

## Women Writing Women's Lives Biography Seminar, 2014-2015

**October 2, 2014.** Seminar member Julia Van Haften, an independent curator, spoke on the evolution of her work on photographer Berenice Abbott. Julia, a curator of photographs at the New York Public Library in 1988 when she wrote the essay for Abbott's volume in Aperture Foundation's "Masters of Photography," organized an Abbott retrospective exhibition for the library that traveled to Tokyo and in the US. Her revised Aperture "Masters of Photography" volume on Abbott will be published in June 2015, and Julia has also recently completed her biography of Abbott. Suzanne Wasserman organized and moderated the session. (Note: This session was originally scheduled for February 2014, but it had to be cancelled due to weather.)

**October 20, 2014.** Dorothy O. Helly Women Writing Women's Lives Works in Progress Lecture. "Combining Marriage and Career 100 Years Ago: Five Pioneering Women and the Med They Married." Seminar member Patricia Auspos, an independent scholar with a Ph.D. in history, spoke about her group biography focusing on the pioneering marriages of five upper-and middle-class women who were married and pursued careers in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-and early 20<sup>th</sup>-centuries. She discussed the difficulties of writing a book that tells the story of five unique marriages while tracing common themes and drawing conclusions across the marriages. The event was co-sponsored by CUNY Graduate Center's Department of History, Department of English, Center for the Study of Women and Society, The Leon Levy Center for Biography, The Center for the Humanities and the MA Program in Liberal Studies.

**November 3, 2014.** "Writing about Disability." Guests Simi Linton, the author of *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* and the memoir *My Body Politic*, and Nadina LaSpina, organizer with Disabled in Action, and ADAPT and author of the memoir "Such a Pretty Girl: A Story of Struggle, Empowerment and Pride," addressed the topic of writing about disability from a memoirist's perspective. Seminar member Barbara F. McManus, Professor of Classics Emerita, The College of New Rochelle, spoke about her struggle to write meaningfully about the deafness of her biographical subject, Grace Harriet Macurdy, a Professor of Greek at Vassar College. Barbara F. McManus organized and moderated the session.

**December 8, 2014.** "Biography, Memoir, and the Inner Life." Seminar member Kathy Chamberlain talked about possible ways to discover a biographical subject's inner life, based on the book she has just finished writing about Jane Welsh Carlyle. Seminar Member Gail Hornstein, author of *To Redeem One Person Is To Redeem the World: The Life of Frieda Fromm-Reichmann* and *Agnes's Jacket: A Psychologist's Search for the Meanings of Madness*, discussed her current project "Our Minds and Each Other." From what she has learned about the mind from people who have experienced madness or breakdowns, Gail spoke about how one can come to appreciate the inner life more fully and train oneself to pay greater attention to its subtleties. Seminar Member Polly Howells, a psychotherapist, talked about how she

is using dreams in the memoir she is writing. Kathy Chamberlain organized the session and Barbara Fisher moderated.

**January 5, 2015.** This meeting was the annual “Problem Solving Session.” Seminar member Dona Munker, author of *Persia: A Woman’s Journey from Her Father’s Harem*, shared her thoughts on writer’s block. Seminar member Sydney Stern, author of *Gloria Steinem: Her Passions, Politics, and Mystique*, addressed the challenges of organizing her dual biography of Herman and Joe Mankiewicz. Seminar member Nancy Rubin Stuart shared her problem with editorial revisions. Nancy Rubin Stuart organized and moderated the session.

**February 2, 2015.** Guest speaker Carol Faulkner, author of *Lucretia Mott’s Heresy*, discussed the challenges of writing about a deeply religious woman from another faith tradition. Kate Culkin organized and moderated the session.

**March 2, 2015.** “Taking an Elastic View of a Life.” Guest speaker Cathy Curtis, a former *Los Angeles Times* staff writer and the author of *Restless Ambition: Grace Hartigan, Painter*, discussed the challenge of narrative pacing. She addressed her choice to focus on certain years of Hartigan’s life and to telescope the rest, in the interest of highlighting the most memorable portion of a life and maintaining readers’ interest. Julia Van Haften organized and moderated the session.

**March 9, 2015.** Dorothy O. Helly Women Writing Women’s Lives Works in Progress Lecture. “For the Love of Your Sister”: Ellen Tucker Emerson, Edith Emerson Forbes, and the Emerson Legacy.” Seminar member Kate Culkin discussed her joint biography of the daughters of Lidian Jackson and Ralph Waldo Emerson and why she decided to write about both sisters in one volume. The event was co-sponsored by CUNY Graduate Center’s Department of History, Department of English, Center for the Study of Women and Society, The Leon Levy Center for Biography, The Center for the Humanities and the MA Program in Liberal Studies.

**April 6, 2015.** Guest speaker Rafia Zafar, Professor of English, African & African American, and American Culture Studies at Washington University in St. Louis, explored the role of food in the civil rights movement narratives, specifically the work of Anne Moody and Alice Walker. Carla Peterson organized and moderated the session.

**May 4, 2015.** Our guest speakers were Iris Lopez, chair of Latin American and Latino Studies and chair of Sociology at City College of the City University of New York, and Mirtha Quintanales, for many years director of the Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies Program at New Jersey City University. Both speakers contributed to *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios*, and in the seminar they spoke to the issues of writing about Latina experiences and how *Telling to Live* evolved out of the Latina Feminist Group, formed in 1993.

June 1, 2015. Barbara McManus Luncheon. "Mitchell, Krasner, de Kooning: Sexual Politics and Abstract Expressionism." Guest speaker Mary Dearborn is author of biographies of John Dewey and Anzia Yezierska, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer, Louise Bryant, and Peggy Guggenheim. Her biography of Ernest Hemingway will be published by Knopf in 2016. Mary talked about her current project, a narrative about 1950s artists, women's lives, and relations between male and female artists.