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THE STRUGGLE FOR AN IDENTITY

WORKING-CLASS AUTOBIOGRAPHIES BY WOMEN IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY GERMANY

Juliane Jacobi-Dittrich

In this article I will present results from my research on the history of girlhood. The findings should be considered as first steps toward a more concise knowledge of the process through which women's identity was developed during the nineteenth century. Generally speaking, the century has been analyzed as the time when patriarchy, in tight connection with capitalism, shaped what Karin Hausen calls the "Polarisierung der Geschlechtscharaktere" (polarization of sexual characteristics).

In the following study I have analyzed three lower middle-class and working-class autobiographies. The class demarcation has been drawn in relation to a selection of upper middle-class autobiographies written by women that I previously analyzed under similar aspects. After discussing the three individual texts according to the theoretical framework that will be outlined below, I will compare the result of this analysis to my findings from the upper middle-class autobiographies. This comparison will emphasize the question of class deferentiation within the general discussion of a specific female experience in building an identity. As an introduction, I will explain my selection and present briefly the analytical framework of identity and life cycle as developed in the work of Erik Erikson.²

My selections are not from the well-known short autobiographical sketches written by working-class authors that have been republished during recent years. With my interest in the history of education and childhood, I tend to focus more on the course of life than on the reconstruction of everyday life and work conditions as structural problems. Acknowledging Annette Kuhn's insightful remarks on the historical approach toward the category "gender" which generally is understood as a "natural" category, I assume that what is considered "natural" undergoes constant change throughout history. To answer the question of how women developed an identity at a given time will thus add to the historical definition of "gender." The above-mentioned autobiographical sketches cannot be used for such an inquiry, since they do not deal with the authors' course of life, but with certain aspects of their lives in a more systematical way.

So as not to be misunderstood: I do not view female identity as an easily described psychological apparatus, molded in a process of socialization that can be generalized for every woman at any given time. I refer to the term "identity" and the process of how it is built up through the life-cycle as described by Erik Erikson, who states that identity is formed through the relationship of the child's ego to the historical prevailing images of his/her time. According to Erikson, identity is the result of the successive integration of all identifications throughout childhood and youth. The crystallizing of the ego-identity binds together early childhood, in which parents and the body have been dominant experiences for identification, with later stages that offer a diversity of social roles adaptable to the ego. Youth and adolescence have a special meaning for the modern process of building an identity, since they provide a psycho-social moratorium during which the young person can go through emotional extremes tentatively to try out ideological alternatives, and to playfully master serious commitment. This concept of identity could be applied in this very broad sense to the male coming-of-age in the European middle classes during the second half of the nineteenth century. As to what extent it will be applicable to female youth and especially to those of working-class background will be shown in this paper.

Erikson's concept surely is based on the psychoanalytical observation of middle-class childhood and youth. The conditions for growing up provided by the working-class environment differed substantially from the middle-class background. For workers, there was no youthful moratorium, but simply a time of employment without the burden of raising a family. Their youth is a transitory stage dependent on the

work place and the family, with less responsibility than an adult person in the working class. I am thus referring to a sex-determined, as well as a class-determined, concept of identity which, roughly spoken, views childhood and youth as a straightforward development toward a grown-up personality reflecting the various influences of family, society, and education. There are potential traps involved in this approach, but I prefer a male- and class-biased concept that takes biases into account to a speculative concept that emerged from "female discourse." Up to now, all attempts at a genuine female concept have tended to reformulate the idea of a "female nature." The reason why the concept of "identity" that I am employing is particularly useful lies in the fact that the genre I am dealing with, the nineteenth-century autobiography, is strongly male and middle class and thus reflects certain structural moments from the introduced concept of "identity." This does not mean that I want to define the identity of women as a deviation from the male set norm. Rather, I intend to explain life courses as processes of developing an identity by using the autobiographical introspection of women.

I will deal with the breaks in their lives, not as breaking away from the male standards, but as events of finding their own way. Neither "the woman who acts like a man" is looked for, nor the woman who fulfills male demands in the image of the trinity of homemaker, mother, and wife. I am searching rather for developments in the process of building up an identity which give independence from these standards and show how women suffered and fought for conditions which would foster autonomy.

Thus I am posing the question: Has there been any consistent image (or images) that offered orientation to women while they grew up, and if so, how did it work? If not, why didn't it work? Their own concepts of their identity will be defined by their ideas of sex roles and sex relations, of political or ideological beliefs, of job achievements and family relations. Autobiographical introspection referring to these areas of experience as well as to how they relate them to the whole setting in which they grew up will be investigated.

It is clear that certain objective conditions such as economic controls on a family shaped the lives of these women, and will be reflected in their autobiographical texts. But the individual autobiography is shaped by the individual's encounter with these objective conditions and by a variety of factors that tend to vary from person to person. Thus the result of my investigation will not lead to a collective biography of working-class girlhood and youth, but rather to a presentation

of single cases of women's lives that might indicate general tendencies in the process of building an identity as a woman at a given time in the given social environment.

All sources dealt with here tell exceptional stories. They also cannot simply be classified as "proletarian" stories. But since all these women either have a working-class background or have been employed as wage laborers during their childhood and youth or joined the working-class movement, I consider these three writings as quite different from middle-class autobiographical writings. It seems to be justifiable to arrange them under the heading of "working-class autobiographies." I have chosen Adelheid Popp's (1869–1939) "Die Jugendgeschichte einer Arbeiterin" (The Youth of a Female Worker) and "Erinnerungen aus meiner Kindheit und Jugend" (Memoirs from my Childhood and Youth), because these two writings present a real working-class autobiography, in the sense that they come strikingly close to the bourgeois genre, while at the same time referring to a different class background.

Clara Mueller-Jahnke (1860–1905) tells the story of a girl who came from a middle-class family. Her father had only recently climbed the social ladder. Because of his early death, the author had to go out to work at the early age of fourteen. In her autobiographical text she considers herself as working class. The autobiography, first published before World War I, was published in a second edition in 1921 by the Dietz publishing company, and we can assume that it represents the literary and moral standards of an influential group within the organized social-democratic working class.

