

# *1 On the Nature of Biographical Form*

## *Is Biography Disguised Autobiography?*

MODERN BIOGRAPHY is marked by the spirit of free inquiry. As readers, we do not expect biographers to allow preconceived ideas to dictate judgments. We expect them to be guided by the facts, unimpeded by either admiration or hostility. This differs from an earlier era when a biographer might write uncritically about a friend or family member, offering praise or at least withholding information that would be unflattering to the subject. Today's biographers are held to a different standard. They must not alter historical truth, and while aspiring to a standard of objectivity, biographers must have some "sympathy of feeling" for and with their subjects.<sup>1</sup>

Noted twentieth-century biographers André Maurois and Leon Edel stressed that biography must reveal the individual within history. According to Edel, "No lives are led outside history or society; they take place in human time."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, because human beings are at the heart of the biographical enterprise, historical events must revolve around them, serving as a background for, or intersecting with, each life and often providing a rationale for the subject's choices and actions.

This volume explores the efforts of three French deaf biographers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to find themselves as individuals and as artists and to bridge the cultural divide between deaf and hearing people by means of their biographical studies of others. All of the authors included took seriously the historical dimension of their work, but they recognized the centrality of their protagonists. Jean-Ferdinand Berthier (1803–1886) always sketched the history, particular-

ly the political history, that encircled his protagonists. He wrote not only of politics within the Paris Institute for the Deaf, which was the setting for most of his work, but of the politics in France that similarly impacted his protagonists. Thus in the 1839 study entitled *Notice sur la Vie et les Ouvrages d'Auguste Bébien* (*Notice on the Life and Works of Auguste Bébien*), Berthier relates that Bébien was fired from the institute because his spirit of rebellion angered those in power in the school administration. Berthier's lengthy 1873 analysis of Abbé Sicard, the second director of the institute, recounts Sicard's arrest in 1792 as a counterrevolutionary and his close brush with the guillotine. These dramatic circumstances notwithstanding, it was the lives-in-full of the two men that Berthier portrayed and that hold the attention of the reader.

Yvonne Pitrois's portrait of Helen Keller, *Une nuit rayonnante: Helen Keller* (*A Shining Night: Helen Keller*), placed Keller in the context of other deaf-blind people whose lives preceded hers, that of Laura Bridgman in particular. But it was the destiny of Helen Keller and her unique relationship with her teacher Anne Sullivan that was the focus of Pitrois's study. Corinne Rocheleau recounted the historical circumstances that led French-Canadian pioneer women to leave France, but the true value of her work, *Françaises d'Amérique* (*Heroic French Women of Canada*, 1915), is found in the portraits that she wrote of the pioneer women. She depicted them as individuals, reflecting a broad spectrum of female personalities and activities: maternal women, warriors, religious women, and the emphasis was clearly on their lives and the choices they made.

Thus, in spite of the importance of the historical aspects of each biography, the biographer must be more than a historian. The biographer must remain focused on the portrayal of the development of a single life. "Biography is the study of the evolution of a human soul,"<sup>3</sup> according to Maurois, so it is particularly important for the biographer to discover and portray the moments when the subject became himself, found a vocation, overcame weaknesses, and developed a new understanding of life. Berthier's biography of the Abbé de l'Épée (1852) sketches the moment when L'Épée discovered his vocation—he stum-

bled on two deaf girls in a house on Fossés-St. Victor Street, recognized their vulnerability because of their disability, and decided to devote his life to teaching them and others like them. Helen Keller made a trope toward goodness once she was able to communicate, and this development is at the heart of Yvonne Pitrois's analysis of her. Rocheleau's study of Ludivine Lachance in *Hors de sa prison (Out of Her Prison, 1927)*, showed the touching development of strength on the part of her deaf-blind heroine. Terrified of death when it was first explained to her, Ludivine ultimately accepted her own death with courage when her time came. For all three writers, then, it was clearly the development of character that was at the heart of the narrative.

