In the first half of the nineteenth century, autobiography became, for the first time, an explicitly commercial genre. Drawing together quantitative data on the Victorian book markets, insights from the business ledgers of Victorian publishers and close readings of mid-century novels, Sean Grass demonstrates the close links between these genres and broader Victorian textual and material cultures. This book offers fresh perspectives on major works by Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Wilkie Collins, and Charles Reade, while also featuring archival research that reveals the volume, diversity, and marketability of Victorian autobiographical texts for the first time. Grass presents life writing not as a stand-alone genre, but as an integral part of a broader movement of literary, cultural, legal, and economic practices through which the Victorians transformed identity into a textual object of capitalist exchange.

Sean Grass is Professor of English at the Rochester Institute of Technology and is the author of *The Self in the Cell: Narrating the Victorian Prisoner* (2003), *Charles Dickens’s Our Mutual Friend: A Publishing History* (2014), and several essays on Victorian literature and culture. He received two awards from the National Endowment for the Humanities in support of the current work.
Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organization, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly synthesis and called into question the terms of older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as ‘background’, feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have reanimated the field. This series aims to accommodate and promote the most interesting work being undertaken on the frontiers of the field of nineteenth-century literary studies: work which intersects fruitfully with other fields of study such as history, or literary theory, or the history of science. Comparative as well as interdisciplinary approaches are welcomed.

A complete list of titles published will be found at the end of the book.
THE COMMODIFICATION OF IDENTITY IN VICTORIAN NARRATIVE

Autobiography, Sensation, and the Literary Marketplace

SEAN GRASS

Rochester Institute of Technology, New York
For Iris, my parents, and my brother
and in memory of
Lucero, Tennessee, and Nimbus
(the world’s least effective but most entertaining research assistants)
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my grumpiness and need for solitude, broken plans and invitations declined, early mornings and late nights, as I worked on this book. I appreciate that indulgence more than I can say. Without it I would have to aim lower, and fall short even of that. And without Iris my world would be innumerable shades of gray rather than the carnival of color she makes it. Finally, thank you to Lucero, Isabella, Nimbus, Monty, Phoenix, and the inimitable Tennessee. They have slept on my books, hogged my chair, disordered my desk, stomped on my keyboard, assailed my typing fingers, and sat between my eyes and my monitor – often all at once. Any typos in what follows are certainly theirs. I only regret that I could not finish the book faster, since a few of them will never get the chance to loll and doze across its pages. They have all, I hope, found sunny places where they can rest.

I have made the shoes.

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