Marie Wegrainer's "Lebensgeschichte einer Arbeiterin, von ihr selbst erzählt" (The Life of a Working Woman, Told by Herself) tells the story of a girl from a declining craftman's family who has to earn a living as a domestic servant. This autobiography documents the fate of women from these declining families during the period of rapid industrialization. In contrast to Popp and Mueller-Jahnke, it tells of everyday aspects that the others would not even mention. Marie Wegrainer's life never took dramatic twists, but reflects the common fate of domestic servants who eventually got married to workers.

Both Mueller-Jahnke and Wegrainer employ the third person in the telling of their lives; Mueller-Jahnke even uses a new name. Among women's autobiographies this objectification can be found frequently (Hedwig Dohm, Lily Braun). It possibly expresses a desire to distance oneself and to maintain personal privacy. As for Wegrainer, I would assume that she wanted to give her story a more "professional" writer's look

The selection of these autobiographical writings was made because of a need for a broad description of childhood and youth. The various aspects involved in the coming-of-age in this particular class background should be found in the narration. I did not want to confine the selection to autobiographies of activists in the working-class movement (like Popp and Mueller-Jahnke), and thus I included one by a woman who never considered herself able to fight for a better life. As I said before, I do not intend to write anything like a "collective biography"—others have recently done that, and on a much better empirical basis but I have been looking for individual life courses. That does not mean that no attempt to categorize these writings will be made, but my analysis centers around the individual introspection of the women.

Since the texts I am dealing with use the literary form of an autobiography, they have to be discussed within this genre. Wolfgang Emmerich categorizes the various forms of working-class autobiographical writing in terms of the following three main types: the story that is written to initiate a process of political learning, the story of the social climber, and the story of the social victim. Popp definitely tries to evoke a political process of learning by describing her emerging class consciousness. Wegrainer thinks of herself as a social climber who failed. Male social climbers did not write and publish their autobiography unless they were successful. If they failed, they viewed themselves unambiguously as social victims, according to Emmerich's types of working-class autobiography.

Autobiography, a nineteenth-century male middle-class genre, has been employed by middle-class women as well as by working-class men and women. Differences within the genre caused by the different conditions of life in working-class autobiographies are the subject of Emmerich's introduction essay in his "Proletarische Lebensläufe" (Proletarian Life Courses). There he states that working-class autobiographies reflect the collective experience of the class more than do middle-class autobiographies and refer much less to individual experience. To verify his assertion, he quotes from Popp, who says in "Jugend einer Arbeiterin" (Youth of a Working Woman):

I did not write my story because I considered it as an individually important story; to the contrary, I wrote it because I realized that my own fate was the fate of hundreds of thousands of women and girls from the proletariat. I wrote it because I recognized important phenomena of our society in the environment that caused my own predicaments.⁷

I think that Emmerich underestimates two aspects of working-class autobiography: first the use of the genre makes it almost inevitable for the writer to develop a deeper understanding of his/her individual life course. The perception by both middle-class and working-class writers of their identity was shaped by the conditions of rising bourgeois society in the nineteenth century, and those who wrote their autobiographies must have had a strong self-concept in that respect. And secondly, Emmerich disregards the sex-determined motif in autobiographical writing. Even if Popp claims to write because her life reflects a collective experience and even if she is doing it from the viewpoint of a class leader, her life course and the way she reflects it disclose a specific female view of class conditions, as I will demonstrate later. Thus Emmerich's main types of working class autobiographies reflect a strong male bias.

The case of Mueller-Jahnke's autobiography most clearly shows that the types developed by Emmerich do not apply very well to my selection of working-class autobiographies. More than Popp, she looks on herself not only as a class-conscious member of the working-class movement, but as a victim of sex discrimination as well. This awareness leads her to proletarian solidarity: a case not considered in Emmerich's scheme. It makes Mueller-Jahnke's autobiography a valuable key story for the interpretation of the remaining two. The meaning and the relevance of sex-defined identity are presented in her writing in such a precise way, that one wonders whether this might be the major subject of the other two texts as well. I will look for evidence of this hypothesis by interpreting the writings one by one. After a brief biographical sketch gleaned from the autobiographies. I will discuss various motifs within each text. The selection of these motifs is made out of the interest in identity processes they reflect. The first question to be asked concerns the motivation to write at all. The assumption that family relations tell of possible persons who offered chances for identification leads to the further subject of how the authors viewed their parents and their own position towards their families. What were the norms concerning sexual relations, partner selection, and marriage with which they were confronted? Education as a means of oppression or enforcement of autonomy appears in male as well as in female middle-class autobiographies as crucial for the process of building an identity. I will also look for possible motifs that are to be found exclusively in working-class female autobiographical writing. At the conclusion, I will attempt to consider how introspection concerning their own sexual role influenced each individual molding of autobiographical writing as a genre.

Clara Mueller-Jahnke⁸

Mueller-Jahnke was born as the daughter of a Pomeranian freethinking minister, who himself came from a rural working-class background and received his parsonage as a result of the revolution of 1848. Because of the early death of her father, Clara, being the only surviving daughter, had to earn a living as a fourteen-year-old by private teaching. At sixteen, after only a brief school training, she went to Berlin to work as a clerical worker. Sexual harassment by her boss drove her back home to Pomerania, where she opened a boarding house at a seashore resort. A love affair with one of the quests, a Polish priest, led to pregnancy. She delivered the child incognito in Berlin. leaving home under the pretense of suffering from a serious disease that needed special treatment. The child died shortly after it was born. Clara went back home again and worked as a writer for the local newspaper. She broke completely with her mother, who had no understanding for the pregnancy and viewed Clara's suffering as a personal attack on her own standards of morality. The story stops at this point. It is told as a report to a beloved man (modelled after Hedwig Dohm's "Schicksale einer Seele" [Fate of a Soul]), allowing the reader to know that later in her life Clara Mueller-Jahnke found a meaningful relationship with another man. From her biography, we know that she married a painter, very likely the "beloved" addressed in her book.

The motives of Mueller-Jahnke are obvious: "I confess" is a qualified title. She wants to uncover the sexual abuse of women, and a new morality based on the equality of the sexes is to be promoted through her text. The Protestant love of truth provided by her upbringing was joined to the material experience of a woman in wage-labor dependence to create this new morality. Sincerity as an ultimate Protestant concept is one of her ideals, and it certainly was her hard fate that the man whom she loved and who hurt her most was a Polish Catholic priest. The first part of her sad story contains the telling fact that the first man who affected her life through sexual assault was her boss, whom she describes as an immoral capitalist. 10 Thus Clara finds the male world utterly oppressive and opposed to her own ideas about love and personal relationship. Males not only commit sexual abuse, but also represent insincerity, wretchedness and dubious social values. The ideals of sincerity and pure love were central for her, and this is certainly the reason why the autobiography was republished with an introduction by Clara Bohm-Schuch, who points out the enlightening values of the book for women within the working-class movement.11 Among a large portion of the organized German working class these idealistic views were highly esteemed. The possible dangers of a liberated sexuality could thus be counteracted by new norms.

