© Dona Munker, 2005

Finding Our Voice

Discovering how to tell the story of an extraordinary woman and her country's tragic history in the modern era.

YOU WON'T OFTEN HEAR THIS MENTIONED IN LITERATURE COURSES, but as any writer or editor will confirm—often in the mystical tones of a wine connoisseur extolling the retronasal action of volatile compounds—for a writer telling a story, "the voice is everything."

"Voice," in writer parlance, is that mysterious combination of vocabulary, tone, and style that unlocks the author's views or emotional attitude toward the subject under consideration. On the finished page, voice goes by the technical term of "narrative persona." But to a working author still struggling toward that blissful state of finality, it's just "the voice."

Voice is crucial to a narrative because it brings the writer's own perspective to bear on the raw circumstances of a life or a plot and turns them

into a story—an artfully-constructed tale with a point of view. For a writer, a story isn't just a laundry list of facts and events. It is what journalist Vivian Gornick, in *The Situation and the Story*, her highly regarded guide to the art of personal narrative, has called "the insight, the wisdom, the thing one has come to say."

Voice is a narrative writer's uniquely individual way of saying that. Voice unifies, clarifies, connects, invigorates, entertains, and instructs. Voice shapes, sustains, moves, and creates suspense. Voice breathes life into the mere "what happened" by expressing what presses most urgently on the writer's heart. It is the open sesame, the secret weapon, the master password, and the keys to city hall, all rolled into one. It is the way into the story the writer is burning to tell.

Which is why, regardless of whether a literary work is fact or fiction, nothing interesting can happen until its writer has "the voice." What follows is an illustration of the lengths to which someone can go to find it.

*

IN THE LATE 1980S I READ A BRIEF PERSONAL NARRATIVE BY AN IRANIAN WOMAN who had made her home in California after being driven from Iran by the Islamic Revolution. I was a freelance editor in New York who had worked in trade

publishing, and mutual friends had explained that I would know if the manuscript she had prepared could be published.

I had been hearing for years about Sattareh Farman Farmaian, who had grown up in the harem of a prince descended from the dynasty overthrown by the father of the late Shah (the first of Iran's two Pahlavi shahs). After studying social work in the United States following World War II, she had returned to the Middle East and become a pioneer in her field, founding first a college for social workers in Teheran and then a nationwide network of community health and vocational centers through which she also established the international birth control movement in Iran.

High-principled, patriotic, and almost as well known for her iron will as for her outstanding professional achievements, when the Islamic Revolution began early in 1979, this fiercely dedicated woman refused to leave her homeland. Barely a month after the Shah's departure, she was arrested before the eyes of her faculty and staff and sent to Ayatollah Khomeini's headquarters to be tried on charges of "counterrevolutionary activities." Expecting to be executed by firing squad at any moment, she was finally released and ordered to return to her school. Instead, she fled Iran and eventually resettled in the United States—where, by this time in her late fifties, she managed after great difficulty to find

a job as a caseworker for the local juvenile courts.

Needless to say, I was moved by her fate—what a terrible reward for years of courage and determination to improve the lives of people in her country! But who, I wondered, *were* the Iranians? The humiliating national ordeal of the 1979 Teheran hostage crisis was still a burning national memory in American minds, but seven years after its conclusion, comparatively few Americans had ever met anyone from Iran or even had much notion of where it was.

Perhaps this account by a woman who had worked among her nation's poor and was sympathetic to the United States—that is, a "good" Iranian who hadn't worn a black robe and gone around shouting "Death to America" on the national news—would tell me and other Americans what we had done to become the target of so much hatred from a former ally. I knew that editors thinking about the bottom line were certain to be strongly resistant to the story of an Iranian social worker. Yet surely compelling personal stories like Sattareh Farman Farmaian's could tell us as Americans more about the rest of the world, how it saw us, and what it was really like. Maybe what she had to say could even help avoid some future foreign policy disaster. But quite apart from these elevated musings, and in spite of the odds against her memoir's finding a

publisher, what I had heard about Sattareh story struck a chord. Even before reading her manuscript, this was a story, I thought, that *had* something.

