by associations of women and friendships, the woman's sphere became a vocation based on sex that provided a group consciousness essential to the development of a woman's movement.

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mesticity was sufficient to move women into the field of action on behalf of their rights and other causes that later engaged them. She says only that there could have been no women's movement without it.

The Factory Girls is a welcome addition to the growing body of literature on the factory operatives of the New England cotton mills during the early years of the industrial revolution and a sourcebook on the contributions of women to the development of the American labor movement. It approaches from still another access point the pre-Civil War origins of the women's movement.

Much has been written about factory girls, from divergent points of view. Were they emancipated young women who found in the model factory villages, corporation boarding houses, evening schools, lectures, and lending libraries a preferable occupation to the few alternatives open to women in their day? Or were they exploited by their capitalistic employers, tyrannized by overseers and agents, shut up in unhealthy factories, housed against their will in crowded boarding houses, and too exhausted at the end of a twelve-hour working day to read the books, study in night schools, and attend lectures as represented in contemporary accounts?

In this book of readings, Foner has gathered a major collection of the writings of factory operatives during the 1840s substantiating the latter point of view. His focus is not on the literary output of those operatives whom he describes as the "genteel factory girls" who joined improvement societies and wrote literary pieces for the *Lowell Offering* and the *New England Offering*, but on the militant factory operatives who wrote for the dissident publications of their day, mainly the *Voice of Industry*, of Lowell.

Few of the selections are outstanding for their literary quality. Their aim was persuasion, and their style appropriately journalistic or polemic. Included are speeches, letters, constitutions, rules, regulations, and reports written by operatives actively participating in social movements directly affecting their lives. They write of organizing and recruiting for the Lowell Female Reform Association and its chapters in Manchester, Dover, Nashua, Waltham, and Fall River, of petitioning the legislatures to investigate conditions in the mills, of the need to reduce the hours of labor. They lash out angrily at overseers and agents. They describe their own condition as white slavery, and the mill owners as moneyed tyrants no less oppressive than southern plantation owners. They complain of working hours endured from five in the morning until seven in the evening, of working by the light of whale-oil lamps, of boarding

houses where girls slept six in a room, of hot humid spinning rooms deafeningly noisy and swirling with cotton dust, of compulsory church attendance, of meals they didn't have time to chew, of strikes against the corporations, of dismissals and blacklisting. The chapters of two sections deal with Women's Rights and other causes espoused by the girls.

If their writings are repetitive in theme and hortatory in style, they nevertheless document their group consciousness as women and the vigor of their efforts to mobilize for social action on behalf of their own interests.

In part 4, Foner has made a valuable contribution to nineteenth-century women's biography by gathering together the writings and fleshing out the biographies of three outstanding labor leaders of that period: Sarah G. Bagley, president of the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association and, for a brief period, editor of the *Voice of Industry*, Huldah J. Stone, labor organizer and traveling correspondent of the *Voice*, and Mehitable Eastman, leader of the Manchester Female Labor Reform Association, secretary of the New England Workingman's Association, and co-editor of the *Voice*.

Unfortunately, Foner is not an unaligned editor. While he has stated that his purpose is to uncover the hitherto neglected literary output of the militant female factory operatives, he has not made this purpose clear in his title. Nor has he been exhaustive in his search for evidence of militancy among the operatives. *The Factory Girls* covers, for the most part, a narrow stretch of time—approximately thirty months—and the output of a single publication, during the heat of struggle for the ten-hour day and the turbulence of the 1848 Whig-Democratic presidential campaign.

The *Voice of Industry*, published in Lowell between 1845 and 1848 and owned by the Female Labor Reform Association during most of this period, is the source of the bulk of selections included in Foner's anthology. *Factory Tracts*, published in Lowell during this same period, and a sequence of newspapers published in New Hampshire between 1841 and 1845—the *Factory Girl*, *Factory Girl's Garland*, and *Factory Girls' Album*—supply most of the remaining contributions.

Foner has excluded as escapist most of the writings of the operatives associated with the *Lowell Offering* and *New England Offering* and dismisses their editor, Harriet Farley, as a minion of the mill owners and an apologist of corporation paternalism (which she was, if you take the short view of events). Part 1, comprising

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Factory operative Lucy Larcom is represented by just one short piece and a poem, Harriet Robinson by one short piece from *Loom and Spindle* (New York: Crowell, 1898) and nothing at all from *Early Factory Labor in New England* (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1883). Foner includes a section from the introduction, only, to Eliza J. Cate's "Lights and Shadows of Factory Life," (*The New World* 2, no. 27 [13 February 1843]) and nothing from her "Rights and Duties of Factory Operatives" (*New England Offering*, 1848–1850)—certainly a classic, if only mildly militant, of working-class literature of that period. Sarah Shedd, both a "genteel" and militant poet, is not included. A brief excerpt from Mary Hall's diary is included, but not the "Sister Ann" letters of a Manchester operative. There are many omissions that challenge its validity as an anthology of factory girls' writings, as the title implies. *The Factory Girls* is an important book, provided the reader is aware that it encompasses a very limited period of time, a single publication, for the most part, and a specific perspective. No honest reconstruction of mill-girl life in the 1840s can fail to take into account the militant avant garde of the women trade unionist movement projected in *The Factory Girls*. Nevertheless, like some of its predecessors, it is also an incomplete record.