

Women Writing Women's Lives Seminar Sessions and Events, 2017-2018

Oct. 2, 2017—Seminar members read Nancy Milford's *Zelda*, a foundational biography in women's studies for considering a "wife" in her own right. Seminar member Deirdre Bair opened the session with comments on her friendship with Milford and their experiences as biographers. Seminar member Jill Norgren organized the session and served as moderator.

Oct. 16, 2017—Dorothy O. Helly Works-in-Progress Lecture. Seminar member Deirdre Bair discussed her in-progress memoir, focusing on her experience writing biographies of Samuel Becket and Anais Nin. She addressed the privilege (and the trials and tribulations) of working with two living subjects, addressing her coming of age as a scholar and feminist, and why now is the proper time to tell these stories. The lecture was cosponsored with The Leon Levy Center for Biography, CUNY Graduate Center's PhD Programs in History and English, MA Program in Liberal Studies, MA Program in Women's and Gender Studies, The Center for the Humanities and The Feminist Press.

Nov. 6, 2017. This session focused on *Letters from Baghdad*, the first feature-length documentary on Gertrude Bell, CBE, (1868-1926), a writer, traveler, political officer, administrator, and archaeologist. Guest speakers Sabine Krayenbühl, the film's director, and Zeva Oelbaum, the producer, discussed their reasons for wanting to document Bell's life and their approach to creating the "hybrid documentary," which includes photographs by Bell and others, rare footage unearthed in extensive research, and voice-over narrative edited from Bell's letters. Seminar member Diane Jacobs moderated the session and seminar member Dorothy O. Helly served as respondent. Seminar member Julia Van Haften organized the session.

Dec. 4, 2017. In this session, seminar member Linda Grasso discussed the challenges she encountered while working on the recently published *Equal Under the Sky: Georgia O'Keeffe and Twentieth-Century Feminism*. She addressed her efforts to understand what feminism meant to O'Keeffe and the people who talked about her and her art and revered her as a model of achievement in a male-dominated art world. Seminar member Laurie Lisle, author of *Portrait of an Artist: A Biography of Georgia O'Keeffe*, served as moderator, as well as offering opening remarks on her experience writing about the artist. Seminar member Kate Culkin organized the session.

Jan. 8, 2018. In this problem-solving session, Barbara Grey, Chief Librarian and Associate Professor of research methods at the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism, shared her online news gathering tips and techniques, specifically for researching biographies. She focused on essential research skills: finding and searching online book and newspaper archives, finding people and information about them, discovering hidden archives, and mining scholarly articles. (Barbara was a guest speaker when she led the session, but joined the seminar as a member in February 2018). Seminar member Barbara Fisher moderated and organized the session.

Feb. 5, 2018 In this session, seminar members Polly Howells and Carol Ascher shared their experiences in delving into family stories that are set in political, historical, and deeply intimate frameworks. They used key words that expressed the quandary they both shared in writing about their families: transgression, inhibition/prohibition, danger, secrecy, and the internal and external pressures that live inside us. Seminar member Marnie Muller organized and moderated the session.

March 5, 2018. In this session, seminar members Sydney Stern, Barbara Fisher, Dorothy O. Helly, Pat Auspos, and Diane Jacobs led a discussion on "How Biographers Deal with Family Relationships: Challenges and Opportunities." After sharing their experiences with researching and writing about family relationships, they encouraged members and guests to bring their own problems and perspectives into the conversation. Seminar member Patricia Laurence moderated the session and seminar member Pat Auspos organized it.

March 19, 2018— Dorothy O. Helly Works-in-Progress Lecture. Seminar member Heather Clark presented "P(1)athography: Sylvia Plath and Her Biographers," an exploration of the role Plath's biographers have played in pathologizing the poet's legacy, as well as new material she has uncovered. The event was co-sponsored with The Leon Levy Center for Biography, CUNY Graduate Center's PhD Programs in History and English, MA Program in Liberal Studies, MA Program in Women's and Gender Studies, The Center for the Humanities, and The Feminist Press.

April 2, 2018. Seminar member Victoria Olsen conducted a practical tour of the world of self-publishing, examining the opportunities, challenges, and options in this growing arena. Victoria organized and moderated the session.

May 7, 2018. Seminar member Alexis Boylan discussed the reputations of Dolly Wall Sloan and Helen Farr Sloan, the wives of Ashcan School artist John Sloan. She explored ways to circumvent the narrative of the "good" and "bad" widow and how the construction of archives can shape narratives, often in sexist patterns. Seminar member Carla Peterson moderated the session, and seminar member Victoria Olsen organized it.

June 12, 2018—Barbara McManus Luncheon. Bringing our year full circle, Nancy Milford was our luncheon speaker. After Nancy made remarks about writing *Zelda*, read by seminar members for the year's first session, seminar member Sydney Stern interviewed Nancy about the problems she encountered in researching the book, her writing process, and if she was aware while working on the book that she was moving into new terrain by putting the life of a wife of a famous man in the forefront of a biography. Marnie Muller, along with Sydney and seminar member Kathy Chamberlain, organized the luncheon.