MY FIRST LOOK AT THE MANUSCRIPT WAS ENCOURAGING. It began with a simple but engrossing discussion of the traditional harem compound where, as a child, Sattareh had lived with five mothers, more than two dozen sisters and brothers, and a thousand servants, all ruled over by an elderly, benevolent, autocratic prince who believed in sending daughters as well as sons to school and whose last name meant "the Supreme Commander." There was a funny, touching description of Friday morning visits to his home in the company of her mother, brothers and sisters, and his other wives and children for weekly "inspections," a description that read like something out of *Anna and the King of Siam*. There were also tantalizing suggestions of emotionally pivotal moments in Sattareh's youth: her bitter disappointment as an adolescent when she was refused the higher education her father was giving her brothers and her despair as a young woman when, having made her way to America alone to attend college, she arrived on the West Coast and was inconsolable at discovering that the Statue of Liberty was not in Los Angeles. There was an inspiring account of her early years back in Iran when, having founded the Teheran School of Social Work, she

enlisted twenty idealistic young Persians to help her clean up the city's horrific orphanages, hospitals, and mental institutions. Finally, there were a few brief glimpses of certain private challenges, such as a personal audience with the Shah to solicit financial support from the man whose father had imprisoned her own father, destroyed her childhood home, and murdered her eldest half brother.

On the other hand, the manuscript also presented problems. Like many memoirs by inexperienced writers, this one was undeveloped, with little of the detail needed to bring even the most gripping personal story to life. It offered insights into social work in the Middle East and an occasional glimpse of the ongoing struggle of the Western powers for influence over the oil-rich country of Iran, but it contained almost none of the information about Iran's culture and modern history American readers would need to visualize the unfamiliar world Sattareh came from or grasp the reasons for Iranians' seemingly virulent hatred of the United States. A particular was that the competent but prosaic and self-consciously decorous style conveyed none of the authors feelings about many of the important events she described. Reserve is often a desirable quality in a memoir, but even the harrowing episode of her arrest and trial was presented without explanation or emotion—it might almost have happened to someone

else, and the manuscript's overall tone would not have been out of place at a diplomatic reception. Naturally, a person with an upper-class upbringing and years of training in social research would be unaccustomed to running on about her personal feelings and opinions was understandable, and sensationalism was the last thing Sattareh's story needed. But the fact remained that the most vital ingredient in any personal memoir—"the wisdom, the insight, the thing one had come to say"—was missing here.

In short, this manuscript lacked an emotional point of view. And harems or no harems, no editor I could think of was going to take a chance on a diplomatic, emotionally neutral account of the life of an Iranian social worker.

Even so, as soon as I finished it I went back to the beginning and read it again. I was as excited as if I had been handed an epic to read. The story of Sattareh's lifelong struggle to help her people was part and parcel of the story of modern Iran; moreover, it ended as epics so often do—in disillusion and betrayal. Reading even a sketchy version of this larger story was like getting a glimpse of a lost kingdom. While that story had not emerged yet, it seemed crying out to be told.

Almost reflexively, I began asking myself the kinds of questions an editor always asks: what information is missing? What is already there that needs

further explanation or elaboration? What do American readers need to be able to visualize Iran's history and culture and identify more closely with the author? Most important, what is the author's emotional attitude—what does she feel, what does she deeply believe—toward all that she has seen and experienced? What has she come to say, and how does *she* think the kingdom was lost? The subject was one I knew nothing about, but I considered that an advantage: I knew what questions Americans needed answered because they were my own.

If, I thought, I investigated the story of how Sattareh had become one of the Middle East's leading professional women, we could submit the book to publishers as what is called an as-told-to memoir—an account culled by a writer from interviews with the book's subject and primary author—and maybe someone would take a chance on a powerful story about a strong, admirable Middle Eastern woman and her baffling, important country. Then I could create a portrait of this interesting woman and at the same time tell, through her own eyes, the story of how America had "lost" Iran. I would make it an ironclad rule to invent nothing (how could either Sattareh or our readers have confidence that her account was authentic or accurate if I made things up?). If I did that and worked hard to keep my own Western prejudices and preconceptions out of the book, I could write a memoir for her that would do justice to the interlocking

stories of Sattareh Farman Farmaian and the lost kingdom of Pahlavi Iran.

