Vitae Scholasticae

The Journal of Educational Biography

Special Issue:
A Biographical Research Bookshelf

Volume 31 Number 2
2014

Vitae Scholasticae
Volume 31, Number 2, 2014

Vitae Scholasticae is a refereed journal published by the International Society for Educational Biography.

Members of the International Society for Educational Biography receive each issue of *Vitae Scholasticae* as part of their membership. Subscriptions are available to other individuals for $50 a year and to institutions and libraries for $100 a year (add $40 per year outside of the United States); single copies of issues may be ordered for $50. See form on page 122.

ISSN 0735-1909.

Articles appearing in *Vitae Scholasticae* are abstracted and indexed in *Historical Abstracts* and *America: History and Life*.

Table of Contents

Editor's Note

Vitae Scholasticae is pleased to present the essays of ten distinguished scholars in this special issue on biographical research. It is an outgrowth of the ongoing work of *VS* contributors that is supported by the journal's publisher, the International Society for Educational Biography (ISEB).

In 2008, *Vitae Scholasticae* published its twenty-fifth anniversary issue with Craig Kridel's invited essay, "Biographical Meanderings: Reflections and Reminiscences on *Writing Educational Biography*."[1] Kridel's edited book, published ten years earlier, helped to define and advance the study of biography as an important field in educational research.[2] In his 2008 essay, Kridel expressed hope for the future of educational biography but quoted biographer Carl Rollyson, who was "especially distressed at the way biographers ignore each other."[3] In an effort to encourage *VS* readers to explore other scholars' work in biography, Kridel offered 22 titles he had assembled that focused on biographical theory.[4] That list, now updated as the Biographical Research Bookshelf, is the focus of our current issue.

In the six years since the publication of "Biographical Meanderings," *VS* contributors have drawn on *Writing Educational Biography* and the Biographical Research Bookshelf. The influence is evident in citations in journal articles, as well as in essays in Linda C. Morice and Laurel Puchner's edited book, *Life Stories*, published to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of *VS* and ISEB.[5] Given this influence, it seemed only fitting to craft a journal issue that would focus on the Biographical Research Bookshelf *itself*. Several people worked to conceptualize the issue, including Morice, Kridel, *VS* Book Editor Naomi Norquay, and longtime Editorial Advisory Board member Lucy E. Bailey. In addition to Kridel, nine scholars submitted invited essays for the special issue. They included former *VS* authors A. J. Angulo, Lucy E. Bailey, Bart Dredge, Susan Laird, Louis M. Smith, and Andrea Walton, as well as Linda M. Perkins, Paula M. Salvio, and P. L. Thomas, authors who are new to the journal. Also contributing to the issue was former *VS* author and new Assistant Editor Alison Reeves, who joined our editorial team in September 2014.

Since Kridel has maintained the Biographical Research Bookshelf as a

fluid document, authors of this special issue had the option of choosing works from the list, or suggesting books they found to be useful in their own biographical writing. One author chose a title not included in the list that advanced his work on lives of scientists; the others chose titles from the Bookshelf. All authors wrote essays addressing the content of their book, the ways the book had influenced their own biographical work, and the possible ways it might shape future biographical writing.

We hope readers will benefit from the authors' discussions of major issues biographers face, such as what it means to compose someone's life, how to decide what to include and exclude, how to determine the truthfulness and reliability of evidence, and how to address gaps in sources. Although scholars will continue to struggle with these questions, we hope the essays in this issue bring readers one step closer to answering the question posed by Virginia Wolfe and cited by *VS* author Lucy E. Bailey: "My God, how does one write a biography?"

—Linda Morice

Notes

[1] Craig Kridel, "Biographical Meanderings: Reflections and Reminiscences on *Writing Educational Biography," Vitae Scholasticae:* 25(2008): 5-16.

[2] Craig Kridel, ed., *Writing Educational Biography: Explorations in Qualitative Research* (New York: Garland, 1998).

[3] Kridel, "Biographical Meanderings," 14.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Linda C. Morice and Laurel Puchner, eds., *Life Stories: Exploring Issues in Educational History Through Biography* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2014).

A Biographical Research Bookshelf:
Method of the Madness

Craig Kridel
University of South Carolina

"To list is to exclude" and, as *Vitae Scholasticae* readers review this collection of essays about biographical research "classics," I wonder whether there will be moments of pause: "why is this book included and not my favorite!"; "where is Edel's *Writing Lives*?"; "what about Meryle Secrest's *Shoot the Widow*?" Well, that *is* my hope . . . that one could react this way while also enjoying the many insights from these nine published reviews. If readers were posing such questions, then we have taken a giant leap forward toward our understanding and awareness of biographical research theory in the field of education. If not, then Linda Morice's beautifully conceived issue will greatly help the cause as we begin to become aware of common biographical research readings and the existence of a well-developed theoretical base for our work in this emerging field of educational inquiry. Biography will no longer be defined in a mere few sentences; rather, the researcher will be well aware that "a field of biographical research" with common readings, shared issues and concerns, idiosyncratic conceptions, and perennial problems exists for those educators who wish to pursue the art and craft of biography.

That *was* my hope when, 20 years ago, I began compiling a bookshelf of works about biographical research for an exhibition at the University of South Carolina's Museum of Education.[1] I was involved with activities at the University's Center for Literary Biography, a research and archival center led by F. Scott Fitzgerald biographer Matthew J. Bruccoli, and John Updike book/artifact collector Donald Greiner. Rather than conceiving of biography in relation to other forms of educational research, I was afforded the opportunity through my participation at the Center to spend time with biogra-

phers, archivists, and rare book collectors from the humanities who were not battling with quantitative researchers, in what was a welcomed relief, or with anyone in the field of education for that matter (albeit, some were fighting for respectability with traditional professors of English and history). They were in pursuit of their biographical subjects—either as researchers and/or as collectors—and were well aware of standard readings in biography and methodology, policy and practices of common archives and libraries, and those oddities and problems faced by other biographers. Their common knowledge resulted in great comradery and led to occasions filled with many delightful anecdotes and witticisms. They were fully engaged in their work—in what clearly was a passion—and were aware of what others were reading and writing. Few of these scholars had taken formal courses in biographical inquiry, but they knew the field—reading widely but also reading "the standards"—and, as a result, they certainly knew their craft.

I sat through the discussions wondering if those of us in the field of education could someday engage in similar conversations, albeit discussing our disparate biographical topics, but also calling upon common readings in biographical methodology. Thus emerged a suggested list of readings for the neophyte educational biographer: a biographical research bookshelf. I must admit that I placed myself on the top of the list of neophyte biographers and selected, initially, those many books that proved insightful and revelatory to me. As I continued compiling the bookshelf and staging various biographical-themed exhibitions at the Museum of Education, I sought advice from many practicing biographers in the humanities and social sciences. My selections were generous and not viewed as an act of exclusion—not every methodological book was included, but I also was not attempting to keep the list to a mere ten or twenty selections (the bookshelf presently includes 35 publications).

By composing a publications list, I wished not to generate a "great books" roster for the field of educational biographers nor to canonize a definitive array of books that every researcher and student must know. Instead, I wanted to explore what publications helped to define this form of research and, in so doing, examine those books that have shaped (for good or bad) our thoughts about biography. As a researcher who wrote biographical vignettes, I found that I was coping with the same research issues—interpretive and documentary—as those preparing book-length works. Biographical research is all inclusive, taking the form of a full length publication, a "lives of teachers" unit within a teacher education report, a free-standing vignette, a school portraiture, encyclopedia entry, or biographical blurb—regardless of length and form, common issues bring together biographers. Further, the intent of the bookshelf was not to prepare for biographical trivia at conference gatherings—e.g., "define Edel's 'figure under the carpet'" or "what is the difference

between copyright and property rights?"These bookshelf authors—Heilburn, Clifford, Bateson, Edel, Backscheider, Wagner-Martin, Kendall, Rollyson, and many others—help us address common and inevitable research problems: how we come upon our biographical subject (and how we deal with our fascination if not obsession with this individual); how we determine our basic interpretive voices; how we ascertain the motives of the subject (as well as our motives); how we balance accuracy with the complexity of the individual; and many other issues. The problems go far beyond standard qualitative research issues of "the determination of fact" and our "reconciliation with constructed truths" and quantitative research issues of fact, validity, and reliability.

Selection Criteria

I was inspired by the warm reception of *The New York Public Library's Books of the Century* which grew out of the library's exhibition celebrating its centennial. Displaying works selected to "recall this past century and its tremendous changes . . . [*Books of the Century*] drew on the enthusiasm and love of books . . . of the institution's librarians,"[2] I realized I could not be objective—nor would I try. Elizabeth Diefendorf of The New York Public Library reached the same conclusion: "All of us who worked on *Books of the Century* understand that any such compilation, no matter how ambitious, can only be '*Some* Books of the Century,' as one visitor commented. Our choices, though certainly diverse, represent a perspective that is urban, American, and profoundly concerned with issues of social justice and freedom of expression. And ultimately there are many other books we might have included."[3] For that reason, I refer officially to this project as *A* Biographical Research Bookshelf rather than *The* Biographical Research Bookshelf. I hope other *Vitae Scholasticae* readers will suggest selections and/or begin composing their own listings. Similarly, I have compiled, for the AERA Biographical and Documentary Research Special Interest Group, a Documentary Research Bookshelf that has already proven to be of great help to many educational researchers conducting biographical and documentary inquiry as well as other forms of archival research.[4]

Ultimately, I worked within four principles while compiling the bookshelf. First, and perhaps most obvious, I limited myself to books and monographs and did not include articles. Certain classic articles come to mind that prove as helpful to the neophyte biographer as books, but I wished not to open a "periodical floodgate." Second, I selected works of theory and methodology rather than actual biographies. Quite frankly, I just did not want to place myself in a role of highlighting (and also critiquing and implicitly criticizing) samples of work. Biographers should read biographies . . . and

there is no need for such a listing of "great works"—especially for those of us who are refining our art. As we are well aware, "bad" biographies, however ascertained, can be as educational and insightful to the practicing biographer as good ones. Rather, I sought to compile those publications that describe an art and craft, generously conceived, for biographical research.

Third, I tried to focus on biography rather than autobiography and memoir, knowing full well that many of us (if not all) write in some form of narrative-memoir-personal biographical style. I recognize that many educational researchers also conceive of their work as auto/biography, autobiography, memoir, prosopography or taking the form of more social-science oriented life history and narrative study of lives (à la Josselson). This is to say that some educational biographers see little difference among these types of research—the definitions are fluid and divisions may always be seen as artificial. If there was any occasion, however, to explore distinctions among genres, I thought this could be the venue. Others can blur the categories among biography, autobiography, memoir, and auto/biography and reconceive correlated styles of inquiry. Yet, I believed that insights could also arise from those who attempt to make differentiations among these forms. I felt even more convinced after reading theory books from these genres and noticing the many different types of significant research issues and questions. From my perspective, writing autobiography requires a set of reconciliations and solutions to markedly different issues than those addressed in biography. I encourage interested readers to begin compiling their own autobiographical theory bookshelf or memoir theory bookshelf. I would be quite interested to see the selections, the overlap among lists, and our implicit articulations of these constantly evolving terms.

Fourth, I sought works that could inspire—noting that certain publications stir the imagination more than others and, of course, what is viewed as inspirational to some may be trite and mundane to others. Further, great biographers are great writers, and I included those publications where the authors displayed a conscious effort to write with style and grace—in essence, the literary style becomes part of the methodology. As the listing expanded, certain books did not fulfill these prerequisites as fully as others. But after reading any entry from Carl Rollyson's *Biography: A Users Guide* or any chapter from Stephen Oates' *Biography as High Adventure*, Paula Backscheider's *Reflections on Biography*, Linda Wagner-Martin's *Telling Women's Lives*, Paul Mariani's *A Usable Past*, one would want, passionately, to begin writing a biography (and would have compiled much material for chapter epigraphs).

Lists of noteworthy books are common, but this listing does not represent a lifetime reading plan to be placed aside for one's retirement pastime. "Reading plans" and any listing of classics prove quite complicated and con-

troversial, as I learned from the Museum of Education's Books of the Century project, but also so valuable for those attempting to understand their current ideological and contextual surroundings.[5] Unlike "great books" programs compiled by Clifton Fadiman, Thomas Jefferson, the Harvard Five-Foot Bookshelf, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, or E.D. Hirsch Jr., that are primarily based upon a concept of knowledge for knowledge's sake, this bookshelf contains knowledge to be used . . . immediately . . . and serves to entrance, educate, and introduce the reader to the world of biographical inquiry.

A Biographical Research Bookshelf circa 2014

> "Too often they (biographers) make extravagant claims of originality, ignoring the work of their predecessors by devaluing it . . . To engage in this kind of blinkered biography is a disservice to the genre itself." Carl Rollyson, *American Biography*

Alpern, Sara, Joyce Antler, Elisabeth Israels Perry, and Ingrid Scotie. *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1992.

Ascher, Carol, Louise DeSalvo, and Sara Ruddick, eds. *Between Women*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.

Backscheider, Paula R. *Reflections on Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Batchelor, John, ed. *The Art of Literary Biography*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.

Bateson, Mary Catherine. *Composing a Life*. New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989.

Bowen, Catherine Drinker. *Adventures of a Biographer*. Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1959.

Bowen, Catherine Drinker. *Biography*. Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1968.

Clifford, James L. *From Puzzles to Portraits: Problems of a Literary Biographer*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1970.

Denzin, Norman. *Interpretive Biography*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1989.

Edel, Leon. *Writing Lives: Principia Biographica*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1959.

Epstein, William, ed. *Contesting the Subject*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1991.

Garraty, John. *The Nature of Biography*. New York: Knopf, 1957.

Goodson, Ivor and Rob Walker. *Biography, Identity and Schooling*. London: Falmer Press, 1991.

Hamilton, Nigel. *How to Do Biography: A Primer*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Heilbrun, Carolyn. *Writing a Woman's Life*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1988.

Holmes, Richard. *Sidetracks: Explorations of a Romantic Biographer*. New York: Pantheon, 2000.

Holroyd, Michael. *Works on Paper: The Craft of Biography and Autobiography*. Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2002.

Iles, Teresa, ed. *All Sides of the Subject: Women and Biography*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1992.

Josselson, Ruthellen. and Amia Lieblich, eds. *The Narrative Study of Lives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1993.

Kendall, Paul Murray. *The Art of Biography*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1986.

Kridel, Craig, ed. *Writing Educational Biography: Explorations in Qualitative Research*. New York: Garland, 1986.

Langness, L. L. and Geyla Frank. *Lives: An Anthropological Approach to Biography*. Novato, CA: Chandler and Sharp Publishers, Inc., 1981.

Lomask, Milton. *The Biographer's Craft*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986.

Mariani, Paul. *A Usable Past: Essays on Modern and Contemporary Poetry*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984.

Morice, Linda C. and Laurel Puchner, eds. *Life Stories: Exploring Issues in Educational History Through Biography*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2014.

Oates, Stephen B., ed. *Biography as High Adventure: Life Writers Speak on Their Art*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986.

Oates, Stephen B. *Biography as History*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 1991.

Pachter, Marc, ed. *Telling Lives: The Biographer's Art*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981.

Roberts, Brian. *Biographical Research*. London: Open University Press, 2002.

Rollyson, Carl. *Biography: An Annotated Bibliography*. Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 1992.

Rollyson, Carl. *A Higher Form of Cannibalism?: Adventures in the Art and Politics of Biography*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005.

Rollyson, Carl. *Biography: A User's Guide*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008.

Secrest, Meryle. *Shoot the Widow: Adventures of a Biographer in Search of Her Subject*. New York: Knopf, 2007.

Veninga, James F. *The Biographer's Gift*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1983.

Wagner-Martin, Linda. *Telling Women's Lives: The New Biography*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994.

A Usable Bookshelf

> "Writing biography is both cerebral and passionate. There is nothing like writing biography." Paula Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography*

After reading just a few selections from the Biographical Research Bookshelf, I hope one would realize that the quest may not be to find "the answers" to solve all of the methodological concerns of biographical research; rather, what becomes significant is knowing that others have struggled with the same problems and that they "cope" in various ways as much as they solve these issues. Many of these authors know how "to turn a phrase" and their writing style is as brilliant as their capabilities as researchers. Their prose inspires, yet their interpretive voice exists with little hesitation and with no "interpretive relativism." Absent is what Rollyson has deemed "the biographical apologia," common among those educational researchers who include pages of interviewee narrative and rich description but who then refrain from interpreting motives and feelings.[6]

In addition to the bookshelf projects, I invite *Vitae Scholasticae* readers to visit a relatively new Museum of Education web exhibition. In the mid-1990s, the Museum began collecting statements from distinguished American biographers for an on-site exhibition, "Advice for the Aspiring Biographer." The exhibit was quite well received and, in fact, inspired the 1998 collected edition, *Writing Educational Biography*. We have now just created a permanent web exhibition of the statements from many of these biographers, with additional remarks to be added as authors' permissions are received.[7]

I conclude by thanking Linda Morice for devoting an issue of *Vitae Scholasticae* to the reconsideration of books that have been included in this archival project, and I look forward to reading the reflections of others who have turned the pages of "my old friends," books that have become part of my family. However familiar I may feel around these texts, new insights always emerge, and I take delight in seeing others' impressions, understandings, and concerns. The Biographical Research Bookshelf project is an invitation to enter a new world of methodology and to proceed in one's work with a sense of excitement and confidence.

Notes

[1] Museum of Education: www.ed.sc.edu/museum/index.html (accessed November 4, 2014).

[2] Elizabeth Diefendorf, ed., *The New York Public Library's Books of the Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 2.

[3] Diefendorf, *The New York Public Library's Books of the Century*, 7.

[4] AERA Biographical and Documentary Research Special Interest Group, a Documentary Research Bookshelf: www.aera.net/SIG013/BiographicalandDocumentaryResearch(SIG13)/tabid/15377/Default.aspx; www.aera.net/SIG013/ResearchConnections/tabid/15386/Default.aspx (accessed November 4, 2014).

[5] Craig Kridel, ed., *Books of the Century Catalog* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina's Museum of Education, 2000;. Craig Kridel,"Some Books of the Century," *Education Week*, 19(16), December 15, 1999, 60, 40-41.

[6] Rollyson, Carl. *A Higher Form of Cannibalism?: Adventures in the Art and Politics of Biography*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005.

[7] University of South Carolina. Museum of Education's."Advice for the Aspiring Biographer" web exhibition: www.ed.sc.edu/museum/biography.html (accessed November 4, 2014).

An Essay Review: *From Puzzles to Portraits*

Louis M. Smith

Washington University in St. Louis

James L. Clifford. *From Puzzles to Portraits: Problems of a Literary Biographer*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1970.

Once Upon A Time

I have always liked the phrase "Once upon a time." Well, once upon a time a colleague and I did an ethnographic study of an unusual student teacher program.[1] We titled one section of the methodological appendix "The Jig-Saw Puzzle Analogy"[2] because our qualitative work resembled the act of putting a jig-saw puzzle together, with an important twist. We had to form the pieces before we could assemble them. And doing that was an important, creative part of the methodology of qualitative ethnographic inquiry.

I don't recall how I first encountered James L. Clifford's book, but the title fascinated me. It had the insightful phrasing *From Puzzles to Portraits*. I was tantalized. The subtitle, *Problems of a Literary Biographer*, indicated I was in a different genre, literary biography, not the social sciences in which I was trained. Just what did that imply? My puzzles were different from Clifford's. Mine involved thinking about how one moved from the overt behavior of individuals to the underlying conceptual structure of persons and events. (I would later find that Leon Edel's concept of discovering "the figure under the carpet" captured what I was about.)[3] Clifford's puzzles, on the other hand, involved hunting for the pieces of data that would eventually be organized into a portrait. The differences between the two approaches clearly merit exploration.

Writing an essay review is not a simple reporting and evaluating of a book's content; rather, it demands an interesting kind of thinking. One compares and contrasts, brings in ideas from other authors as well as oneself, illuminates the book's content, and makes judgments. In this way the essay review becomes a kind of personal statement. Clifford's subtitle reference, *Literary Biographer*, intrigued me for I have always found reading novels to be an important part of my avocational life. But even here I found a linkage between literature and the social sciences. Gordon Allport, who—along with Freud, Henry Murray, Abraham Maslow, and Carl Rogers—is a giant in the field of psychology of personality, once related Stefan Zweig's epigram:

> in literature … great masters of characterization … are giants of observation and literature whereas in psychology the field of personality is worked by lesser men, mere flies who have the safe anchorage of a frame of science in which to place their petty platitudes and minor heresies.[4]

This potent critique is followed by 380 pages of a psychologist's contribution to the study of personality. For me, the challenge was to see Clifford's place in all this.

1. Beginning Reading: From Puzzles to Portraits

Then I started reading *Puzzles*. The table of contents identifies two major parts: "Finding the Evidence" and "Putting the Pieces Together."[5] Clifford's titles and labels always seem to both tantalize and make sense, here and throughout the book. The first part begins with a discussion of "'Outside' versus 'Inside' Research."[6] Why "versus" rather than "and"? That seems strange. Is something or someone fighting or is it just a major contrast? It turns out to be both. Clifford notes that some literary biographers accent and spend most of their time in libraries poring over "musty" volumes of previously-gathered material and "working their way through piles of long-forgotten authorities."[7] Clifford acknowledges this activity is important but contends there is another side to doing biography. That is outside work, not in libraries but searching for new—and valuable—evidence. He sees this part of doing biography as a much less discussed and settled activity. But I call such work "doing ethnographic biography"[8] and find that it brings anthropological ideas and practices into play. It is what anthropologist/ethnographer Bronislaw Malinowski called going into the field with "foreshadowed problems" rather than "preconceived solutions."[9] This distinction is important as one seeks data or evidence. In the field of history, Jack Hexter offers a similar idea by labeling "the first record" versus "the second record."[10] The first record

is the data one finds in the search while the second record is what the historian brings to the task—who s/he is, what s/he knows, and what attitudes and beliefs s/he holds. Here I'm making what I believe to be an important point, the similarities among biography, ethnography and history, even though the latter two disciplines are seldom taught to biographers. This seems to help clarify Clifford's notion that outside research is less discussed and settled. These other disciplines (ethnography and history) have their own partial and reasonably well worked out standards.

Clifford soon moves his attention to the homey and enchanting labels, "the vague footnote" and "the Welsh farmhouse."[11] While he separates these two sections, they are really parts of a report on Clifford's trip to Wales in the mid nineteen thirties when he was a Ph.D. student at Columbia University. His dissertation topic was Hester Thrale-Piozzi, a close friend of Samuel Johnson. In thoroughly reading the Johnsonian literature, Clifford "stumbled" on the book, *Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Thrale*.[12] Written by a collector and journalist named A. M. Broadley, the book was "filled with out-of-the-way information."[13] The footnote on page 59 indicated there were two caches of Thrale-Piozzi letters in Wales. No other information was given, for apparently the author wanted to brag about his superior knowledge but didn't want anyone to poach on his discovery. In the spring of 1935 Clifford received a year-long traveling fellowship and began his biographical adventuring. Seeking the letters, he and a young cousin in high school traveled to London, bought bicycles, and biked from London to Wales. Yes, from London to Wales!

Clifford keeps drawing me along with fascinating stories, mostly of his own experiences. Doing outside research is "adventuring"—not some tiresome laboring in libraries, as important as that is. The pages zing along as Clifford's descriptions call to mind Catherine Drinker Bowen's *Adventures of a Biographer* as well as my own work in ethnographic biography in England.

In 1987, my wife, the late Marilyn Smith, and I spent "a difficult ten day week" hopping on and off the underground in London, seeking information about Nora Barlow, granddaughter of Charles Darwin.[14] We looked for sources in five women's libraries, including the Fawcett Library, the largest women's library in the world. Our goal was to find information about Nora Barlow and the Levana School she attended in 1902. The adventuring was difficult and frustrating. Well into our work, we had found no sources on our subject. Lady Luck had apparently deserted us. Although our efforts would eventually bear fruit, it seemed for a while that Nora Barlow and the Levana School did not exist.

Clifford points to similar unhappy adventures by citing a series of examples. His descriptions reminded me of Michael Scriven's comment that philosophers make their case, their analysis and argument, through examples.[15] This seems different from the social science I had learned in Ph.D.

training in psychology where correlations, experiments, t-tests, and analyses of variance reign. Now, as I read the literary scholar Clifford, I find him telling stories and presenting examples with vivid but unusual titles as "The Paralyzed Old Lady."[16] By the time he is finished he informs the reader that he's behaving like a detective—or, I would add, like an ethnographer. All this literary theory and criticism is done through examples!

Clifford provides an additional image, one of a scholar at work. Crossing England, he stopped at several universities and met with a few well recognized professors and private biographers. He knew enough Johnsonian and Piozzi literature that he seemed to move easily as an equal. Creatively inventing and carefully planning while making decisions along the way, Clifford nevertheless fumbled and stumbled along, only to find serendipity smiling at him. One of the people he was interested in meeting was Mrs. Evans, then the occupant of the Piozzi home in a small town in Wales. Not knowing anyone, Clifford decided to interview everybody he met. His first contact was with a minister while exploring and taking photos of a small cathedral. The minister became interested in his project, and invited him and his cousin to tea and conversation. This led to an offer to stay the night and live there as long as they would be in Wales. The logistics of living, a real problem for an adventuring biographer, had been solved.

Clifford found nothing in the post office where his mail was to be sent, but his cousin had a number of family letters that he read immediately. As Clifford waited for his relative, a woman came in (Mrs. Evans) who asked the postmistress if she could leave a letter for a Mr. Clifford. He began a conversation and soon was invited to tea at Mrs. Evans' beautiful home overlooking the river valley. A ping-pong table was visible from where they sat. A conversation ensued, and Mrs. Evans commented on how disappointed she was that none of the women in town knew enough for a good game. The cousin volunteered that he plays "a little."[17] They had a game, and Mrs. Evans was ecstatic. She had found a worthy opponent. The tea time went just as well. Clifford mentioned the names of two families he understood were longtime members of the community. Upon hearing the names, Mrs. Evans smiled, noting that two women from those families were coming over for a visit that afternoon. When they learned of the purpose of Clifford's trip, one of the women smiled, stating that her cousin had a cache of the letters he was seeking. Later the victory was dampened, for they were mostly written in Mrs. Piozzi's later years and Clifford already had most of the relevant information.

As Clifford and his cousin were leaving the town with some discouragement, they decided to bike down to the valley and to have a look at the coach house that remained after the Piozzis' Elizabethan home was destroyed early in the nineteenth century. The coach house had been converted into a farmer's cottage. The crotchety farmer was at home. He hesitantly invited

them in, determined their purpose, and reluctantly showed them a number of folios of letters discovered just the week before in an old cupboard his wife wanted to use. Clifford's enthusiasm did him a disservice; the farmer envisioned pounds and shillings and held out for considerable money. Several weeks later the old man was feeling pressure, worrying about the cold winter that had killed some of his sheep, his wife's desire to build an addition to the house, and the possible money for the letters. The situation is resolved when Mrs. Evans decides she will buy the letters and Clifford persuades the farmer to sell to her at a fair price. Clifford's 19-page description of "The Welsh Farmhouse" reads effortlessly. The reader has been taught a lot about this kind of adventuring.

In pursuing information on Thrale-Piozzi, Clifford visited a "paralyzed old lady" accompanied by her daughter. According to his account, the woman could hardly speak but nodded to her daughter's questions. The visit resulted in Clifford's discovery of the existence of a lost love letter between Mrs. Piozzi and her first husband, Henry Thrale, in which he is proposing to her. After running through a half dozen adjectives as to the nature of the letter, the daughter finally hit upon "ardent." The paralyzed woman reacted with "a decided nodding up and down and with noises of pleasure."[18] Finding this letter led to a long and difficult search of people, auctioneers, museums, and catalogs in England and the United States. When Clifford determined the date of the letter, 1919, he was directed to the rare book dealers Stevens and Brown, who could tell him nothing. Finally, after no one had any records or knew anything about the letter, Clifford asked who was buying Johnson materials at that time. A bookseller suggested R. B. Adams of Buffalo, New York. Clifford responded that he knew, almost by heart, Adams' major volume of a catalog of letters. No mention of this letter occurred in the catalog. A few years later, as Clifford was finishing his biography of Hester Thrale-Piozzi, he made one more try with a letter to Adams. The quick reply was a "yes." Adams had the letter and was surprised about the omission—purely an oversight, he said. Later Clifford went to Buffalo and read the letter. The "paralyzed old lady" had been right. If there is an unstated lesson here it is that frustration and persistence, and a huge creative investment over a long period of time, can eventually produce results.

By the time I was a third of the way in reading *Puzzles*, I felt that Clifford was what I call a *scholar's scholar*. His command of the literature was more than impressive. Even as a young man on his way across England to Wales he knew enough about Hester Thrale-Piozzi and Johnson that it guided his search and set up his interview questions. As he tells his later project stories, one sees his expanding command of the literature in his field. Always for me, that is a stunning experience.

In summary, this part of *Puzzles*, the act of finding the evidence is out-

lined as a series of stories, not a conceptual structure. This contrasts with Part Two, "Putting the Pieces Together."

2. *Portraits: Putting the Pieces Together*

In this second part Clifford raises some of the most interesting problems facing the biographer. I call them dilemmas because there are no simple answers, no black and white formulas, for these concerns: 1) testing for authenticity, 2) deciding the type of biography one writes, 3) determining the biographer's degree of involvement, and (4) determining how much one should tell. These are conceptual categories. They contrast with the chapter headings of the first part that depict stories to be told. Part Two calls for judgment, which may require the biographer to be what Donald A. Schon calls a reflective practitioner, a description that offers a perspective for analyzing Clifford's discussion. Schon refers to "… situations of practice" that involve "complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflicts," which are increasingly perceived as central to the world of professional practice.[19] Rigid formulas do not work. And this kind of thinking, with all of its ambiguity, is what Clifford does as a biographer.

2.1 Testing Authenticity. This part of developing a portrait involves "evaluating the facts he has assembled."[20] The idea is simple: Is the piece of data or the evidence true? Determining truth is very difficult. Before becoming a life writer I was trained in tests and measurements in psychology and education with a dissertation titled "The Concurrent Validity of Six Personality and Adjustment Tests for Children."[21] One of the criteria of a good test is its validity (Does the test measure what it is supposed to measure? That is, does the test give a true measure of the underlying trait or ability?) Psychologists then break down the kinds of validity—content, concurrent, predictive, and construct validity. Does the reading test *really* indicate how well the child reads? Does the IQ test indicate whether the child is bright or dull? These ideas transfer easily into Clifford's concern with authenticity—and this integration is an essay I need to write.

Also my background in qualitative work in classrooms, schools, and school districts led my colleagues and me to reports where every sentence had to be backed with data. Authenticity was very important, especially when results of an evaluation might be challenged by individuals holding different positions on controversial programs. The challenges might be over factual items in the report or the interpretations made of the programs.