All biographers are on a quest for the truth. They must consider which materials can be used to find and to record the truth about their subjects. They must see what others have written about a chosen subject and read letters, diaries, and journals written by the subject. But even after such careful research, the biographer must be aware that the subject may be posing and that the words of others may be contradictory. The biographer must cultivate "faculties of artistic divination," as well as scientific investigation, in order to be successful in finding and portraying the subject with accuracy.<sup>4</sup>

Further complicating this quest is an understanding on the part of modern biographers of the complexities of personality. Berthier, Pitrois, and Rocheleau all understood that the quest for the truth includes an acknowledgment of the protagonist's faults as well as his virtues. Berthier, although he deeply admired the Abbé de l'Épée, wrote that L'Épée did not always have sufficient faith in the possibilities of sign language in and of itself, without alteration. In this same analysis, Berthier acknowledged the abbé's commitment to the children he taught, even depriving himself of heat in the hard winter of 1788, in order to save the kindling for his young students. Similarly, Pitrois underlined the brilliance and dedication to social service for the blind and deaf-blind of Helen Keller, while faulting her for her vaudeville appearances with Anne Sullivan. Pitrois saw these performances as undignified and sensationalistic, an interesting view that will be dis-

cussed in depth in a later chapter. Rocheleau, in her portrait of Jeanne le Ber in *Françaises d'Amérique . . .*, showed us a “saintly recluse” who desired to live following the laws of God but failed in her earthly commitments to family and friends.



CAN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL narrative provide us with the truth more readily than biography? It would seem so, as who better than the man himself to write about his own motives or the secrets behind his actions? But numerous factors make even autobiographical narratives false. We forget a lot about our own lives, a phenomenon that occurs throughout our lives and that may have numerous causes. There may be aesthetic reasons, as an autobiographer may be tempted to make of his life a work of art, often eliminating, without realizing it, the everyday events that reveal what that person had in common with others. This might create the impression that his life was more different than it really was. Forgetfulness might also be triggered by the censorship the mind performs upon the disagreeable or the shameful. We may want to forget humble origins or embarrassing episodes in our lives. Memory often fails through a process of rationalization. An event may be the work of chance, but we may discover, in retrospect, a heroic narrative.

Additional obstacles to creating authentic autobiographies and memoirs exist for people with disabilities, deaf people, women, and other marginal groups. This genre was long defined by men in the mainstream of society. The powerful early writers of autobiography, Augustine and Rousseau, do not offer adequate models for writers on the margins of society. Perhaps in some measure due to an absence of models, none of the deaf authors included in this analysis wrote a full-length autobiography. Writing, in general, before autobiographies were too much in fashion and perhaps additionally distanced from this form by his marginality, Berthier did not even write a memoir. He did include personal observations and comments in his biographies of deaf educators. His affection for Laurent Clerc and his continuing correspondence

and relationship with him long after Clerc's initial departure from France are revealed in an essay appended to the biography of the Abbé Sicard.

Pitrois included moral observations that reflected her religious views in her biographies, but she left neither memoirs nor autobiographical essays. Some rich comments, however, surface in her newsletter for deaf people, *La Petite Silencieuse* (*The Little Silent Girl*).<sup>5</sup> There we learn of her close relationship with her mother and of her deep concern for deaf and deaf-blind people. Pitrois used the newsletter to urge her readers to support one another and to collect books, clothing, and money from those able to spare it for the benefit of the poorest. It is perhaps this same religiosity and moral rigor that prevented her from chronicling herself—this, coupled with the fact that it was still considered inappropriate for women to write about themselves and their personal aspirations.

Rocheleau, alone of the three, wrote an autobiographical essay, "My Education in a Convent School for the Deaf," in 1931. It is a partial analysis, covering only the years up to and including the oralist education she received at the convent school in Montreal. The essay narrates the devastation Rocheleau felt upon becoming deaf at the age of nine and how her studies at this school, after many failed attempts to find a suitable education, finally enabled her to reconnect with family and friends and lead a productive life. The essay is sensitively written and reflects a courage and assertion that this disabled woman's life is worth the retelling. Rocheleau revealed herself here as an early feminist, an aspect of her work and life that will be analyzed more completely in a later chapter. Her essay resembles more modern biographical writing in that she does not write about a completed life but about a life in progress, and the writing itself becomes part of her process of defining herself.

Maurois asserted that autobiography, like biography, is difficult to create. We need appropriate models. We cannot completely retrieve the past, as it is impossible not to change it both consciously and unconsciously. He believed that an intellectual autobiography is the closest one can come to writing an authentic autobiography. Such a biography,

he said, recounts how a person's intelligence and ideas were developed. His belief was that, in this manner, there are fewer subjective or emotional elements that come into play.<sup>6</sup> Rocheleau approached this model in her essay, which focused in large measure on her educational development both before and during her years in the convent school.