NOT LONG AFTER THIS, I CALLED SATTAREH ON THE PHONE, nervously introduced myself, explained the obstacles to publishing the manuscript she had sent me, and asked if she would consider letting me write a somewhat different book—one that would still be her memoir but would also go into far more detail about both her life and Iran in the modern world. By taking the narrative from interviews with her, using her own words as much as possible, and showing everything to her for correction or approval as we went along, I could write her story as if I were her. I would have to be in charge of the writing, but she would have full veto power over the content, and in addition, to help her feel that what we produced was her book, I would not ask to share in the copyright. If she wanted to pursue the idea, I could come to California and we could discuss the details and do some interviewing. After that, I would return to New York and begin work on a first chapter and an outline to show publishers.

Soon afterward, we spoke again. In a careful, deliberate manner showing that she had thought the matter through, Sattareh said that she was willing to try my idea. Our friends had vouched for me and she felt that she could trust me. She was a professional, she added proudly, and I was a professional, too.

*

GRATEFUL AND ELATED, I BEGAN ORGANIZING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND GOING TO THE LIBRARY, where I looked up everything I could find about Iran's twentieth-century development, its traditional culture, and Middle Eastern women in general. I was shocked at how little existed on any of these subjects in English, but excited as I realized that our book would not only be among the first to bring Iran's modern history to English-speaking readers but the first biography in English of a modern Middle Eastern woman.

By the time I arrived at my California destination a few weeks later, I had managed to read enough not to be completely uninformed. However, as I stood on the balcony of Sattareh Farman Farmaian's modest second-story apartment—a balcony lined with luxuriant, carefully-tended plants—and rang the bell, I was still nervous. Sattareh met me at the door, a fit, handsome, gray-haired woman in a jogging suit. She had a straight back, a slight, permanent frown, and a manner that seemed gracious and unpretentious but at the same time guarded and a little aloof. Her English was strongly accented but fluent and colloquial, and her voice was dark, low-pitched, and intriguing. (It was, I later realized, the voice of an aristocrat accustomed to having her orders

carried out.) She offered to make tea; when she brought it, to break the ice I asked her about several fine Persian carpets I saw on the floor of her neat, extremely clean apartment. Sattareh explained that they had been given to her as gifts when she returned to America after the Revolution. She had left Iran with nothing but a suitcase, but she had had friends here. In addition, a number of family members, including her daughter, now lived in the United States.

I asked her about her life here, and she told me that her work for the juvenile courts was stressful. To relax, she went for long hikes in the mountains on weekends, often alone and regardless of the weather, to be out in nature. She loved nature and the outdoors, and as a child had always escaped from her troubles into movement and action. When she was growing up, words had not been safe; she and all her brothers and sisters lived in constant fear of Pahlavi spies who might have had her father dragged off to prison and executed on orders from the last shah's father, who had also killed her oldest half brother, her father's favorite son.

Wishing, not for the first time, that I were less ignorant of everything about Iran, I asked if I could interview others in her family who lived in the United States. Only her daughter, Sattareh replied. She did not want to tell anyone else that she was writing a book until we were done.

Taken aback, I waited for an explanation, but none came. Mystified, I explained that while I wanted her to feel that the book was truly hers, I needed to gather as much material as I could about her life, her experiences, and Iranian culture. Writers normally talked to a subject's families and friends as a matter of course, and since there was almost nothing available in English that could give me information about life in her country--and since it was still considered unsafe for Americans to visit her homeland--I stood a far better chance of learning all I needed to learn about Iran and Persian culture, as well as getting to know her better, if I could talk to people who knew her well.

Sattareh was polite but adamant. She would be happy, she explained, to provide me with what I needed—articles on oil politics, Islamic fundamentalism, and so on. But until the book was finished, I could not talk to anyone else; she would supply any additional information I required. Crestfallen, I saw that her decision was not subject to protest. I suddenly realized, with equal parts of amusement and chagrin, that there was a reason why Sattareh Farman Farmaian had been able to persuade thousands of fervently traditional Persians to start using birth control.

WE HAD AGREED TO BEGIN WITH THE SUBJECT OF SATTAREH'S COMPOUND CHILDHOOD. Inviting

me to sit beside her, she produced several detailed pencil drawings of the compound. Her father's compound had been no mere collection of houses but a virtually self-contained medieval town, over which he had ruled as an omnipotent, quasi-divine presence. In Sattareh's manuscript, most of her references to this lofty figure were in a tone of veneration mingled with a lasting, poignant sadness.