One might come to the conclusion that this autobiography is a product of plain ideology. When examined more closely, however, it reveals some traits that tell a different story. The therapeutic effect of a "confession" may give us the key. Mueller-Jahnke's life was so humiliating and painful that only the written confessions made under the conditions of a newly-found love and her new ideals helped her to cope with these experiences. The jobs available to an unmarried woman at the time (clerical work, running a boarding house) made her totally defenseless against male harassment, with no assistance offered by the conventional rules and mechanisms that apparently worked for other middle-class girls and young women—as the autobiographies of Lange, Baeumer, Tiburtius, and Weber (for example) point out, Under these particular conditions, the necessity to go out for work created a major danger for the physical and mental intactness of a woman. Without the protection of a father or close male relative, Clara Mueller-Jahke was defenseless in her exposure to male harassment. But she presents this in a special, noteworthy way. By means of her Protestant "sincerity." she was able to reveal her own needs and desires in the relationship to the Catholic priest, portraying her own sexuality quite pitilessly despite an occasionally overdone sentimentality:

My beloved, I shall try to describe my feelings during the trip. I was not a child in need of protection about to meet her fatal lot unsuspectingly. I knew exactly what I was in for. Nevertheless, stirred by a wild defiance and pushed by an invisible hand, I went on. . . . This was no longer me, Wilma, this pale obstinate woman. . . . I stood right next to me and watched every facet of her tense features, every convulsion of her feverish soul with a demonic cold desire for knowledge, and I maintained the desire. It remained within me when I walked at his side through the magnificent night in the light of the full moon, towards the little town in the middle of nowhere that we had chosen as the place for our encounter. 12

We can tell from this quotation that sexuality and eroticism had a central meaning in this woman's life, and that she was aware of this. Oppression and solidarity with the suppressed were the result. Thus sex is seen as the most powerful force in her life. How did this develop during her childhood and how does she herself understand the shaping force of sexuality for her personal identity?

The idullic life in the parsonage seems at first glance to have been far

from influenced by dark carnal forces. But the author reveals that those forces existed and were closely related to the sex roles in the family:

My mother cried a lot. Married at just eighteen to a man twenty years older, she had stayed a spoiled and pampered child in her narrow family circle despite her genuine intelligence. She raised five children, of which I was the youngest, under bitter sufferings, . . . and four children died very young. 13

This quotation shows that the daughter had a deep understanding of the mother when she was an adult woman. She does not, however, talk about her relationship to the mother openly as long as she is dealing with her own childhood. In retrospect, it was her father who was influential in terms of educational ideas. He planned a professional career for her and wanted to send her to a Swiss university, guite an unusual idea at the time. She received the same instructions he gave to the boys boarding with the family who were being prepared for academic studies. Strangely enough, she writes less about what they studied than about her attraction to a handsome boy among them. The emphasis on this aspect of being educated among boys reveals that Clara as an author was very much aware that her sex and consequently her sexuality or eroticism shaped her relationship towards men and at a very early state formed her identity as a woman. This awareness is accompanied by a critical attitude toward conventional sex-roles. An early disdain for a "good match" is mentioned when she writes of her first passionte fondness for the young doctor of the family and describes the sad "good matches" of her schoolmates. Her mother was the one who firmly believed that Clara should herself look for a good marriage. The plan set up by her progressive father for her to become a doctor was destroyed by his early death; the mother refused to send her even to a one-vear course in a normal school for women.

Briefly stated, this presentation of childhood and youth sharply depicts the contradictions in a woman's biography that arose so early because of the premature absence of a protecting father. The result was an extremely sensitive girl suffering from sexual defenselessness and very much inclined to get involved in romantic love affairs. She tries to cope with her bitter experience by writing these confessions denouncing the pretentious bourgeois morality her mother represents. The ultimate goal seems to be propaganda for the "new" old idea of a marriage among equals. 14

As opposed to middle-class woman in the second half of the

nineteenth century, Mueller-Jahnke could not take ideological or emotional refuge in a job or a profession that would have been approved by the society as appropriate for a woman. She had to sell her work on the job market of the modern economic world and could not acquire training in a "feminine" profession accepted as approximating mothering as a genuine female occupation. That is what makes her story initially different from all middle-class biographies I have read and what justifies her inclusion in a selection of working-class autobiographies. She does not, however, present a straight working-class movement view of her life course. Her own coming-of-age is not interpreted through mere social-democratic idealism of clean and fair sex relations among men and women, but tells of deeper introspection of a process she views as molded through sex-related oppression. Her identity is not idealistically presented as shaped only by "sincerity" and diligent work, but also through the experience of erotic attraction as a constructive as well as a devastating force.

In this respect, Mueller-Jahnke's autobiography offers as a key for the understanding of working-class women's autobiography the importance of sex determination. It is blatant sexual abuse that constantly threatened the life of these women on the one hand, and, on the other, the insight that among women's rights there should be the right for an autonomous sexual life. Mueller-Jahnke explicitly declares that she found her path to the working-class movement through the experience of her sexual defenselessness. Her strong will to fight for a society of freedom emerged from these sufferings. This is a case of autobiographical writing in which class determination can only be understood through sex determination.

Adelheid Popp¹⁵

Popp's "Jugendgeschichte einer Arbeiterin" (Youth of a Working Woman) is one of the best-known autobiographies written by a woman from the second half of the nineteenth century. Although it is the explicit goal of these memoirs to show the development from oppression to a class-conscious proletariat, implicitly there are other issues included in this autobiography, therapeutic ones as in Mueller-Jahnke's.

Popp's childhood was marked by poverty, loneliness, and severe illness. Her youth was endangered by unemployment and sexual abuse at her place of work. Her life story gives us the impression that she finally emerged from the dark days of her childhood into the bright

light of a social-democratic organizer who then knew all about how to fight poverty, illness, and ignorance. Popp points out that she had very little schooling. As a ten-year-old she considered herself no longer a child and thus avoided registration as a child and bypassed compulsory school attendance. She began work as a wage laborer. Despite her deficient education, she had always read a lot and apparently had a special gift to describe what she had read to others. Her later achievements as a party organizer originated from this ability.