Now to Clifford's views of testing authenticity! He argues for "rigorous skepticism,""subject[ing] each anecdote to severe analysis," "check[ing] the truth of an item which came from only one source," and considering the item "carefully in the larger context of the work as a whole."[22] On a following

page he argues for "persistence and dedication."[23] Each suggestion is seen throughout his own work. My simple phrasing echoing Clifford, is: I believe everything and *I believe nothing that I hear in interviews or I read in documents*. These are important, simply stated guidelines. They indicate the kind of rigorous thinking Clifford cherishes.

2.2 Forms—Types of Biography. Some years ago when I began thinking of the biography I was writing about Nora Barlow, I found Clifford's discussion of types of biography very helpful. His major point—a legitimacy of more than one kind of biography—was simple but striking. This resonated with my ethnographies of classrooms and schools, e.g. Geoffrey's classroom at the Washington School[24] and the innovative Kensington School in the Milford School District.[25] Each ethnography was organized mainly around themes, although each had a chronological twist. With Geoffrey's class the first days of school were critical because he established much of the structure that was to last all year. This seemed important to our study, for much of quantitative classroom analysis didn't take it into account. In effect, the quantitative study missed the point and the analyst got meaningless data for misguided theorizing. The form of our qualitative report, on the other hand, incorporated such information. As with studies of Geoffrey's classroom, Clifford told his readers that several options existed for biographers.

In brief, Clifford suggests five kinds of biographies, entering into a critical discussion of each type. First is the "objective biography," an attempt to relate only the facts about an individual. He argues that one can never get all the facts, and one ends with a partial or selective set of facts. Clifford's second category is the "scholarly-historical" biography, that is, "selected facts strung together in chronological order, with some historical background." My own image is that of a string of items on a clothes line with little or no interpretation. In this type of biography, scholars are admonished for using unacknowledged guesswork, fictional devices, or psychological interpretations of the individual's personality. Clifford refers to a third category as "artistic-scholarly." Once the biographer has assembled the array of data about the individual he "considers his role that of an imaginative creative artist." He is more than an historian, and he creates a vivid interpretation of the individual's personality and character.[26] Drawing on this background, Clifford gives a detailed description of what he tried to do in his *Young Sam Johnson*.[27]

The fourth category Clifford calls "narrative biography," which reads a bit like a novel.[28] The author may take items from letters or a diary and turn them into a conversation between the cited individuals. Readability seems to be a key criterion, but the facts and anecdotes must be authentic. According to Clifford, the books by Catherine Drinker Bowen fall mostly in this category.

The last category gives full rein to imagination. The author tends to depend on secondary sources and when gaps in knowledge appear in the

study the author fills in with his imagination. The biography becomes heavily fiction, with the writer assuming the role of novelist. The central character really has lived but most of the circumstances surrounding the character are invented. Clifford cites Irving Stone's very successful books as examples of this category.

For me, these alternatives opened the gate for my own idiosyncratic organization of the Nora Barlow biography.

2.3 The biographer's involvement. Clifford's position on involvement comes early in the dozen pages of this section. He says the writer's personality creeps in even when making decisions on collecting data, deciding what passages might be quoted or neglected, or determining what interpretations are made. Clifford states,"The character of the biographer becomes of central importance."[29] He continues with specifics such as inner motives, prejudices, and even the purpose of the biographer. A colleague, Laurel Puchner, and I faced this issue in writing an essay on ADD with respect to her son and my grandson. We found we were too close to our "subjects,"i.e. on a trip to New York was I going to visit my grandson or was I collecting data? We decided not to go forward with the project. Instead we did a methods piece on difficulties in studying a subject we were too close to.[30] Along the way we also raised important questions about usefulness of the principles of anonymity and informed consent.

Clifford in his own facile way becomes something of an empirical social scientist. While in England he decided to individually interview a small group of established biographers as to how conscious they were of their own actions while engaged in biographical work. In a sense, were they reflective practitioners? The setting was over tea or lunch at the Athenaeum Club. No consensus appeared. A few immediately got the point and others thought the questions were ridiculous. A major finding of Clifford's was, "None of the distinguished biographers … would admit to having thought deeply about the topics I was bringing up."[31] The subtleties in the decisions they were making did not appear in his Athenaeum Club lunches. Later he interviewed historians about their personal involvement in the content and methods of the subject they were exploring. The stories he presents are strikingly similar to those of the biographers. Claims of objectivity were a myth under his sustained and pointed questioning.

To me this is Hexter's second record and Malinowski's foreshadowed problems versus preconceived solutions coming into play. Clifford's concerns are every inquirer's concerns.

2.4 How much should a biographer tell? In this last chapter Clifford's basic question is, How much of his or her copious material should the biographer use? The quantitative question soon flows into how much of a person's private life should be told. Clifford turns to his ever-present examples.

He cites Boswell as a biographer whose study of Johnson is a book of intimate details that was highly criticized at the time. More recently, Lord Moran's biography of Churchill is also full of intimate details. His ethical problem is that he was Churchill's physician reporting on "secrets" he obtained as a doctor.[32] This raised considerable criticism and a vigorous response by Moran.

These issues take Clifford a step further, as he notes that in the post–Freudian era biographers face the added complication of whether to attempt psychological interpretations of their subjects. Now Clifford is into my kind of puzzlement, the search for underlying structure or patterns, or as Leon Edel suggests, "the figure under the carpet." In my view Clifford makes a mistake and lets his discussion follow Edel further into using only or mostly Freudian theories of personality. Contemporary psychology and social science is much broader than this. My option is a mix of other personality theory such as David McClelland's early major book *Personality*[33] that my colleague Bryce Hudgins and I used in our educational psychology text.[34] Now I would blend this with social interactional theory. This kind of discussion returns me to the kind of biography one wants to produce. One of my choices was to ground each chapter of the Nora Barlow biography in a major concept. The biography became a kind of study, a narrative undergirded with key concepts, e.g. "images," "abiding interests," and "strands." I found this kind of biography both personally workable and useful in clarifying the figure underlying her life.

Without the label *puzzlements*, while initially leaning on Edel, items soon appear everywhere. Clifford's scholarly bent takes him into brief but careful analyses: he compares and contrasts, breaks apart, and integrates details and ideas from several dozen biographers and biographies. An amazing tour de force, leaving this reader stimulated and ready to move in many new directions!

One aspect of biographical writing that I wanted him to discuss concerns how to begin and end the biography. Nigel Hamilton[35] for instance, in his biography of John F. Kennedy, began with Kennedy's funeral because it was both an item that most readers would know and had a powerful, dramatic quality. In my biography of Nora Barlow[36] I began the biography with a chronology of brief but dramatic images of her life. My reasoning was that most people would not know her, and the images would both inform and captivate the reader. Further, I wanted her life's ending to be a conceptual integration of what a life is about, how Barlow's life as one individual life would be illuminated by that conception, and how her life gradually came to an end. Clifford did not present me with other alternatives or with any rationale for critiquing my decisions. My guess is that he would take me back to other decisions—and a plethora of examples. These would help me think

through my problem again and again!

Lessons Learned: Summary and Conclusions

Puzzles is a must read for biographers! Clifford is one of the most scholarly of writers in the theory, practice, and criticism of biography. He knows every problem and dilemma facing a biographer, with examples from seemingly every biography written in the last two hundred years. He presents authors and their works effortlessly.

For making biographical decisions, no simple rules exist. Each issue must be approached with a knowledge of prior efforts and particular situations of other biographers, and enhanced by a critical and creative handling of evidence. Every decision is a judgment. A baffling agenda exists especially for the neophyte biographer, but also for the most experienced biographer. Being a reflective practitioner is neither simple nor easy.

One of the remarkable aspects of *Puzzles* is how well written the book is. Clifford's choice of words is priceless. They are vivid, precise, and often a bit unusual. His stories are enchanting and draw one along; "the vague footnote" soon has him biking from London to Wales with a young cousin in search of some letters. Any old, sometime biker can't help but want to join him.

Each of his stories has a moral, a major biographical point. Clifford speaks constantly of luck and chance in helping him find data, letters, and people to interview. Sometimes though, it is managed luck. Yet serendipity is alive and well! Each of the anecdotes and stories reveal an important aspect of the life under investigation. For a social scientist, I found literary theory and criticism opening new domains of intellectual activity. Other readers should find similar stimulation and joy.

For Clifford's term "outside research," I would substitute "doing ethnographic biography." That change broadens one's perspective to beginning to think like an anthropologist and read the discipline's methodological appendixes, articles, and monographs. Granted, the "outside" contrasts with inside work in libraries and museums. But the thought processes of anthropologists like Malinowski, William Foote Whyte,[37] and Clifford Geertz,[38] over several generations, would be on my short list.

One of my colleagues, in an attempt to probe the depths of one's worries and concerns while engaging in inquiry, would ask, *What is it that keeps you awake at night?* There was something about knowing the vagaries of my own psyche that could lead to more precise and telling questions in any discussion. For me it was small and large mistakes and missed opportunities that kept me from sleeping. One example happened when my wife Marilyn had just come to England, and we were taking the day off, enjoying a holi-

day. We were in Kew Gardens on the weekend when the millions of crocus plants (one for each subscriber to *Readers Digest*) were in bloom. We were in a coffee and scones line, and began chatting with the man ahead of us. I had mentioned Nora Barlow, Wimbledon and the Levana School, and he indicated he knew something about the school. He was at the head of the line, getting his coffee, and I didn't follow up on that possibility. I turned to Marilyn and asked her why she had not alerted me. She thought there might have been a reason I didn't pursue him that she did not know. When we talked later she indicated I had felt so strongly about being on holiday. That mistake haunted me for months, especially when we could not find anything about the Levana School in various indexes and when we later traveled to Wimbledon. Probing that man's memories and related events would, I thought, have given me information to begin making interpretations of the school, and his relation to it. I thought "the figures under the carpet" had eluded me. Even as I write this review I can feel the residual emotion from that moment.

Putting the pieces into a portrait gives Clifford opportunities to point to the several large categories of decisions facing every biographer and critic. The problems of authenticity exist in all inquiry. Making sure that your evidence is true demands a series of careful procedures. Puzzling over his other topics—types of biography, involvement, and how much of one's data to use—will make any life writer more self reflective and aware of all the challenges in this kind of writing.

A final comment is in order. A book that stimulates one's thinking is not as common as it ought to be. Every topic and all those wonderful examples should help every serious biographer think about his/her biographical inquiry. Beyond the direct help to a biographer such as myself, Clifford stimulated many other aspects of my thinking. This appeared in references to other scholars that stretch one's research imagination. Each of these is a foreshadowed essay I need to write to extend my thinking about biography, criticism, and literary methods. And I would hope to spark each of the readers of this essay and the total collection in this issue of *Vitae Scholasticae* to further inquiry.

Notes

[1] W. Conner and L.M. Smith. *Analysis of Patterns of Student Teaching* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Office of Education, 1967).

[2] Ibid., 301-311,

[3] Leon Edel, "The Figure Under the Carpet," in *Telling Lives: The Biographer's Art*, ed. M. Pachter. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 16-34.

[4] Gordon Allport, "Personality: A Problem for Science or a Problem for Art?" in *Personality and Social Encounter* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), 16.

[5] James L. Clifford, *From Puzzler to Portraits: Problems of a Literary Biographer* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), vii.

[6] Ibid., 3.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Louis M. Smith, *Doing Ethnographic Biography: A Reflective Practitioner at Work during a Spring in Cambridge* (Gujurat, India: Perspectives in Education Press, 2009), 1.

[9] Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. (London: Routledge, 1922), 9.

[10] Jack Hexter, *A History Primer*. (New York: Basic Books, 1971), 1.

[11] Clifford, *Puzzle*s, 13, 23.

[12] Ibid., 13.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Louis M. Smith,"Adventuring as Biographers: A Chronicle of a Difficult Ten Day Week," *Vitae Scholasticae*, 31(2014): 15-22.

[15] Michael Scriven, *Primary Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966).

[16] Clifford, *Puzzles*, 41.

[17] Ibid., 20.

[18] Ibid., 44.

[19] Donald A. Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 14.

[20] Clifford, *Puzzles*, 69.

[21] Louis M. Smith,"The Concurent Validity of Six Personality and Adjustment Tests for Children" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1958).

[22] Clifford, *Puzzles*, 69.

[23] Ibid., 71.

[24] Louis M. Smith and William Geoffrey, *The Complexities of an Urban Classroom: An Analysis Toward a General Theory of Learning*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968).

[25] Louis M. Smith and Pat M. Keith, *Anatomy of an Educational Innovation: An Organizational Analysis of an Elementary School*. (New York: Wiley, 1971.)

[26] Clifford, *Puzzles*, 83-85.

[27] James L. Clifford, *Young Sam Johnson* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955).

[28] Clifford, *Puzzles*, 87.

[29] Ibid, 99.

[30] Laurel D. Puchner and Louis M. Smith, 2008."The Ethics of Researching Those Who Are Close To You: The Case of the Abandoned ADD project," *Educational Action Research*, 16(3): 421-428.

[31] Clifford, *Puzzles*, 192.

[32] Ibid, 120.

[33] David McClelland, *Personality*. (New York: Henry Holt Company, 1950).

[34] Louis M. Smith and Bryce B. Hudgins, *Educational Psychology: An Application of Social and Behavioral Theory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964).

[35] Nigel Hamilton, *How to Do Biography: a Primer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

[36] Louis M. Smith, Nora Barlow Biography (in progress).

[37] William Foote White, *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955).

[38] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books).

Educational Biography as an Adventure in Genre

P.L. Thomas
Furman University

Stephen B. Oates, ed. *Biography as High Adventure: Life-Writers Speak on Their Art*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986.

As a public high school English teacher in the upstate of South Carolina, with an undergraduate and master's degree in secondary English education, I found myself mostly ostracized from completing a doctoral degree. My heart had always remained with literature and writing, but my need to remain a full-time teacher and my degrees in education resulted in my being directly told not to bother applying for a doctoral program in English.

And then I discovered the Ed.D. program at the University of South Carolina where colleagues of mine had completed degrees while working full-time, one writing a biography of Pat Conroy for his dissertation. And thus began my adventure in educational biography, reading Stephen Oates's slim edited volume, *Biography as High Adventure: Life-Writers Speak on Their Art*.[1]

Paul Mariani, biographer of William Carlos Williams, offers what I suggest is the crux of why Oates's collection was foundational for me as a beginning biographer and why it remains important for the future of biography and educational biography. Offering Norman Mailer as an example, Mariani explains:

> Mailer's is not, perhaps, a "true" biography since he is enough of an iconoclast to break generic bindings when he can, but for biographical texture his book by and large succeeds where [Albert] Goldman's [biography of Elvis Presley] fails. This is because Mailer had the imagination to find a vehicle for [Gary] Gilmore's felt sense

> of reality in the relentless, quotidian, and ultimately stark quality of the language he himself used, a language which employs the techniques of journalism in much the same spirit of Andy Warhol painting his meticulous reproductions of Campbell soups: a medium of flat, unadorned and even tacky sentences, precise as plastic rulers, the thin tissue of syntactical connectives simulating the thin tissue of unconnectedness which turns out to have been Gilmore's life.[2]

As I look back now about twenty years, then, Oates's volume was and remains a powerful entry point for examining how biography remains a *genre* of tensions and debate–defined by those tensions and debates as a vibrant and important avenue for understanding the human condition writ large and small.

Biography as High Adventure

As an edited volume of essays by biographers, *Biography as High Adventure* is certainly not exhaustive, but it is incredibly important as a foundational entry point into a living genre, biography. And for those of us practicing educational biography, the debates and fluctuations found in biography are replicated and somewhat intensified for our subgenre. One of the most compelling aspects of the volume is the impressive list of essay authors, all biographers: Andre Maurois, Leon Edel, Paul Murray Kendall, Frank E. Vandiver, Catherine Drinker Bowen, Justin Kaplan, Mark Schorer, Barbara W. Tuchman, Paul Mariani, and Stephen B. Oates. Instead of cataloguing these chapters separately, however, I want to highlight the motifs running through the volume as a whole.

Especially important for novice biographers and scholars of biography, this volume includes a recurring emphasis on "standing on the shoulders of giants." Biography as a field and discipline includes significant seminal and key works and biographers, all of which build a foundation for biography as a purposeful discipline. While the essays are accessible and uncluttered by overt citations, readers are introduced over the course of the entire book to who and what one should read and consider; in this respect, Oates's collection is an ideal introduction to the field. As I re-read my original copy, in fact, I found a clear trail to the works that informed my dissertation beyond this collection itself, but I also recognize how reading this collection spurred my need to reach beyond Oates, especially to feminist biographical theory and debates.

Lynton Strachey, for example, becomes a refrain throughout the volume. As Vandiver notes:

> I have saved Strachey's Eminet Victorians for a special word. Graceful, "lacquered" style, skilled insights, willingness to shake traditions willy-nilly, sometimes scalding wit, all contained in Strachey's work, set new directions for life-writing. He broke idols.[3]

Biography, as Schorer admits, is "difficult to define,"[4] so the biographers in this volume return to leading biographers as markers along the history of writing lives to build the structure that is biography, something yet to be completed. Schorer mentions Sir Edmond, Gibbon, and Johnson, highlighting the tensions and shifting conventions of the genre, especially as genres overlap and inform each other:

> Today, I believe, the problem of selection is not made more acute by what were once thought of as ethical considerations. One should write in anything that is true and relevant to one's themes—anything, that is, that will not bring us into the court. In this sense, at least, therefore, the biographer today enjoys some of the freedom of the novelist, and he does not have to publish that famous and foolish disclaimer at the front of his book about how nothing in it has any relation whatever to any real person, now living or now dead.[5]

The motif of "standing on the shoulders of giants," then, leads into the next motif related to genre.

Possibly the most powerful aspect of the essays is that biographer after biographer wrestles with issues related to genre–how biography blends history with literary craft as well as how biography is shaped by a wide range of disciplines: history, fiction/literature, psychology, sociology, journalism, anthropology, economics, archaeology.[6] The emphasis on genre throughout also focuses on how biography is shaped by debates, questions about the rightful influence of many disciplines: That psychology grew as a discipline, for some biographers, did not justify its influence on biography, for example. Possibly the broadest point to be drawn from the focus on disciplinary influences on biography is both the shifting genre elements that constitute biography itself and the remaining debates about the disciplinary credibility of biography (as distinct from biography as a subset of history or a weak cousin of literary fiction).

As Vandiver explains, biography is informed by a wide range of disciplines, but "still clings to individuality."[7] Along with the focus on the individual, biography is an adventure in genre committed to one part history and one part literature. Mariani asks, "How then does the biographer go about accomplishing this rich illusion of life, this essential fiction?"[8] In other words, biography as an adventure in genre is a task grounded in both the rigors of

the disciplines–fundamentally history–and the craft of composing fiction–point of view, setting, dialogue, atmosphere, tone, diction. The motif of genre suggests as well the importance of biography as a domain of the writer.

A third motif of the discussions reveals who writes biography as well as what it means to compose another person's life. Briefly stated, the biographer is, whether by inclination or necessity, a writer–possibly explaining why so many biographers are drawn to writing about writers. Even though the research required for biography rests solidly within the behaviors found in the disciplines, many of the biographers in this volume detail clearly that producing the manuscript of a biography parallels in many ways the act of producing a novel—the works take many years and often involve fits and starts that have to do with the writer's craft as much as with the content being presented.

Kaplan, as the biographer of Walt Whitman, is illustrative of biography as the domain of the writer. The tension for Kaplan is "whether biography is a branch of history or a branch of literature, a work of record or an imaginative exercise."[9] As many in this volume do, Kaplan leans toward "the biographer…[as] a storyteller and dramatist," adding:

> Whitman biography, like practically all biography, has to begin with legend….Whitman's overflowing records, so accessible and careless, were ultimately guarded and recalcitrant, like their owner. They are the materials of biography and also the materials of a fable of biography.[10]

Biographers as writers speaks powerfully to the final motif I want to address, an encompassing message of this volume about the power of tensions for recreating a life.

Biography is the consequence of tensions: among conventions of the disciplines, among conventions of genres, along the trends of the history of biography, among the "giants" and the demands of the field of biography. And while I see this as an overarching motif of the entire collection, I want to focus briefly on Kendall:

> The shape of biography is partly created by the inner tensions peculiar to the practice. All great art achieves much of its force from tension, the existing state of balance or reconciliation achieved among apposing elements….Two characteristic tensions of biography arise out of the relation between the biographer and his subject and out of the conflict between the demands of simulation and the implacability of facts.[11]

As the biographer navigates "giants," genre, and being a writer, she/he is rendering art out of those inescapable tensions that make biography both indefinable and a genre always in flux. Before moving on to how Oates's collection informed my own adventure in educational biography, I want to note a few ways in which the essays left me unsatisfied as a novice biographer and scholar.

Recognizing *Biography as High Adventure* was published about 30 years ago and includes essays even older, and valuing the discussions as artifacts themselves, I still find much of the volume culturally and socially *naïve*, somewhat in a popular sense but also too far removed from post-modern and critical academic perspectives that have reshaped the disciplines. Yes, many of the biographers embrace a very subtle position rejecting modernistic objectivity, but nearly absent are feminist and critical lenses that would frame the role of biography as a genre of recreating a life as a form of social activism. Where the discussions are approaching the critical, the message is barely a whisper–such as the push against biography as mere sensationalism, a veiled confrontation of the negative consequences of the market on a discipline.

Before I had begun writing a biography of educator Lou LaBrant as my doctoral dissertation, then, I had confronted "the problem of gaps"[12] present in Oates's important volume. However, the powerful voices of the collected biographers had given me an important foundation for knowing where I needed to go next before I could test the waters as a biographer.

Lou LaBrant and Coming to Educational Biography

My path to writing an educational biography was crooked. At first, I considered William Van Til, who had donated his papers to the Museum of Education at the University of South Carolina. In an educational biography course taught by Craig Kridel, each of us presented biographical vignettes of educational figures, many of whom also had papers and work in the Museum. However, instead of this brief piece on Van Til laying the foundation for my dissertation, I discovered Lou LaBrant, the focus of a fellow doctoral student's presentation.

LaBrant, as a radical and progressive voice in English education, immediately called to me, and soon afterward, I was convinced that LaBrant would be my subject. As I reconsider the value of Oates's *Biography as High Adventure* for me as a beginning biographer and for the field of biography (as well as educational biography), I am faced with a similar adventure because as I began my work on LaBrant, I discovered my artifacts were few–a memoir hand-typed by LaBrant as she turned 100 and a very small box of a few articles published by LaBrant. In reconsidering Oates, I confront essentially a single artifact, my bound dissertation.

One scholarly link between *Biography as High Adventure* and my biography of LaBrant is the references list, much of which documents my Chapter One outlining the grounding for my biography to follow. Bowen, Mariani, Oates, Schorer, and Vandiver are prominent in that Chapter One, and the essential nature of doing biography—how to manage sources of evidence, balancing the tension between fact and recreating a life, confronting gaps and the urge to include every detail uncovered—is clearly traced to Oates's volume as well as the seminal works that collection led me to examine: Barzun and Graff's *The Modern Researcher*, Edel's *Writing Lives*, Kendall's *The Art of Biography*. But another important aspect of the influence of Oates's slim collection is that I was faced with, as noted above, what was lacking in my consideration of writing LaBrant's life.

Two elements were required to complete what was absent in Oates—a thorough consideration of feminist theory on biography (LaBrant was a woman, often unclear because of her called name, Lou) and a narrower look at educational biography. One fortunate aspect of my journey as a biographer was that Kridel had the draft of his soon-to-be published edited collection on educational biography, *Writing Educational Biography: Explorations in Qualitative Research*.[13] But I also needed to supplement Oates with Ascher, DeSalvo, and Ruddick's *Between Women*, Gerlach and Monseua's *Missing Chapters*, Heilbrun's *Writing a Woman's Life*, and Wagner-Martin's *Telling Women's Lives* (I also relied heavily on work by Maxine Greene, combining her considerations of education and women).

Here now, as the biographers do in *Biography as High Adventure*, I want to offer briefly how my experience writing LaBrant's life was informed by and influences my reconsideration of Oates. Researching and then writing LaBrant's life posed many traditional problems for me, but as an educational biography and as a biography about a woman by a man, additional challenges also faced me.

"The first choice," Maurois asserts, the biographer "must make is that of a subject."[14] As I noted above, my journey to LaBrant was impacted by constraints related to writing educational biography as a doctoral dissertation: choosing an educator of some significance to the field, finding a subject with enough artifacts of her/his life to make the project achievable, matching my scholarly goals with an appropriate subject. As an initial project designed to lead to my larger commitment to a dissertation, Van Til appeared ideal, as his career matched the parameters above. But LaBrant raised the level of the last in that her long career as an English educator proved ideal to my career as an English teacher and then my scholarly focus on literacy education. LaBrant was widely published in major academic journals addressing literacy education; she played a high-profile role in my primary professional organization, including serving as president in the 1950s, the National Council of Teachers

of English (NCTE); and she represented a powerful and nuanced scholarly stance grounded in progressivism over her career spanning from 1906 until 1971. As I will examine below, however, LaBrant as a subject created problems also.

One of those problems is confronted by Edel, who wrestles with "biographical responsibility" associated with facts, archives, and "the revealing mask of life":

> The biographer must learn to know the mask—and in doing this he will have won half the battle. The other half is his real battle, the most difficult part of the task—his search for what I call the figure under the carpet, the evidence in reverse of the tapestry, the life myth of the given mask.[15]

LaBrant proved the master of the mask, in fact (something I also explored through the work of Maxine Greene). While LaBrant left behind a memoir written as she turned 100[16] and a significant catalogue of professional journal articles and book chapters, she also worked diligently throughout her life to keep her personal life mostly hidden.[17] Since I had little evidence of her personal life, I had to heed Edel's warning about cataloguing everything I could find. But I also had some degree of relief since as an educational biographer, I was primarily seeking to reconstruct LaBrant's life as an educator and scholar (recognizing that her personal self was inextricable from her professional self). In the end, I was able to recreate a solid and accurate professional LaBrant, augmented with a recognition that more questions remain about her personal life.[18]

Recreating LaBrant's life as an educator placed me as a biographer directly against Kendall's consideration of tensions and gaps.[19] Concurrent with my first adventure as a biographer was my evolution as a critical educator; thus, an added tension for me was setting aside the objective lens and honoring how writing LaBrant's life was also writing my own. I came to recognize that shaping a biography of LaBrant was a dialogue among many contexts: LaBrant as a teacher with me as a teacher, LaBrant's progressivism with a historical misreading of progressivism, my critical perspective confronting that distorted progressive tradition, and other tensions. Again, gaps were significant. The first gap I was able to close was the initial gap of collected published works by LaBrant—which I was able to solve by doing the work of a biographer, identifying and then gathering her substantial publishing history. The personal gaps lingered, however.

"The biographer does not trust his witnesses," Kendall warns, "living or dead."[20] And here was possibly the most interesting aspect of writing LaBrant's life. To close the gaps, I had LaBrant's long life, 102 years, captured

in her memoir and a significant publishing career. But I also had a number of living witnesses to her life. As Kendall and others in the collection note, I was pushed to triangulate among LaBrant's claims, LaBrant's published record, and then the recollections of people who knew, worked with, and befriended LaBrant. The two challenges of LaBrant's living witnesses were that many were elderly themselves and that one of the best witnesses was her personal primary physician who grew to be her close friend in her fading years. These witnesses often had direct and intimate[21] knowledge of a rich and vibrant LaBrant, but that fact also meant their perspectives were skewed by their intimacies. And thus, Kendall's words spoke directly to my work: "Withal, [the biographer] must expect to be deceived, and more than once, and thus stand ready, unto page proof, to excise the much test truth that turns out to be error or invention."[22]

While virtually every biographer in the volume notes the connection between history and biography, Tuchman[23] and Oates[24] highlight the power of biography as a window into broader understanding of eras. LaBrant proved to be an ideal subject for tracing both a tangential history of NCTE (targeting key debates and developments that characterize the organization) as well as how progressivism represented itself among key figures but often failed the larger public debate—mostly misunderstood and very rarely implemented authentically. Was LaBrant a particular representing the universal? In some, or even many, ways, yes. But LaBrant served for me a better purpose; she personified the debates that characterize literacy education, debates that are not only historical but also contemporary.

Finally, and again a dominant motif of the collection, I want to focus on a concluding comment by Oates:

> For me, biography has not only been high literary and historical adventure, but deep personal experience as well. I have lived through four human lives beside my own, something that has enriched me beyond measure as a writer and a man.[25]

For me, echoing Oates, educational biography was foundational and transitional in terms of discovering who I am as writer/scholar. As a first-year student in college, I came to see that I am a writer, leading to much of my 20s being spent writing poetry, short stories, and one unpublished novel. Those mostly fruitless years as a writer (a few stories published, a few more poems published) were incredibly important; I learned craft, revision, and writing to write, not because someone promised publication. But completing my doctorate and the concurrent educational biography in my mid-30s was the key moment for turning those early years into something tangible. Within four years after receiving my doctorate, I was in higher education and starting a

journey that has produced a rich publication career—including nearly 20 self-authored and edited scholarly books—that never drifts too far from what I learned as a writer and scholar by writing LaBrant's life.

And it is there I want to turn to a final section on how *Biography as High Adventure* remains an important work for me as a scholar, for biography as a field, and for educational biography.

Educational Biography as an Adventure in Genre

Since I completed my biography of LaBrant for my dissertation and then published that study,[26] I have not completed another full-length biography. But how biography has entered my work, I feel, represents the enduring importance of *Biography as High Adventure*, the ever-evolving field of biography, and the sub-genre educational biography. Biography continues to impact my public and scholarly work as a *mode* embedded within a wide variety of genres, purposes, and media; furthermore, my adventure in educational biography rests as the beginning of two decades dedicated to re-imagining and challenging genre.

Particularly after I moved to higher education and found a place publishing consistently as a scholar, I have continued to mine LaBrant—notably because writing (thus recreating her life) is something that can never be completed. Just as I found ways to use LaBrant's life as a connection to larger historical and disciplinary issues in my biography/dissertation, I have continued to connect LaBrant with ongoing and enduring issues in education and literacy. After being named Council Historian for NCTE (2013-2015), I built a blog dedicated to LaBrant's extensive publications, many in NCTE journals, that are now accessible through JSTOR (http://loulabrant.wordpress.com/). Both my public and scholarly work[27] draw on her work by blending biographical vignettes with scholarship and public commentary.