As works with both historical and scientific dimensions, the best biographies and autobiographies must be works of art, as well. The first and most important choice of the biographer is that of his subject. The biographer must then uncover what is unique about the protagonist. Although the life depicted may manifest the influence of some underlying philosophy, the author must avoid being heavy-handed in the expression of that philosophy. To achieve artistic effect, he may, instead, analyze the themes and motifs that reveal a hidden artistic unity.

How else can the biographer respect scientific truth but still approach the art of the novelist? First, he must follow chronological order, allowing for the portrayal of the evolution of the human spirit in the individual. Character evolves in contact with human beings and events. These influences revealed in their progression will ideally lead to art, which depends upon a sense of movement. Thus, even though the characters of a biography or autobiography are real, they may still be appropriate material for a work of art, if the biographer composes his work with care.

Midway between art and science, reflecting elements of both, are the findings of Sigmund Freud and his successors, and their influence on biography. There was, after Freud, a new arena for biographical study. Reading audiences wanted to know more about human nature and the motivations for human achievement. There was a desire to learn about the inner life, as well as the outer life, of the subject. The biographer had to pay heed to this in his "recording and telling of human lives."<sup>7</sup> A new form of biography called "psychobiography" developed, essentially beginning with Lytton Strachey, who was the first to use Freud in a creative way in his work. The biographer now was expected to discover and

understand his subject's secrets and feelings, as well as how the subject handled his or her own life.

The biographer also needed to understand himself, his own inner life, well enough so that he didn't confuse it with that of his subject. *Transference* is the term used to describe the involvement between psychoanalyst and patient that occurs during psychiatry. It is the development of an emotional attitude toward the analyst on the part of a patient, which may be either positive or negative. By seeing these attachment patterns and interpreting them, the analyst gains understanding. (Edel believed that, in fact, the analyst may be considered a biographer of the soul.) Biographers have a similar emotional attachment to their subjects but often don't acknowledge it or understand it completely.

How do biographers choose their subjects? According to Edel, Freud observed in his study of Leonardo da Vinci that biographers became quite obsessed with their heroes.<sup>8</sup> The biographer's choice of subject may be a response to some hidden need in his own personality or nature. At the heart of the biographical enterprise is "the relation of the biographer to the subject."<sup>9</sup> In *Aspects of Biography* (1929), André Maurois, without specifically using the term *transference*, described his relationship with his own biographical subjects in exactly those terms. He added that when the author chooses his subject in response to a personal need, biography can be said to be disguised autobiography. Similarly, according to Edel in *Writing Lives* (1984), Vladimir Nabokov felt that all biographers were individuals who completed their lives by writing the lives of others.

A biographer, then, may use his writing to work through his own personal obsessions, or he may portray in his work what life has denied him, depicting the subject as the kind of man he would himself hoped to become. He may, like the novelist Marcel Proust who translated his illnesses and withdrew from life's difficulties into the rich world of Combray, convert negatives into positives, revealing "the triumphs of art over neuroses and of literature over life."<sup>10</sup> We return, then, to Mau-

rois's theory, supported by Edell, that biography is disguised autobiography.

All three of the deaf biographers featured in this volume used the biographical form to help themselves to understand, to heal, and to resolve feelings about their deafness at a safer distance than autobiographical confession would have allowed. Their subjects, in large measure, wrestled with issues similar to those experienced by the authors, or found a way to transcend them.

Awakened to the vulnerable situation of deaf people in society by his loss of standing at the National Institute for the Deaf in Paris between 1832 and 1836, Berthier portrayed, in all of his studies, the political pressures that influenced the lives of his subjects, as they had his own. Through his writing, Berthier was able to learn from his successive subjects and moderate his own anger and frustration. The healing effects of writing about his own issues, through the more comfortable medium of biographical sketches of others, led to an effective catharsis that enabled him to live his own life more creatively.