Popp tells about her early life as a working child in considerable detail. Exploitation of children, especially of female children, by so-called *Zwischenmeister* (intermediate supervisors) is a major theme. Working in a factory for bronze articles and in a glass factory caused a serious nervous attack. Although she was only fourteen, she was placed in a psychiatric ward and, having been totally abandoned by her mother, finally ended up in a workhouse. A reader oriented toward middle-class ideas of the family might be surprised that Popp does not blame her mother for leaving her alone, but rather blames the condition of psychiatric wards at the time. As for the psychic disease that put her in these institutions, she does not describe it clearly but calls it a "nervous attack." She says only that this type of nervous attack had been a constant threat in her youth because she feared ending up in an institution like a workhouse or a hospital for good.

"Die Jugendgeschichte einer Arbeiterin" does not deal with the problem of sex relations as Popp did very didactically in her "Erinnerungen" (Memoirs). In this first autobiographical text, she gives instead an account of the sexual harassment that marked her childhood. There was a boarder in the family's house who, according to her judgement, had not been sufficiently called to account for what he did to her. Her mother as well as her brother treated the man with indulgence and pointed out to her quite clearly that their interest wasn't as much in Adelheid's intactness as a person as in the establishment and retaining of a hypocritical morality. Popp had to experience these socially accepted standards yet again when the travel agent of the factory where she worked tried to seduce her. She immediately quit, since she felt endangered and humiliated. Brother and mother had no understanding of her predicament and forced her to go back to work.

The relationship to her mother seems to have been very strong. Popp claims that although her mother in her old age had become an almost unbearable burden, she could never abandon her. She admires her mother because she had been someone "who never wanted to depend on anyone." Quite contrary to Clara Mueller-Jahnke, Popp sees herself deeply influenced by her mother's image. The personal

strength of the mother enabled her to develop her own strength as a working-class organizer.

The choice of a partner is talked about at length in the more didactically oriented "Erinnerungen." Popp points out that she always had high aspirations, but in her youth never met anybody who would have really met her expectations. Her self-described prudishness as a young person seems to prevent her from describing how she met her future husband. She tells about dreams of the desirable man, but these dreams turn out to be not very sensual: "Whenever I thought about marriage, I dreamed of a man who would share my ideals. I expected not only happiness from him, but also support for my own personal development." Here again, we find the ideal male-female relationship that seemed to prevail among socialist women at the time. It symbolizes the change in her personal life as a result of political insight, but at the same time shows that she has always been very aware of the suppressive effects of the dominant conventional sex-roles. Even when Popp sees working conditions as constituting the main influence on her personal development, she has a clear sense of the importance of sex-related oppression.

She gives a touching account of the significance of beauty in her life: outfits and jewelry embellished the youth of this proletarian fighter, and on occasion she reports at great length on how to dress despite her poverty.¹⁶ In comparison to most of the middle-class autobiographies I have examined, this subject is more important to workingclass women. When Popp began work, she commented: "Now I had nice dresses according to my taste at the time; I was allowed to buy fancy shoes and other things a young girl enjoys."17 A remarkable tale of feudal mercy and fancy outfit is included that underlines this aspect. As a young child, she was often given a certain amount of money and new clothes by a dutchess, which, of course, brought about no longterm improvement in the living conditions of the family. Her relating of the story, however, makes it hard to believe that it is written by a social democratic leader, since she does not pay much attention at all to the class struggle aspects of the anecdote—it seems more like a miraculous fairy tale.

On her first visit to the castle bedecked in her new clothes, she suddenly sees herself in a mirror door and wonders who this person might be with a mysterious resemblance to herself in terms of color of hair and clothing. After coming home, she talks it over with her mother, but the two of them can find no explanation because they do not know that doors covered with mirrors exist. The real event surely has symbolic significance, even if the author herself does not allude to

it and might not even have interpreted it in that way. The very fact that she recalls the event and considers it worth telling in her autobiography gives us a hint that this woman, even as a child, was quite aware of the problem of self-consciousness. The reflection in the mirror enclosed a mystery about herself that she tried to uncover. At the same time, this tale reveals her self-perception as a nicely dressed girl.

It is insufficient to characterize Popp's autobiography as a working-class autobiography "in which the decisive step [is taken] to view a proletarian life no longer from the perspective of the more or less helpless victim in history, but to see a strong relationship between individual development of class and society." The author adds very special personal aspects originating from her fate as a female member of her class. No male writer of her political background has paid that much attention to problems of sexuality, beauty, and psychological explanations of parent(mother)-child relationship. It is a specific characteristic of Popp that even when she explains family conditions through class struggle, she still deals with the "personal affairs" that contrast so noticeably with male working-class autobiography. 19

Popp's coming-of-age is viewed as particularly influenced by the fact that to grow up as a woman means to become potentially or actually a victim of male power. As opposed to Mueller-Jahnke, she does not have the experience of ambivalence toward her own desires for love, although I tend to interpret her attitude toward female beauty as her way to experience the positive aspects of her gender. Thus Popp adds a motif to her autobiography which otherwise adopts significant aspects from the male-shaped idea of a working-class autobiography. Her story reflects her sexually-defined role not merely as being a victim, but also as providing beauty in her life.

Marie Wegrainer

Marie Wegrainer's Lebensgeschichte einer Arbeiterin (Life Story of a Working Woman)²⁰ tells the story of a child born in a workhouse near Rothenburg ob der Tauber in 1852 as the illegitimate daughter of a servant who had been left by the father of her child. She grew up with foster parents and was sent to Munich to work as a domestic servant in a shopowner's household when she turned thirteen. At the age of sixteen, she was asked by her birth-mother, who had in the meantime married a wealthy shopowner, to return home. Two years later, Marie left home again after her stepfather had tried to rape her. She went back to Munich and worked as a chambermaid. After a disappointing

affair with an artist, she met a young craftsman. A long period of betrothal followed because her fiancé had to serve in the army. During this time she gave birth to a child who died briefly thereafter. Finally she married the craftsman, had four children, and lived in poverty most of her life, since her husband, an independant cabinetmaker, was unable to adapt to changes caused by rapid industrialization in the late nineteenth century. Although she suffered considerable hardship, she claims that the motivation to record her autobiography derives from a satisfying life course. Clearly the success of her children (mainly that of the youngest son, the writer Leonhard Frank) was the joy of her life. She says of her son Leonhard: "He had inherited a sense of delicacy from his mother. Only she had a deep understanding for him and was obsessed by the wish that he would one day achieve what had been denied to her by a hard fate. He should rise up and not be submerged in the misery of life that had threatened and almost overtaken her life."21 He was able to fulfill the goals she had only dreamed of. The end of the story reveals more about the author's motivation: she had looked on herself as somebody appointed for a higher destination and in retrospect she tries to justify her lack of success. We know from other studies in social history that the prevailing self-perception of domestic servants throughout the nineteenth century was that of being people between the classes.