Biography as a mode within various genres and writing purposes reinforces my use of personal narrative[28] to push the boundaries of all of my different contexts for publishing. Certainly building on my entry into biography through *Biography as High Adventure* and then my work with LaBrant's life, I have adopted and then advocated for expanding (and rejecting) traditional conventions honoring objectivity and generalizability.[29] Instead of marginalizing individual experiences wholesale, I incorporate biography and personal narrative within my demand that such individual references illustrate only what the weight of the evidence can bear—sometimes individual examples do illustrate generalizations, other times individual examples illuminate exceptions, outliers, or contentions about *what could be*. My thirty-plus years as a teacher, much of that career steeped in literature, have driven me more and more toward the value of rich artifacts—the sort of recreation found in

personal narrative and biography. Since education is a deeply human venture, I am compelled to draw our field, shape the issues and build the arguments with *specific people doing real things*—the stuff of narrative.

While I still see *Biography as High Adventure* as an effective entry point for exploring and understanding biography—especially for those planning to write a biography—nested within the power of biography as a mode of many genres and purposes for writing is another development as my work as a teacher and scholar: the problem of genre itself. I have begun practicing in my own work and using as central to my teaching a consideration of challenging and fostering genre awareness[30]—both as a way to create meaning and as a way to expand genre and form.[31]

Genre provides writers and readers conventional paradigms, supporting both composing for writers and comprehension for readers. As noted above, for example, Vandiver acknowledges how conventions of many disciplines inform and shape biography.[32] Just as I argue that biography is very much the domain of the writer, I view biography as a genre characterized by the shifting conventions of many genres. One example is the rise of graphic biographies–such as Helfer and DuBurke's *Malcolm X: A Graphic Biography* and Rodriguez's *Che: A Graphic Biography.*[33] As the collected biographers in Oates's volume establish, biography is a powerful and enduring form that forces us to consider and reconsider the nature of truth (and recrearing truth), the credibility of evidence, and the value of a wide range of disciplinary ways of confronting both.

Oates argues that "the pure biographer must be both a historian who is steeped in his material and an artist who wields a deft and vivid pen."[34] And now some three decades later, Oates's *Biography as High Adventure* remains an important artifact of those claims, a powerful articulation of where to begin with a form and genre defined by its tensions and always reforming because of the influences of many disciplines and many genres.

Finally, for educational biography, issues of tensions, truth, evidence, and genre conventions remain central,[35] but I want to note that educational biography carries a current additional burden—the political and cultural attack on teachers—that *Biography as High Adventure* can inform. In Tuchman's assertion, "biography is useful because it encompasses the universal in the particular,"[36] the educational biographer has the foundation upon which drawing the life of teachers great and small can serve to counter "myths that deform"[37] the popular view of teachers and provide instead a rich tapestry of what it means to teach and why teachers matter in a free society.

So I want to end with LaBrant speaking to NCTE in 1946 when she argues:

> This is not the time for the teacher of any language to follow the line

> of least resistance, to teach without the fullest possible knowledge of the implications of his medium. Before we, either as individuals or as a Council, experiment with methods of doing specific things or block out a curriculum, let us spend some time with the best scholars in the various fields of language study to discover what they know, what they believe uncertain and in need of study. Let us go to the best sources, and study the answers thoughtfully.[38]

Teaching and writing biography share many goals—truth as one—and problems—how to achieve truth. And in both cases we must honor the individual in rich and complex ways. Teaching like biography is a high adventure, and both are too often misunderstood, requiring us not "to follow the line of least resistance."

Notes

[1] Stephen B. Oates, ed., *Biography as High Adventure: Life-Writers Speak on Their Art* (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1986).

[2] Paul Mariani, "Reassembling the Dust" in Oates, *Biography*, 116.

[3] Frank E. Vandiver, "Biography as an Agent of Humanism," in Oates, *Biography*, 58.

[4] Mark Schorer, "The Burdens of Biography," in Oates, *Biography*, 78.

[5] Schorer, "Burdens," 88.

[6] Vandiver, "Humanism," 52-53.

[7] Ibid., 53.

[8] Mariani, "Reassembling," 106.

[9] Justin Kaplan, "The 'Real Life,'" in Oates, *Biography*, 70.

[10] Ibid., 75-76.

[11] Paul Murray Kendall, "Walking the Boundaries," in Oates, *Biography*, 40.

[12] Ibid., 41.

[13] Craig Kridel, ed., *Writing Educational Biography: Explorations in Qualitative Research* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998.

[14] Andre Maurois, "Biography as a Work of Art," in Oates, *Biography*, 7.

[15] Leon Edel, "The Figure under the Carpet," in Oates, *Biography*, 19, 24.

[16] See Schorer, "Burdens:""Never trust the author, said D.H. Lawrence. Trust the tale. Do not, he meant, believe the author when he lectures us; believe only the conduct of the narrative itself, and the resolution of its values," warning about "self-deception," 84.

[17] See Kaplan, "Real": "at best biography is only a plausible, inevitably idiosyncratic surmise and reconstruction, severely limited by historical materials that are loaded with duplicities and evasions," 71.

[18] See Kendall, "Walking," 35.

[19] Kendall, "Walking," 40, 41.

[20] Ibid., 44. See also Schorer, "Burdens," 79-83.

[21] See Schorer, "Burdens": "There are deeper forms of intimacy than friendship," 85.

[22] Kendall, "Walking," 45.

[23] See Barbara W. Tuchman, "Biography as a Prism of History" in Oates, *Biography*: "biography is useful because it encompasses the universal in the particular," 94.

[24] Stephen B. Oates, "Biography as High Adventure," in Oates, *Biography*: "Perhaps this is what Yeats meant when he said that 'nothing exists but a stream of souls, that all knowledge is biography,'" 138.

[25] Oates, "High," 137.

[26] P. L. Thomas, *Lou LaBrant: A Woman's Life, a Teacher's Life* (Huntington, NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2001).

[27] See my blog (http://radicalscholarship.wordpress.com/) and, for example, the following: P.L. Thomas, "Revisiting LaBrant's 'Writing is more than structure' (*English Journal*, May 1957)," *English Journal* 101.1(2011, September): 103-104; P.L. Thomas, "Entry—Lou LaBrant," in *The Encyclopedia of Education*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2002), 4; P.L. Thomas, "Our Never-Ending Challenge–Lou LaBrant and PS 65," *English Record* 53.1 (2002, Fall): 17-21; Thomas, *LaBrant*; P.L. Thomas, "Blueprints or Houses?–Looking Back at Lou LaBrant and the Writing Debate, *English Journal* 89.3 (2000, January): 85-89; P.L. Thomas, "The Paradoxes of Lou LaBrant: Choreographer of the Learner's Mind," *Vitae Scholasticae* 18.2 (1999, Fall): 35-54.

[28] See P.L. Thomas, (2012). Song of Myself: Honoring the Individual as Critical Scholarship. In Tricia M. Kress, Curry S. Malott, and Brad J. Porfilio, eds., *Challenging Status Quo Retrenchment: New Directions in Critical Qualitative Research* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2012), 69-84.

[29] See Tuchman, "Prism," 94.

[30] Ann M. Johns, "Genre Awareness for the Novice Academic Student: An Ongoing Quest," *Language Teaching* 41.2 (2008): 237-252.

[31] See P. L. Thomas, "Looking for Vonnegut: Confronting Genre and the Author/Narrator Divide," in Robert T. Tally, ed., *Critical Insights: Kurt Vonnegut* (Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, 2013), 118-140; P. L. Thomas, "Challenging Genre, Medium and Text–Students as Authentic Readers and Writers," *English Journal* 101.4 (2012, March): 90-93; P.L. Thomas, "Adventures in Genre!: Rethinking Genre through Comics/Graphic Novels," *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 2.2 (2011, December): 187-201; P.L. Thomas, "Diving into Genre—A Case for Literature as T(t)ruth," *Notes on American Literature* 19 (2010, Spring): 4-12.

[32] Vandiver, "Humanism," 52-53.

[33] Andrew Helfer, author, and Randy DuBurke, illustrator, *Malcolm X: A Graphic Biography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); Spain Rodriguez, *Che: A Graphic Biography* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2008).

[34] Oates, "High," 125.

[35] See Craig Kridel, "Biographical Meanderings: Reflections and Reminiscences on Writing Educational Biography," *Vitae Scholasticae* 25 (2008): 5-16; Kridel, *Writing*.

[36] Tuchman, "Prism," 94.

[37] Paulo Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare to Teach* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2005).

[38] Lou LaBrant, "Research in Language," *Elementary English* 24.1 (1947, January): 94.

Auto/Biographical Mentoring for Women

Susan Laird
University of Oklahoma

Carolyn G. Heilbrun. *Writing a Woman's Life*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1988.[1]

The first woman ever tenured at Columbia University, Carolyn Gold Heilbrun (1926-2003), a graduate of private schools and Wellesley College, taught English at Columbia for thirty years, became the Avalon Foundation Professor of Humanities there, and still bears the mantle of a revered mother of academic feminism. She accomplished all this without mentoring from senior women scholars before her, by reading and writing lives of women literatae who dared and achieved much.

Everyone knows what "mentoring" is: A big buzzword among educators today. Although some have analyzed this concept's often overworked and trendy institutional usage,[2] mentoring can have profound existential, social, and cultural consequences as it responds to deeply felt human needs that far exceed, and may even contradict, institutional agendas for us. Generally, mentoring does refer to initiating and sustaining a mutually voluntary relationship between a generous, successful elder and a hopeful ingénue: an educative relationship that can actively support and encourage the ingénue to recognize and realize her own fullest potential, to develop her skills and cultivate her strongest dispositions, to understand how and why the elder's world has worked well and worked poorly for whom and for what, and to organize and navigate her own life so that indeed she can become and be the person she wants to be, flourishing, living the purposeful life she wants to live, ideally even making the world a better place to live and work. Often feminists have found mentoring downright stifling or hard to find within

patriarchal institutions, as we have explored and risked aims and ways of living, learning, and working of which our mothers and grandmothers, and men who have served as our faculty advisers and colleagues, may never even have dreamed. Heilbrun's most popular critical book, *Writing a Woman's Life*, which by 1997 had sold over 150,000 copies,[3] addresses that huge gap. It gives voice to her particular concern that "women have been deprived of the narratives, or the texts, plots, or examples, by which they might assume power over—take control of—their own lives" (17), where "Power is the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter" (18).

This classic, unabashedly "feminist" work taught the late twentieth-century generation of women with "quests" for their own stories of how reading and writing women's auto/biographies can speak to us and to our own thoughtful life-making projects as a kind of virtual mentoring. In effect, this feminist biographical theory is an inquiry curriculum for women's self-education in the "unorthodox logic" of iconoclastic life-making, which may otherwise seem "incoherent and even dysfunctional" when it involves choosing not to "make a man the center of [our] lives" and allowing ourselves to become "outsiders" with "larger selves than convention dictates."[4]

I. A Literary Legacy for Feminist Intellectuals' Life-Making

Virginia Woolf's niece, Anne Olivier Bell, credited Heilbrun with the landmark literary-historical contribution of having "created Bloomsbury." Literary scholarship was Carolyn Heilbrun's life. She wrote little, if anything, about her own domestic life as wife of Fordham University's prominent cultural economist James Heilbrun or as mother of three brilliant children, or about her scholarly life's dependence upon aid from a nanny working daily till 5 pm as well as a twice-weekly house-cleaner. Yet how else could she have achieved so much? Heilbrun published several other book-length works of literary-historical scholarship on British Modernism besides *Writing a Woman's Life*. These included *The Garnett Family* (1961), based on her dissertation at Columbia, and two other feminist classics, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (1973) and *Reinventing Womanhood* (1979), plus a couple edited books, as well as ten mystery novels written under the pseudonym Amanda Cross–all published before her 1992 retirement from the professoriate in feminist indignation. As a public-intellectual emerita, she authored *The Education of Gloria Steinem* (1995) and *Women's Lives: The View from the Threshold* (1997), along with two memoirs, *The Last Gift of Time* (1997) and *When Men Were the Only Models We Had* (2002), plus five more mysteries by "Amanda Cross," before her sudden, thoroughly puzzling (and to me, frankly, also still demoralizing) suicide on October 9, 2003, at age 77.

Susan Kress's highly praised intellectual biography *Carolyn G. Heilbrun: Feminist in a Tenured Position* (1997, 2006) begins by repeating what Heilbrun disclosed about her own girlhood in *Writing a Woman's Life*: That as a mere schoolgirl she began reading all the biographies in the New York Public Library methodically, in alphabetical order. Thus she evidenced early what would become her life-long preoccupation with identity formation, "to see what lives were to be lived, what self-inventions could be tried on, tried out,"[5] as she navigated conflicts and ambivalences concerning her own filial, gender, class, Jewish, and professional identities. Nonetheless, Kress acknowledges that this contemporary of Betty Friedan, Adrienne Rich, Maya Angelou, Paule Marshall, Gerda Lerner, and Jane Roland Martin, "does not speak for everyone: She speaks primarily for those with education, with access to meaningful work, and with the means to make choice possible. . . . Her grand subject is the formation of an achieving self and the ways of enlarging the possibilities for that self."[6] Indeed that is the grand subject of the book at hand, *Writing a Woman's Life*, which Linda Morice has invited me to think about here.

Of her girlhood biographical reading, Heilbrun explains in that book that at age ten she had to make herself a boy in order "to enter the world of daring and achievement," because women's biographies were scarcely even to be found (27). She therefore begins *Writing a Woman's Life* examining the pitfalls of writing literary biographies and literary scholars' changing concepts of biography itself as she organizes her inquiry around a veritable swirl of questions about "what a woman's biography or autobiography should look like" (27)—concerning that woman's birth and its reception, the proper way to view her childhood, her "inevitably complex" relation with her mother, her presumed more straightforward relation with her father, her "process of becoming, or failing to become, a sex object" (27), her coping with her attractiveness to men or lack thereof, the markers of her marital success or failure, her possible aversion to marriage, her friendships with other women, her aging, her choices, and the pain of living without models, exemplars, or stories of possible lives she might live as she claims "the courage to be an 'ambiguous woman'" (31). Heilbrun searches writing about the lives of modern, mostly white Anglophone literatae of her own generation and earlier generations for some possible answers to such questions. Her interests do not extend beyond the profession of literature to that of education, as does Anna Neumann and Penelope L. Peterson's culturally diverse collection published in 1997, *Learning from Our Lives: Women, Research, and Autobiography in Education*, which included Gloria Ladson Billings' now-classic work of autobiographical mentoring, "For colored girls who have considered suicide when the academy's not enough: Reflections of an African American Woman Scholar."[7] But educators can indeed learn from the lives of literatae—and

from studying Heilbrun's analysis of economically privileged white women's contradictory life-plots, critically.

To end or avoid entrapment in the erotic or familial plot of conventional white bourgeois patriarchal femininity, she observes that a pre-feminist woman who wished "to live a quest plot" (48; a term she borrowed from literary theorist Nina Auerbach) had to invent a seemingly accidental event to transform her life, an "awakening" (64). A scandalous or entirely secret pregnancy, for example. Philosophers and historians of education might think here of Maria Montessori, although Heilbrun wrote of mystery writer and theologian Dorothy L. Sayers. A woman must also be "gifted" with some sense of her possibilities beyond the conventional plot. Acknowledging historical shifts from generation to generation in such biographical commonplaces, Heilbrun challenges conventional understandings of marital happiness and, commending both spousal friendship and the equality of spouses' quests, theorizes that "The sign of a good marriage is that everything is debatable and challenged; nothing is turned into law or policy" (95). This is the feminist voice of an auto/biographical mentor.

Perhaps this work's greatest contribution to auto/biographical mentoring is Heilbrun's theorizing that women should reclaim the practice of speaking honestly aloud to one another in groups, much as feminism began, with consciousness-raising that caused "women to see themselves collectively, not individually, not caught in some individual erotic and familial plot and, inevitably, found wanting" (46). Observing that biographers and autobiographers have generally represented lives as eccentric and individual, she proposes that stories exchanged and examined orally among women, with talk of their "ambitions, and possibilities, and accomplishments" and "the most personal accounts of their lives" (46), can yield feminist narratives that serve intellectual women's courageous life-development and life-writing, no longer completely isolated from one another in solitary rooms of their own. Heilbrun's brilliant example of this practice is the generation of women poets born 1923-1932–Rich, Plath, Sexton, Kumin, Kizer, Cooper, Levertov–who "found a frankly autobiographical, 'confessional' mode for their poetry and discovered a form for their uninhibited autobiographical impulses," thus offering "details of personal rebellion and sudden, dazzling recognition of too easily accepted female servitude with forthrightness that would have been unthinkable two decades earlier" (63). Reading Rich's prose life-writing, Heilbrun celebrates a practice she considers vital to the feminist movement's success: A new approach to women's autobiography that invites us to identify "with women alone, not as fellow sufferers, but as fellow achievers and fighters in the public domain" (72). Affirmation of Heilbrun's argument for collective life-storytelling comes forth in subsequent feminist practices of life-writing as auto/biographical mentoring. A year later, for example, Mary

Catherine Bateson organizes and researches an inter-racial collective of intellectual women talking with one another, precisely as Heilbrun recommends, in order to author her undeniably generative *Composing a Life*, and a decade later, feminist educational theorist Susan Douglas Franzosa conceives the entire composition of her *Ordinary Lessons: Girlhoods of the 1950s* as actively collective, to challenge nostalgic accounts of blissful postwar white-patriarchal home life.[8] Strong, mutually supportive collegial friendships growing out of that collective work have generated later collaborations in educational studies, and some have endured a lifetime, resulting in formation of the intergenerational, international Society for Educating Women.[9] Heilbrun recommends that biographers search for those friendships between women that have proven crucial to our development and achievement: "The sign of female friendship is not whether friends are homosexual or heterosexual, lovers or not, but whether they share the wonderful energy of work in the public sphere" (108).

Just as conventional marriage plots have proven deleterious to intellectual women's development and achievement, Heilbrun's narrative suggests that conventional quest plots in academe require examination and revision as well. In *Writing a Woman's Life* she examines her own clandestine construction of fictional identity, "recreating myself" (117), in Amanda Cross's sleuth Kate Fansler: "to create space for myself" available in neither private nor public life (113), "to create an individual whose destiny offered more possibility than I could comfortably imagine for myself" (114). Heilbrun's interpretation of Kate Fansler in this context echoes much of her reading of Woolf's *Three Guineas*, as she calls attention to Cross's *Death in a Tenured Position* while defending Woolf's much-criticized feminist stridency, to argue that

> as we age many of us who are privileged—not only academics in good tenured positions, of course, but more broadly those with some assured place and pattern in their lives, with some financial security—are in danger of choosing to stay right where we are, to undertake each day's routine, and to listen to our arteries hardening. I do not believe that death should be allowed to find us seated comfortably in our tenured positions (130-131).

Thus Heilbrun's auto/biographical mentoring takes up questions about a woman's challenge of speaking with authority and commends Woolf's agenda of living and working as an "outsider."[10]

II. Reading Women's Lives, Learning To Live

Heilbrun's scholarship has not directly influenced my own, although it has resonated strongly with my own interests, and infused the intellectual air that I have breathed. A cross-eyed schoolgirl growing up on a farm (a setting much less sophisticated than Heilbrun's Manhattan), I loved reading poetry. Later that pastime would become my chosen genre emphasis as an undergraduate English major—and forever afterwards the curricular core of my spiritual self-education in adult solitude. Thus the autobiographical poets whom Heilbrun studies in *Writing a Woman's Life* have influenced my own reflective coming-of-age life-making.

Heilbrun published *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* the year I graduated from this nation's first college for women (1973), painfully aware that women authors in its undergraduate English curriculum were not only scarce: All had committed (or at least attempted) suicide. Yet Virginia Woolf became my classmates' and my own literary hero anyway, doubtless somehow thanks to Heilbrun's scholarship on Bloomsbury and Woolf (scholarship I never encountered in college, however). Heilbrun published *Reinventing Womanhood* the year I became certified to teach Secondary English (1979). Already having learned a new skepticism about the conventional marriage plot from my study of (suicide survivor) Mary Wollstonecraft in Beth Darlington's memorable English senior seminar on the English Romantic Poets, along with some skepticism about the conventional quest plot from my harassed, abortive pursuit of professional preparation in architectural design in 1973-75, I read both these books by Heilbrun in the early 1980s, along with feminist classics by Simone DeBeauvoir, Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Kate Millett, and others, before risking heavy debts in pursuit of a Ph.D. As a public high school English teacher, finally acclimated to my monocular vision, I had studied many novels and stories with my students. Inspired by profound educational thought on gender, ethnicity, and race that I encountered in those novels and stories, my doctoral research on maternal teaching involved my philosophical study of <u>the</u> one way of "writing a woman's life" that Heilbrun identified but chose specifically <u>not</u> to address in *Writing a Woman's Life:* Fiction. My dissertation was a philosophical study of maternal teaching represented in autobiographical fictions by Louisa May Alcott and Ntozake Shange, the basis for my professional debut at the Philosophy of Education Society, a general session called "The Concept of Teaching: *Betsey Brown* vs. Philosophy of Education?"[11]

Whereas Heilbrun avoided close study of African American women's autobiographical writing by narrowing her historical frame to those born 1923-1932 and by choosing to exclude fiction from her study (albeit while acknowledging contributions by Toni Morrison and Audre Lorde), I took up

such study eagerly as a white daughter of the Jim Crow era, largely because an African American woman from Heilbrun's generation, Rosa Doran, had encouraged my interest in education and mentored me into and throughout my first exploratory experience educating children. Although Doran had earned a teaching degree, *Brown v. Board of Education* had prevented her employment as a professional teacher in my hometown's freshly desegregated public schools, forcing her to work as a domestic servant to white people instead. Angry about that obvious injustice, she seized upon an opportunity offered by the War on Poverty to found and lead a day care center for her town's working-poor families' children, where she invited me to work during my summers as a college student. She became the first (and maybe last) woman, also the first (and maybe last) person of color elected to City Council there. Somewhat later, Eloise P. Dowdell and other, younger African American women educators administering Educational Opportunity Programs at Ithaca College, for whom I worked as a secretary, seconded Rosa Doran's encouragement and mentored me through my decision to pursue a Master of Arts in Teaching English. When I became a public high school teacher, two more African American women, vice principal Marjorie N. Penalver and affirmative action director Beverly J. Martin acted as my wise mentors also, both in the classroom and in a group of feminist teachers that organized a community coalition to work for sex equity and racial justice in our school district. All these African Americans offered me brilliant models of smart, strong womanhood devoted to courageous quests for social justice through public education. For my dissertation, therefore, within a research-university scenario that offered almost no access to African American women's educational wisdom, I chose to extend their mentoring, as it were, by studying autobiographical fiction not only by white literatae, but also by African American literatae who had thought deeply about childrearing and education within the context of struggles for both sexual and racial justice.

When assigned to write book reports in elementary school, however, I had chosen not to write about fiction, but instead to write about Landmark biographies of great women, a series of children's non-fiction books that my grandmother had given me. The books presented consequential queens and strong-minded First Ladies, but also Jenny Lind, Florence Nightingale (whose life Heilbrun contemplates), and Clara Barton. Thus I had learned early to believe myself somehow capable of living in "the world of daring and achievement" that as a girl Heilbrun could only find in men's biographies (27)—and to look for women around me whose lives exemplified such courage and worldly intelligence—very few of whom were white in my family's pre-feminist Jim Crow world. But women of color like those who had put me on the path into the education profession were scarce in the world of my doctoral education, and such reading of women leaders' lives became

another part of the curricular core of my spiritual self-education in adult solitude as I came of age professionally later, a doctoral student schooled by Carol Ascher, Louise DeSalvo, and Sara Ruddick's *Between Women*, whose later edition Heilbrun would introduce as an acknowledged prophet of auto/biographical mentoring for white feminists.[12]

Trying to make my way as a junior scholar in a field hitherto almost exclusively a male preserve, I sought inspiration for my own life-making in Emma Goldman's *Living My Life*, in Phyllis Rose's *Parallel Lives*, and in Rose's diversely authored, monumental *Norton Book of Women's Lives* (from which I read one selection per weekend)—also in Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*.[13] At that same tenderfoot age, Heilbrun had preferred Woolf's more placid, less politically radical *A Room of One's Own*, a preference that may have become part of her scholarly legacy to the academic canon of English even though she later came around in the last chapter of *Writing a Woman's Life* to value Woolf's more strident later work, generally still excluded from that canon. Perhaps thanks to my African American mentors as well as the assorted auto/biographies I had read, never would I have thought I should wait till my age advanced past fifty to give up female impersonation and voice my feminism. Having encountered *Three Guineas* amid the radically challenging cultural politics of campus life in 1969, I never found its strong critical voice a cause for wariness. I found it a cause for hope. I have read it at least once yearly ever since, embracing its methodical reliance upon biographies as rich sources of imaginative and critical insight concerning the sexual-economic politics of education for war-making, or for conscientious anti-war life-making, within a greedy, imperialist, patriarchal culture.

Heilbrun published *Writing a Woman's Life* just as I was completing my Ph.D. At that same time I remember encountering also a sudden but (for me) timely flood of women's biographies by historians of education—Joyce Antler, Joan N. Burstyn, Geraldine Jonçich Clifford, Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, Joan K. Smith, Barbara Miller Solomon, and others. Their brilliant writing of women's educational lives seems to have exerted no influence whatsoever upon Heilbrun's thought about writing women's lives; *literary* women's lives were her subject, not women in the profession of education. Reading those educational historians' biographical scholarship at that moment amended my feminist mentor Jane Roland Martin's generous efforts to sustain my struggle to enter and influence my field, philosophy of education, despite the active efforts of its celebrated patriarchs young and old to discourage me, in public and in print. *Peabody Journal of Education* published a special issue in 1995 on mentors and mentoring, which included my own memoir, "Working It Out with Jane Roland Martin," and Leonard J. Waks has published Martin's intellectual self-portrait, "It's Not on the List," in the first volume of his series, *Leaders in Philosophy of*

Education;[14] but if I were a historian of education, I would now be hard at work researching and writing her life as well as the lives of my earlier African American women mentors. Although Heilbrun is unlikely ever to have taken interest in writing a woman's life in philosophy of education, even one as internationally significant as Martin's, her *Writing a Woman's Life* might engage such a biographer nonetheless—along with Lucy Forsyth Townsend and Gaby Weiner's *Deconstructing and Reconstructing Lives: Auto/Biography in Educational Settings*[15] and other relevant theorizing in this special issue of *Vitae Scholasticae* that Heilbrun's classic has inspired, at least indirectly.

III. Heilbrun's Influence

I am not a biographer, not even an educational biographer. As a philosopher of education, I am engaged in mentoring graduate students of Educational Studies and of Women's and Gender Studies and in studying the concept of coeducation for social and ecological justice, which makes learning to live a vital aim, beyond just learning academic subjects and professional practices. Therefore I value biographies, autobiographies, and my students' and my own topical autobiographical inquiry as indispensable primary sources of conceptual and practical insight into what learning to live can mean: vital curriculum.

In writing *Mary Wollstonecraft: Philosophical Mother of Coeducation*,[16] for example, I reviewed many, and closely studied several, biographies of Wollstonecraft in order to theorize the revolutionary self-education that shaped her critique of monarchist miseducation and inspired her imaginative, revolutionary vision of republican coeducation. Surveying those various biographies, I found Heilbrun's many themes: Wollstonecraft's infant care in a wet-nurse's home rather than her parents' (about which she became forever resentful), her simultaneous disrespect and active care for her abused mother, her simple disrespect unmixed with affection for her abusive and unstable drunken father, her refusal of both sexual objectification and marriage, her formative passionate friendship with Fanny Blood, her late and perhaps unprecedented egalitarian marriage and passionate friendship with William Godwin, and her own "gift" of knowledge that she was not meant to live out any conventional life-plot. However, the most prominent theme my study of Wollstonecraft's biographies discerned—her self-education via mentors of both sexes whom she sought and found, and from whom she learned much—differs profoundly from Heilbrun's account in *Writing a Woman's Life*, insofar as Wollstonecraft's mentors were alive, not dead, even though none provided a clear model for her to emulate. Instead, they gifted her with hospitality and conversation; with shelter, food, and other needed economic assistance; with travel, books, and other learning opportunities then scarce to

women, without which, she might have died as a bitter, uneducated prostitute, even younger than she did, from unsanitary medical practices at the birth of her second child. My own professional development has depended upon precisely such live mentoring from various generous and thoughtful people outside my homes, schools, and workplaces, everywhere I have lived and worked. *Writing a Woman's Life* is inexplicably silent about women's searches for that sort of live mentoring, apart from her emphasis on such value in close friendships between women, although her last book does examine the "models" that Jacques Barzun and Lionel Trilling provided her as a rare woman graduate student and junior scholar. I would therefore amend Heilbrun's inquiry in *Writing a Woman's Life* with more attention to women's narratives about their mentors, and any patterns evident in the substance of mentoring they recounted, with particular regard to their quest plots.

To deepen scholarship on auto/biographical mentoring useful specifically to educators, I look forward to future documentary studies of that work and of Heilbrun's own life in the professoriate, specifically as a teacher and mentor, akin to Paula M. Salvio's teaching biography, *Anne Sexton: Teacher of Weird Abundance*,[17] one (also suicidal) poet whose poetic life-writing Heilbrun studies in *Writing a Woman's Life*. At the same time, the biographical palette[18] from which Heilbrun theorizes in that classic work has severe limitations for twenty-first century scholars in educational studies. Postmodern women with quest plots in this field can take Heilbrun's original keen insight into the educative power of reading and writing women's lives, and apply it not only to white Anglophone literatae in Modernity, but also to women of color and women of courage in other eras and arenas, especially education. Women who have shared not only Woolf's feminist anger at patriarchy, but also Woolf's deep ethical concerns in *Three Guineas*, about education's part in perpetuating the imperialist political economy, about education's part in perpetuating fascism and war, about education's part in fostering greed and violence in private life—all vital current concerns on which *Writing a Woman's Life* is utterly mute. Thus broadening the biographical palette of Heilbrun's own brilliant project can amend her theorizing to mentor us as we learn how better to respond in our own time and from our own places to her Woolf-inspired call out to women who are senior scholars: that we "should make use of our security, our seniority, to take risks, to make noise, to be courageous, to become unpopular" expressing and acting upon precisely such concerns (131). Now that should be a life worth reading, writing, and living as fully as possible, a life not to be cut unnecessarily short, a life whose narrative may mentor others for much-needed world-changing work.

Notes

[1] Page references to this work alone will appear parenthetically throughout the text of this essay.

[2] For example: Barry Bozeman and Mary K. Feeney, "Toward a Useful Theory of Mentoring: A Conceptual Analysis and Critique," *Administration and Society* 39, 6 (October 2007): 719-739; also http://www.mentorset.org.uk/pages/mentoring.htm (most recently accessed September 5, 2014).

[3] Susan Kress, *Carolyn G. Heilbrun: Feminist in a Tenured Position*, with a new epilogue (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997), 167.

[4] Ibid.,167-168.

[5] Ibid., 2.