The trauma that Pitrois would try to resolve through her biographies was her loss of hearing and vision, as a result of sunstroke, at the age of seven. Between the ages of seven and twelve, Pitrois struggled between light and darkness, finally regaining her vision, although she remained deaf all her life. Even though she recovered her sight, Pitrois was deeply affected by the temporary experience of its loss, and her biographies reflect this preoccupation. Her biography of Helen Keller and the trilogy of biographies entitled *Trois lumières dans la nuit: Valentin Haüy, Louis Braille, Maurice de la Sizeranne* (*Three Lights in the Darkness: Valentin Haüy, Louis Braille, Maurice de la Sizeranne*) allowed her to explore heroes who benefited the blind community and, in the cases of Keller, Braille, and de la Sizeranne, were blind themselves and therefore overcame great odds, including the inclination to become bitter. Through her exploration and analysis of these models, Pitrois would finally be able to defuse the haunting memory of her blindness.



Corinne Rocheleau chose to portray subjects who reflected her dual concerns for the place of deaf citizens and women in society. Her deafness at the age of nine had isolated her, but the education that she received at the convent school in Montreal gave her the tools, not only to survive, but to thrive. At the convent school, as well, she saw the nuns' dedication to their work, a dedication that Rocheleau wanted to emulate, and after observing the effectiveness of many of the sisters in their professional roles, she came to believe that a woman could be scholar, teacher, and writer.

Rocheleau's writing would build on this foundation and additionally free her. In *Françaises d'Amérique*, she presented a panorama of women, all of whom lived in the New World but who made very different life choices. *Hors de sa prison* and *Those in the Dark Silence* (1930), dealing with deaf-blind subjects, enable her to resolve some of her remaining feelings of bitterness about her deafness. Rocheleau, in later years, served the deaf community extensively, as a writer and as a teacher. Her writing had sufficiently helped to defuse the negative feelings and to allow her to lead a creative, happier life and to make peace with her difference.

This element of emotion in psychobiography, however, must not keep the biographer's art from being objective. Although it is hard to avoid excessive emotional involvement with the material, the biographer needs to stand back and strive to be a "participant-observer."<sup>11</sup> There must be some involvement on the part of the biographer, but she should resist being taken over by her subject. The biographer must be sympathetic, yet sufficiently distant, both involved and uninvolved, and must be able to separate from the subject, according to Edel.

Berthier, Pitrois, and Rocheleau tended to involve themselves in their texts more than later biographers would find acceptable. They register moral approval or disapproval and clearly indicate whether they accept or reject their subjects' positions. All three, however, were impeccable in their research; they consulted works and letters in archives, and they interviewed surviving friends and colleagues who

were contemporaries of their heroes. The reader can feel confident of their research, if not always of their interpretations.

For them, as well as for mainstream biographers, the major task of the biographer is to recover the mind of the subject. The text must be true to the human sources from which it springs, and therefore, the chronicler must take into account written archival materials and the application of psychoanalytical concepts of life writing when depicting the hero. The biographer must get beyond the appearance of things and establish a nuanced relationship with his or her subject that allows for an understanding of how the subject may have been motivated by compulsions, emotions, and passions to make significant life choices and how she fulfilled her destiny, or failed to do so.

The reader also has a relationship with the text and its hero. "The biographer makes himself like his hero in order to understand him; the reader in order to copy his actions."<sup>12</sup> A reader may be comforted, or may aspire to act more responsibly and become a more empathic person. Biography offers us lessons in morality by giving us a panorama of individual examples and reminding us that human beings have both positive and negative features and that we would do well to imitate the best, rather than the worst, examples. Challenges, then, exist for the reader, as they do for the biographer.

But regardless of its challenges, biography merits the doing, as the need for the hero is "as old as mankind."<sup>13</sup> It sets before us lofty but accessible, astonishing but credible, examples to follow. It seems to flourish particularly during periods of doubt and despair, appearing as a source of reassurance that people are capable of strength and goodness. It is a complex art form, and we demand much of it and its practitioners: "We demand of it the scrupulosity of science and the enchantments of art, the perceptible truth of the novel and the learned falsehoods of history."<sup>14</sup> But it meets our expectations, if not always on an individual basis, as a genre, by offering us heroes whose actions and voices sometimes uplift us and always interest and educate us to human potential.



THE HUMAN need for heroes exists just as strongly for people with disabilities who, until recently, lacked heroes and a voice. Thomas Couser believes that life-writing genres are particularly useful. But disability and illness narratives present particular challenges to a genre that, as we have seen, is already quite complex. The issues that Couser seeks to explore include how such narratives get written at all, given the disadvantaged position of the protagonists; and how can one make a coherent narrative out of such lives.<sup>15</sup>

Couser especially laments the rareness of deaf biography and autobiography. Although the study of marginalization with regard to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation has become quite prevalent, illness and disability studies have been slow to develop. Yet, as Couser asserts, this is the most widespread kind of marginalization.