In the deliberate manner I had noticed before but with evident pleasure and nostalgia, she pointed out the compound's main features: her father's mansion, where their Friday inspections had taken place; the walled subcompounds and smaller homes of her mother and stepmothers and their families; a large park in the center where she had played with her brothers. Normally, this park, which was in public view, was *birun*—the men's quarter, not open to women. However, since there had been no other girls her age in the compound, Sattareh's father—whose advanced ideas included a belief in exercise for girls as well as boys—had ordered her to play out of doors in the company of her brothers, half brothers, and the servants' sons under the not very watchful supervision of her mother's male gatekeeper.

Sattareh had explained in her manuscript that allowing a respectable daughter of the Persian aristocracy, even a very young one, to run wild in the

men's quarter was a freedom that had scandalized her deeply religious mother, and at this point I interrupted eagerly to observe that later in life such freedom must have had far-reaching implications for her. Did she, I asked, think that being the only girl in a group of boys by order of her all-powerful father had helped her feel that she could carry out her goals in life in spite of the fact that she was a woman?

No, replied my hostess, with a courteous patience much like that of a teacher repeating herself to a student who hasn't been paying attention. She had just been all alone in her mother's house, and her father thought that girls should have exercise, and she could climb trees and run faster than any of the boys, so she knew that if she had a good education she could do as well in life as they could. She was sure that she had explained all this in her manuscript.

*

I RETURNED TO NEW YORK WITH SEVEN HOURS OF TAPED INTERVIEWS ON A RANGE OF TOPICS and more than enough raw material for a first draft of an opening chapter. However, I did not know if I was going to find the emotional point of view we needed, and therefore I did not know if I was going to find "the voice": the way in, the thing that would allow me to tell her story.

Despite the decorousness of her writing and the occasional imperiousness of her manner, Sattareh's real-life voice was far from neutral or unemotional. Her feelings ran deep and strong, and while her English occasionally showed some fractures, she discussed her work among the poor with a simple eloquence that I found both inspiring and wise. She answered my numerous questions helpfully and with a conscientious thoroughness, and in talking of her own past (her childhood especially, but other parts of her life as well), she was animated and even earthy, qualities that I found likable and enjoyable. She also spoke of the people she cared about—her daughter, her grandchildren, a beloved older brother and sister who were unable to leave Iran, the students who had followed her into the slums and remained close to her over the years—frankly, spontaneously, and with open joy, affection, or sadness. Amazingly, despite all she had been through she still had energy, passion, and a sense of humor.

Nevertheless, I wondered what I would hear when I played back the tapes—or rather, what I would *not* hear. Having known authors of both collaborative and "ghosted" memoirs, I was well aware that most subjects of an as-told-to were normally eager to see their own lives on paper. They nearly always talked volubly about their feelings and opinions, usually wanted to tell the writer what to include and what to leave out, and sometimes even dictated

exactly how the book should be written. Sattareh, by contrast, was a model of self-restraint—in spite of the strong undercurrents of feeling I sensed in her, it was actually hard to get her to talk about herself. She rarely volunteered an observation unless the subject was her childhood, her education, or her work, and her answers to my questions tended to be very specific and narrowly focused. She was by no means unwilling to state her opinions on political events or historical developments, but I had to ask.

I guessed that this reticence was not only because her native tongue was not English or because she was modest (although I had found her to be that), or because she considered herself unqualified to pronounce on historical events about which she felt she had no professional expertise. In fact, from my point of view she had exactly the level of expertise we needed: she had not been a political scientist or palace courtier but a kind of privileged observer, a member of Persian high society who had enjoyed access both to the queen and to ministers at the highest levels of government and who simultaneously possessed, thanks to her school and her community centers, a greater than usual awareness of the currents of feeling among the poor, Iranian students, and Persian intellectuals. To judge from all she had told me so far, Sattareh had been no more a political insider than any other concerned, well-informed citizen,

but that was the vantage point Western readers were most likely to identify with.