[6] Ibid.,214.

[7] Gloria Ladson-Billings,"for colored girls who have considered suicide when the academy's not enough: Reflections of an African American Woman Scholar," in *Learning from Our Lives: Women, Research, and Autobiography in Education*, eds. Anna Neumann and Penelope L. Peterson (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1997), chapter 4.

[8] Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Life* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989); Susan Douglas Franzosa, ed., *Ordinary Lessons: Girlhoods of the 1950s* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

[9] About which, see www.educatingwomen.net. Note SEW's strong mentoring mission.

[10] Kress, *Heilbrun*,168.

[11] Susan Laird, "The Concept of Teaching: *Betsey Brown* vs. Philosophy of Education?" First General Session in *Philosophy of Education 1988*, ed. James Giarelli (Normal, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1989), 32-45.

[12] Carol Ascher, Louise DeSalvo, Sara Ruddick, eds., *Between Women: Biographers, Novelists, Critics, Teachers and Artists Write about Their Work on Women* (1984); with new foreword by Carolyn Heilbrun (New York: Routledge, 1993).

[13] Phyllis Rose, *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984); Phyllis Rose, ed., *The Norton Book of Women's Lives* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993). The latter is my standard graduation gift for a young woman.

[14] Susan Laird, "*Working It Out* with Jane Roland Martin," *Peabody Journal of Education: "Mentors and Mentoring"* 71, 1 (Fall 1995): 103-113; Jane Roland Martin,"It's Not on the List," in *Leaders in Philosophy of Education: Intellectual Self-Portraits*, ed. Leonard J. Waks (Sense Publishers, 2008), 125-134.

[15] Lucy Forsyth Townsend and Gaby Weiner, *Deconstructing and Reconstructing Lives: Auto/Biography in Educational Settings* (London, ON: Althouse Press, 2011).

[16] Susan Laird, *Mary Wollstonecraft: Philosophical Mother of Coeducation* (London: Continuum, 2008; forthcoming in paperback, Bloomsbury, 2014).

[17] Paula M. Salvio, *Anne Sexton: Teacher of Weird Abundance* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007).

[18] My thanks to Paula M. Salvio for coining this term,"biographical palette," and sharing it with me; also to her, to Linda Morice, to Julie Davis, and to John C. Green for discussing this project in formation and for reading and responding generously and helpfully to drafts of this article.

Lessons from Women's Lives:
Patterns of Improvisation and Achievement

Andrea Walton
Indiana University Bloomington

Mary Catherine Bateson. *Composing a Life*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989.

> Current research on women often focuses on a single aspect or stage of life. Dissection is an essential part of scientific method, and it is particularly tempting to dissemble a life composed of odds and ends, and to describe the pieces separately. Unfortunately, when this is done the pattern and loving labor in the patchwork is lost. This book started from the effort to explore different ways of thinking about my own life, to see its pattern as a whole, and to illuminate it by looking at the lives of other women I admire, lives of achievement as well as caring, that have a unitary quality in spite of being improvisations.[1]

Much research, especially the study of lives, is, I believe, rooted in autobiographical questions and preoccupations. I study the lives of academic women in large part because I am a woman in academe. In the stories of earlier academic women I find voices and patterns of career that are not evident in our mainstream narratives of higher education. I see not only these women's public selves—the professor or the teacher—but the private life that shaped their imaginations, their sensibilities, the possibilities and limitations they discerned, and in many cases their scholarship. Indeed, I believe one cannot paint the essence of any scholarly career, but especially a woman's, by simply referring to the lines on their curriculum vitae or employment histo-

ry. The story instead means looking more broadly, more holistically, to discover the range of varied experiences that shaped the contours of her life, what she envisioned for herself, and what it meant for her, a woman, to follow the life of the mind. In my biographical studies of academic women I find compelling stories of courage and conviction, a context for understanding my own engagement with the world of ideas and commitment to making higher education more inclusive, and an inspiring sense of connection—an appreciation of how I have benefited, in my career as an academician, from the tenacity and achievements of these earlier generations of women.

This personal orientation to the study of women in education and commitment to the research enterprise not only as a contribution to knowledge but also as in itself a mode of learning and a conduit to self-understanding helps account for my chosen focus here, Mary Catherine Bateson's 1989 *Composing A Life*. For Bateson's study is at once social commentary and a deeply personal portrait, tracing how she, at mid-career and mid-life, arrived at this particular study. Her subject is how women make meaning of the world; how women come to define and better understand themselves in evolving relationships to others—in the rewards and disappointments in friendships, marriage, family, and workplace and in our roles as daughters, partners, caregivers, and colleagues. Although Bateson's narrative has great applicability to the study of history, her concern is the present moment, the lives of contemporary women grappling with a moment of social transition, where women had benefited greatly from the women's movement but still needed to "break free" from a lingering "sense of inferiority," to find their way amid flux, as old stifling gender conventions were beginning to fall away, but shifting norms brought unpredictability and challenges, the constant need to assess, to navigate and adapt.[2] Candid about the subjectivity inherent in her approach as a writer, Bateson's book is about her life, about women's lives more generally, and, in my eyes, about why and how we should write about women—finding in their stories a more profound understanding of the types of creativity and connection that our institutions, including our institutions of learning, need most to cultivate.

The Path to Studying Women's Biography

Much as Bateson begins her narrative by explaining the journey she traveled to write *Composing a Life*, I'd like to preface my retrospective of her book with a brief account of my early years in graduate school—how I came to the study of biography and, in turn, came to read Bateson's book.

My path to a doctorate in the history of education was not direct. I had majored in English and American literature in college and after spending time abroad and a few years of teaching high school embarked upon gradu-

ate study in International Education at Columbia's Teachers College. During my first term, I took an elective course on the history of US education with professors Lawrence Cremin and Ellen Condliffe Lagemann and soon realized that the questions I found most intriguing—questions about women's intellect and place in the world—were best studied through history. Perhaps because of my literary bent of mind, and because I had no exposure to women's studies as an undergraduate, I immediately delved into the treasure-trove of biographies, especially studies about women in education, but I still naively thought about biography solely as chronology—the detailed timeline of a life. The measure of subjectivity in judging a life worthy of study and an understanding of the power and politics of biography—the story of a life—did not crystallize fully for me until one autumn day, during my second year of graduate studies, as I spoke with a faculty member in the history department—"What do you think you'll select as a dissertation topic?" he asked. "I am very interested in Alice Dewey," I replied. He paused, perplexed. "Why study her, she was just John Dewey's wife. Why not study Marjorie Hope Nicolson. She was tremendously accomplished—a real woman scholar. No one has yet written about her," he underscored while handing me a well-worn copy of *Newton Demands the Muse*.[3] Later that week, I went to speak to another faculty member, a woman, about my research interests. She firmly challenged me. "Why study Nicolson? She was the *best* man in the English department."

These two encounters—the juxtaposition of two divergent views by respected historians—hooked my imagination, and underscored for me the value-laden assumptions biographers routinely make in selecting a subject for study and in interpreting lives—namely, who and what counts?—and how differently conventional historical writing, like the wider society, has treated the lives of men and women.

Why, I pondered, was Alice Dewey facilely reduced to "John Dewey's wife," despite her leadership at the Chicago Laboratory School and intellectual partnership with her husband? Why, by comparison, was Nicolson's career—her achievements as the first woman to lead Phi Beta Kappa and the first woman to hold a full professorship in Columbia's graduate faculty—seen as seamlessly purposeful and therefore more worthy of biographical study? Did the traditional story of academic brilliance and acclaim fully tell Nicolson's story, her accomplishments notwithstanding? Did academe treat men and women equally, as Nicolson professed, standing apart from the limiting gender conventions of the wider society? Hadn't Nicolson changed paths and studied literature, instead of her first love, philosophy, when professor Mark Wenley advised her that gender mattered—"until you can drink and smoke you will ne'er be a philosopher"? Hadn't Nicolson found a creative path to still study philosophy—through the study of literature?

These brief exchanges were eye-opening and pivotal in directing my attention to the power of biography as a lens for better understanding the explicit and subtle ways gender shapes our lives, and most relevant here, for grasping two interconnected ideas—namely, how traditional history had neglected the power of women's lives and how prevalent gender ideology has shaped our notions of success and achievement. One of the thought-provoking pieces I read with deep appreciation as I delved into then burgeoning literature on women's history and women's biography was Mary Catherine Bateson's *Composing a Life*.

Historiographical Reflections

In my first reading of Bateson's *Composing a Life*, back in graduate school, and in rereading the text now, twenty-five years later, I've been struck by how vividly the book evokes the time in Bateson's life and the era in modern women's history when the book was penned. Its pages capture the intellectual moment in the late 1980s when numbers of women scholars across the disciplines—their own lives and imaginations in dialogue with strands of modern feminism—put the study of women's lives front and center. This intellectual ferment challenged dominant models and paradigms that neglected or discounted women's experiences while helping to focus scholarly attention on the study of lives and on the genre of biography. Having initially critiqued conventional biography as an elite enterprise—one largely male-focused, linear and obsessed with the hero's quest, while inattentive to common everyday experiences—feminist scholars reconsidered the power of the genre. New questions and sources provided the scaffolding for alternative portraits of familiar figures as well as an entry to the stories of a wider range of women whose accomplishments had been undervalued or "hidden" from history. Biography was a way to document formidable barriers embedded in our social and educational institutions but also to illuminate an individual's agency, to recover the forgotten or overlooked contributions of women, to shift the lens from the quest of hero or heroine, and to affirm the value of everyday achievements within women's lives.[4]

The period's embrace of biography and autobiography as a means of unraveling the complexities of gender—refracted through the prism of an individual life—provided the intellectual backdrop for Bateson's *Composing a Life* and was also important in my own education, providing an entrée into women's history and feminist questions, helping to shape the ideas and questions that I would eventually explore in my dissertation. Then, as now, I counted myself lucky to be entering the history of education as a generation of scholars, mostly women, began to forge a community of researchers and mentors who took seriously women's education and who brought the meth-

ods of feminist research and insights of women's history into the study of education. The pages of *Notable American Women* recovered and made visible the lives of women professors, teachers, activists, and educators, as did a number of compelling biographies pointing to the centrality of gender. Kathryn Kish Sklar's path-breaking portrait of Catharine Beecher, already a classic by the time I read it in graduate school, probed the enabling power and constraints of the ideology of separate spheres; Ellen Condliffe Lagemann's development of the concept of educational biography in *A Generation of Women* illuminated the influence of family, mentors, and friends in shaping the lessons learned, the private vision and public careers of activists like Grace Hoadley Dodge and Leonora O'Reilly. Joyce Antler's interpretation of feminism as life process in her portrait of Lucy Sprague Mitchell shed new light on a dual career marriage and a woman's continued intellectual vibrance and energy in her later life. Studies like Jean Strouse's portrait of diarist Alice James's bedridden life and Geraldine Jonçich Clifford's edited volume on women in coeducational institutions, *Lone Voyagers*, pointed to the diverse strategies by which women forged a "career."[5]

In addition to these biographical studies of women, an explosion of feminist perspectives from across the humanities and social sciences challenged the male experience as the norm and pointed to alternative valued sensibilities embedded guiding many women's lives. Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*, Mary Belenky's *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Nel Nodding's *Caring*, and Carolyn Heilbrun's *Writing a Woman's Life*, all challenged male norms and pointed to alternative values and sensibilities, other stories, in women's lives. Bateson herself acknowledges the political and cultural dynamics shaping keen interest in women's lives and provided an intellectual rationale for biography and its popularity in her opening pages of *Composing a Life*:[6]

> Women today read and write biographies to gain perspective on their own lives. Each reading provokes a dialogue of comparison and recognition, a process of memory and articulation that makes one's own experience available as a lens of empathy. We gain even more from comparing notes and trying to understand the choices of our friends. When one has matured surrounded by implicit disparagement, the undiscovered self is an unexpected resource. Self-knowledge is empowering.[7]

Composing A Life: Bateson's Journey

> Composing a life involves a continual reimagining of the future and reinterpretation of the past to give meaning to the present, remembering best those events that prefigured what followed, forgetting

those that proved to have no meaning in the narrative."[8]

Born in 1939, the only child of two of the country's most prominent social scientists, Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, Mary Catherine Bateson by her own account had an atypical upbringing. The original Dr. Spock baby, she had an "anthropological childhood," growing up in an extended household her parents shared with progressive educators Lawrence and Mary Frank in Greenwich Village, and her mother's example of trying to meld rather than merely balance marriage, family, and career. The iconoclastic contours of Mead-Bateson family life notwithstanding, Bateson, who attended Brearley and Radcliffe, still grew up feeling the weight of white middle-class conventions and the dissonance many women confronted of competing commitments and expectations: "As a young woman, I never questioned the assumption that when I married what I could do would take a second place to what my husband could do."[9] Comparing herself to her famous mother, she wrote "She constructed her life around professional constancies and made her marriages fit."[10]

Trained as a Middle East language scholar, Bateson forged a vibrant career. Despite holding successive academic appointments, serving as a public intellectual, and authoring an impressive list of publications that combined linguistics, anthropology, and systems thinking, she never held a professorship directly in her field. Bateson's career had been interrupted several times—as she followed her husband, Barkev Kassarjian, to support his career, when the couple had to leave their home (and years of Bateson's field notes) in Iran at the outbreak of Revolution, and when she was forced from the deanship at Amherst. In these ruptures and patterns of her own life, Bateson found a subject to study that would speak to both academic and popular audiences—a conduit to self-understanding and through that to social analysis. "Continuity is the exception in twentieth-century America," she wrote, realizing that "adjusting to discontinuity is not an idiosyncratic problem on my own but the emerging problem of our era."[11]

Reflections on these unsettling experiences and the deaths of Mead and Bateson, in 1978 and 1980, respectively, helped lead Bateson, the social scientist back to her literary side—an early love of poetry and creative writing—as she crafted the memoir of life with her parents, *With a Daughter's Eye*.[12] In turn, this spirit of reflection, of self-discovery, of considering "different ways to think about [her] own life, helped fuel the project that eventually became *Composing a Life*, shaping its questions and narrative voice:

> This is a book about life as an improvisatory art, about the ways we combine familiar and unfamiliar components in response to new situations, following an underlying grammar and an evolving aesthet-

> ic. It started from a disgruntled reflection on my own life as a sort of desperate improvisation in which I was constantly trying to make something coherent from conflicting elements to fit rapidly changing settings.[13]

Composing Lives was one of those books that, tapping into the period's currents of feminist thought and debates about changing gender roles circa 1980s, offered a re-visioning and deeper valuing of women's lives, explicitly the learning and creativity embedded in homemaking, and explicitly added a new dimension to thinking about education.

From Bateson's perspective, the discontinuities and challenges so common in many women's lives—twists and turns often viewed as scatter-shot, negative, or disruptive—could in fact be viewed in a positive light, as circumstances sparking high levels of creativity, adaptability, and learning; such patterns embedded within women's daily lives, Bateson argued, illuminate ways of thinking and resilience that have been the bedrock of women's experience and are crucial during times of social transition and change—times such as the late 1980s when Bateson wrote and indeed our own day. The reality of women's lives challenges the models of life and leadership most biographies have portrayed and that has been held up as achievement. Invoking a metaphor, Bateson sees in her own life and the autobiographical reflections of friends, life as an improvisational art—one "composes" a life. The concepts of education, adaptability, and engagement become fused—evoking echoes of Bateson's friend Eric Erikson's notion of one life stage building upon the next (an influence Bateson warmly acknowledges), or in Deweyan terms, the idea of life as a process of growth leading to more growth. This is especially poignant in this historic moment when modern lives—especially women's lives—were fundamentally different from and less restrictive but far less certain and predictable than those of early generations. "Many of the most common concepts we use to construct a sense of self or the design of a life have changed their meanings: Work. Home. Love. Commitment."[14]

Here is a poignant study that in its substance and narrative voice reflects gender in action, an intellectual woman making meaning of the gendered values and assumptions she regarded as embedded in American culture. Here are the concerns of women's history and feminism seen through ordinary but adept and accomplished women's lives, reflecting their point of view, revealing how they made meaning of their experiences, and how their identities are shaped and strengthened in their relationship and commitments to others. Based on extensive interviews, Bateson's narrative artfully weaves "conversation and reflection" and reflects a non-hierarchical mode of inquiry. The resulting narrative is, as she explains, "autobiographical, not biographical, shaped by each person's choice and selective memory and by

the circumstances of our work together."[15]

The four lives portrayed, and which serve as a touchstone for Bateson's self-understanding, are not meant to be representative of all women but, rather, were chosen purposefully: Joan Erikson (a dance educator and collaborator with husband psychologist Erik Erikson), Alice d'Entremont (an electrical engineer and entrepreneur), Johnnetta Cole (an anthropologist and college president), and Ellen Bassuk (a physician and psychiatrist). These women are Bateson's friends, mentors, colleagues—some are older, some younger than Bateson. The social profile of these lives is narrow—all the women identify as heterosexual, only one is a woman of color—but the angle of vision these lives shed on the limitations and possibilities for women in the wider society is capacious. Presenting neither chronology nor a full-blown portrait of each personality, Bateson's narrative interweaves self-reflection and observations with the voices of these women remembering and the words they chose to tell their own stories. They were able to move from phase to phase in life, applying insights and skills from one context to the next, even from disappointments, learning from and building on the past, and investing life with a sense of connection and respect for interdependence. Thus, at its core, *Composing A Life* speaks to the power of memory and autobiography and to the biographer's craft but is also profoundly about women's education, and the lessons for women and society embedded therein, even though formal schooling and higher education figure only slightly in the narrative.

Bateson's book was a best seller, striking a chord for academic and popular audiences alike. The book spoke to contemporary women seeking to see the contours of their lives valued and dignified and by extension to biographers challenging male-modeled norms—What is success and achievement? Who is a worthy subject of a biography? Is there one grand narrative of a successful life—a "single rising trajectory" by which to measure ourselves—or are there multiple narratives, anchored in more fluid circumstances—the twists and turns, the fits and starts, the cobbling together of experience?[16] *Composing a Life* resonated with women readers and, like Carolyn Heilbrun's *Writing a Woman's Life*, another classic from this time period, was the type of book that was read and re-read, allowing the reader to reflect, at different junctures, upon her own life.

Like Bateson, I have endeavored to study women's lives on their own terms—the choices made, the competing expectations, the complexities and inconsistencies—for what they could tell me about my own life. My interest in the history of academic women emerged directly from reflection on my own circumstances and from encounters such as the description at the beginning of this essay. Having been warned that my proposed research on academic women at Columbia might bear little fruit, because, ostensibly, there were *no* women, I looked for where women might be in a variety of roles,

across the university configuration—in the extension school, Barnard College, Teachers College—faculty, students, spouses, donors, and administrative assistants. These women were not naïve to entrenched gender biases but in many instances, like the women Bateson portrays, found space for creativity at the margins. None of these Columbia women conformed to the conventional (male) image of the academician—as women scholars they were regarded as anomalies. Unlike their male counterparts they were not encouraged in their ambition, and as even Marjorie Hope Nicolson admitted in a moment of candor, women scholars were at a disadvantage compared to male colleagues who benefited from the support of a wife who typed and cooked.[17]

In my study of women at Columbia I asked, "How did women build lives that were subjectively satisfying and socially significant?"[18] In thinking about how women "crafted" a career, I realized early on that the pathways available to men were not nearly as open to women. Few of these women had a career that followed the linear trajectory we uphold as achievement or that biographical memoirs of male figures tend to evoke. Not all identified as feminist or made the choices I wished they had made but the complexity of their lives—their adroitness in navigating gender expectations and biases and pulling lessons from challenges or disappointments—was intriguing, inspiring. My emphasis was on how these women perceived what it meant to embrace the life of the mind and while not diminishing the weight of the overt sexism and structural and attitudinal barriers they encountered to illuminate how their careers coalesced. In my portraits of these women I tried to capture the structural and attitudinal barriers these women confronted and also to illuminate their individuality and agency, and the intellectual rewards they found in a scholarly life. I wanted to see how a confluence of factors—the nature of disciplines and academic departments and the networks of support for intellectual women in the wider metropolitan culture—enabled them to embrace an intellectual life. The gender biases in hiring, tenure, and promotion were still real as were the competing demands and commitments of marriage, family, and career. Like Bateson's friends, these lives opened to me a lens into the choices and the resources women have and might marshal. "We need to look at multiple lives to test and shape our own."[19]

Though I did not employ Bateson's framework in my study, in retrospect, these Columbia women, like Bateson's interviewees, experienced and artfully negotiated the moments of transition for women in the twentieth century, meeting the complexity of competing commitments of marriage, family, and career, learning from situation to situation, bringing creativity and cohesiveness to variegated experiences. When Elsie Clews Parsons married and subsequently resigned her Barnard College lectureship in sociology to raise a family, she had the means—the intellect and the wealth—to carve out her

identity, sans an academic appointment, as an ethnographer and folklorist of the Southwest. The author of *The Family*, in which she advocated trial marriage, Parsons used her expertise knowledge of native cultures to critique the customs and taboos of her social class, and to redefine the terms of marriage with her husband, Republican senator Herbert Parsons.

A number of Columbia women like Christine Ladd-Franklin, a logician and color theorist, and Lucy Hayner, a physicist, spent many years at Columbia, in part because of a husband's career elsewhere in New York City, in a string of special appointments or an academic rank that belied their talent and disciplinary standing. These women bristled at the sexism they encountered at Columbia, but they saw value and accomplishment in their dual career marriages, in raising children, and in their roles as mentors to generations of students.

Some women came late to an academic career. Ruth Benedict was married but childless and in an emotionally stifling marriage when she earned her Ph.D. in 1923. Benedict had looked to traditional feminine pursuits—charity work, teaching, poetry, and biography—before taking a course in anthropology with Elsie Clews Parsons at the New School for Social Research. She brought her humanities bent of mind and her personal questions about "outsiders" into her description of the "patterns of culture" and developing the concept of cultural relativism.

The most compelling figure for me was Margaret Mead, Bateson's mother. Lacking a regular academic appointment, she used the lecture circuit and her curatorship at the American Museum of Natural History to become a public intellectual. Her concept of marriage as an intellectual partnership, her ongoing dialogue with feminism and evolving views on mothering and homemaking, her ideas about generational changes are, I believed, echoed in the pages of *Composing a Life*. Most interestingly, like the women Bateson describes, Mead combined work and intimacy, her life "interwined" with Benedict's.[20] Mead's life, and indeed the other lives of academic women I studied, did not conform to the biographies I had read of academic men; her life and career exemplified "improvisation" rather than "single-track ambition."[21]

Looking Forward: the Continued Relevance of Composing a Life to Biography and to the Study of Women in Education

> Working through this project has been a form of consciousness raising for me, carrying me beyond the discovery of anger; the interwoven stories of these different women may provide something of the same experience for others.[22]

If, as I have explored, *Composing a Life* was intimately connected to Bateson's own autobiographical journey as an academic woman and a mirror to a world she and other women confronted in the late 1980s—a world where, in comparative terms, overt sexism and notions of female inferiority were still often unquestioned and gendered expectations were far more restrictive—what relevance, what lessons or inspiration does the book, now, twenty-five years later, hold for us?

Bateson herself has extended and elaborated on the framework of *Composing a Life* in relation to present day issues in a recent book, *Composing a Further Life*.[23] In this recent volume, she considers the profound generational changes evident in the lives of both women and men in the 2010s, as life expectancy rises and baby boomers retire. Drawing from her own life, she describes a group of her female contemporaries—feminist-minded politicians, artists, and scholars, all respected as leaders in their field—who nearing retirement gathered together to share ideas about the next few years, the next chapter in their life's journey, and in reflecting on past contributions these women, as Bateson elaborates, felt a moral and political responsibility to give back for the benefit of future generations.

Much as Bateson's *Composing a Life* tapped into currents of liberal feminism and women's studies circa 1980s, *Composing a Further Life* also captures a wave of lively discussion, driven at least in part by feminist debates about women's social leadership. What will the next chapter of life hold? A number of prominent female intellectuals and public figures—notably Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, Gloria Steinem, and Jane Fonda—have theorized with great optimism about a new phase in adult life. Bateson calls it "Adulthood II"—that span of later life between 50 and 75.

It is a phase of life when adults have the opportunity to reinvent themselves—either to build upon the momentum of earlier years or self-consciously change course. What can be learned from studying the lives of individuals negotiating this transition? In particular, how might Bateson's framework—the concept of composing a life, and by extension composing a further life—help us open up new vistas in writing the history of women in education and women's biography?

In my own study of women's lives I hope to bring some of the insights of Bateson's work into rethinking how we write about philanthropy. As Bateson and other observers have noted, one of the most striking goals widely held by the women, and men, embarking on this new stage of life, Adulthood II, is the desire to do something for the greater good—to think in terms of connection to the planet, the welfare and transformation of society, stewardship of the environment, and the well-being of future generations. These aspirations are translating into a new wave of volunteerism, service, and philanthropic action.

It is well worth underscoring that this later-in-life interest in "paying it forward" is but a new chapter in the history of women's philanthropy. The values that many women today are bringing to philanthropy and service in fact resonates with philanthropic values that have been salient in women's lives historically. These values have been evident and nurtured in the domestic sphere—caring for the elderly and the young—and in taking the female-centered values of homemaking and care to the public sphere as volunteers, settlement workers, and donors, for instance.[24]

We need to capture and write the stories of women's philanthropy and the lives of women philanthropists, past and present, to inspire us in making the longer lives we live more civically engaged and socially responsible. Much as our notions of achievement have, as Bateson explores, been limited, I believe our notions of what counts as philanthropy, who is a philanthropist, and how to study philanthropy have been limited.[25] The range and significance of women's philanthropic contributions—from organizing bake sales and church bazaars to caring for the sick, to the generous bequest of a washer woman—have been eclipsed by a narrow focus on money or the male-modeled image of philanthropist as titan, as domineering industrialist—a Carnegie or Rockefeller.

If leaders of the modern women's movement once viewed volunteerism with ambivalence—dismissing it as unpaid labor—a new generation of female activists and scholars, and women from various walks of life, have found an affirming power in philanthropy and volunteerism, and have through their actions redefined the culture of giving—organizing around social justice issues, bridging notions of difference, and promoting less hierarchical, more fluid, grassroots modes of giving.[26]

Women navigating Adulthood II, turning their efforts toward social improvement, need to have a sense of their lives and philanthropic goals within a broader context. Although Bateson's generation fought for women's equity in the workplace, fought for civil rights and advocated for greater attention to homelessness and poverty, they did not necessarily conceptualize their efforts as philanthropic. We need, I believe, to recognize and value these efforts as such and, further, to see the current women's philanthropy movement—a movement that has been fueled in large part by a feminist consciousness of the value of women's lives, especially in relation to larger social issues—as part of a longstanding history of women's philanthropy. As Bateson's writing explores at length, society could do well to nurture the types of deep social commitments often embraced in women's worldview. "The need to sustain human growth should be a matter of concern for the entire society…This surely is the deepest sense of homemaking," Bateson urged in *Composing A Life*.[27] The same could be said of women's commitment to service and philanthropy.

In women's history we find women who came to a public role in philanthropy, in some instances late in life, bringing a wealth of experience from earlier endeavors to their philanthropic identity and public commitments—Olivia Slocum Sage, a former school teacher, used her inheritance from her miserly husband to fund the Russell Sage Foundation, which helped shift public interest from charitable relief to understanding the root of social problems. Elizabeth MacCormack left her religious order and presidency of Manhattanville College, married, and then entered a new phase in her career as an educator by becoming a major advisor in the world of philanthropy. Dorothy Height, a YWCA and sorority leader, deeply shaped the modern civil rights movement. Irene Diamond was a successful Hollywood script writer who went on to be one of the biggest funders of AIDs research. Carol Ferry and her husband William "Bing" Ferry had no strategic plan in their giving other than to disperse their wealth in funding large and small social justice projects, open at the outset to every project rather than searching for reasons not to fund a proposal.

None of these women aspired to be philanthropists. None of them formally studied or wrote treatises about philanthropy. None of them was in the mold of a Carnegie or Rockefeller. They found their philanthropic voices and vision "along the way," emerging from their lives as women, listening to the needs of communities, at times changing gears, rather than seeking to impress their values on recipients.[28] For many, education was the target of their philanthropy and part of how they conceptualized the philanthropic relationship between giver and recipient. We need to tell and draw inspiration from their stories.

"When the choices and rhythm of lives change, as they have in our time, the study of lives becomes an increasing preoccupation. This is especially true now for women," the words with which Bateson introduced *Composing a Life* in 1989 still ring true today.[29] We can find inspiration in the past by looking anew at the Cold War 1950s, for instance, and seeing a "quiet activism" in the stories of the women who took seriously the discontinuities in the female life cycle and spearheaded the women's continuing education movement—or we can look to contemporary women, whose lives have less restrictive assumptions and choices than women of earlier generations, and see women reinventing themselves, taking the skills from a professional career or homemaking and applying those to new engagements as a volunteer or funder or nonprofit leader.[30]

I'd like to end this essay as I began, with a personal reflection on what Bateson's *Composing A Life* has meant and continues to mean to me. No doubt, the book will remain an inspiration guiding my historical study of women. But its value to me, and to other readers, rests at least in part in that we can read and reread the book at different moments in our life and see dif-

ferent things. I surmise that Bateson's account of being ousted from the deanship at Amherst may not resonate with younger readers, women who have never known college campuses where women were not a majority of the collegiate population, for instance, but that other stories—of marriage and partnership, for instance—may resonate for them. I know that the twenty-five years that have passed since I first read the book no doubt shaped my recent re-reading of the book. In find in the pages of *Composing a Life* a guide for my historical writing but also inspiration as I deal with changes in life, including caring for elderly parents.

In all, I study women's lives in education and philanthropy because their lives tell me about the ways gender is interwoven into the fabric of our institutions and because, as Bateson elaborates, women's lives embody patterns of creativity and adaptability we need to address larger society issues. But I also study these lives to guide my choices as a woman and citizen, to imagine my own next chapter. To borrow Bateson's words, "We need to look at multiple lives to test and shape our own."[31]

Notes

[1] Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Life*. (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989), 10; hereafter Bateson, *Composing*.

[2] Ibid, 38.

[3] Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Newton Demands the Muse; Newton's Opticks and the Eighteenth Century Poets* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946).

[4] Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Norton, 1988); Barbara Finkelstein, "Revealing Human Agency: The Uses of Biography in the Study of Educational History," in Craig Kridel, ed., *Writing Educational Biography: Explorations in Qualitative Research* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1998), 45-59; Susan Ware, "Writing Women's Lives: One Historian's Perspective, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11 (Winter 2010): 413-435.

[5] Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973); Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, *A Generation of Women: Education in the Lives of Progressive Reformers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); Joyce Antler, *Lucy Sprague Mitchell: The Making of a Modern Woman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Jean Strouse, *Alice James, A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980); Geraldine Jonçich Clifford, *Lone Voyagers: Academic Women in Coeducational Universities, 1870-1937* (New York: Feminist Press, 1989).