He rightly points, however, to great progress in making the deaf community and its issues more visible, beginning with a deaf Renaissance initiated by William Stokoe's 1960 *Sign Language Structure*. Stokoe's research legitimated American Sign Language and the Deaf Pride and Deaf Empowerment movements in the 1970s that culminated in the Deaf President Now uprising at Gallaudet University in 1988 and the installation of the university's first deaf president.

Within the deaf community, there are powerful cultural impediments to autobiographical and biographical narratives. The deaf community has continued to be somewhat segregated. Its cohesion and use of a different language, American Sign Language (ASL), has had the important value of forging community among deaf people, but this has complicated the process of reconnecting to mainstream hearing society. As with the languages of all oral cultures, ASL is unable to function as a written language. Thus, autobiography and biography of deaf lives must be written and published in the language of the majority hearing society.

Once written, the question arises as to how to classify these stories. Should deaf narratives be considered part of the new genre of disability studies? Do they belong in the category of minority group studies? The Deaf empowerment movement has been accompanied by the growing belief by many deaf and hearing people that the deaf community represents an oppressed linguistic and cultural minority. To many deaf people, deafness is not a medical condition that requires a cure. According to Couser, the obstacles to literary self-representation and representation of the deaf create a problem. Continued segregation will encourage the ongoing perception of deafness as a disability, rather than as a cultural/linguistic minority. However, all narratives of deaf lives offer a counterdiscourse that disables “stereotypes of disability” merely by the act of giving voice to deaf experiences.<sup>16</sup> The importance of these narratives lies in the portrayal of the life into which disability enters and intrudes, imposing marginality on the deaf person and how the deaf person deals with that state. For deaf people, the depiction of their own marginality similarly serves as an agent of their recovery in addition to being a means of self-expression.

In spite of the need to rethink the concept of life writing (including biography, autobiography, diary, and memoir) in its application to disability and deafness narratives, these genres that are “located on the borders of the literary”<sup>17</sup> are genres that are especially appropriate to individuals who are marginalized and, consequently, on the borders of society, according to Couser. Memoirs and autobiographies of deafness, in particular, seem to be entering a richer period. Each narrative offers a new view of the ways in which deafness can impact on life experience and interact with other factors, both physical and cultural: “Signing individuals have been given lasting and memorable traces on paper.”<sup>18</sup>

These narratives of disability and deafness have value both for the storyteller and for the audience. The biographer may transmute painful experiences in art and may rise above adverse circumstances. Even if one cannot repair the situation and it ends badly, there is value in being able to describe and discuss it in literature. The fact that the tale can be told can reduce stigma and marginalization for the person recounting it.

These written narratives may provide help to other deaf and disabled people by giving them a different perspective on their situation, and friends of deaf people can support their friends more intelligently by reading such narratives and reflecting on them.

Particularly noteworthy is that through these narratives, deaf people can find meaning in their deafness. The writing serves as a healing ritual. According to Couser, "If illness and disability are reminders of our mortality and frailty, narratives of these conditions are testaments to our resilience and vitality."<sup>19</sup> Narratives at first take us out of our bodies and later return us to them with a better understanding of how bodies shape our identity. Illness or disability threaten to make our lives meaningless by fragmenting them. But by organizing our lives in coherent ways, these disability and deafness narratives shore up a sense of the value of these lives.

Disabled and deaf people, like women of previous centuries, had been made invisible. In part this situation was created by others: the society-at-large for deaf and disabled people and the male establishment for women. But the situation was complex, for the marginalized groups came to internalize and accept the diminished view of them propagated by mainstream culture, and they lost the belief that they could achieve heroic stature. Carolyn Heilbrun, in *Women's Lives: The View from the Threshold*, describes the courage it takes for those in a liminal or marginalized state to struggle against their isolation. Focusing in large measure on the situation of women, Heilbrun speaks of the realization on the part of early feminists that women had been made invisible as professionals, and how daring it was for these women to step outside of established societal structures and challenge the norm.