It is no accident that Wegrainer dreams of being an artist, a status between the classes. She was neither a socially descending person nor a class-conscious climber (like Popp). Calling herself a working-class woman, she can be viewed as a woman from those social classes that have been forced into the status of proletarian workers by industrialization. Women of this class background very often had to lower their sights and become domestic servants. Wegrainer adjusted to poverty and assumed it to be her personal fate since she had married a goodfor-nothing.

As a child, she had the maximum amount of schooling for her class background, although she says that she would have liked to have gone on beyond her confirmation in order to learn sewing and other skills. Her unwed mother could not afford a lengthier education. Unlike Popp, Wegrainer never suffered from unemployment during her youth and had instead a wide range of social experience among the upper class. The extremely bad relationship to her mother was improved when her mother gained modest wealth through her marriage.

It seems as if everything improved in Marie Wegrainer's life, which she defines as a moderate story with moderate expectations. This modesty, accompanied by narrow-mindedness, can be very clearly shown in the depiction of sexual experience, deliberately chosen or shaped by her actual encounters with men. She is pregnant while still unwed and loses the child, but the relationship with her fiancé stays stable. The rape attempted by her father is named as such, but does not cause a radical change in her family relations; new grass grows, and after two or three years everybody has forgotten the assault. It is a general tendency in Wegrainer's story to describe the most dramatic events undramatically. The course of a normal life is the line she wants to follow. Aspects of pain, despair, suffering, or pleasure are named, but put in no relation to the "normal" life. There is a heavy pressure on her to harmonize the whole description of her life. The destiny of life is well planned from the outset: a "good marriage," well-arranged circumstances of life, modest wealth, a nice home, and successful children who achieve what Wegrainer as a mother thinks they should achieve, are the central values in her life.

Since her own mother initially had to give her children away in order to make a living, the foster mother had a much closer relationship to Marie during her childhood, but the author nevertheless does not mention her after leaving her house. The birth-mother is portrayed in a very ambivalent way: on the one hand, she was hard-hearted enough not to allow her another year of school, yet on the other hand. Marie returns home to her without any question. The father, who never cared for her at all, is seen in the general mild light of her report: "Only once and only for a short quarter of an hour was Marie allowed to see her father."22 Returning from America, he visited the inn next door and asked to see his child before he had to travel on. He was friendly to her, was a "real handsome young man," asked her questions "with tears in his eyes." She describes the end of the meeting: "And even if the father had done so much wrong to her and her mother, for her he remained a beautiful recollection, since he had kissed and caressed her."23 It is common in women's autobiographies that the father appears in a radiant light despite his total retreat from responsibility.

Her lack of a possible better education is never blamed on social conditions, but rather on the hard-heartedness of her mother or bad luck, as when the possible financial support from an old man in Munich who believes in her talents is withdrawn. "Luck had only touched her slightly" is her fatalistic comment on the death of that possible sponsor. The author never thinks of herself as someone capable of struggling against oppressive conditions, but she strives mightily to gain a better education for her children. One of them becomes an artist, thus fulfilling her own hopes which are revealed only at the very end of her report. In her dreams, she apparently envisioned herself as

an artist. Although her first love was a painter, she avoided any mention of her own dreams of becoming an artist in her account of that affair. It is only very indirectly that we find further hints in her autobiography of a possible interest in this kind of work.

Wegrainer talks a lot about her beauty. She depicts herself as a beautiful girl and adds lengthy descriptions of clothes. Female beauty is important for her; even in her depiction of men, she often refers to their good looks. Her later husband, a social disaster, was very good looking, always dressed well, and thus she falls in love with him. She gives this picture of him without questioning her own judgement. It seems as if Wegrainer wrote down her life because she thought of herself as a person with an outstanding sense for beauty, but it is only in the last few passages of her narration that she links this sense of beauty with possible professional achievement, and here she is proiecting her wishes onto her son's career. At the same time, her son represents her superego. She finishes her book with the following dedication: "After my death to my son Gerhard. And if he finds his mother guilty, he should not condemn her but keep in mind that she has paid early for her guilt."25 The only possible guilt she might be referring to is the illegitimate child and its early death or the near-rape by her stepfather. The repentance she could have in mind is the life with the good-for-nothing husband. The outline of the book would not evoke this interpretation, since guilt is at no point a topic in the narration. But the concluding passages indicate that Wegrainer viewed her life's course as structured initially by a fateful sexual relationship.

This interpretation of Wegrainer's autobiography gives support to the following conclusion: her own view of how her identity has been established puts an emphasis on her crucial relationship to men. In that respect, her autobiography is not that different from Mueller-Jahnke's and Popp's: she did not find a way out of this predicament through joining the working-class movement, but projected her dreams of professional achievements onto a narration of lost love and onto her support for her beloved son.

As I pointed out before, she perceives herself as a potential social climber who failed. Her solution to project her aspirations onto her son's life is a woman's solution. A man possibly would have interpreted a similar life course as his fate as an unrecognized genius, an idea Wegrainer did not have in mind. The question is thus raised: does she see herself as a victim? And does my initial thesis apply at all: that all three women struggled through their lives by breaking away from conventional rules and fighting for autonomy? Wegrainer sees herself as a victim. She did not only suffer, however, and positively views her

own life before marriage in her work as a chambermaid; she also purposefully strives for a better future for her own children, and tries to avoid what her mother had done to her. Another break from the prescribed life course remains only weakly expressed, but appears in dreams. The assumed collective experience within working-class auto-biographies, however, does not apply to her story.