[6] Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Mary Field Belenky, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

[7] Bateson, *Composing*, 5.

[8] Ibid., 29-30.
[9] Ibid., 40.
[10] Ibid., 12.
[11] Ibid., 14.
[12] Mary Catherine Bateson, *With a Daughter's Eye: Memoir of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson* (New York: W. Morrow, 1984).
[13] Bateson, *Composing*, 3.
[14] Ibid., 2.
[15] Ibid., 33.
[16] Ibid., 6.
[17] Andrea Walton. "'Scholar,' 'Lady,' 'Best Man in the English Department'?: Reconsidering the Career of Marjorie Hope Nicolson," *History of Education Quarterly* 40 (summer 2000): 169-200.
[18] Andrea Walton, "Women at Columbia : A Study of Power and Empowerment in the Lives of Six Scholars," Ph.D. diss. Columbia University, 1995.
[19] Bateson, *Composing*, 16.
[20] Lois W. Banner, *Intertwined Lives: Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and their Circle* (New York: Knopf, 2003).
[21] Bateson, *Composing*, 15.
[22] Ibid, 114.
[23] Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Further Life: The Age of Active Wisdom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).
[24] Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Refor*m, 1890-1935 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
[25] Andrea Walton, ed. *Women and Philanthropy in Education* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).
[26] Arlene Daniels, *Invisible Careers : Women Civic Leaders from the Volunteer World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
[27] Bateson, *Composing*, 55.
[28] Mary Catherine Bateson, *Peripheral Visions: Learning Along the Way* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994).
[29] Bateson, *Composing*, 4-5.
[30] Linda Eisenmann, "A Time of Quiet Activism: Research, Practice, and Policy in American Women's Higher Education, 1945–1965," *History of Education Quarterly* 45 (March 2005): 1-17.
[31] Bateson, *Composing*, 16.

Is She a Feminist and Do I Like Her?: Dilemmas of a Feminist Biographer

Linda M. Perkins
Claremont Graduate University

Sara Alpern, Joyce Antler, Elisabeth Israels Perry, and Ingrid Winther Scobie, eds. *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992.

The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women is an important book for anyone writing a scholarly biography or a collective biography. It is comprised of ten essays written by ten women historians whose biographical subjects where born between 1859 and 1900. The last of the subjects died in 1980. In presenting this anthology, the editors state the feminist belief that women's lives differ from those of men. Because society values male achievement models more than female models, a woman's gender may profoundly affect the way her life evolves. It is with this understanding that the book presents the lives of ten women from the perspective of the women who wrote about them.

Writing the biography of an individual is a major undertaking requiring an acceptance that the subject will be a part of the biographer's experience for many years, if not a lifetime. This edited book was an outgrowth of a panel discussion titled "Biographies of Women in Public Life: Challenges and Results"[1] at a 1988 women's history conference in Spartanburg, South Carolina. The response to the panel was so positive that the presenters decided to write an anthology of essays to address the myriad of concerns that surface in writing women's lives. At the time of the conference a growing number of dissertations were being written as biographies; furthermore, women

were beginning to raise issues that biographers had not previously addressed (for example, the mother-daughter relationship and the merging of professional and personal lives). Despite the growing interest in the genre, the essays in *The Challenge of Feminist Biography* demonstrate that life writing is a difficult, complicated, and time-consuming task. All of the biographers spent at least ten years on their subject. Through their efforts (and others), biography—once the domain of "great men"—became a major field for women, with impressive results. The editors of the book report that nearly 200 biographies of women were written between 1970 and the publication of *The Challenge of Feminist Biography* in 1992 (5).

The book's ten essays present women public figures in the twentieth century, some of whom were famous and others less-well-known. Included are: Florence Kelley, the social reformer; Emma Goldman, the communist anarchist; Molly Dewson, a social reformer who worked with Florence Kelley; Mary Heaton Vorse, the labor journalist; Belle Moskowitz, a political activist who was the campaign manager for Al Smith, governor of New York; Lucy Sprague Mitchell, progressive educator and founder of the now Bank Street School for Children in New York City; Mabel Dodge Luhan, patron and salon hostess; Jessie Daniel Ames, suffragist and civil rights activist; Freda Kirchwey, editor and owner of *The Nation*, the political and cultural magazine; and Helen Gahagan Douglas, an actress and United States Congresswoman from California.

The book is organized by the biographical subjects' birth order. Each essay includes the author's candid discussions of issues faced in writing the biography, as well as the author's recounting of her own professional and personal journey with her subject.

The first question each author addresses is how she selected her biographical subject. Several biographers chose their subjects as a result of a broader or related topic. For example, Kathryn Kish Sklar stated she was a "reluctant biographer" of Florence Kelley and initially fought the notion of writing Kelley's biography. Sklar originally set out to write a collective biography of women reformers of settlement houses in order to answer the question, "Why were women so central to the creation of the welfare state in the United States?" (20). However, Sklar realized that, in the end, she couldn't answer this question without a scholarly biography of Florence Kelley. Alice Wexler noted her study of Emma Goldman was one she wanted to write for years. She said she admired Goldman's outspokenness and radical views on sexuality. In addition, Wexler said she could identify with Goldman's background "as an East European Jewish immigrant, since my grandparents were also Russian Jews who had come to America in the late nineteenth century" (37-38).

Several biographers report a personal identification or family relation-

ship with their subjects. Belle Moskowitz was Elisabeth Israels Perry's paternal grandmother, although she never knew her. Dee Garrison noted she wanted to write a biography of an American radical and labor war activist. Her first choice was Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, but Flynn's papers were not available to researchers. However, the papers of one of Flynn's closest friends, Mary Heaton Vorse, were available. Garrison noted that she had not heard of Vorse, nor had many others when Garrison started her research. Joyce Antler wrote that Lucy Sprague Mitchell had been a small part of her dissertation on educated professional women in the early twentieth century. Mitchell's attempt to move from the Victorian era of women to that of the "new woman" of the twentieth century intrigued Antler. Moreover, Antler noted she identified with Mitchell's struggles with "intimacy, independence, childrearing and creative and professional development" (99). Rudnick chose Mabel Dodge Luhan because she wanted to do a dissertation on a writer who had not attracted the attention of scholars and had little written about her. Additionally, Rudnick said she identified with Luhan because her father was also involved in the Communist party in the 1930s and the Progressive party in the 1940s.

Various other motivations contributed to the selection of other subjects. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall said she chose Jessie Daniel Ames, the anti-lynching and civil rights activist, because Ames was so marginalized in women's history. Unlike most of the other women in this volume, Ames was a southerner and did not grow up wealthy in the North. Hall said she asked herself why she was writing about such an anomalous figure instead of someone better known like Eleanor Roosevelt or Jane Addams. Sara Alpern decided to do a biography of Freda Kirchwey as a result of a conversation with Kathryn Kish Sklar. Alpern consulted her about her topic on "Women in the Twenties: What Happened to Women After they Got the Vote." Sklar told her that Kirchwey's papers had been recently deposited at the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College, making Kirchwey an excellent subject for original research. Scobie's research on Helen Gahagan Douglas grew out of her research on anticommunist legislation in California in the 1940s. Her dissertation advisor recommended that she look at the records on the 1950 United States Senate race in California when Douglas ran against Richard M. Nixon. When she was invited in 1973 to present a paper on a woman at the Western History Association, she retrieved the information she had gathered on Douglas. Doing this paper resulted in her pursuing a biography of Douglas. Finally, Susan Ware's interest in Molly Dewson was as a politician, feminist and social reformer. The original title of her book was "from Wellesley to the White House" but after discovering significant materials on Dewson's personal relationship with her partner, Molly Porter, she shifted the focus to how Dewson's personal life impacted her professional life (54).

Several themes emerged from the essays: writing a biography; sources; identifying with the subject; maintaining scholarly integrity; and dealing with the responses of critics to the finish book. I will explore these themes as I concurrently address my overarching question: what is a feminist biography?

Length of Time For Research and Writing and Personal Impact

All biographers discussed the lengthy period of time required to write their books and the emotional investment they made in their subjects. The biographers also commented on the impact their research had on their families as they pursued sources and persons to interview, made archival visits, analyzed data, and became obsessively preoccupied with their subject. Sklar noted she invested her personal finances, time, and energy on Florence Kelley over a ten-year period. Kelley's papers were in an array of locations, and Sklar listed more than a half page of archives she visited. She reported that once her son inquired to her daughter of Sklar's whereabouts because she was always on research trips; her daughter responded, "Mom, who?" (23). Sklar underscored the difficulty of being a mom at the same time she had to complete the research for the book. This was a repeated theme by the writers. Elisabeth Israels Perry was a wife of an academic with small children. Her research was put on hold for years while she took care of domestic duties. It took her twelve years from the beginning of her research to the completion of her book. Joyce Antler noted that the writing of her book on Lucy Sprague Mitchell took a toll on her children. Like the other biographers, she had been consumed with her subject, sources, interviews, papers to analyze, etc. When she announced to her family at dinner one evening that she had finished her book and was thinking about her next project, her eight-year-old daughter was stunned and said, "*Another* book? *You can't do this to me!*" (113). Antler noted she was startled at the comment, and it was then that she recognized the "inevitable feelings of anger and jealousy she [her daughter] had about my work, despite her interest in it" (113). Beyond the expressed resentment, Antler found her daughter also had great pride in her book. Sara Alpern's son said he felt as if Freda Kirchwey were his sister; moreover, the man Alpern was dating said, "I feel like I'm dating two women and one of them is dead!" (175). Dee Garrison noted that in the company of her family and friends, Mary Heaton Vorse was spoken of "as though she was a dead relative whom we loved" (69).

Sources

The issue of sources is paramount to any scholarly endeavor. For the biographers of this book, there were either too many sources or too few. Both

situations presented significant challenges and required creativity and in some instances luck to write a cohesive book. As mentioned earlier, Sklar had mounds of sources for Kelley. She noted that Kelley was a prolific writer who had produced an astounding bibliography of her writings between 1882 and 1932. Alice Wexler stated that Emma Goldman had a vast number of sources; furthermore, Goldman had written an extensive autobiography and received endless, daily letters from people. Garrison reported that there was a massive amount of data on Mary Heaton Vorse. She had lived in one house for fifty-nine years and, according to Garrison, "saved almost every piece of paper she ever touched" (70). There were several archives that housed papers on Vorse, and Garrison said she found the holdings "overwhelming" (70). Vorse had written hundreds of short stories and newspaper articles and sixteen books. The sheer volume of documents that Garrison had to explore was staggering to me as I read Garrison's essay!

On the other hand, some biographers had few sources or had gaps in sources for various periods of their subjects' lives. Elisabeth Israels Perry noted that Belle Moskowitz had no papers. Some Moskowitz memorabilia was located at Connecticut College for Women, including a scrapbook of newspaper articles, photographs, and letters of Moskowitz's children to her. However, there were no sources to aid Perry in her search for information on Moskowitz's political life and activities. Perry said she followed every lead during her first year of research on Moskowitz, many of which proved to be dead ends. She searched the indexes of the *New York Times* as well as Jewish community papers and various women's labor organizations papers. Finally, she was able to find rich sources in the transcripts of grievance and arbitration proceedings of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union in which Moskoswitz participated. Perry noted that the annual reports and proceedings of social work and women's organizations also became a rich source of information. Doing the work of a historian (often compared to the work of a detective), Perry saw the pieces slowly begin to fit together. She smartly decided to go through the names of people and organizations who sent letters and cards of condolence when Moskowitz died. Perry put these names on a list and began to search to see if the people and organization had papers in which there might be information or correspondence from Moskowitz. Part of the frustration that Perry experienced, and a common problem with researchers, is that documents were either misfiled in folders or not filed in folders that were logical to the subject. She recalled, "Some research experiences were downright frustrating" (86). She discovered on the final day of one research trip that there was indeed a rich set of Moskowitz letters that had been in a file of private correspondence of Al Smith's private secretary. She had not been informed by the archivist of the existence of these letters. Perry said, "I felt betrayed!" (86). Perry was able to find persons to interview regard-

ing Moskowitz but noted that most were quite elderly; she had to rush to visit them while they were still alive. Perry also worried about their reliability because of their age.

Like Perry, Joyce Antler reported that she initially suffered from an absence of sources. She noted that Lucy Sprague Mitchell had not left a diary and kept few letters related to her private life. There was an oral history and a published biography, which was the basis of Antler's sources at the beginning of her research project. However, as luck would have it, Antler discovered the existence of the diaries of two of Mitchell's relatives – an aunt (her mother's sister), and also the wife of her father's brother whose diary discussed family life in Chicago during Lucy's childhood and early adolescence. More importantly, Antler was able to gain access to the diaries of Mitchell's husband, Wesley Clair Mitchell. She had given the diaries to one of her husband's former students who planned to write a his biography. The diaries became the personal possessions of the former student, who refused to allow others to read them. After Antler interviewed him about his knowledge of Lucy Sprague Mitchell, he agreed to allow Antler to read them under the supervision of a librarian. They ended up being a "gold mine of information" (102). The access to these Wesley Clair Mitchell diaries added years to the project, according to Antler. Initially informed by the owner that there was nothing in the diaries that would be of use to her work, Antler learned the lesson that "materials considered irrelevant by biographers of male subjects or other traditional historians may hold enormous value to those writing women's lives or the stories of families" (103).

Finally, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall experienced a gap in sources in writing her biography of Jessie Daniel Ames. She found there was a void in the middle years of Ames's life—those most relevant to her experience as an anti-lynching advocate. (Ames wrote diaries in the period before her anti-lynching activities and after she retired.) There were records of her public life; however, for those writing feminist biographies, the personal life was essential to understanding the public life. For historians of the past, the public and professional life was all that a reader needed to know. Feminist biographers, on the other hand, were clear that their subjects were whole people who had a personal and a private life.

Sara Alpern also expressed concern that there were gaps in her book due to the lack of Freda Kirchwey's personal letters after 1930s. In hindsight, Alpern felt she should have prepared the reader for an abrupt shift in the book's recounting of Kirchwey's life after that period.

Maintaining Scholarly Integrity and Boundaries

When biographers have contact with their subject and with the subject's

family and friends, the relationships often become friendships. Several biographers discussed this issue and the challenges of maintaining boundaries to ensure scholarly integrity. The authors all grappled with the goal of writing a *feminist* biography, one that took into account the centrality of women's culture and history and their personal as well as professional experiences. Often gathering this information required establishing relationships with their subjects and/or families. Dee Garrison acknowledged this as a concern once she developed a friendship with Mary Heaton Vorse's sons. She noted they opened their homes to her and shared with her important documents related to their mother. Garrison recounted, "With the fearless, loving spirit of their mother, they opened their hearts, homes and memories to me, without restrictions, knowing that their judgment of events might not agree with mine." However, Garrison noted in reading Vorse's diaries and correspondence that much of it reflected her distress and disappointment in her children. Garrison asked herself the difficult question: …"How could I....not hurt these lovely old men?" (71). Biographers draw boundaries and thus make choices about the privacy of family and friends. Garrison asked,"what is honorable to leave out—in truth, to hide? How to judge, as a feminist, the questions of confidentiality, of humane sensitivity to others' needs?" (71). She recalled these were tough choices for her to make as a scholar, but she believes she made the right ones.

Joyce Antler interviewed the three surviving children of Lucy Sprague Mitchell and other members of Mitchell's family. Antler also rented a home and spent a summer in the same location where the Mitchells had vacationed throughout their marriage. Antler noted that once, when she went to Caspian Lake in Vermont to interview one of Mitchell's sons who had retired there, she took her entire family. After encountering "grandchildren, other relatives, and neighbors who knew Lucy well," Antler and her family rented a house near the Mitchells' compound where she wrote some of her book chapters (112). Antler's oldest daughter became good friends with several of Lucy Sprague Mitchell's great-granddaughters, and her husband became acquainted with Lucy Sprague Mitchell's family and former neighbors. Antler didn't indicate these relationships posed any problems with her final preparation of the Mitchell biography.

Ingrid Winther Scobie was the only biographer in *The Challenge of Feminist Biography* who actually interviewed and developed a relationship with her subject. Helen Gahagan Douglas was the youngest woman in the volume and died in 1980. Her political papers were at the University of Oklahoma in the Western History Collection. As a stroke of luck, the archivist at the library allowed Scobie to take a collection of unidentified photos to Douglas's home in New York so she and her husband could identify them. This was the beginning of Scobie's personal connection to her biographical

subject. Scobie, who was pregnant when she met Douglas, told the former actress and Congresswoman that after she finished raising her children, she would write Douglas's biography. For four years Scobie did nothing with Douglas's biographical materials. Then, when Scobie and her husband moved to California so he could assume a position at the University of California-San Diego, she revisited the Douglas project. Scobie wrote, "I wanted to explore gender relations and issues in Congress and in political campaigns; how Douglas's personal and professional lives shaped each other and where the children 'fit'; the structure of Douglas's daily life; and how various Washington women viewed Douglas—not just as a woman but as a Hollywood 'star'" (185).

Like Antler, Scobie went to Vermont to the summer home of her biographical subject. There she viewed private papers Douglas had allowed her to access. The papers covered Douglas's activities after 1950 when she lost the race for U. S. Senator from California to Richard M. Nixon. At the time, Douglas was working on her autobiography. Before Scobie left, Douglas invited her to travel to New York that winter and stay as a guest in her residence, where they could go through papers together. Scobie accepted the invitation, and this began a change in their relationship. Scobie stayed in the bedroom of Douglas's husband while he was in California. Scobie regularly ate dinner with Douglas and her daughter, Mary Helen, and played cards with them. When Douglas's friends came over, she included Scobie in their conversations. Scobie accompanied Douglas on walks and ran errands for her. Douglas even asked Scobie her opinions about issues related to her daughter. Scobie came to realize that her friendship with Douglas jeopardized her scholarly integrity. She wrote, "I realized that I had become too involved. I knew I had to back off, to distance myself to maintain detachment and scholarly integrity" (186-187). Later Douglas asked Scobie to help her with her autobiography. Scobie declined, stating, "I had learned my lesson" regarding becoming too involved with Douglas on a personal level (187). Scobie said her advice to scholars who find themselves in similar situation is to "know when you are in compromising territory" (187). She added that no biographer should put herself in a situation of feeling she owes something to her subject. Having access to the subject should not come at the expense of scholarly detachment. And, Scobie cautions, never become your subject's confidante. Avoid offering interpretations, even if your subject asks. Douglas and her husband died before the completion of Scobie's biography. Scobie said while she was sad to learn of their deaths, "the overriding emotion was relief… I felt emotionally and intellectually liberated" (189).

The final biographer who discussed issues of scholarly integrity was Elisabeth Israels Perry. Her concern was that she was writing a biography of her paternal grandmother, Belle Moskowitz. Perry said this immediately pre-

sented credibility issues and questions of her ability to be *objective*. She pointed out that she never knew her grandmother. Perry's parents divorced when she was small, and she had limited contact with her father's side of the family. Nevertheless, Perry found herself constantly responding to this charge—as one reviewer of a grant commented—she was "just writing a book about...[her] grandmother" (95). Her husband's department newsletter announced that she was conducting a "history of her family," implying it was a genealogical study (95). Despite these concerns, over time Perry found that having Moskowitz as a grandmother was more of a plus than a minus since it gave her access to documents that she could not have viewed had she not been a relative. For example, the Women's City Club of New York denied her access to their board minutes because she wasn't a member of the club. However, when they discovered she was Moskowitz's granddaughter, they allowed her to read them. Having Moskowitz as a grandmother also gave Perry access to critically important persons that she interviewed for the book. People began to send her information regarding her grandmother once she made the right connections. In the end, the biography was completed, and Perry reported she will never have a project that will provide her with such a powerful experience.

Was She a Feminist and Do I like Her?

Most of the biographers embarked on their project with a preconceived notion about their subjects—that they would like them, the subjects would live up to feminist ideals, and they were women with whom the biographers could strongly identify. However, several biographers found this not to be the case—a disappointing and sobering reality. Sklar noted that after she researched and got to know Kelley over years, she determined she did not like her. Sklar reported that when people asked her if she *liked* Kelley, she would respond that she respected her. In the end, Sklar found Kelley to be, "too demanding, too formidable, too uncompromising, too passionate, too charismatic to be merely liked." Sklar said she doubted that she was liked by "anyone who knew her" (19). Likewise, Wexler's research on Emma Goldman resulted in disappointment. Wexler was particularly aware that feminists who viewed Goldman as an iconic figure would be upset with her analyses of the biographical subject. Wexler wrote, "I felt ambivalent [about Goldman]. I wanted to like her more than I did" (47). Wexler said she had come to know many of Goldman's admirers and friends in the course of her research and "I worried about their response to my deepening criticism." Wexler stated she felt "uncomfortable" and "felt ashamed, as if I had somehow betrayed a heroine" (48). In the end, Wexler had to be true to her sources and analyses.

Both Antler and Hall discovered that neither Lucy Sprague Mitchell nor

Jessie Daniels Ames were feminists as defined the era in which they lived. Antler noted that Mitchell was "emphatically not a feminist" and did not support equal political rights for women, nor did she participate in collective action on behalf of women (109). Hall noted of Ames, "I found that even as she [Ames] devoted herself to a female public world, her private relationships with women were often marked either by distance and reserve or by stormy competition. The question then was what to do with these unwelcome signs of ambivalence where I had hoped to find female bonds" (147). Like Kelley, Antler and Wexler found their subjects wanting as feminist icons and persons they admired. Hall wrote that after researching Ames's life, she had "to struggle not just with concern about discrediting an admirable woman, but with my own feelings of disappointment – even, perhaps, dislike" (148).

Douglas, in the end, was also deemed "not a feminist." She did not support the Equal Rights Amendment for women. As a result when Scobie was invited to speak about Douglas for a Women's Studies lecture at a university, the invitation was rescinded when the department discovered that Douglas was not considered a "feminist" (191).

Lessons Learned

Reflecting on their desire to write a meaningful biography of an important feminist icon, all of these women had to confront the truth of the sources they found. Several biographers were disappointed by what they discovered about their subject. Garrison raised the issue of what to do with facts one does not wish to find, noting that the problem with biography is "we want the lives of our subjects to be a perfect whole" (72). In reality, all of the biographers discovered that a person's public image doesn't always match the personal persona. Biographers have to be prepared for what they will discover about their subject. Perry said in writing the biography of her grandmother, she discovered some disturbing facts about her family. One of the biggest issues for several of the biographers was the severe criticism that the subjects' children had for them. Kirchwey, whom Alpern described as a "new woman," a "feminist who had no qualms about saying so," and a supporter of the suffrage movement, was severely criticized by her son. Alpern stated, "I didn't want to hear his criticism; it didn't fit my expectation of the answers I wanted" (165). Antler noted that Lucy Sprague Mitchell's children uniformly resented her and found her style of parenting to be neglectful. They also described Mitchell as a mother who was "cerebral and non-emotional" (105). Antler said after assessing the perspective of Mitchell's children, she had to rethink her view of her as a woman who had successfully combined family life and career. Douglas sent her children away to boarding school and lived away from them for years of their lives. Scobie noted that as adults, Douglas'

sons distanced themselves from her, both emotionally and physically. Antler pondered if it was fair and feminist to judge these women by the assessments of their children. All of the biographers who interviewed the children of their subjects obviously believed the offspring had something to contribute to the understanding of their mothers. When the results don't reflect what the biographer wants to hear she can either accept the critique or rationalize it away.

Susan Ware's biography of Molly Dewson presented different challenges. Dewson was the only known lesbian in the group of women who were subjects in *The Challenge of Feminist Biography*. Ware said she completely refocused her book on Dewson, *Partner and I*, when it became apparent how central Dewson's partner, Molly Porter, was to her professional life and decisions. Ware said she had to determine whether to use the L word when discussing Dewson since it wasn't used to describe Dewson and Porter's relationship during their lifetime. In the end, Ware used the word lesbian twice in *Partner and I*—in the introduction and in the chapter describing their relationship.

Responses to the Biographies

One of the surprises many biographers experienced was the criticism that their subjects were all white and wealthy. This was before the recognition of intersectionality that feminist scholars now take for granted.[2] The analysis of any race and class differences was wanting in the book, according to some critics. As noted above, many of the subjects studied were not feminists with whom female historians of the late twentieth century could identify as advocates for women. Rudnick said of her work on Mabel Dodge Luhan, "In terms of certain feminist and leftist notions of 'correct' scholarship, I had chosen the wrong woman to write about, and she was wrong for numerous reasons. She was white, rich, and spoiled, with the financial wherewithal to do as she pleased with her life…She was manipulative, domineering, and often suspicious of other women" (124). When viewing Luhan through the eyes of her critics, Rudnick became very uncomfortable. She felt defensive about her topic but believes the study of all women is legitimate.

Many of the biographers noted the white privilege of their subjects. Of Lucy Sprague Mitchell, Antler noted, "while Mitchell was a wealthy woman, and thus not a representative one, I believed that her story held significance beyond the boundaries of class" (101). Florence Kelley was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the interracial Civil Rights organization founded in 1909, and Jessie Daniel Ames spent her adult life as an anti-lynching crusader and civil rights activist.

Without question the women chronicled in *The Challenge of Feminist Biography* are indeed extremely privileged and represent many of the earliest

attempts at feminist biography. As outlined above, the reflections of the ten biographers on the many issues to consider when writing women's lives are very instructive, regardless of the race or socio-economic background of the subject. One commonality in the essays is that most biographers wanted to highlight their subjects as exemplary; they often had an essentialist notion of womanhood and were not prepared for the flaws—often glaring—of their subjects. This is one of the most important lessons of this volume. The question of why one studies a particular subject, the availability of sources, the relationship to the subject and/or their family or close friends are very relevant issues in the writing of biography or a collective biography. Finally, a researcher should keep an open mind to what she may find in exploring the life of her subject.

As an African American scholar who grew up in Alabama where I was surrounded by people whose families worked in the homes of wealthy whites for generations, I'm intrigued as to why scholars who research elite whites never consider interviewing their domestic workers. These are the people who really know the personal lives of these subjects. Many have worked a lifetime in these homes (as have often their parents before them, as cooks, maids, nannies, handymen and drivers). Domestic workers are often the closest confidantes of the wealthy. It is probably unlikely that they would talk to a researcher; however, the fact that they are rarely considered a source of information is curious.

Conclusion

The study of women utilizing a feminist lens as reflected in the ten essays of *The Challenge of Feminist Biography* shows how the study of women can often reveal more about human nature than gender. Sara Alpern wrote that when she began her research on Freda Kirchwey she strongly identified with her; however, by the end of her research she had to separate herself from her. Some other biographers reported a similar phenomenon. Lois Rudnick summed up what is perhaps the most pertinent message of *The Challenge of Feminist Biography* when she wrote that feminists shouldn't always expect their subjects to be "nice" (131). Rudnick added that this is not an expectation of male biographical subjects. Despite the impulse for historically oppressed groups to look for positive role models, biographers must include "the full range of female personalities, just as we must include the full range of gender and class identities, if we are to understand our past and present" (131).

Notes

[1] Sarah Alpern et al., ed., *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 1.

[2] Kimberle Crenshaw, "</>Intersection ality: The Double Bind of Race and Gender," *Perspectives Magazin*e, 2004, 2.

"In a Different Voice": The Contribution of Wagner-Martin's *Telling Women's Lives* to Biographical Scholarship[1]

Lucy E. Bailey
Oklahoma State University

Linda Wagner-Martin. *Telling Women's Lives: The New Biography*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994.

"What changed in biography during the 1960s and 1970s was that readers developed a new consciousness about both the facts of women's lives and the many possible ways stories about those lives might be told."[2]

Linda Wagner-Martin's exploration of how gender shapes the craft of constructing and representing women's lives, *Telling Women's Lives*, remains a rich resource for biographical work. Written decades after Virginia Woolf posed her striking question, "My God, how does one write a biography?" (1938) and a few years after Heilbrun published *Writing a Woman's Life* (1988) and Alpern et al. released *The Challenge of Feminist Biography* (1992), Wagner-Martin extended their collective feminist meditation on life writing through analyzing gendered expectations that shape writing about women's lives. Reviewing an array of texts written by and about women, Wagner-Martin synthesizes the particular challenges biographers face in 'telling' women's lives that do not—and cannot—align with traditional (male) biographical structures or life patterns. She details key developments in women's 'new' biography that have enabled different sorts of tellings. Since *Telling Women's Lives* was published in 1994, the gendered biographical imaginary has continued to expand in compelling directions. Yet, through casting writ-

ing about women's lives in a gendered light to animate key questions in how writers produce and readers receive such texts, her synthesis offers enduring insight into an interpretive genre saturated with gendered constructions and implications. In short, Wagner-Martin's analysis of diverse narratives, across genres, from a feminist perspective, illustrates how writing about women's lives can both codify and challenge epistemological assumptions regarding what constitutes a "valuable" life as well as conveys the complexities and promise of narrating the sometimes elusive, too often peripheral, female biographical subject.

Wagner-Martin, currently the Hanes Chair of American Literature at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, who has lived a 'valuable' scholarly life by any number of definitions, has edited and written fifty literary and biographical books focused primarily on women's writing and lives. Among the subjects that have caught her analytic attention are the writers Gertrude Stein and Barbara Kingsolver, the poet Sylvia Plath, and the first wife of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald. Along with Cathy Davidson, Wagner-Martin is also the editor of the *Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States* and an anthology of writing published by the same press. Her literary training informs the particular trans-genre approach she takes to surveying writing about women in *Telling Women's Lives*. She explores dozens of texts that fall outside of the traditional biographical form—collaborative biographies, autobiographies, fiction, poetry—to tease out patterns across genres of writing about women, and in the process, reminds readers of their fragile boundaries. In fact, while many conceive of biography as a form of "art dependent on fact" quite distinct from fiction—a point Edel makes forcefully in *Writing Lives* (1959/1984)—Wagner-Martin argues that biographers' tales are "as much fiction as the narrative[s]" that fiction writers create.[3] Although more illustrative than prescriptive, this text is a methodological offering to biography because of the author's consciousness of craft—that life stories are not transparent windows on to A Real, or The Real, but they are forged, constructed, by particular choices, forces, and theories.

This essay reviews Wagner-Martin's arguments in *Telling Women's Lives* twenty years after its publication to consider its contributions to biographical scholarship. I revisit some key analytical and methodological points that remain salient for current biographers, and point to applications for the field of educational biography. I occasionally contextualize textual material in broader methodological trends to convey how Wagner-Martin's work might converse with that of others, extending, complicating, echoing their ideas, or neglecting potential connections beyond the text's reach at the time. Wagner-Martin's feminist analysis is part of a broad body of scholarship that explores the relationship between gender and genre.