Heilbrun looks at the biographies and memoirs of women who struggled with a state of "betweenness." In so doing, they altered literature and society. How did such marginalization initially occur? Feminists believe that literature before and after World War I reflected what amounted to a war of the sexes. Professional women, particularly those who wrote, were consistently portrayed as evil and intruding upon men's clear right to be the only literary creators. Feminism came to see in

modernism, the literature that prevailed during that era, a fear of women's voices that seemed to be its single most powerful motivation. Women are consistently seen in the works of this era as objects of men's desires or hatred; the women are not seen as capable of having a range of human experiences. And women who gave all their energy to writing, rather than trying to please men, were judged not to be worth looking at, either as women or as writers. Feminism, beginning in the 1960s, revealed this war of the sexes and, at the same time, in writing about it, revised the situation. Women in their writing and analyses began to portray a new range of possibilities.

The cost was high, however, for female writers dissenting from mainstream culture between World Wars I and II and even into more recent times. Such women were on the point of leaving one condition or self for another, but were not yet clear about where they belonged or what they should be doing. Heilbrun saw them as having a threshold experience, or being in a state of liminality. (The word *limen* means "threshold.") Women turned to liminality in order to find a way out of patriarchy. They needed to take stock, define a new direction, and find alternative communities to support them. The path was particularly challenging for women who wrote memoirs or biographies. When women memoirists write about being between worlds or experiences that are new, they must create a new form, as male autobiography doesn't provide them with adequate models. They discover themselves, become famous, and re-create themselves by the act of writing. Even if they don't conclude their works with the certainty of male autobiography, they do reflect a less apologetic tone than earlier female autobiography. These newer autobiographies have an admission of ambition and do not shy away from discussing the suffering the women experienced to attain their goals. Although these women had their individual goals and destinies, the desire for all of them was to move from this state of liminality, courageously chosen, to the center of human experience.

The female biographers portrayed in this study will be in a state of liminality in two arenas. They are caught between worlds both as deaf individuals and as women. Their somewhat ambivalent views of their

deafness will be discussed at length in the chapters of the book devoted to them. Their views of themselves as women are equally complex, stemming in part from their belonging to two eras, as their education occurred in large measure during the late nineteenth century while their actual professional careers extended well into the twentieth century. Pitrois, although additionally challenged psychologically by a temporary blindness that had traumatized her in childhood, had great courage and energy in pursuing her writing career. Her works were well reviewed during her era, and she was decorated by several countries, including France and Belgium. She seemed to have had little conflict about pursuing her writing. This may have been due, to some extent, to the influence of her mother, who was well established as a writer of children's books in France and offered much encouragement to her talented daughter.

Corinne Rocheleau received more opposition from her family when she entered the work world, even though the decision to do so was, at least in part, due to financial considerations. It is true, though, that she took jobs in addition to her writing, working at the Census Bureau in Washington, D.C., and, later, at her brother's factory. This was still a more unusual path for a woman at that time than the teaching and writing that the family was more able to accept when she chose it as her full-time work later in her life. The differences between the responses of the families may also be culturally based. Pitrois traveled extensively, but her home and values were French. As a Franco-American who matured in both French Canada and the United States, Rocheleau and her family had values that belonged to the two cultures, but in this area, the family seemed to fall more into the American pattern of a reluctance to opening the work world to women. With impressive fortitude, Rocheleau followed her own path, eventually gaining the acceptance that she wanted, as she was close to her extended family.

Rocheleau challenged societal biases in other ways. For the women of her generation, the public and private spheres were separate. Women who wanted a public life did not marry, and for those who married, there was a private, but not a public, life. Already a well-known author,

Rocheleau married Wilfrid Rouleau later in life and had with him, according to her own accounting, her happiest years. He was very supportive of her achievements and was particularly proud of her writing success.

For those marginalized individuals in society—whether they are women or people who happen to be deaf, disabled, or ill—much courage is needed to tell their story. Negative portrayals in literature and the media and the absence of adequate role models still perpetuate stereotypes. And those writing to challenge these stereotypes encounter ridicule. But for those writing courageously in spite of such impediments, there is the possibility of self-discovery and re-creation of the self through the act of writing.

This was the path chosen by the three deaf writers included in this volume, which explores how they tell their stories of marginality, focusing in particular on how they crossed the divide between deaf and hearing people, each in his or her unique way. Although these biographers found different ways to bridge this gap, they are all brave, ethical, and civic-minded role models for us as readers, whether hearing or deaf. They teach us that it is possible, if challenging, to cultivate our uniqueness in a creative way while still participating in the larger society and making substantial contributions to it.