The question as to why these women wrote their biographies can be easily answered: Mueller-Jahnke and Popp shared the same motive of wanting to present their lives in the public sphere, of describing their individual fate as that of a woman and a class in such a way that other women could learn from it. In both cases therapeutic motives entered in as well. Through writing, they liberated themselves from the pain they had suffered. Therapeutic motivation is also evident in Wegrainer's autobiography, although she has no class-related political goal for the publication of her life's story. Writing in a way very close to the middle-class autobiographical style of the time, Mueller-Jahnke, Popp, and Wegrainer made an attempt to present their childhood and youth as moving along an upward path. 26 It turned out, however, that in the lives of none of these women does such an "upward path" become apparent. The reason guite clearly lies in their gender. In various ways the definition of what they were supposed to become as adult women and the threat of male abuse caused deviations and twists in their lives which were brought on by their sex-role. This, at least, is the ultimate motivation for telling their stories publicly.

In conclusion I will focus my comments on certain key motifs in the above works: family relations, educational chances, job possibilities and aspirations and the subjective perception of sex-roles, and male sexuality and eroticism. In a second step, I will compare my findings with the results from the interpretation of female middle-class autobiographies, an interpretation that has been guided by similar questions: How did these women become who they were? What have been the most influential personal relations, images, and structures in their lives that molded their identity as they became adult? Finally, I will sum up what kind of identity these working-class women developed in reference to Erikson's concept of identity.

Family relationship is dealt with in all three autobiographies in reference only to the mother and father. The relationship to the mother is reported as being problematic in all cases, although each woman attempts to analyze and find legitimate explanations of why her mother treated her as she did. None of the mothers seemed to the authors to have helped them in their development and instead constrained the

lives of their daughters by hard-heartedness and narrowly-defined social norms. Of the fathers, none shared their lives consistently in child-hood and youth, but both Wegrainer and Mueller-Jahnke describe their fathers with much indulgence and only Popp presents hers in a negative way. The well-known belief that it is the task of mothers to impose society's demands on their children can be found even in nineteenth-century working-class autobiography. Manuals of educational advice repeatedly demanded this role of women throughout the century, and the great pedagogical ideas of the time as proposed by Rousseau and Pestalozzi underlined the importance of this task. Even the daughters of the lower classes reflected these demands on mothers, as illustrated by Popp:

My feelings for childhood recollections are different. No light, no sunbeam, no cosy home, where motherly love and care led me through childhood, come to mind. Nevertheless, I had a good and devoted mother who didn't allow herself a minute's rest; she was always driven by necessity and the strong will to raise her children properly and to protect them against hunger."²⁸

Despite a desperate situation, the mother fulfilled her task.

I think that the high esteem of the father finds its explanation in the fact that in Wegrainer's as in Mueller-Jahnke's life he was far less influential in their real lives than the mother and thus could be idealized. On the other hand, all three women refused the demand to live the kind of life their mothers had, and this was the severest break in their life course. In Mueller-Jahnke's story, this aspect comes up frequently; Popp several times relates incidents that point out quite clearly that she does not share her mother's view of how to shape her relationship to men. Wegrainer puts strong emphasis on her own family life; she sees herself as a much more concerned mother than her own mother and blames her mother for missed chances in life.

The education of all these women was poor. Mueller-Jahnke and Wegrainer at least attended school for eight years; Popp spent only three years in school, but emerged an enthusiastic reader. Wegrainer apparently enjoyed the time she spent in school and would have liked to have stayed longer. She regrets her brief education again and again.

None of these women worked in the fields that became accessible through the middle-class women's movement, namely education and social work, in which feminine qualities in the sense of "motherly" qualities were demanded. Mueller-Jahnke tells the story of a midwife who had worked as a clerical worker and who helped her at her delivery. She describes the work of this woman apparently in order to

show that militant action for access to meaningful jobs is important. She herself did not strive for a goal in the field of these "mothering professions" but confined herself to clerical work. ²⁹ Popp was never in a position to be able to develop "career plans" at all, since she was bound to become a worker anyway. Wegrainer's role as a domestic servant represents just another case of female proletarian fate that cannot be concealed by her description of the fancy life among the upper class. The "right to work" did not have to be fought for in the lives of these women. The simple necessity to survive did not allow much reflection on what type of work they were doing. One of the most significant characteristics in these women's process of finding an identity was that they did not become aware of their condition through *Bildung*, but through direct suffering from exploitation at the work place and through the ever-present danger of sexual abuse.

Sexuality, sensuality, a sense of aesthetics, and eroticism are themes that belong together in the stories they tell about their lives. Mueller-Jahnke talks romantically about beauty and erotic attraction when she tells of her childhood. Popp deals at length with problems of how to dress as a young working woman, which surprises the reader, because otherwise she takes such a firmly moralistic class-conscious stand. Wegrainer's major motive in writing her story lies in her sensuality, which she connects directly to eroticism and sexuality.

Male sexuality is a basic threat in the lives of the three women. There are other more positive aspects of how they encounter male relationships in their stories, but the emphasis is undoubtedly placed on danger. Popp describes the relationship to her "ideal" man as absolutely chaste and thus locates the danger outside the bounds of marriage. Even if she does not point out in the narration of her own life's course the aspect of danger that much, she speaks of the defense through her "iron morality" as a growing girl. Wegrainer and Mueller-Jahnke look at themselves as victims of male abuse and this leads them to autobiographical writing. Men (or one man) have been important figures in the lives of these three women and have given direction to their life course more than anything else. Their identity as women has been shaped throughout their childhood and youth under the overall assumption that they were to become the submissive objects of male desires. I tend to explain the male orientation of Mueller-Jahnke and Wegrainer through the general predicament of women of their time to find a way out of prescribed submission. They have been influenced by the prevailing ideology of mutual complementary relations between the sexes, and consequently, they all express an ambivalent attitude toward men. Men are not only potential and real oppressors, but offer images as autonomous persons and thus bring about dreams of ideal partners who would accept their autonomous lives. Wegrainer did not have sufficient positive experience for such dreams, but must confine herself to seeing her successful son as the "ideal man."