Gendered Genres and Gendered Lives

> *"Both biography and autobiography lay claim to facticity, yet both are artful enterprises which select, shape, and produce a very unnatural product."*[4]

When *Telling Women's Lives* was published in 1994, reviewers noted the impressive scope of Wagner-Martin's textual review and her useful critique of publishing trends that too often ignore women's biography.[5] Such trends suggested the devaluing of women's accounts despite the demographics of a 1990s biography-reading public, of which women comprised 60 percent.[6] These remarks remain salient today. Wagner-Martin's analytic gaze sweeps far and wide across the literary landscape encompassing well-known authors such as George Elliot, Edith Wharton, and the Brontë sisters, political powerhouses such as Eleanor Roosevelt, as well as lesser known figures such as Isak Dineson and Sylvia Beach. She scrutinizes narrative choices, ponders alternatives, and considers cumulative implications for the craft. Throughout she demonstrates her familiarity with, and perhaps penchant for, literary biographies. Her wide-ranging review has a staccato, fragmented character, shifting from section to section across 14 chapters without a clear roadmap of where the reader will travel. Yet the glimpses of many a textured life she provides coax the reader to create new reading lists to learn more.

Wagner-Martin takes her place alongside other feminist biographers such as Alpern et al. (1992), Heilbrun (1988) and auto/biographers such as Liz Stanley (1992) who have worked to reframe understandings of and expectations for storying women's lives. The contemporary awareness of the constitutive power of gender in biography owes its allegiance to such scholars who illustrate how gendered expectations and the social context of writer, biographical subject and reader profoundly shape both *narrating* and *evaluating* women's life writing. New biographical forms gaining momentum after 1970 embrace portraits that attend to interior, psychological, and emotional aspects of a life. Wagner-Martin echoes Virginia Woolf's insistence that we must disrupt limiting narrative conventions to expand approaches to interpreting and representing lives. In the case of women's biography in particular, decisions about form, style, and voice require a gendered sensibility about options and implications.

To illustrate these ideas, Wagner-Martin traces across diverse texts how (often unspoken) gendered norms and expectations of "appropriate" social and familial roles for women pose challenges for biographers and their readers: to merit a biography has required exceptionality as a subject—the structure of the female life must mimic in some way that of men's, must be tied to her role as a wife or daughter of a famous man, and/or must achieve, some-

how, success worthy of biographical attention—all while embodying socially-appropriate forms of femininity. This is a daunting task for any good girl to achieve. Wagner-Martin hints to the formidability and fate of the endeavor when she writes, "For all the professed interest today in women's lives . . . the cultural assumption remains that most women who have biographies written about them are eccentric rather than exemplary."[7] Such expectations leave out all kinds of women and pose all kinds of representational challenges.

'Eccentrics' are not the only female biographical subjects facing a critical reception. A genre preoccupied with public accomplishments leaves little space to accommodate women who have lived corporeal, interior, domestic lives. Wagner-Martin indicates that early biographies did not 'validate and value women's inner lives,'[8] and biographers have found the 'private' realm particular challenging to represent. The mundane matters of menstruation and pregnancy, daily housekeeping and kinship work,[9] desire and relationships, have seemed too messy or too ordinary to immortalize in print. Yet, biographical forays into the personal are always fraught, as one reviewer of the text noted,[10] and if biographers are drawn only to those female figures which traditional conventions deem significant, those women who seem rather ordinary in the glare of these prescriptions may be lost in the historical ether.[11] These expectations may in large part explain the uneven biographical record. As Heilbrun argued in *Writing a Woman's Life* (1988), "[a]nonymity, we have long believed, is the proper condition of woman."[12]

A key point to which Wagner-Martin returns throughout her analysis is that portraying women with texture and nuance remains challenging in part because readers breathe in the same cultural and gendered air as authors/biographers, potentially evaluating female biographical subjects and female characters based on how well they fulfill their roles as daughters, as sisters, and as helpmates to worthy men. These expectations and challenges persist. Women's successes in public sphere might seem laudable topics for biographical portrayal—until they intrude on domestic pursuits. Readers might feel unsettled by a subject's sexual activity, psychological struggles, professional ambition, or other complex expressions of self[13] that might surface in biographies. Gendered expectations of the female subject can thus prompt silences in the archival record, shape which secrets writers choose to reveal, or shape how a reader engages with the text—regardless of the biographer's intent. Although we may call for 'truth telling' in the genre of biography (as both Heilbrun and Wagner-Martin do), *Telling Women's Lives* suggests that accounts and readings of truth are inevitably selective, shaped in part by gendered norms.

In light of these expectations, Wagner-Martin suggests that The Teller of Women's Lives should write with consciousness of potential audience reception and work to balance the archival record with a sympathetic portrait of

the subject amid the cultural codes at the time. She argues that the biographer must provide "readers with a bridge back into history" to help the reader understand how the subject's behavior mapped on to or conflicted with gendered norms.[14]

Yet anticipating the potential reception of a text is challenging for any writer, because at the same time that readers seem to yearn for both admirable and proper women subjects, they also have a taste for the forbidden and the secret.[15] Biographers' preoccupations with such secrets as well have prompted many to criticize the genre as a voyeuristic and cannibalistic enterprise. Biographical practice is inevitably riddled with silences—both in the data available and in the process of crafting a life story—and such silences can be distinctly gendered and revealing. Contemporary qualitative researchers have considered textual silences and absences in a number of ways that aid us in analyzing their meaning in biographies. Steinar Kvale, Maggie MacClure, and Lisa Mazzei suggest that silences in qualitative data are multi-dimensional, perhaps indicating participant resistance (MacClure), discomfort with a topic such as race (Mazzei), psychic pain (Anderson & Jack),[16] the power of conventions, or imagined implications of the telling. In fact, silence in data can be a far weightier type of data than words. The notion of gendered silence prompts an array of analytical questions useful for the contemporary biographer: How do gendered norms shape the inevitable silences in the historical and biographical record? What events do women subjects choose to exclude from their diaries and letters to shield from gendered judgments? Why might public figures such as Eleanor Roosevelt, for example, limit the personal information they share even in their 'private' correspondence?[17] How does a biographer attend to a subject's crimes, frailties, mental health issues, family complexities without replicating in her account limiting constructions, such as the cult of invalidism associated with the (white) Woman Subject? Which personal matters should biographers gloss over to avoid codifying gendered scripts in text? What does the biographer owe to subjects? Wagner-Martin insists that biographers remain vigilant to gendered expectations at the time they write and at the time the biographical subject lived, to contextualize a given life/story.[18]

Truth-telling in women's biography (any biography) remains challenging because of the ethical implications involved in meddling in details of a life without necessarily, consent or confirmation from the subject. Some of Wagner-Martin's observations about women's biography, as one reviewer pointed out in 1995, affect all biographers regardless of the sex of their subject: what to share and what to shield plagues us all, given that 'the moving finger writes; and having writ, moves on.' Yet, the examples and questions above suggest the particular gendered constraints for women in living and in telling that shape the politics of representation. A corporeal frailty shaping a

figure's life could easily map on to a broader gendered script about the "nature" of women just as a fierce activist could be read as an "unnatural" oddity. Feminists have described the constructs of 'public' and 'private' governing social life and scholarship as artificial in part because 'domestic' matters and 'public' accomplishments are utterly integral.[19] Whatever the external pressures for women, part of the biographer's responsibility is to interpret and convey the experiences most important to the subject, to her humanity, to the sense of her life.[20]

Controlling Images[21]

Changing social landscapes continue to free women from rigid prescriptive roles, and as the possibilities for women's lives shift, so too do the options for narration. Wagner-Martin frames the new biography as an avenue for producing new renderings that can challenge or escape stereotypes. She recognized the promise of creating new narrative configurations of "the family," displacing stereotypical roles, incorporating new resources, and revising previous accounts of women's lives. Yet she suggests that 'controlling images' are tenacious, and they endure in biographical form.[22] Certain roles for women bear such potent symbolic meaning (the wife, the mother, the daughter, the good middle-class girl from the good public family) that they can intrude on whatever reading the biographer intends.

Wagner-Martin illustrates these patterns in part through considering the narrative predicament of Anne Morrow Lindbergh, a writer and aviator who lost her oldest son in an infamous kidnapping, but who "remained, always, Charles A. Lindbergh's wife."[23] In public accounts of Charles' life, authors emphasized the significance of his accomplishments as an aviator over his roles as a father and his emotional reaction to the kidnapping of his young son in 1932. In contrast, biographies featuring Anne focused on her role as his spouse. Anne could not shake free of the spousal role narratively to emerge as a multidimensional subject. Yet, in her diaries, Anne's grief, her marriage conflicts, and her ideas on aviation figured prominently to provide a fuller, more holistic sense of her humanity. In this sense, social codes can shape biographers' and readers' interpretation just as "narrative form [can reify] social codes."[24]

Wagner-Martin instructively turns to different biographical treatments of the same subject (e.g. Emily Brontë, George Eliot, Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald) written at different points in time to illustrate her argument that who tells the story and with which evaluative resources molds the narrative and can freeze or free the subject. Wagner-Martin suggests, as does Heilbrun, that men and women's reading and writing of biographies differ and that women may read women's lives in more sensitive ways. Even in biographies of male subjects,

the women who inhabit the narrative can be sidelined as peripheral to the Major Life or read as inferior.[25] Readers can sometimes grow attached to these accounts and resist new interpretations, such as in the case of Charlotte Brontë's biographies.[26] While we can take issue with any firm claims about what either "women" or "men" biographers *do*, the straightforward but freeing reminder that versions of lives are always open to new interpretations speaks to the potential of dislodging a subject from controlling images in a previous account that may have smothered her multidimensionality.

The biography of Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, penned by Nancy Milford in 1970, underscores for Wagner-Martin the value of both narrative retellings and the promise of the new biography to provide avenues for the female biographical subject to escape from unidimensional portraits. *Zelda* was a significant contribution to women's biography. Wagner-Martin suggests, "Milford challenged everything people thought they knew about the flamboyant writer [F. Scott Fitzgerald] and his wife by placing Zelda at the center of the canvas and arranging husband, child, family members, and friends around her in clearly subordinate roles."[27] In previous accounts, Zelda came across as unstable and meddlesome to her husband's work. Milford's text complicates these interpretations through drawing from correspondence and interviews that other biographers did not use to describe Zelda's childhood, her relationship with her father, some familial tendencies to mania, and the breakdown of the couple's marriage in which both partners played a role. Zelda emerges as a psychologically-complicated character whose prescribed life path was at odds with her spirit and hopes. Still a wife, still a mother, still a partner to a historically-significant figure, Zelda in Milford's account is not trapped into fixed tropes that reify interpretations of her life only as helpmate or intruder.

The insightful analysis of Zelda exemplifies for Wagner-Martin the best of what new biographies can accomplish and the depth and texture she sees in the field at the time of writing. In a chapter titled, "The Best of Them," Wagner-Martin lists *Zelda* as one of seven texts published between 1970 and 1994 that represent biographers' artful and conscious work to present compelling versions of lives within contexts always-already saturated with gendered meanings salient to that place and time. Although space limited her to only seven exemplars,[28] she lists dozens of other compelling accounts elsewhere in the text, which together might serve readers seeking narrative models that grapple effectively with stubborn stereotypes. Through these examples, she demonstrates how biographers' personal and theoretical investments can shape the telling and how expanding source material to include autobiographies and letters can "inform" and "counter" previous versions.

The seven "bests" Wagner-Martin describes in Chapter 12 mark "an acceptance," perhaps, "of the kind of book necessary to tell a woman's

story."[29] Their subjects, no longer props to their husbands'-fathers'-brothers' Important Life Stories, emerge as complex figures in their own right. Multidimensional aspects of the subjects' personalities and life choices animate the accounts, such as the cultivation of agency within constrained physical and economic circumstances (Judith Thurman's *Isak Dineson*), professional accomplishments and forging of community (Noel Riley Fitch's work on Sylvia Beach), global travels, relationships, and accomplishments (Jane Howard's *Margaret Mead*) and sexual relationships, mental health issues and writing attachments (Elizabeth Frank, *Louise Brogan*).

The New Women's Biography: New Visions, New Possibilities

The developments in biography that Wagner-Martin explored in 1994 and forecast on the horizon for future decades suggests that biographers' work benefits from reflecting on the gendered norms shaping their social and archival field. Feminist scholarship, including Wagner-Martin's work, has transformative potential for the broader field of biographical practice because it brings gendered questions to the fore for all biographers. Although she contains her interrogation of gender to the category of women, some might extend her arguments to analyze gendered filaments in biographies of male subjects, or to consider how women might read male subjects differently than women, or to interrogate how heroic narratives for the ideal male subject might occlude 'private' aspects of their lives, or to ponder how gendered expectations might shape audience responses to male subjects. These gendered questions could inspire additional nuanced portraits that enhance the craft.

The biographical field could benefit from more conscious and transparent mobilization of some of the broad methodological shifts shaping the production of research beyond gender as well. Methodological possibilities shift, gendered norms fluctuate, and reader expectations change. Reflexivity in contemporary methodology can include a variety of foci, including reflexivity on the audience, on the subject, and on the researcher's investments and connections to the project. Some biographers consider a three-part connection among audience-subject-reader in their accounts, to which Leon Edel's classic work, *Writing Lives* gestures in 1959.

Patti Lather's theorizing of validity in qualitative research seems salient to considering the value of methodological awareness, of reflexivity on potential reader reception, and of the potential implications of narrative choices in the field of biography.[30] Unlike the traditional mechanistic lists of validity criteria some researchers might tally in their work (triangulation—check; peer-debriefing—check), Lather argues that research validity in part depends on authors' demonstration of their awareness of the philosophical

and historical foundations of research.[31] Conventional criteria are inadequate and irrelevant for ensuring quality research because they are disconnected from the governing assumptions of a given theoretical and methodological approach. The field is too theoretically imbued, the methodological choices too diverse, to present one's work as if disconnected from the broader terrain of methodological possibility. Lather's vision of validity might have value for biographical practice as well.

The extent to which biographers explicitly contextualize their work within the history of the craft (or its gendered contours) is another question entirely. Craig Kridel has long advocated for biographers' explicit attention to methodology as they too often present their accounts as reflections of A Real without foregrounding their specific theoretical or narrative investments. Edel wrote his biographical principles in *Writing Lives* (1959/1984) with awareness of the narrative possibilities for representing lives and offered writers important touchstones for approaching varied intricacies of biographical practice. For Edel, the biographer's task is to breathe life into the mosaic of scraps and remnants of a unique life through the "ideal and unique literary form that will express it."[32] Wagner-Martin frames this reflexive stance in gendered terms.[33] Like Edel, Wagner-Martin suggests the biographer adopt roles as a psychologist, anthropologist, and cultural historian to wrestle with the archive to gain "psychoanalytic knowledge" of the subject's behavior, to understand subjects' self-perceptions, and to determine which "life events have been most important to the (woman) subject."[34]

Perhaps one of the gifts Wagner-Martin adds to biographical practice that particularizes Edel's ideas is the similar sensibility woven throughout her text, albeit in explicitly gendered terms, that social norms should not smother or eclipse the female biographical subject's unique life or dictate how her life is narrated. Gendered social structures may be both formative and inevitable; yet if the biographer's narrative options are endless and the choice of form tied to the contours of a given life, she, too, is entitled to escape from beneath the burden of her biographer's weighty and culturally-prescribed gender roles to merit her own story. Although Wagner-Martin does not address these points directly, the diverse ideas that surface in the text seem forged in the same spirit: that particular norms shape the field of biography, that biographies bear the marks of those contextual norms, that writers have and should make use of multiple analytical and narrative options to tell their tales, that context and positioning shapes accounts, and that women's narratives across genres display gendered patterns.

Near the end of her book, Wagner-Martin sums up her assessment of the field of women's biography in 1994. Despite the missteps, challenges, constraints, and what she sees to be insufficient attention to the constitutive power of gender in lives and in genre, she also sees great power and abun-

dance: we "have learned to write women's stories about as well as we can. Nearly every biography that has appeared during the last decade has been credible, interesting, and free of most of the flaws of didacticism and sentimentality that sometimes plague biography. The range of excellence possible during the current season's publication of books shows a kind of culmination of effort and talent: women's biography has come in to its own."[35] Her optimism regarding the future of biography also shines in her final three chapters focused on revisionist, popular and fictional biography. Critical and poststructuralist theories that blur genres and experiment with voice also extend interpretive options through highlighting questions of power, voice, and perspective: "The past [told] from whose viewpoint? Who says this? What would be the effect of working from a contrary viewpoint?"

In recent years, poststructuralist renditions of biographies (and auto/biographies[36]) have emerged that reject a modernist subject and embrace particular partial and fluctuating biographical figures as sites to analyze broader discourses about education and teaching.[37] Paula Salvio's recent (2007) biography is a powerful example of these developments and a reminder that conceptions of a given (and gendered) discipline (e.g. education) can also shape expectations and tellings. Salvio writes with the consciousness of context, audience and gendered norms that Wagner-Martin champions, analyzing the 'controlling images' that shape how controversial poet and teacher Anne Sexton is understood and received. In her remarkable biographical treatment of Sexton's "weird abundance," Salvio uses Sexton as a site through which to analyze discourses of the appropriate teacher and the appropriate biographical subject that are profoundly shaped by gender. A poet who battled with depression and substance use, Anne Sexton did not conform to dominant gender norms during the 1950s or exemplify the Idealized Female Teacher in any era. In Salvio's psychoanalytic rendering, the corporeal and controversial topics of Sexton's poetry and her unconventional life and teaching style situate her as the unsettling Other against which good teachers and good women might compare themselves.[38]

Rather than engaging in a series of authorial machinations to sidestep these fraught aspects of Sexton's life and construct palatable versions of her femininity for the reader, Salvio productively confronts these tensions head on to consider what they mean for education, for educational biography, for teaching, for narrating complex subjects such as Sexton who can confound expectations of the heroic biographical figure. Sexton is thus not only one partial and situated biographical representation of a subject, but a narrative site for pondering a host of broader issues, among them: constructions of The Teacher, connections between biographers and subjects, governing forces in the field of education, the possibilities of psychoanalytic readings, and diverse pedagogies. Feminist biographies can bring a range of productive

questions to broader fields, such as the gendered field of education.

Reflections and Future Directions

Telling Women's Lives is part of the body of feminist scholarship that takes the craft of women's biography seriously, and in the process, casts biographical work in a gendered light. Gender permeates the genre—though it is the category of Woman rather than Man that so often signals it. To this reader, what is timeless about Wagner-Martin's text its thorough marking of a significant shift in writing about women's lives that demonstrates cumulatively the possibilities of retellings, the promise of narrative diversity, and the power of context for shaping how life stories are produced and received. It is a book that affirms the act of revisiting female subjects languishing in previous biographies under gendered tropes that have left them as constrained in text as they might have been in life. It is a text that reminds us that good biography need not, best not, adhere to (gendered et al.) formulas but can trace the particularities of the subject in whatever ways seem appropriate to render accessible her personality, choices, constraints, and triumphs. The craft provides us, perhaps, as many ways to narrate a life as there are subjects, Wagner-Martin asserts, and in the end, it is "the biographer's conviction that directs the narrative."[39] The sheer number and type of texts she surveys–though often without a clear rationale for the reader–provide glimpses into both the intractability of particular gendered structures as well as biographers' interpretive artfulness that allow subjects to escape from static readings.

Twenty years after the production of this text, certain critiques remain salient. To one reviewer, Wagner-Martin's ambitious project and field of review compromised analytic depth, finding the chapters too brief (14 chapters, multiple subsections) for the author to develop her arguments fully and to ground the text sufficiently in the history of biographical scholarship[40] that is in no way a gendered monolith. The genre has diverse antecedents and subjects prior to the 20th century, where Wagner-Martin primarily directs her gaze. The implications of that reviewer's point today is that alternative or contradictory examples and interpretations might emerge if we broaden the context or shift the field of review. The sometimes choppy sections and organizational structure undermine cohesive and forceful emphasis of some of her key points: that gender matters in both the telling and the receiving of writing about women's lives; that biographers must sculpt with narrative conviction the tales they need to tell to capture the spirit of the life for the reader; that rich, new, textured biographies have emerged since 1970 to counter gendered prescriptions; and that boundaries across genres of writing are *productively* permeable when it comes to rendering women's lives. These points need not be prescriptive or absolute; they might function as touch-

stones or points of comparison for biographers' work.

Scholars seem to have used the text in that spirit, mobilizing particular ideas that serve their work. As I was reflecting on the place of this text in biography today, I conducted a brief literature search to discern how authors were putting her ideas to work. I discovered over one hundred citations. There are probably many more. Some scholars referred to the text briefly in passing as part of a literature review. Some referred to the key gendered scripts that have governed biography (e.g. success narrative; public over private; constricting narrative roles of wife, mother, lover) as a springboard for their own women-centered projects. Some celebrate her woman-centered convictions. Several emphasize Wagner-Martin's claim that any biography reflects elements of the author's life.[41] Others are idiosyncratic, tuning in to a selective, potent quote. Interestingly, several books published after hers also use the title (Judy Long's *Telling Women's Lives: Subject/ Narrator/ Reader/Text*, 1999 and Kathleen Weiler and Sue Middleton's *Telling Women's Lives: Narrative Inquiries in the History of Women's Education*, 1998) but do not mobilize her arguments. This may reflect disciplinary silos, purposeful associations integral to literature reviews, or the sheer production of words in contemporary scholarship that can outpace any scholar's ability to track or absorb.

Readers must consider how and when the patterns in *Telling Women's Lives* are relevant to biographical scholarship more broadly–for example, cross-culturally, or for traditional biographies that refuse the trans-genre approach that Wagner-Martin embraces. And, importantly, I think, we cannot assume from the outset of a study *how much* or in *what ways* gender matters in the life, its narration, or its reception because of the complexities of female positioning in matrices of domination that can render other aspects of social location and context far more significant for a given telling.[42] Race and nationality and literacy are key forces, of course, in the constitution of the archival record, and in whose lives are narrated, how they are told, and how they are received. These elements may have salience alongside or intersecting with particular gendered framings. Scholars have noted, for example, Harriet Jacobs' acute awareness of her charged racial and gendered context when she penned her slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and worked to render her account as "appropriately" as possible for the audience.

As is true of many theoretical efforts that focus primarily on Anglo-Saxon/white subjects, questions of race can receive scant treatment despite the textured and epistemological questions that a racialized reading of women's biography, whatever the race of the biographical subject, can add to interpreting and contextualizing the life. Class, poverty, race and racism surface in Wagner-Martin's review of the field but fall out as sustained topics, which underscores an earlier reviewer's critique that a feminist lens may not

always fit the given stories and lives it attempts to encompass.[43] She incorporates biographical work on significant women of color, such as Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, and Frances E. W. Harper, that reflect remarkable lives and also raise questions about dominant Western and European biographical conventions. Like Wagner-Martin's critiques of masculine norms, biographers who focus on subjects of color have confronted the limits of dominant racialized narrative structures and necessarily turned to other tools for their work. And this act is another productive consequence of scholarship like Wagner-Martin's: authors can consider and mobilize analytic lenses as a touchstone for their projects even if "use" translates to rejecting the framework outright.

Readers can also benefit from the reminder that as new types of biography become possible in the wake of genre changes that include critical race readings, queer readings, poststructuralism, and multi-voiced and layered texts, that we must remain vigilant against the possibility of codifying new structures for "women's biography" and reifying sex/gender textual difference at the expense of other salient framings. Wagner-Martin seems to freeze sexual and gender difference in her approach to biography—women's stories, men's texts—concretizing through analysis the very field she analyzes. Although she does so to highlight gendered forces, such constellations might dissolve with other analytical tools. Thus, a particular implication of Wagner-Martin's text to which I am drawn because of my poststructural allegiances is that we can use new tools to revisit and reframe biographies constructed at earlier historical moments.

Opportunities for productive re-reading, through the lens of the present, pose both puzzles and possibilities that keep the genre of biography alive, dynamic, endlessly reinterpret-able as new questions and concepts emerge. I love this. We can appreciate, for instance, traditional biographies while also recognizing the contribution Salvio's psychoanalytic and poststructuralist reading of Anne Sexton offers the genre by nudging aside the humanist subject that has long taken biographical center stage. Sexton emerges as an unruly, uncontainable figuration who also represents new biographical possibilities. As subject, Sexton is created rather than represented through the very act of telling, she is partial and situated, and she is endlessly re-presentable. With all of these choices before us, in the end, we are left with the same question Virginia Woolf asked in the 1930s: "My God, how does one write a biography?"

Notes

[1] The title gestures to Carol Gilligan's classic work, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,

1982), which delineates how men's and women's approaches to moral reasoning can differ. Wagner-Martin similarly proceeds from the analytic stance that women's and men's lives differ in ways that their biographers must consider.

[2] Linda Wagner-Martin, *Telling Women's Lives: The New Biography* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 4.

[3] Ibid., 9; Leon Edel, *Writing Lives: Principia Biographica* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1956/1984), 9.

[4] Liz Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Autobiography* (Manchester University Press, 1995). Quoted in Wagner-Martin, *Telling Women's Lives*, 69.

[5] Annette Wheeler Cafarelli, "Review of *Telling Women's Lives: The New Biography," Biography* (18) 4, 1995: 369-371; Elaine Showalter,"Risky Business,"*London Review of Books* (16) 18, (22 September 1994), 19.

[6] Wagner-Martin, *Telling Women's Lives*, 20.

[7] Ibid., 21.

[8] Ibid., 3.

[9] Micaela Di Leonardo, "The Female World of Cards and Holidays: Women, Families and the Work of Kinship, *Signs* (12) 3, (Spring, 1987): 440-453.

[10] Cafarelli,"Review," 369-370.

[11] Wagner-Martin, *Telling Women's Lives*, 6-7; 20.

[12] Ibid., 12.

[13] Ibid., 18.

[14] Ibid., 29.

[15] Carl Rollyson, *A Higher Form of Cannibalism: Adventures in the Art and Politics of Biography* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005).

[16] Lisa Mazzei, *Inhabited Silences in Qualitative Research: Putting Poststructural Theory to Work* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997); Maggie MacClure, Liz Jones, Christina MacRae, "Silence as Resistance to Analysis, or, On Not Opening One's Mouth Properly," *Qualitative Inquiry* (16) 6, (July 2010): 492-500; K. Anderson and D.C. Jack, "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analysis," *Women's Words: the Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, 1991), 11-26.

[17] Wagner-Martin, *Telling Women's Lives*, 55.

[18] Ibid., 29.

[19] Sara Alpern, Joyce Antler, Elisabeth Israels Perry and Ingrid Winther Scobie, eds., *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 6-7; 61.

[20] Wagner-Martin, *Telling Women's Lives*, 9.

[21] A concept from Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

[22] Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement is a feminist mothering organization that explores these enduring issues. See Motherhoodinitiative.org.

[23] Wagner-Martin, *Telling Women's Lives*, 58.

[24] Ibid., 21.

[25] Ibid., 49.

[26] Ibid., 40.

[27] Ibid., 136.

[28] A focus that variously pleased and confused reviewers.

[29] Wagner-Martin, *Telling Women's Lives*, 143.

[30] I discuss this point in Lucy E. Bailey, "Auto/biography in Educational Contexts: Reflections and Possibilities." *Vitae Scholasticae*, 30 (2), (2013), 5-15.

[31] See the perspective of feminist methodologist Patti A. Lather in the article, Pamela A. Moss, D.C. Phillips, Frederick Erickson, Robert E. Floder, Patti A. Lather, and Barbara L. Schneider, "Learning From Our Differences: A Dialogue Across Perspectives on Quality in Educational Research," *Educational Researcher* 38, (2009): 501-517.

[32] Edel, *Writing Lives*, 29-30.

[33] Wagner-Martin, *Telling Women's Lives*, 29.

[34] Ibid., 9.

[35] Ibid., 149.

[36] See Liz Stanley (2002); she places a forward slash between auto/biography in her title to signal her theoretical positioning that the biographer Self and biography are integrally connected.

[37] Paula Salvio, *Anne Sexton: Teacher of Weird Abundance* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007); Lucy E. Bailey, *The Absent Presence of Whiteness in Didactic Texts* (Unpublished dissertation, The Ohio State University, 2002) and Lucy E. Bailey, "Wright-ing white: The construction of race in women's 19th century didactic texts," *Journal of Thought*, 41(4), 65-81.

[38] I discuss several of these points briefly in Lucy E. Bailey, "Auto/biography in Educational Contexts: Reflections and Possibilities." *Vitae Scholasticae*, 30 (2), (2013).

[39] Wagner-Martin, *Telling Women's Lives*, 10.

[40] Cafarelli, "Review," 369-370.

[41] Wagner-Martin, *Telling Women's Lives*, 8-9.

[42] I make a version of this point in several methodological essays, including most recently a piece on feminist methodology in which Mary Margaret Fonow and I argue that feminist researchers cannot imagine and mobilize in advance of a study a frozen prescribed set of "feminist principles" they check off, one by one, to achieve a "valid" feminist project. A given project determines which approach, analysis, representation is fitting. See Lucy E. Bailey and Mary Margaret Fonow, "Foundational Commitments, Intergenerational Knowledge Production, and New Trajectories," forthcoming, in Gaile Cannella, Michelle Perez, and Penny Pasque, eds. *Critical Qualitative Methodology: Foundations and Futures* (Walnut Creed, CA: Left Coast Press).

[43] Cafarelli, "Review," 371.

Mastery of a Life:
Reading Paula R. Backsheider and the Writing of Modern Biography

Bart Dredge
Austin College

Paula R. Backsheider. *Reflections on Biography*, 2nd edition. CreateSpace Independent Publishers, 2013; 1st edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

I suspect that most serious readers discovered the pleasure of books through biography—and that many continue to enter and share the lives of others with a joy perhaps not possible in any other genre. In this dense and occasionally challenging book, Paula Backsheider offers a celebration of biography, exposing its hazards and pitfalls, and revealing its rewards for writers and readers alike. Filled with lively examples and powerful anecdotes, like every good biography, *Reflections on Biography* serves as a primer for anyone interested in the biographer's art and the experience of making difficult choices while describing and interpreting the complex lives of often distant subjects. Backsheider divides her project into two sections, "The Basics," and "Expansions." In the first, she investigates the presence of the biographer in the text; the difficulty of determining the reliability of evidence; problems with the "magisterial" voice of the biographer; the challenge of treating personality without over-psychologizing the subject; the risk of biographer obsession with the story; and the degree to which biography can be reliably understood as a cultural map for a particular time and place. Given the nature of my work, I found the second half of the book interesting but less personally valuable. This section on "Expansions" begins with the paradig-

matic shifts that have "permeated biography" through the inclusion of the woman's point of view regarding historical context, personality and place.[1] Here Backsheider also addresses experimental biographies; the creation of the literary style and often novelistic approach among British biographers; and the development of a "black biography" that is more political, wrapped in identity politics, and concerned with death and history.