In my final section, I will compare the writings of these women, who in a very basic way were connected to the working class, with the writings of contemporaneous middle-class women. My previous research dealt with the autobiographical writings of the following: Fanny Lewald (writer), Hedwig Dohm (writer), Mathilde Franziska Anneke (writer, politician, principal of a girl's school), Franziska Tiburtius (doctor), Helene Lange (teacher and women's movement activist), Marianne Weber (academic), Lily Braun (writer and politician), Ellen Hauss-Knapp (politician and teacher), and Gertrud Bäumer (teacher and activist of the women's movement). Although the classification "proletarian" versus "middle-class" is not entirely satisfactory, I am tentatively sticking to it for the purpose of discriminating the various work experiences of those women.

Almost all the writers of either group were very critical toward their mothers. The mother-daughter relationship is not only a current topic of interest (Hammer, Friday³¹), but was already a problem among women in the nineteenth century. The fathers generally are treated with much more indulgence by both groups. Many middle-class autobiographies even claim that had there not been these fathers, the women would not have become what they were. Mueller-Jahnke corresponds most precisely to this pattern (Braun, Lewald, Baeumer). Only Popp, as I said before, unforgivingly portrays her father as a tyrant under whom the whole family had to suffer. The father clearly represented a positively identified figure for these women who, however, was in a position with which they never could really identify. This kept him above criticism as an unreachable image. But while the middle-class autobiographies portray the father as the image for the possibility to live a life outside the narrow house, two of the workingclass autobiographies give a much more idealized and colorless picture of the fathers, while Popp confines his role to that of an oppressor.

The accent on educational opportunities and training represents a large part of almost all autobiographies, since by definition a nineteenth-century personality gains self consciousness through school and *Bildung* in childhood and youth. There is a significant difference between the two groups, however. Middle-class women deal with education as a means of finding meaning in life, and thus the striving for a good education was the motivation for personal and

political action. Even those among them who did not have to fight for an education and might have taken up other interests for their professional career ended up as teachers for young girls (Heuss-Knapp). Popp, Wegrainer, and Mueller-Jahnke had to work for a living and did not need to oppose family or society for the right to work outside the house. There was no opportunity for them to live a life as a hoehere Tochter, as a wife, or as an unmarried aunt, who in all three cases could stay at home. I do not want to belittle this choice for a middle-class woman, but it made a difference for the course of a life. Since working-class women did not have these choices, they did not work in those areas which had been fought for and established by the middle-class women's movement and which had produced the idea of a geistige Mütterlichkeit (spiritual motherhood). Working-class women did not reflect on job profiles, but took any available wage-labor jobs in the industrial, commercial, or domestic labor market.

Another basic difference can be found in the differing attention paid to eroticism and sexuality. The activists from the women's movement (Tiburtius, Lange, Baeumer, Weber, and Heuss-Knapp) do not talk about this topic in a way comparable to the treatment it finds in the working-class autobiographies. Indeed, Tiburtius, Lange, and Baeumer give the impression that there was no such thing in their lives. Weber theorizes on sex relations and eroticism and tells at length about the sexual fate of her domestic servants. Heuss-Knapp confines herself to some very soft hints. Only the married radicals (i.e., Lewald, Dohm, and Braun) talk about their sexual and erotic relations with men. The potential danger of male violence caused by sexual desires is stressed only by Dohm and Braun.

The relationship to a particular man was of major importance for a number of women from the middle-class group. Very often it led to the specific direction their life took and produced characteristic twists in the process of personal development. For the working-class writers, the relationship to men was marked by danger. Despite their ideas about the "ideal man," it wasn't he who shaped their experiences with men when they were young. Although some of the middle-class women no doubt had quite similar experiences with men, they do not talk about it. Did rules of convention really protect those women, as Tiburtius claims, or did rules of convention only keep them from publicly denouncing those humiliating experiences? There are certain indications that the latter assumption is correct. Dohm tells briefly of sexual harassment by male teachers and other men of her bourgeois environment. In Marianne Weber's biography of her husband Max Weber, she portrays at length the rape of her beloved aunt, the mother of her later

husband, which took place in the best of Heidelberg academic circles. She also describes her mother-in-law's miserable life as a married woman oppressed sexually by her husband, a highly esteemed member of the Reichstag. What was Marianne Weber's motive in writing this bizarre introduction to the life of her famous sociologist husband?³² Education and rules of convention for middle-class women made it possible for them to repress this whole field of experience and to build an environment as adults which kept this threat under control.

In comparison to their sisters from the middle-class women's movement, Wegrainer, Mueller-Jahnke, and Popp did not strive for education (Bildung) as a means for a self-defined identity in itself. Too often they had been threatened by male abuse and economic disaster. Strategies for economic and personal independence were less important for them, but the threat of violence called for basic protection of women through better working conditions, for abolishment of maledominated morality, and for the acknowledgement of the equality of sexes. They expressed this call either through political action or through the hope for a better future for their children.

Autobiography as a nineteenth-century literary genre has been viewed as the description of the acquirement of a certain education. The molding of an identity in Germany through *Bildung* led to a certain social position in the public arena. Consequently, the middle class autobiographies I have dealt with have been significantly influenced by this view, even if most of them tell the story of the struggle against restrictions set by a male-dominated society. The working-class women of my sample who adopted the genre do not reflect that struggle for an education. They emphasize much more the bleak oppression of working conditions and economic exploitation. In that respect, they resemble male working-class autobiographies as defined by Emmerich. They differ significantly from Emmerich's scheme, however, in their focus on the sex-related forms of oppression and in their descriptions of the "private" experience of aesthetic values.

These women depicted their lives within the accepted genre. In addition to the therapeutic motivation, they considered themselves capable of relating a consistent individualized life course. Yet the consistency was not provided by the prerequisites of an acknowledged idea of what they were to become, but rather by their fight against the restrictive life of a working woman and—in the case of Mueller-Jahnke and Popp—for an autonomous life. This specific adoption of the genre leads to the question: to what extent could their view of coming-of-age be interpreted in the framework that Erikson offered for the process of building an identity.

My discussion of their writings indicates that there was no consistent concept of identity offering orientation to these women. The prevailing stereotypes of male and female personalities and relationships and their consequences for the female life course cannot be addressed as a concept for identity as long as one shares Erikson's notion of an identity that includes the active acquisition of personality traits and qualities. The dominant ideas of the female personality were not acceptable for two of the authors (Popp, Mueller-Jahnke); Wegrainer manages in her depiction to harmonize her ideal goals with her female fate, but the underlying contradictions are easily disclosed. Popp's selfacknowledged prudishness, Mueller-Jahnke's disdain for "good matches," and even Wegrainer's escapist dreams of a beauty admired by upper classes indicate counter-concepts they developed themselves in their childhood and youth. They all wanted to take an active part in shaping their lives. They refused to accept a role as a victim of a maledominated love life, and they developed personal and/or political goals for themselves. The process of building up an identity did not involve a close relationship with parents for unquestioned identification or a moratorium during their youth. No successive integration of all identifications through childhood and youth, as Erikson puts it, shaped their identity, but rather severe breaks, most dramatically indicated by the decision to break away from the kind of life their mothers lived and the negative experience brought on by their gender.

NOTES

- 1. Juliane Jacobi-Dittrich, "'Hausfrau, Gattin und Mutter,' Lebensläufe und Bildungsgänge von Frauen im 19. Jahrhundert" (Homemaker, Wife and Mother, Life Course and Education of Women in the Nineteenth Century), Frauen in der Geschichte IV (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1983), pp. 262–81.
 - 2. Erik Erikson, Identität und Lebenszyklus (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969).
- 3. Annette Kuhn, "Das Geschlecht—eine historische Kategorie?" (Gender—a Historical Category?), Frauen in der Geschichtiv, pp. 29–50.
- Bernd Neumann, Identität und Rollenzwang, Zur Theorie der Autobiographie (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1970).
- 5. Sabine Richebächer, *Uns fehlt nur eine Kleinigkeit*, Deutsche Proletarische Frauenbewegung 1890–1914 (We only lack a small last bit, German proletarian women's movement 1890–1914) (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1982).
- 6. Wolfgang Emmerich, *Proletarische Lebensläufe*, Bd.1 (Proletarian Life Courses) (Hamburg: Rowolt, 1974) pp. 22–26.
 - 7. Emmerich, p. 21.

- 8. Clara Mueller-Jahnke, *Ich bekenne* (I Confess) (Berlin: Dietz, 1922); Klaus Osterroth, *Biographisches Lexikon des Sozialismus*, Bd.1 (Biographical Encyclopedia of Socialism) (Hannover: Dietz, 1960) p. 227.
- 9. Hedwig Dohm, Schicksale einer Seele (Fates of a Soul) (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1899).
- 10. I must omit discussion of another interesting twist illustrated by this work, that is the strange German mixture of nationalism, populism, and Protestant religious beliefs of the late nineteenth century among certain social democrats.
- 11. Clara Bohm-Schuch was Clara Zetkin's successor as editor of *Die Gleichheit* (Equality), the women's periodical of the Socialist party after the party's split in 1917.
 - 12. Mueller-Jahnke, pp. 140-41.
 - 13. Mueller-Jahnke, pp. 9-10.
- 14. It would be interesting to go through social democratic autobiographical writings under this aspect.
- 15. Adelheid Popp, *Jugend einer Arbeiterin* (Youth of a Working Woman) ed. H. J. Schuetz (Berlin-Bonn: Dietz, 1977) contains the two autobiographical writings: "Jugendgeschichte einer Arbeiterin" (Youth of a Working Woman) and "Erinnerungen aus meiner Kindheit und Jugend" (Memoirs from My Childhood and Youth).
 - 16. Popp, p. 61; 132.
 - 17. Popp, p. 40.
 - 18. Emmerich, p. 22.
- 19. Compare the family life record given by Moritz Bromme, Lebensgeschichte eines modernen Fabrikarbeiters (The Life of a Modern Factory Worker) ed. Paul Göhre (Jena: Diederich. 1905).
- 20. Marie Wegrainer, Die Lebensgeschichte einer Arbeiterin von ihr selbst erzählt, (The Life Story of a Working Woman, Told by Herself) (München: Delphin, 1914).
 - 21. Wegrainer, p. 182.
 - 22. Wegrainer, p. 9.
 - 23. Wegrainer, p. 9.
 - 24. Wegrainer, p. 32.
 - 25. Wegrainer, p. 186.
- 26. Cf. Eckhard Dittrich and Juliane Dittrich-Jacobi, "Autobiographien als Quelle zur Sozialgeschichte der Erziehung" (autobiographies as source material for a social history in education) in *Aus Geschichten lemen*, ed. Dieter Baacke and Theodor Schulze (München: Juventa. 1979).
- 27. Uta Enders-Dragässer, *Die Mütterdressur* (The Mother's Taming) (Basel: Mondbuch, 1981).
 - 28. Popp, p. 25.
- 29. Cf. Ute Frevert, "Vom Klavier zur Schreibmaschine. Weiblicher Arbeitsmarkt und Rollenzuweisungen am Beispiel weiblicher Angestellter in der Weimarer Republik" (From Piano to Typewriter, Female-Labor-market and Role Assignment as Exemplified by Female Employees during the Weimar Republic) Frauen in der Geschichte, Bd.II. (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1979) pp. 82–112.
- 30. Fanny Lewald, Meine Lebensgeschichte, (My Life's Story) ed. Gisela Brinker-Gabler (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1980). Hedwig Dohm, Schicksale einer Seele (Fates of a Soul) (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1899). Mathilde Franziska Anneke, "Autobiographisches Fragment," Mathilde Franziska Anneke in Selbstzeugnissen und Dokumenten, ed. Maria Wagner (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1980). Franziska Tiburtius, Erinnerungen einer Achtzigjährigen. (Memoirs of an Eighty-year-old) (Berlin: Schwetschke, 1925). Helene Lange, Lebenserinnerungen (Memoirs) (Berlin: Herbig, 1927). Marianne Weber,

Lebenserinnerungen (Memoirs) (Bremen: Strohm, 1948). Lily Braun, Memoiren einer Sozialistin (Memoirs of a Socialist) 2 vols., (München: Langen, 1909). Elly Heuss-Knapp, Ausblick vom Münsterturm (View from the Cathedral's Tower) (Tübingen: Wunderlich, 1952). Gertrud Baeumer, Lebensweg durch eine Zeitwende, (A Life Course in Changing Times) (Tübingen: Wunderlich, 1933).

31. Signe Hammer, Mütter und Töchter (Mothers and Daughters) (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1977). Nancy Friday, My Mother/Myself (New York: Delacorte Press, 1977).

32. Marianne Weber, Max Weber. Ein Lebensbild (Max Weber, A Portrait) (Tübingen: Mohr, 1926).