Those interested in the daily work of the biographer are certain to find the first half of Backsheider's book of most interest, and here one finds a number of clues to the biographer's art that should be taken seriously by readers and writers alike. Having in my work spent months hovering over an ancient microfilm reader to unravel the life of a single individual, I especially enjoyed her ruminations about living with the subject of the work. I became aware of how intertwined one might become with the focus of a biography after finishing the close reading of articles and editorials by David Clark, the ultraconservative defender of the textile industry who published and edited the *Southern Textile Bulletin* from 1911 until his death in 1955. Unlike the editors of other trade journals who offered readers only information concerning industry personnel changes, experimental production processes, and equipment advertisements, Clark filled the pages of his journal with thousands of editorials, addresses and articles that excoriated all who he believed to be the enemies of the industry or himself. In his weekly diatribes Clark focused his vitriolic rage against evolutionists, labor organizers, college professors, liberal ministers, blacks who did not know their "place," and a hodgepodge of others routinely condemned as "communists, socialists, Bolsheviks, and parasites." After reading more than 150 microfilm reels of this material, only missing one week in sixteen months, I was amazed to discover a growing sadness in myself as I read of Clark's failing health, diminished capacity to work (although he persisted to the last month and never lost his demagogic editorial edge), and finally his death. Yet, as Backsheider suggested, it is precisely this immersion into the life of another, no matter how vile, that allows the reader to get a much richer view of the individual and the cultural ambiance of a particular time and place.[2]

While some work might not yield a personal affinity between biographer and subject, it is certainly true that the writer might develop a greater interest in a particular time, place or culture through researching the life of a single individual. Reading the editorials penned by David Clark led me to investigate a little known literary contribution by Langston Hughes that eventually further enriched my understanding and appreciation of the American South during the 1930s. Disturbed by recent events swirling around the arrest and trials of the "Scottsboro Boys" in Alabama, Hughes traveled throughout the South, eventually receiving and accepting an invitation to speak at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. While his well-

attended and much-appreciated address provided students with a unique view of the art of poetry and the challenges of making a living from writing, Hughes arrived on campus only days after publishing a provocative poem and essay in the small "communist" journal *Contempo: A Review of Books and Personalities*, published in Chapel Hill by two former students seemingly determined to create controversy. One does not have to enjoy a deep understanding of race relations in the Depression-era South to appreciate the likely reaction of southern Christians and others to this poem:

"Christ in Alabama"
Christ is a Nigger,
Beaten and Black –
O, bare your back.
Mary is His Mother –
Mammy of the South,
Silence your mouth.
God's His Father –
White Master above,
Grant us your love.
Most holy bastard
Of the bleeding mouth;
Nigger Christ
On the cross of the South.[3]

Nevertheless, sensitivity to racial disharmony in the South during this period would assist readers in understanding the controversial reactions ignited by this poem, especially on the heels of world-wide criticism of the southern treatment of the Scottsboro defendants in Alabama.[4]

At the same time, Backsheider also notes that the biographer can illuminate for the reader the atmosphere of a time and place that might not be as well known. Reading "Southern Gentlemen, White Prostitutes, Mill-Owners and Negroes" in *Contempo* does not require an extensive knowledge of southern mill culture, but is nonetheless likely to leave the reader with a greater understanding of the insult many in the region experienced when reading these views. Concerned by the flagrant abuses at Scottsboro, Hughes asked why not let Alabama mill owners pay "decent wages" so their women won't need to be prostitutes—and why not provide schools for Alabama blacks so that the "mulatto children of Southern gentlemen (I reckon they're gentlemen)" won't be so dumb again? Otherwise, let "Dixie justice (blind and syphilitic as it may be)" take its course and let Alabama's men "amuse themselves" by burning the eight young blacks to death in the state's electric chair. By absorbing these comments, readers discover more about the texture of

southern culture at that time and in that place. In fact, perhaps few readers would be surprised to then learn that the *Gastonia Gazette* in North Carolina condemned Hughes and his writing as "common, filthy, obnoxious, putrid, rancid, nauseating, rotten, vile, and stinking."[5] Certainly David Clark was not himself shy in expressing his reaction to these comments, reprinting the "scurrilous and blasphemous" essay in the *Southern Textile Bulletin*, and pointing out approvingly that throughout most of the South such a man would be "fortunate to escape bodily harm."[6] Perhaps this reaction was not surprising given Clark's earlier ruminations about calling on the Ku Klux Klan to defend the "purity of the blood" of mill workers against outside agitators such as Hughes who had "spit in the faces" of southern whites.[7] As Backsheider suggests, even biographical work on the unjustly neglected can reveal much about the "almost unknown person" or other "repellent" human beings" and their critics.

Backsheider also devotes considerable space to the analysis of the biographer's voice. Of particular value to me was the discussion of the necessary interpretations—the choices—one makes when attempting to illuminate the life of another. I have found it difficult to remain in the "neutral grey" area between the biographer and the subject, but have nevertheless attempted to let the reader discover the subject through the words and writings of the person being examined (3). By carefully weaving a fabric describing the actions, needs, interests, and words of the subject, I have avoided losing the person through a process that risks nothing beyond the mere cataloging of events. I have also avoided entirely the temptation to remind the reader of my own position, preferring to let the gap in time and place between me and the subject alone make that point. Backsheider suggests an integrated blend of interpretation and narrative in biographical works, yet it seems to me that it remains the singular responsibility of the reader to interpret the meaning of the life described. The responsibility of the biographer, instead, is to write in such a way that it would be possible, although perhaps unlikely, to interpret the life of the subject in some way other than intended, although not all readers should necessarily come to the same conclusion. For example, the biographer might hope that all would learn the same lesson when reading David Clark's description of a concert attended by University of North Carolina president Frank Porter Graham. Arriving at the musical event in the company of "some niggers," as Clark reported, Graham found other whites sitting with blacks and the "stink got so bad" in the heated auditorium that the white students had to open the windows."[8] One might hope the reader finds this odious comment and what it implies repugnant, but it is certainly possible for others to find it merely the trenchant expression of long-held beliefs. The voice of the biographer may be used to lead the reader to certain conclusions, but a heavy-handed effort will not appear credible and some readers

will inevitably fail to arrive at the point intended.

In her discussion of the biographer's voice, Backsheider also stresses the importance of consistency, especially in the use of metonymy or "substitute naming." The biographer bears the burden of getting the record right, and changes in language risk both misinterpretation and confusion on the part of the reader. Yet, she is correct when suggesting that metonymy provides greater emotional weight than lesser language, and I think this particularly helpful when the terms intend to harm others. For example, for nearly a half century David Clark filled his editorials and public addresses with condemnation of his enemies as "Bolshevikis [sic]," "parasites," "atheists," "niggers," "communist agitators," and "radical socialists." Not only did these terms rely for their power on contemporary fear, anger and, often, ignorance, but the repetition alone compelled the reader to see the images Clark had in mind. In fact, in thousands of editorials and articles, on only one occasion did the prolix Clark fail to use such terms when describing others whose values or ideas he did not share. On one occasion in 1940 he published without further commentary a photo of a white woman eating dinner with two black males. The photo told the story, and further explanation was not needed.[9] Recording such expressions on a consistent basis provides the reader with not only a richer and clearer view of the subject, but suggests a more accurate and reliable account derived from the choices the biographer faces when confronting the moral requirement to "get it right." As Backsheider insists, the biographer has the burden of knowing the subject and telling the story accurately, fairly, and with an awareness of related consequences. Like careful description, then, language can itself help the biographer offer the reader lively and engaging prose–all the more so when the words are those uttered by the subject him or herself.

Backsheider is also helpful to the beginning biographer when discussing the difficulty of producing prose that goes beyond mere description, and instead provides the kind of euphony that will keep the reader digging deeper into the individual life and the time and culture occupied by the subject. I appreciated comments regarding the necessity to work on pacing, and found after reading this portion of *Reflections on Biography* that adhering to a simple, yet pleasing, chronological structure most readily helped me avoid (I hope at least) sounding too pedantic, rigid, awkward, or chatty. The chronological approach allowed me to situate the subject in a particular time and place, but move with ease to the historical context by shifting to an earlier time as well. For example, the success David Clark enjoyed in defeating the 1924 Child Labor Amendment could stand alone, but a deeper analysis demanded a treatment of his experience in challenging other federal statutes years before. Moreover, one can only appreciate his hatred of outside interference in the decision of textile industrialists to employ minors by reading

earlier editions of his trade journal, including the very first editorial in 1911. There he praised the "ability and willingness" of textile industrialists to handle their own affairs, and expressed his contempt for the "long-haired men and short-haired women" from the North who presumed to "tell us what we shall do."[10] One short biography may fill a gap in the historical record, but a chronological approach to that subject allows, and perhaps requires, the necessary linkages to other ignored treatments of the past as well.

One difficulty confronting many biographers is the challenge of addressing potential controversies that may result regarding the truthfulness or reliability of evidence. At times what appears to be factual may be untrue, distrusted, disputed, or simply inaccessible. Backsheider contends that it is the duty of the biographer to make clear the efforts invested in wrestling with such evidence, and to divulge gaps in information that are in most works of biography inevitable. Even when a biographical event appears to have occurred, without reliable evidence the biographer must decide whether to avoid mention of the event, offer an unreliable version, or speculate how the evidence was lost, allowing readers to draw their own conclusions about its importance with little or no guidance. While researching another relatively unknown subject, industrial educator Lawrence Peter Hollis from the textile mills at Greenville, South Carolina, I stumbled upon passing references to a visit to nearby company-owned schools by John Dewey. This visit included speeches to local educators and students alike, and would have been an important event as Hollis had patterned much of his educational philosophy after his understanding of Dewey and evolving notions of "democratic education." Yet, despite its potential significance, I was unable to confirm the visit. Mill magazines published around the purported date of the speech all failed to mention the visit, including the pages of the *Parker Progress*, a local company-run newspaper for textile employees published by Hollis himself. The same was true of all local newspapers, as well as regional trade journals that commonly provided extensive coverage of any event that tended to support the preferred image of progressive employee relations in the southern industry. Finally, even personal communication with Robert Westbrook, who had not long before completed a massive biography of Dewey and who graciously checked his personal records, failed to confirm this historical event. I was left then, as Backsheider suggests, to decide what to do with this unconfirmed evidence, choosing on this occasion to omit it entirely from my account of the life I was trying to describe. To do otherwise, I think, would place too much burden on readers even less prepared to weigh the value of this seemingly minor piece of historical information. It is one thing for the biographer to rely on a trusting relationship with the reader, but quite another to place before the reader historical facts so unsupported by evidence that the trust might well be shaken or destroyed.[11]

Interestingly, the search for confirmation of historical events for which there is little evidence may often yield other information about subordinate actors whose activities further illuminate the lives of the primary subject. While investigating Lawrence Peter Hollis and his connections to John Dewey, I interviewed an elderly mill worker who remembered being a child in the Parker District during a visit by a "Professor Happy" who led her and other local mill children in a series of health-related discussions she recalled as "Feeding and Washing the Human Structure." Intrigued, for months I searched for supporting evidence to confirm the visits by "Professor Happy," but could find nothing in the historical record and no other living witness who shared or supported this woman's recollection of events. Yet, just about the time I had given up, I mentioned the incident to another elderly mill employee who did not remember much about the visits, but offered a copy of a small booklet he had saved since the mid-1920s. I still own his copy of *The Wisdom of Professor Happy by the Professor Himself*, published in 1923 by the Health Education Division of the American Child Health Association, and distributed by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. Further investigation revealed that the author—"Professor Happy"—was a Cliff Goldsmith who excited the children with such bits of homespun advice as "sleep with the windows open and the mouth shut," and "have horse sense and eat oatmeal," as well as the insight that "thin soup never made anyone fat." Additionally, I found other information that, as Backsheider suggests, offers a detail about human experience that tends to make a biography of greater interest and, at the same time, more trustworthy. I discovered that not long after his stint in the textile company towns of the South, Goldsmith began a career in Hollywood, later working as a writer for a number of popular television shows including "The Flying Nun," and a number of episodes of "Leave it to Beaver."[12]

Backsheider also points out the importance of what I have implied here—the value of being relentless in the pursuit of biographical evidence. No subject comes to the biographer with a ready reserve of answers to all questions that might arise, but many have been surprised at the amount of verifiable information discovered in the process of digging for those same answers. One is sometimes disappointed to read a biography that relies entirely upon secondary sources, and in such books it is generally obvious the *very point at which a more serious investigation might have begun. Reflections on Biography* insists on the importance of tenacity when researching the life of another, especially those earlier ignored, and stresses for the beginning biographer the potential significance of discovering and developing all possible evidence including long hours spent in archives reading correspondence, court transcripts, diaries, and a host of other sources. I was surprised to see, however, that Backsheider failed to mention one of the hazards of archival

work that must plague others beyond myself. Archives are often of such interest to the biographer that he or she must develop a disciplined mind to resist the temptation to read everything one comes across. Reading papers at the wonderful Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, for example, tempts the biographer to drift from his subject to countless other fascinating sources, such as original slave narratives, oral history records, and legislative histories. When reading the thousands of editorials penned by David Clark and discussed earlier here, I found myself drifting from his often venomous rhetoric to other issues confronting the textile industry such as a noticeable rise in the number of suicides among mill hands, and the more trivial debate in 1912 whether the internal combustion truck might someday replace the horse drawn wagon for the shipment of industrial supplies over short distances.[13] Likewise, I discovered it difficult to focus on the issues that Clark found most important when it was possible to read and contemplate the experiences of several of his subordinates who had gone to fight in France during the First World War, not to mention Clark's often laudatory comments early on about the political and organizational talents of Adolph Hitler. It is often only the practical need to finish one's research that draws the curious mind back to a focus on the initial biography, and the inability to focus on the subject has undoubtedly been the death of many such stories.

Another seemingly commonplace issue Backsheider addresses for the young biographer is how to maintain and manipulate the massive amounts of historical material that typifies biographical research. As she makes clear, while a seemingly mundane topic, the biographer is often only as good as his or her filing system. My personal method is the accumulation and use of typed 5x8 index cards, and over the past several years I have amassed over 120,000 such cards crucial to my biography writing. Not only do I possess and continue to add to the original cards, easily shuffled according to topic, subtopic and date, I maintain copies of the entire set on several computer hard drives as a security measure as well. While I find this method perfect for my purposes, it is not for everyone. In fact, students gazing at the fifty-plus green boxes of index cards in my office often complain that the sight "depresses" them. This is undoubtedly true, but the comment reminds me to reinforce with them what Backsheider makes clear in this book—finding some system of evidence collection and filing is an imperative component of any serious, dependable and authoritative biographical work. Moreover, I have found it extraordinarily useful to follow another suggestion Backsheider offers the biographer. When possible I have tried to visit some of the locations where events described in my work have occurred. Of foremost importance, as soon as I began my focus on the southern textile industry, I moved into a former company-owned mill house in the Monaghan village in South

Carolina. This gave me access to thousands of potential correspondents and witnesses, as my residence in the industrial community provided personal credibility and consequent access to company picnics, church services, textile basketball and baseball games, stores, cafes, and finally a number of funerals for textile employees. It cannot be gainsaid that five years living in that environment provided a sensitivity to the industrial culture and its people simply unattainable in any other way. At the same time, I have also taken advantage of lesser opportunities. Before it was destroyed I visited the former offices from which David Clark published the *Southern Textile Bulletin*, and introduced myself to the current owners of his home in the Myers Park section of Charlotte, North Carolina. I visited the hall in which Langston Hughes addressed the faculty and students at the University of North Carolina; and in the Parker District of South Carolina walked the halls of the old high school built by Lawrence Peter Hollis, as well as the textile training mill that still stands at that location. In every case, such visits helped me to later describe the atmosphere in which historical events occurred as the biography subjects lived out their lives. Backsheider correctly insists that new biographers make such efforts when possible so as to enrich not only the biography, but the experience one has in the telling.

Perhaps the best section of *Reflections on Biography* for the new biographer addresses what Backsheider contends is of paramount important to the reader who expects of the biographer integrity of judgments, skillful interpretation, and the writer's best effort to produce a "good read." It is the responsibility of the biographer to provide good evidence and to make sense of it for the reader, and when possible to offer that evidence in vivid detail—to reveal something uniquely human in the experience of the subject. While the task is difficult, the biographer must simultaneously avoid repetition, unexplained action, and unconcealed moralizing, while at the same time discouraging on the part of the reader unrestrained speculation. Backsheider makes equally clear what I and undoubtedly many others have discovered. While challenging, the writing of biography may be among the most rewarding of all literary efforts. Biographers are bound to the evidence they unearth, yet are painting a picture on an incomplete canvas. Nevertheless, in narrative form a biography can illuminate human nature, and invite others to a greater understanding of themselves and their time through an investment in the life of another and the period he or she occupied. One critic of this book wrote that those interested in the "changes and shifts in biographical writing and theory" will be disappointed with this text, and that is likely true.[14] Nevertheless, for the reader of biographies, and the writers as well, this primer into the biographer's craft will reward the effort. If nothing else, this book reveals Backsheider's goal for biography, which is to convey the full range of human experience through the mastery of a life. One does not readily conclude that

this is possible, but quickly concedes that one ought to make the effort.

Notes

[1] Paula R. Backsheider, *Reflections on Biography*, 2nd edition, (CreateSpace Independent Publishers, 2013; 1st edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 159.

[2] For example, Clark's files revealed not only his views on southern labor problems, but racial opinions that, while extreme, were emblematic of many upper-class whites in the Depression-era South. See Bart Dredge, "In Defense of White Supremacy: David Clark and the Southern Textile Bulletin, 1911-1955," *North Carolina Historical Review* 89 (January 2012): 59-91; and Dredge, "David Clark's `Campaign for Enlightenment:' Child Labor, and the Farmers States' Rights League," *North Carolina Historical Review* 91 (January 2014): 30-62.

[3] Emphasis in original. See Langston Hughes, "Christ in Alabama," *Contempo* 1 (December 1, 1931), 1.

[4] Bart Dredge & Cayce Tabor, "Dreams Deferred: White Reaction to Langston Hughes' Depression-Era Educational Tour of the South," *Vitae Scholasticae: Journal of Educational Biography* 29 (Summer 2012): 4-22.

[5] Hughes, "Southern Gentlemen, White Prostitutes, Mill-Owners and Negroes," *Contempo* 1 (December 1, 1931): 1.

[6] Clark, "Lower and Lower," *Southern Textile Bulletin*, (December 3, 1931): 18; and "Communist Paper at Chapel Hill," *Southern Textile Bulletin*, (November 26, 1931): 11.

[7] Clark, "New England Operatives Not Wanted," *Southern Textile Bulletin*, (July 6, 1922): 18; for spitting in white faces see Clark, "How Strange?" *Southern Textile Bulletin*, (December 31, 1931): 19.

[8] Clark, "Excitement at Chapel Hill," *Southern Textile Bulletin* (April 15, 1947): 52-53, 52.

[9] The photo was of Catherine Lewis, daughter of John L. Lewis of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, eating dinner with A. Phillip Randolph of the National Negro Congress and John Davis, secretary of the National Negro Congress. See Clark, uncaptioned photo, *Southern Textile Bulletin*, (May 15, 1940): 26.

[10] Dredge, "Campaign for Enlightenment," 33-42; see also, "Found No Child Slavery," *Southern Textile Bulletin*, March 2, 1911, 4; and untitled editorial, *Southern Textile Bulletin*, March 16, 1911, 10.

[11] Here see Bart Dredge, "Company Schooling in the New South," Lawrence Peter Hollis and the Parker Mill Schools in South Carolina," *Vitae Scholasticae: Journal of Educational Biography* 25 (Winter 2008): 17-38; and Dredge, "Company Magazines and the Creation of Industrial Cooperation: A Case Study from the Southern Textile Industry, 1880-1940," special issue on "Company Magazines, Work and Organizations," Stefan Schwarzkopf (ed.), *Management and Organizational History*, 3 (2008): 273-288. Personal communication with Robert B. Westbrook; see his *John Dewey and American Democracy*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

[12] Dredge, "Company Schooling," 34; Clifford Goldsmith, *The Wisdom of Professor Happy by the Professor Himself*, (New York: American Child Health Association, 1923).

[13] Clark published dozens of articles describing in lurid detail the suicides of those

who worked in the mills, only ceasing the practice in 1929 when he likely determined that such accounts challenged his insistence that mill life and work was both healthy and safe. See for example, "David Hayes Commits Suicide," *Southern Textile Bulletin* (May 6, 1915): 16; "Wife of Master Mechanic Commits Suicide," *Southern Textile Bulletin*, (March 16, 1916): 16; and "Drowns Himself with Weight around Neck," *Southern Textile Bulletin*, (March 14, 1918): 20.

[14] See the unpleasant and often unfair review, Ira B. Nadel, review of *Reflections on Biography, in Biography* 23 (Fall 2000): 762-767. While some of this review touches on actual weaknesses in this book, much of it criticizes Backsheider for not having written what Nadel might have preferred. No work can touch on everything, and as Backsheider offers a densely written book of nearly three hundred and fifty pages here, this seems like carping.

In the Pursuit of an Examined Life:
On Writing and Reading Biographically

Paula M. Salvio
University of New Hampshire

Carl Rollyson. *A Higher Form of Canibalism?: Adventures in the Art and Politics of Biography*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publishers, 2005.

I. Introduction

In *A Higher Form of Cannibalism?: Adventures in the Art and Politics of Biography,*[1] Carl Rollyson explores the complex relationships that develop, not only between the biographer and her subject, but also among the subject's estates, lovers, publicists, family and friends. Rollyson, a professor of journalism at City University of New York's Baruch College, is a columnist, a blogger, and a playwright who has authored more than 500 articles on American and European literature and history. Rollyson is perhaps most widely known for his numerous biographies. To date he has offered us biographies of Marilyn Monroe, Lillian Hellman, Amy Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Dana Andrews, Martha Gellhorn, Norman Mailer, Rebecca West, Susan Sontag, and Jill Craigie.

A scholar by training, Rollyson has not been content simply to write biographies. He has also given us a thought-provoking book on the history of biography and the complicated ethical decisions involved in writing a biography. Students of biography and life writing practices will learn a great deal from this book about biographical subjects' rights to privacy, the distinctions between biographical writing and history, and the way "biography as bloodsport" plays out for the biographers of J.D. Salinger and James Joyce.

Rollyson also dishes up the bad bits about his own legal battles with Martha Gellhorn and his tussles with critics of his biography of Susan Sontag. In short, Rollyson covers quite a bit of ground in this guide to the pleasures and perils of writing and reading biography.

In this essay, I focus on some of the lessons Rollyson offers to students of biography in an effort to consider the promise and the limits of using biography to practice the examined life in educational studies. I begin with a discussion of Rollyson's response to the question—is biography a higher form of cannibalism?—by way of considering Rollyson's insights into the role of empathic identification in writing biography and the place of discretion when one engages in life writing practices.

II. "Biography as Bloodsport"

Rollyson opens his book with a discussion of "biography as bloodsport," a descriptor he takes from *New York Times* critic Michiko Kakutani's 1992 article titled "Biography Becomes a Bloodsport."[2] In her searing analysis, Kakutani indicts the harm done to subjects and others when biographers and autobiographers trespass into private matters that can very well damage reputations, hurt feelings, and tarnish idealized versions of the biographical subject, friends, and family. Kakutani concludes her assessment of contemporary biography with a quote from the British writer, John Arbuthnot, who considered biography as "one of the new terrors of death."[3] Rollyson takes Kakutani's observation seriously and uses it to challenge his readers to consider what, if anything, is new about modern bloodsport biography, given that Arbuthnot's statement was written over two hundred years ago. In what ways, Rollyson asks, does what Kakutani describe as 'bloodsport biography' run contrary to the faculty of empathy that he so highly values? Implicit in Rollyson's question is a set of provocative claims: might it be that a tenacious, relentless pursuit for all that is difficult and unsettling when writing biography is precisely what makes empathy possible? Could it be that the cautious writer, the writer bent on pleasing his/her biographical subject (and accompanying estate, friends and family), the writer who avoids complications that interfere with romantic images of a subject, is most likely to fail to achieve an empathy that leads to important self-discovery for the biographer and her readers?

III. On "suiting our sensibilities to an other…"

Rollyson traces his appetite for biography to Samuel Johnson's belief that writing biography has the potential to teach the biographer empathy. Rollyson is not invoking what I understand as a promiscuous identification

or clichéd notion of empathy that calls for the writer to put him/herself in another's place. Promiscuous identification limits biographers to share only what is comfortable, familiar, and only that which they have or imagine they have in common with their subjects. Rollyson fears that such an empathic approach to reading and writing biography simply transforms the subject of biography into a mirror image of the writer/reader (69). Rollyson calls for a different sort of empathy. He believes that the writer must "put another in yourself," to become, in the words of biographer Elisabeth Young-Bruhel, "another person's habitat" *without* cannibalizing them.[4] The parallels the writer and the reader of biography come to recognize in the biographical subject, while produced, in Johnson's words, "by an action of the imagination," require what Rollyson describes as a "disciplined effort to suit our sensibility to another's to *move beyond the self*" (emphasis added, 72). One promise offered by this "disciplined effort" is that the writer and reader of biography learns something about living an examined life in the presence of characters who challenge his/her sensibilities, values, beliefs and convictions. I would like to suggest that this effort entails engaging with degrees of difficult knowledge.[5] I use the term *difficult knowledge* to refer to practices of remembrance that are associated with conflict, violence, and loss. But there is more. I am also interested in what it means, from a pedagogical point of view, to introduce knowledge that confronts writers and readers of biography with material that challenges their expectations and interpretive capacities, and provokes anger, confusion or anxiety. Following Roger Simon, I believe that what makes knowledge difficult is an affective force that challenges the limits of thought.[6] In other words, the affective force of difficult knowledge has the potential to challenge our frameworks for acting ethically in the world. It cannot be specified in advance or assumed to be unitary, singular or shared.[7] If we extend biographical writing and reading to the realm of teaching and learning where one learns to live an examined life, the concept of difficult knowledge becomes a particularly generative concept for recognizing the capacity to know and to feel in ways that unsettle our previous understanding of relationships, truth, trust and all that is familiar. In my estimation, Rollyson's concept of empathic identification requires an encounter of a particular sort: an encounter that brings the reader and writer of biography up against the limits of their preconceived notions of what it means to be reasonable, civil, and respectful. This encounter is indeed 'difficult' and marks the intersection where the means of knowing and feeling cannot be separated from the biographer's psychic history of learning about their subjects. Let me offer a few examples of such 'difficult' encounters.[8]

Toward the end of his book, Rollyson turns to Ian Hamilton's work on J.D. Salinger. Hamilton wrote an unpublished manuscript titled "J.D. Salinger: A Writing Life," in the 1980's. Salinger, well-known for his reclusive

ways, felt literary biography was nothing less than harassment and believed no one should write about him until after he was dead. Furious with Hamilton for interviewing friends and using unpublished letters, Salinger blocked the publication of the book and sued him for using the unpublished letters in his original manuscript. A 1987 court ruling eventually determined that Hamilton had violated the spirit of the *fair use* standard. Hamilton, legally prevented from publishing his first book on Salinger, started over again with "In Search of Salinger," a meditation on writing biography in which Hamilton establishes himself as the main character of his book and, in the words of Rollyson, must learn to "make do with limited access, not merely to sources but to the very words he would have liked to reproduce in order to render the flavor of his subject's life" (152). Hamilton's biography presents as a particularly interesting study, one that Rollyson uses to make a few final points about the problems inherent in failing to pursue what is difficult about the lives of our biographical subjects.

Rollyson uses Hamilton's limited access to Salinger to privilege the lack rather than full access to biographical materials when writing biography. "The critics' celebration of access is fallacious …," argues Rollyson – who recognizes the path to access as a potential path to deception. First of all, access to materials often comes with a price. The biographer very often must behave in ways that keeps them in good standing with the family, lest they lose access and favor. In this sense, access is not the equivalent of complete control over archival materials (154). Rollyson suggests that authorized biographers may more likely avoid rather than grapple with difficult knowledge and engage in the work of empathy that is at the heart of the examined life.

The second danger Rollyson points to is the biographer's conscious and/or unconscious yearning for the biographical subject's recognition and approval. In Hamilton's case, Salinger's early ambiguous approval to write about him, which was expressed in an invitation extended by Salinger's agent to meet, as well as in a letter in which Salinger wrote, "I can't stop you," made Salinger a very real presence in the life of Hamilton rather than just an idea (157). The "very real presence" of Salinger partly led Hamilton to take a limited path of inquiry—to "observe some ground rules," not to "bother" Salinger's family and friends, and to omit any research on Salinger after 1965, when he lived in seclusion in Cornish, New Hampshire. In the end, Rollyson concludes that Hamilton was simply not 'cold-blooded enough' as a biographer and found him too tangled up in contradictory hopes both for Salinger's support, for access to an 'off the record' Salinger, and for a book that Salinger might like (161). Hamilton's "legal version" (165) about Salinger stands as a fine example, concludes Rollyson, of biography as bloodsport precisely because it represents all that is lost when a writer's courage and imagination fails him in the pursuit of knowledge about a life that both the biographer

and the biographical subject find difficult. In the case of Hamilton, the blood that was shed was that of the biographer.

The "disciplined effort to suit our sensibilities to another's to move beyond the self," is at the heart of Rollyson's approach to writing and reading biography and stands in contradistinction to the idea that biographers cannibalize their subjects for a good story. I imagine that Rollyson's answer to the question, "is biography a higher form of cannibalism?" would be "no, it isn't." Rather, reading and writing biography is a form of inquiry that has the capacity to deepen how we relate to others in friendship and with compassion while recognizing the distinctions between ourselves and others. While biographers may put another in themselves, "becoming another person's habitat," they do not devour or metabolize their subjects.[9] Nor does Rollyson believe that biographers are in need of surveillance or careful scrutiny. He argues that the art of biography is firmly grounded in the Enlightenment principle that even the most ordinary life is worthy of biography, the most mundane details significant, the most private domestic activities revelatory. This principle calls for biographers to pursue difficult knowledge about their subjects despite accusations that they may be sensationalizing a life, trafficking in gossip, or being intrusive. Moreover, in Rollyson's estimation, to veer away from the difficult details of a life is to potentially become susceptible to a romanticism that very well may lack a moral compass.

Reflecting on his biography of Norman Mailer, Rollyson recounts his harsh critique of Mailer for defending the late Jack Henry Abbott, a murderer whom Mailer defended because he was a sensitive writer who taught Mailer about life in prison. "To be sure," writes Rollyson, "Mailer did not excuse Abbot's crime, but he certainly contended that Abbott deserved special consideration because of his powerful writing" (113). Any biographer, argues Rollyson, who slides into the role of disciple and takes up the practice of hero worship is ethically irresponsible. Not only does such a position compromise the writer's capacity to exercise the discipline Rollyson attributes to empathy, but by treating a biographical subject as sacrosanct, the writer is likely to avoid aspects of a life that the writer cannot bear to move in close to, understand or represent. Rollyson raises concerns about any biographer who allows his or her own fears of failed decorum, hurt feelings, or criticism to interfere with portraying a full and complex life. This is what Ian Hamilton described as a "bewildered consciousness," a form of self-deception that confuses decorum with a failure to face difficult knowledge (127).

Rollyson seems to suggest that it's the biographer's ethical duty to reveal, to the fullest possible extent, the complexity of the biographical subject's life. That includes *exposing* aspects of that life that may disturb public images of that subject or the subject's own image of him/herself. But it may also disturb the biographer's preconceptions. In my estimation, Rollyson raises important

questions for students of biography and life writing practices. We cannot prescribe the answers to these questions, but we must continually raise and pursue them.

Notes

[1] Carl Rollyson, *A Higher Form of Cannibalism?: Adventures in the Art and Politics of Biography*. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publishers, 2005).

[2] Michiko Kakutani, "Critic's Notebook; Biography Becomes a Bloodsport," *New York Times*, May 20, 1994.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Subject to Biography: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Writing Women's Lives* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 22.

[5] Alice Pitt and Deborah Britzman, "Speculations on Qualities of Difficult Knowledge in Teaching and Learning: An Experiment in Psycholanalytic Research," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 16 (2003); Roger I. Simon, *A Pedagogy of Witnessing: Curatorial Practice and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014).

[6] Simon, *Pedagogy*.

[7] Alice J. Pitt and Deborah Britzman, "Speculations on Qualities of Difficult Knowledge in Teaching and Learning," in Kenneth George Tobin and Joe L. Kinchloe, eds., *Doing Educational Research: A Handbook* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2006), 379-401.

[8] Simon, *Pedagogy*, 12.

[9] Young-Bruehl, *Subject to Biography*, 22.

Globalizing Life-Writing:
New Directions in Educational Biography

A.J. Angulo
Winthrop University

Michael Shortland and Richard Yeo. *Telling Lives in Science: Essays on Scientific Biography*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

David Levering Lewis, author of the Pulitzer Prize winning biographies of W.E.B. Du Bois, once lamented that the biographer's task is seldom appreciated by historians. Historians, he argued, believe biographers have it easy, or at least easier than historians, because their work is predetermined by birth and death. With a pre-set canvas, all the biographer needs to do is fill in the details. Historians, meanwhile, claim to have the more difficult job of creating the canvas too, determining the size and scope of their work and deciding the starting and ending points to their projects. Lewis saw in this a grave misunderstanding of the practice of life-writing. Done well, biographical studies can be far more difficult than traditional historical works that often align with a narrow sub-specialty (e.g. intellectual history, social history, political history, and so on). Writing lives requires mastery over all relevant sub-specialties, including their historiographical debates and internal logic and nuances, and how each of these intersect with the arch of a single life.[1]

Lewis' focus on degrees of difficulty, however, reveals only part of the story. Biographers and historians have long had an uneasy relationship across the twentieth century and around the world. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, they began to part ways as historical scholarship—as well as almost all other areas of social and humanistic research—got swept

up in the academic fervor over German-style *wissenschaft* that valorized scientific approaches to the study of just about everything. Historians, seeking the distinction, precision, and status of the scientist, experimented with applying scientific methods to historical problems and began treating their topics with the same cool, analytical methods found in laboratories. Biographers, meanwhile, fell out of favor. With good reason, researchers scoffed at their tendency to write sympathetic accounts that lionized their subjects and moralized life stories. The tendency toward dispassionate, scientific approaches continued during the global slump of the Great Depression. Economic conditions of the era further complicated the biographer's work as "Great Man" studies appeared out of step with the times. Social and economic forces took center stage and the individual receded into the background. By mid-century, the rise of social scientific statistical methods buried biography under an avalanche of numbers and data sets. Historians infused sociological analysis into their work and questioned the validity and reliability of single life studies. But by the eighties, number crunching had lost its luster. It failed to deliver on the promise of precision, as ideologues accused each other of manipulating statistics to achieve desired ends. It also ran headlong into the nettles of Continental postmodernism that questioned the logic of logic and the "metanarrative" of scientific precision.[2]

Since the nineties, just as Lewis' Du Bois biographies began to appear, life-writing started receiving significant methodological and theoretical attention. Lewis' works contributed to a movement that highlighted the use of a single life for studying broad social and cultural questions and problems. Out of this movement came models for how to turn a life into a prism through which we can see contours, colors, and dimensions to the past overlooked by sociological analyses, statistical data sets, and postmodernism's tendency toward decentered drift. Fortunately, for those about to start the journey, the burden of navigating the shoals of life-writing is eased a bit by the wide range of available resources, guides, manuals, and other materials aimed at supporting the biographer's work. As this issue suggests, educational biographers have used and been inspired by these methodological reflections on the craft of life-writing.[3]

In this essay, I consider one such reflection—*Telling Lives in Science: Essays on Scientific Biography*—in relation to my previous work on *William Barton Rogers and the Idea of MIT* as well as a historiographical puzzle that I'm currently working on. The puzzle has to do with understanding the relationship between three seemingly distant, unrelated elements: global perspectives on education, the social construction of knowledge, and a new field of research focused on the study of ignorance. This essay will argue that these elements are in fact intimately related and that *Telling Lives* offers one key to solving this puzzle.[4]

Telling Lives, edited by Michael Shortland and Richard Yeo, appeared in 1996 and claimed to be "the first" of its kind. It's still the only available reflection on scientific biography published by an academic press. There are now two other works on the topic, but neither has received substantial review attention from historians or biographers. As such, this one-of-a-kind study has generated much interest among biographers, historians of science, and intellectual historians.[5]

Contributors to the volume explore the role of biography in the historical study of medicine and science, the production of scientific "heroes" for popular consumption, the ongoing popularity of scientific biography at large despite the relative lack of interest in the topic among historians, and the importance of scientific biography in "forming our ideas about what scientists do, how scientists work." At the time of publication, the editors could safely state that biography has the distinction of being "one of the most popular and yet least studied forms of contemporary writing." The market for biographical studies of Charles Darwin, then reaching almost two hundred in number, serves as a prime example of the hunger the public has for biography. About this ever expanding market, Shortland and Yeo note that it's of course important to update scholarship as new bodies of evidence or directions in scholarship take shape. But they also point out that these are not typically the concerns of the professional biographer. Citing several examples, the editors argue that historians often revisit topics to fill a scholarly gap or integrate new findings. Biographers, on the other hand, treat their subject in terms of the art and literature or "narrative, rhetoric, and discursive structures" that the life affords. In short, the quest for the biographer is in literary achievement and in completing the "definitive" account of a life, not necessarily in taking stock of new knowledge or broader historical trends. Nineteenth century comparative zoologist Louis Agassiz has recently received this kind of treatment by Christoph Irmscher, a professor of literature at Indiana University. Irmscher's *Agassiz*, published in 2013, has novel-like qualities, but historians are likely to find too many omissions in the bibliography to consider it a contribution to historical analysis.[6]

Educational biographers and historians of education have much to gain from Shortland and Yeo's tight little volume. Many of the struggles and difficulties defining scientific biography and history of science share important similarities with the evolution of educational biography and history. Life-writing in science was born out of the broader field of history of science that underwent seismic transformations as it entered the twentieth century. New theories and methods in philosophy and sociology began transforming how historians approached the study of science. These transformations influenced perceptions and, ultimately practices, of scientific life-writing. Celebratory accounts were quickly dismissed as unreliable by academics. Historians

turned from studying individual lives and toward collective biographical studies that focused on the social construction of knowledge. Gone were the days, at least for academics, when sympathetic accounts of scientific lives were taken seriously, even if the public still wanted these heroic recountings of discovery and advancement of knowledge. Educational biography, to a large extent, followed a similar trajectory. Born to the larger field of history of education, life-writing in education moved from heroic treatments of such key figures as Horace Mann and Thomas Jefferson to more critical accounts of George Ticknor and Charles W. Eliot.[7]

The key point here is that both fields followed a similar pattern and the case of scientific biography as outlined in this work by Shortland and Yeo suggests critical points of departure for educational biographers as they reflect on their craft. Consider, for instance, approaches to analyzing the role of the individual in times of transnational revolution. In *Telling Lives*, Michael Hunter examines the life of Robert Boyle during the so-called Scientific Revolution and Dorinda Outram explores the significance of science autobiography during the French Revolution. Hunter's chapter reviews the multiple accounts of Boyle, most of which seek to brighten the scientist's star. Outram's finds the autobiographies of elite French scientists to be an important place to reconsider "official histories" and the multiple identities these scientists had in an era of shifting patronage and social status. For both authors, the question is one of balancing individual achievement within the context of broad intellectual and social upheaval. To what extent can we attribute the accomplishments of one life to the forming of a globally significant movement? Hunter and Outram attempt to answer this question by considering the subject's self assessment, external assessment, and historical assessment. But the task of the biographer is complicated further when dealing with contemporaneous visions of the same life that do not align and flatly conflict with one another. The quest to justify a biographical study may skew the ends of the exploration and color the biographer's perceptions about how an individual scientist arrived at a significant discovery or participated in the advancement of knowledge. For educational biographers, very similar complications arise. Rather than scientific ideas and achievements, questions of primacy (e.g., the first to do "x"), influence (e.g., the diffusion of innovation), and legacy (e.g., the practice continued to the present) center on educational ideas, methods, and institutions. What Hunter and Outram bring into perspective is the highly competitive culture of science and the desire to achieve distinction among peers. Educational biographers, likewise, can adopt and adapt important approaches to mitigating these tendencies that skew results for both the subject's benefit and, by association, the biographer's as well.[8]

Another point of departure for educational biographers comes to us from

Geoffrey Cantor's chapter on Michael Faraday. Cantor, a historian of science turned biographer, wrestles with existing biographical studies on Faraday, sorting them into two camps: the romantic and the realistic. He acknowledges that as a young child he read the biographies of Newton, Davy, Pasteur, and others and that reading these, in part, inspired him to pursue a life in science. The young Cantor, however, took no note of and would have taken no interest in the "complexities of biographical narratives or of their cultural, educational and ideological functions." Biographies were vehicles for intellectual pleasure and no more. As he matured and became a historian of science, he had to contend with new questions and problems. Cantor surveyed the various accounts of Faraday's religious practices and selfless devotion to science—staples of the young adult biography—only to find them grossly misleading and, at times, flatly inaccurate. His interest is in how "'Faraday' was *constructed* in the public arena. I place Faraday in quotation marks since I am not concerned with the historical Faraday who was born on 22 September 1791 but rather with the number of different 'Faradays' who were the purported subjects of these biographical narratives." These Faradays came in two forms—romantic and realistic—with John Tyndall squarely in the first camp and Samuel Smiles leading the second. Among the romantics, uniqueness and otherworldly qualities come to the foreground of the narrative. They are the reason for Boyle's success and cause for our admiration. Smilean or realist narratives emphasized and, in this case, moralized Faraday's hard work to suggest that anyone can aspire to similar achievements. Cantor suggests that studying these public constructions of scientists—and for our purposes, education-related figures—are important toward understanding how the subject was perceived and what these perceptions tell us about the era's needs for and use of biography.[9]

A final and critical point can be seen in *Telling Lives*' treatment of narrative voice in relation to such figures as Charles Darwin. James Moore discusses his *Darwin* study coauthored with Adrian Desmond in terms of metabiography–in this case, meaning autobiographical reflections about the process of biographical study of a subject already inundated with biographical attention. He concludes that academics should not shy away from the great public interest in biography for fear of producing what tenure and promotion committees might view as unscholarly work. Rather, Moore offers what he calls the "cine theory" of narration."Just as in a cinema the technical work of filmmaking is hidden, and the projection goes on silently," he suggests, "so *Darwin* offers a 'space' where readers may suspend their disbelief and enter another world, undistracted by the machinery of scholarship." Moore celebrates the "defiantly social portrait" of Darwin produced in this vein as a vehicle to inform or educate the widest possible audience about the "politics of scientific practice" and the "cultural formation of natural knowl-

edge." Few, if any, in the realm of education have attracted the kind of biographical attention that Darwin has, but Moore's point is nevertheless an important insight: let biographers advance the cause of narrative excellence to hook the reader, but demand that they also include the technical, scholarly apparatus in the notes. By doing so, scholars can use biography to reach a broad audience with the latest developments in research that typically reach only the initiated or privileged few.[10]

These three points of departure—placing achievements in their social and political contexts, sorting the real from the romantic, and valuing an engaging narrative voice—all raised important questions during my reconstruction of William Barton Rogers, conceptual founder of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. I had come across these points elsewhere in my reading, research, and training in history of education and history of science, but *Telling Lives* brought them to life and gave them new meaning in relation to Rogers.

Much like the French and scientific revolutions discussed in *Telling Lives*, Rogers lived through periods of great social, political, and global change—the forming of a new nation, hardening of southern values and civilization, Civil War, industrialization, urbanization, and the early onset of progressivism. It was also a period of great intellectual change with *Origin of Species* (1859) appearing midway through his career. As a scientist and educator with one foot in the South and the other in the North, his life intersected with these developments in ways that provided access to biographical opportunities flagged by Hunter and Outram. Hunter's caution about properly treating contributions helped train my attention on the social construction of the idea of MIT, the borrowing of scientific and educational ideas from Europe, and the evolution of laboratory instruction. This approach facilitated the discovery of unusual connections between problems in social and intellectual history that had yet to appear in print, such as the relationship between science, slavery, and antebellum higher learning. Outram's focus on status and concern over patronage in autobiographies of French elites had an analog in Rogers' letters to his three scientist brothers, all of whom wrestled with issues of status and employment. In many ways, I combed through their correspondence the way Outram mined autobiographies.

While researching Rogers' life I also found myself in Cantor's shoes, sorting the real from the romantic. Rogers was no Faraday, but he did direct a state-wide geological survey, write over one hundred chemistry, physics, and geology articles and presentations, spar with Louis Agassiz over evolution, and organize an institute of technology based on European models of science instruction. All of this meant that he enjoyed a very respectable status as a nineteenth scientist and educational reformer. What some Victorian-era writers constructed from this, however, was a portrait of an almost other-world-

ly being who faced down insurmountable odds, never flinched at adversity, and made novel contributions unseen elsewhere. This simply was not so. His life was peppered with illness, bouts of disability, and a sense of uncertainty about where his career decisions might lead. He longed for a sense of home, but never quite fit in with slaveholders in the South nor the Boston elite in the North. And Rogers' lasting achievement, MIT, suffered grave financial instability during his lifetime despite his ongoing efforts at raising funds for the institution. He was neither hero nor failure. Rather, his life tells us much about how scientists and educators of the era operated, organized, and reformed their practices and institutions. Like Cantor's sorting through multiple "Faradays," I spent countless hours pouring over the many "Rogerses" I met along the way. Part of the value of *Telling Lives* is in reminding biographers that they and their subjects are not alone in this process.

But the final, and perhaps most valuable, insight I drew then and continue to draw upon now is in recognizing the significance of narrative voice. Other works on the craft of biography discuss this point at length, but none satisfied the way Moore's chapter did. Many reflections on biography focus on narrative voice in terms of literary art form—elegance, beauty, and aesthetics. The concern from this view, as I understood it then, had more to do with literary criticism and what the literary critic might say rather than with communicating substantive ideas. This struck me as privileging form over content. Moore's message rang an entirely different note. His goal was to write a "people's" Darwin. "Why not have a full-scale Darwin for the general market," he asks, "the first with history-of-science credentials; a user-friendly Darwin, cheap, with a concealed apparatus, brief judicious quotations, a straightforward narrative, and above all a vivacious style?" When I began the Rogers-MIT project, I knew from the outset I wanted to write a readable life and to communicate advances in our understanding of nineteenth century science and education that a study of his life could generate. I recall negotiating this point with my advisors and, to my surprise, all of them signed off on my request to write the book rather than a dissertation. Moving the scholarly "apparatus" to the notes was just the beginning. If Rogers was to come to life at all, I was determined that it would be through a work both enjoyable to read and satisfying in terms of historiographical questions and problems addressed. In short, I wanted a "people's" Rogers.[11]

It's been fifteen years since I first read *Telling Lives*, but I remember vividly working through this volume and finding these and other points of connection that I now view as points of departure for educational biographers and historians of education. In retrospect, after rereading Shortland and Yeo this year, I now realize that I relied a great deal on this reflection. Some works speak to our needs more than others at specific times and this volume appeared at the right time and place during my graduate student years as I

puzzled over how to bring all of Rogers' pieces together.

My current work brings me back to my roots, somewhat, giving new life and meaning to *Telling Lives*. I'm currently working on understanding the relationship between education, the "science" of economic thought, and global economic crises across the twentieth century. Inspired by the worldwide economic meltdown of 2008, I launched a program of research to explore the interplay between education and economic ideas—how economic ideas influence educational policies and practices and how educational settings have shaped the development of economic ideals. By and large, educational researchers and historians have focused on the first of these interactions. They have analyzed the rise of free market thinking since the early 1970s and the impact it's has had on schools, colleges, and universities. From this well-established perspective, educational systems are the recipients of market-oriented policies in the form of vouchers, charter schools, and other deregulatory, competition-centered initiatives. The puzzle I'm currently working on, however, is an analysis of the other side of the equation: educational settings as producers (rather than recipients) of the free market ideology that has come to dominate the economic landscape. This is a largely overlooked story that has to do with a small group of mid-century free market advocates who used educational and academic strategies to advance their ideas, interests, and ideologies. They did so at a time when their views had fallen out of favor among academic economists. Their strategies, nevertheless, significantly influenced politicians like Margret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan who spearheaded a campaign of deregulation and market liberalization that scholars now link to the 2008 economic collapse.[12]

Telling Lives takes on new meaning and utility in light of this project on education and economic thought as much of the heavy lifting for this study involves getting a handle on the lives of academic economists. These individuals, including Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek, operated across borders—politically, intellectually, and in terms of nation-states—as well as in a gray area between science and advocacy to influence existing educational settings. They leveraged their scientific prestige as economists in efforts to educate the public and shape public policy, but were marginalized for doing so by their peers because of unscientific reasoning they used with the public.[13]

The problems these individuals in economics faced are familiar ones that resonate with my work on Rogers and that are skillfully explored in *Telling Lives*. For one thing, these economists were heavily concerned with status and dealt with social, political, and economic dislocation during times of global economic depression, World Wars, and the Cold War. Their marginalization within the economics profession triggered a great deal of soul-searching about how to promote free market thinking in a time of British Keynesian

dominance. They began by organizing international conferences in the thirties and forties that served the social, psychological, and intellectual needs of these free market advocates. Approximately three dozen economists, business executives, journalists, and others attended these meetings and commiserated on their exclusion from mainstream economic discourse. Some, like Hayek and Friedman, also turned to publishing mass market writings to address the public with ideas then dismissed by professional economists. Hayek wrote *Road to Serfdom* with this in mind and, to his surprise, ended up reaching millions of subscribers to *Reader's Digest* when the magazine decided to run a serialized version. Friedman followed suit with *Capitalism and Freedom*, selling hundreds of thousands of copies. They were motivated by a desire to be heard and to find status and place in an era when their peers had little interest in free market ideology. In revisiting the Hunter-Outram chapters on revolution and status with a fresh perspective, I find reminders of the need to locate research contributions within global social networks and within the pressures produced by times of status dislocation.[14]

What's more, there's no shortage of romantic accounts of the lives of these mid-century market advocates. Cantor's musings on the many "Faradays" he encountered in his work still rings true as I explore the many lives of Hayek, Friedman, and others in their circle. Ronald Reagan once canonized these individuals as the most influential "intellectual leaders" of conservative economic ideology who have "shaped so much of our thoughts." Contemporary economists have called Friedman the "Great Liberator" of laissez faire thinking in an era of economic planning. Lawrence Summers has gone so far as to suggest that "we are now all Friedmanites." Only recently have historians begun to sort the romantic from the realist among these lives and very little biographical work has been done along these lines. The dominant biographies currently come from authors commissioned by free market think tanks who produce "official" narratives that often take the form of chronologies rather than biographical studies. As with Victorian-era biographical writing, they tend to search for greatness and establish primacy and legacy. What's needed are scientific and educational biographies of these individuals, guided by the insights of *Telling Lives*, that establish links between these lives and broader historical trends and historiographical debates that intersect with their work and ideals.[15]

But I continue to share Moore's view that writing these kinds of lives requires a narrative that's both appealing and instructive. Mid-century free market advocates lived lives filled with controversy, struggle, and disagreement. Some led colorful lives, as Hayek did with his clashes with Keynes, controversial divorce, and career movements from Europe to England to the U.S., and, ultimately, back to Europe. Others, like Friedman, worked with Argentina's brutal dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet to implement free mar-

ket reforms. A lively or, as Moore put it, "vivacious" telling of these lives would diffuse more broadly the scope and development of economic ideas, their impact on education, and their role in economic crises and collapse. Economic ideas, principles, and laws emerge out of social networks, collaborations, culture, and convention. We lack a "people's" Hayek and a "people's" Friedman that can shed light on the "politics of scientific practice" and the "cultural formation" of scientific knowledge. Anyone embarking on such a task would do well to start with *Telling Lives*.[16]

To this project on education and economic thought, I'm also bringing an insight hinted at but not fully addressed in *Telling Lives*. Throughout Shortland and Yeo's volume, a common theme appears organized around the social construction of knowledge. All of their contributors tip their hats toward the idea that scientific biography and history of science has long ago moved away from the "Great Man" study of lives and, since the early twentieth century, toward the recognition that big ideas and advances in knowledge have largely come out of social rather than individual constructions. This repudiation of the individual as lone innovator has gone a long way toward dispelling myths once created by biographers. But a recent breakthrough from historians of science has generated a new theoretical framework that holds great promise for educational biographers and historians of education that was not available to the authors and editors of *Telling Lives*. The breakthrough modifies the social construction of knowledge paradigm and adds to it a quest for understanding the social construction of ignorance, or, as some have dubbed the sub-field, agnotology. Agnotology has emerged from the work of historians of science interested in distortions of knowledge and the deliberate diffusion of ignorance about such topics as tobacco, asbestos, and climate change.[17]

Educational biographers and historians of education have much to gain from *Telling Lives*' focus on the social construction of knowledge and agnotology's exploration of the social construction of ignorance. Part of what made David Levering Lewis' *Du Bois* so compelling, I believe, is that he intuited and, to some extent, applied these insights before they had a name, framework, and theoretical literature. These insights can assist biographers in reestablishing imperatives to contextualize a subject's contributions, sorting through the realistic from the romantic, and developing a narrative voice worthy of an audience. They can also inspire all of us to consider the way our subjects—who typically worked in schools, colleges, universities, and other formal, non-formal, and global educational settings—might have played a role in the promotion of ignorance. While counterintuitive, this is particularly relevant to educational biographers as it challenges our deeply-held assumptions that our subjects were in the business of promoting teaching and learning rather than the diffusion of ignorance and distortions of knowl-

edge. Together, these approaches have the potential to bring about fresh substantive, methodological, and global perspectives on educational biography.

Notes

[1] Levering's comments from his conference presentation at "The Craft of Biography," Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History, Harvard University (May 2001).

[2] For starters on the evolution of historical scholarship, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[3] David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993); *W.E.B. DuBois: A Reader* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995); *W. E. B. Du Bois, 1919-1963: The Fight for Equality and the American Century* (New York: Henry Holt, 2001).

[4] Michael Shortland and Richard Yeo, Telling *Lives in Science: Essays on Scientific Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); A.J. Angulo, *William Barton Rogers and the Idea of MIT* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

[5] Shortland and Yeo, *Telling Lives*, xiii; Thomas Söderqvist, ed., *The History and Poetics of Scientific Biography* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007); Paola Govoni and Zelda Alice Franceschi, eds., *Writing about Lives in Science: (Auto)biography, Gender, and Genre* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2014)

[6] Christoph Irmscher, *Louis Agassiz: Creator of American Science* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013).

[7] David Tyack, *George Ticknor and the Boston Brahmins* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); Hugh Hawkins, *Between Harvard and America: The Educational Leadership of Charles W. Eliot* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972). 8 Shortland and Yeo, *Telling Lives*, 86.

[8] Shortland and Yeo, *Telling Lives*, 86.

[9] Ibid., 171-172.

[10] Ibid., 280-281.

[11] Ibid., 271, 275.

[12] For a sampling of the education literature, see Henry A. Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014); Jeffrey R. Di Leo, et. al., *Neoliberalism, Education, Terrorism: Contemporary Dialogues* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2014); Diane Ravitch, *Reign of Error: The Hoax of Privatization and the Danger to Public Education* (New York: Knopf, 2013) and *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Kenneth Saltman, *The Failure of Corporate School Reform* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2012); and Michael Apple, *Educating the Right Way: Markets, Standards, God, and Inequality* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[13] On Friedman, Hayek, and Mises, see Lanny Ebenstein, *Milton Friedman: A Biography* (New York: Palgrave, 2007); Bruce Caldwell, *Hayek's Challenge: An Intellectual Biography of F.A. Hayek* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Jörg

Guido Hülsmann, *Mises: The Last Knight of Liberalism* (Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2007); Juan Gabriel Valdes, *Pinochet's Economists: The Chicago School in Chile* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[14] Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945); Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

[15] Shortland and Yeo, *Telling Lives*, 172; Reagan cited in Angus Burgin, *The Great Persuasion: Reinventing Free Markets since the Depression* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 230; Lawrence Summers, "The Great Liberator," *New York Times* (November 19, 2006).

[16] Shortland and Yeo, *Telling Lives*, 271, 281.

[17] Robert Proctor and Londa Schiebinger, eds., *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

Membership Form:
International Society for Educational Biography

Members of the International Society for Educational Biography receive current issues of ***Vitae Scholasticae*** as part of their membership benefits. Member dues are $75 per year. Please use the form below to join:

ISEB Membership Form:

Name_____

Institution_____

Address_____

City, State, ZIP, Country_____

Please send with your $75 check payable to ISEB to:

Dr. Lora Helvie-Mason, ISEB Treasurer
PO Box T-0490
Tarleton State University
Stephenville, TX 76042

Subscribe
To *Vitae Scholasticae*

❑ Please enter my subscription
for the next year of ***Vitae Scholasticae***

Name _____

Institution _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip, Country _____

_____

Type of subscription:
❑ Individual subscription ($50 per year)
❑ Institutional subscription ($100 per year)
❑ Add $40 if outside the United States

Method of payment:
❑ Check enclosed payable to International Society for Educational Biography
❑ Money order enclosed payable to International Society for Educational Biography

Mail completed form to:

Professor Linda C. Morice
Department of Educational Leadership, Campus Box 1125
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
Edwardsville, Illinois 62026-1125 USA
Telephone: 618-650-3278; Fax: 618-650-3808; Email: lmorice@siue.edu

Contributing Authors

A.J. Angulo is the Elizabeth Singleton Endowed Professor of Education and Professor of History (Courtesy) at Winthrop University. He is the author of the award-winning *William Rogers and the Idea of MIT* (2009) and editor of the forthcoming *Miseducation: A History of Ignnorance–Making in America and Abroad.*

Lucy E. Bailey is Associate Professor of Social Foundations and Qualitative Inquiry and Director of Gender and Women's Studies at Oklahoma State University. She co-authored *Wanted—Correspondence: Women's Letters to a Union Soldier* (2009). Bailey's research and teaching interests include qualitative methodologies, diversity issues, and the history of women's education.

Bart Dredge, Professor and Chair in the Department of Sociology at Austin College, researches the South's industrial culture—currently the 1930 "Industrial Bill of Rights" promoted by former UNC President Frank Porter Graham. Dredge's articles appear in *Vitae Scholasticae, Libraries and the Cultural Record, North Carolina History Review*, and elsewhere.

Craig Kridel is the E. S. Gambrell Professor of Educational Studies and Curator of the Museum of Education at University of South Carolina. He is completing a study of black progressive high schools from the 1940s and beginning a montage memoir-biography on Harold Taylor, former president of Sarah Lawrence College.

Susan Laird, Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, and Human Relations at the University of

Oklahoma, serves as its Educational Studies Program Coordinator. President and co-founder of the Society for Educating Women, she authored *Mary Wollstonecraft: Philosophical Mother of Coeducation* (Continuum 2008: Bloomsbury 2014).

Linda M. Perkins, Associate University Professor and Director of Applied Women's Studies at Claremont University, is completing a book on Black women's higher education, 1840-1963. Her work includes a published book on nineteenth century Black feminist educator Fanny Jackson Coppin, and biographical pieces on Black women faculty at Howard University.

Paula M. Salvio is Professor of Education at the University of New Hampshire and a Faculty Scholar at the University's Sustainability Institute. She writes on the cultural and historical foundations of education. Salvio authored *Anne Sexton: Teacher of Weird Abundance* (2007), which received the American Educational Studies Association's Critics' Choice Award.

Louis M. Smith, Professor Emeritus at Washington University in St. Louis, authored the "Biographical Method" chapter in Denzin and Lincoln's *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (1994). The University of South Carolina Museum of Education selected Smith and Geoffrey's *The Complexities of an Urban Classroom* (1968) as a "Book of the Century."

P. L. Thomas, Associate Professor of Education (Furman University), taught high school English in South Carolina before moving to teacher education. He is currently a column editor for *English Journal* (National Council of Teachers of English) and co-editor of *Social Context Reform* (Routledge). Follow his work at http://radicalscholarship.wordpress.com/ and @plthomasEdD.

Andrea Walton is Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Indiana University Bloomington. Her research interests focus on the history of women in education, the rise and development of colleges and universities, and the rise of philanthropy in education at all levels.

Vitae Scholasticae

Information for Contributors

Vitae Scholasticae welcomes manuscripts dealing with all aspects of educational biography. The 16th edition of *A Manual of Style* from the University of Chicago Press is the final authority for most questions of style and structure. Manuscripts should be submitted via e-mail with author identification on the cover page only; the text of the manuscript should be in Microsoft Word.

For more information about ***Vitae Scholasticae,*** visit the International Society for Educational Biography website at http://tc.bsu.edu/ISEB/. Click "Vitae Scholasticae." Or contact:

Professor Linda C. Morice
Department of Educational Leadership
Campus Box 1125
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
Edwardsville, Illinois 62026-1125, U.S.A.

Electronic submissions should be directed to: **lmorice@siue.edu**

All statements of fact or points of view in articles are the responsibility of authors and do not represent any official position of the International Society for Educational Biography or *Vitae Scholasticae*.

International Society for Educational Biography

Membership in the International Society for Educational Biography is open to anyone interested in educational biography. Dues are $75 per year, which includes issues of *Vitae Scholasticae*. See membership form on page 121.