In the end, however, when all was said and done, social problem solving had been her life's work, not political commentary—practical to the bone, she cared first, last, and always about getting things done, not expressing her own views. Drawing attention to herself by broadcasting her opinions would have cost her school much-needed government support and meant the end of a reputation for nonpartisanship that was extraordinary in Iran, and to preserve it she had carefully steered clear of politics. Besides, as she herself had told me, as a child she had learned not to express herself through words, while twenty years of dealing with the Shah's government had shown her that words were for politicians—they produced only more words that led nowhere and meant nothing. She did not appear to find my relentless probing for information intrusive, but my enthusiastic plans for expanding on something she had said in an interview or in her original narrative elicited only a polite, noncommittal murmur, and she sometimes seemed puzzled as to why it was necessary, as she put it, to include "all these details."

I hoped that the chapter I was about to begin would demonstrate why including many details was important. On the other hand, I could not supply

opinions I was not sure she had held, just as I could not supply her with emotions I did not know she had felt. Even I could have, inventing "details" of that kind was as out of the question as inventing facts—this was a work of nonfiction, not a novel, and not only she but the reader had a right to trust that it was what it purported to be, not the product of someone else's literary imagination. Although I would have to introduce background information that did not come from our interviews when linking events and circumstances in her own life to the larger political picture, I would do so only if Sattareh herself confirmed that the information conformed to what she had observed or believed at the time. I was mortally certain that the truth of her own lived experience would be infinitely more compelling (not to say more convincing) than anything a writer could invent. However, it was clear that because of her unusual reserve, the strong authorial viewpoint the book required was not simply going to emerge from our conversations of its own accord, like Venus from the waves. To find a voice to portray the emotional complexity of the strong, dynamic woman on the interview tapes, I would have to look for one.

I decided that the first step was constructing a full explanatory context for everything Sattareh had told me that seemed important to her. Like an actor mining a text for clues to a character's "motivation," I had to come as

close as possible to understanding the emotional details of her past and how she perceived her own history. Entering completely into someone else's emotional experience—that is, telling Sattareh's story as though I *were* Sattareh—would require drawing on my own. To avoid compromising the story's authenticity, I wanted to make sure that I was imagining her past as accurately as I could.

The first step in that process was furnishing myself with a verbatim transcription of the interviews. Typing a perfect transcript from even seven hours of interviewing is a tedious, time-consuming task, but the intense concentration it demands forces the transcriber to notice emphases, inflexions, and what psychologists call "feeling tones" that often go unremarked during an interview. I made notes on these passages as I went along, enclosing my own observations, responses, and questions in brackets in order to distinguish what soon became a running commentary from Sattareh's replies.

When the transcript was finished, I made a copy from which I eliminated my interview questions. Then, one by one, I rearranged Sattareh's answers and my bracketed observations in chronological order. From time to time I called her to make sure I understood the meaning or implication of something she had told me or to verify that an episode had taken place at the time I assumed.

MEANWHILE, I WAS DEVOURING NOT ONLY THE ACADEMIC ARTICLES SATTAREH FURNISHED ME WITH, but works by American and Persian historians and journalists about the Iranian Revolution, the 1979 hostage crisis, and Shi'a Islam. I also read older nineteenth- and twentieth century historical accounts, travelers' tales and Western memoirs, novels in English, portions of the Koran, and the poetry of Sa'adi and Hafez (Sattareh's favorites), as well as works by anthropologists, archaeologists, and former diplomats who had served in Iran. I consulted illustrated volumes on the Persian arts, cookbooks, maps, and tourist pamphlets from the years when she had lived in Teheran. I went to concerts and bought musical recordings and used rosewater and other traditional Persian flavorings in cooking. I even (though only once, and feeling a bit as though I were back in my college acting classes) tried to drink tea in the style Sattareh explained had been customary when she was a girl: from a tiny glass with a sugar cube clenched between the teeth.

When I was satisfied that the order of statements in the second transcript was as close as I could get it to the order of events in real time, I began inserting my research notes, once more setting them off in brackets and tagging each with its source. I paid special attention to anything that would

yield concrete information about her childhood in Teheran in the 1920s and '30s—traditional Persian religious rituals, the layout of gardens and water canals, the British-sponsored coup that had toppled the dynasty of her father a few months after she was born in 1921, installing the first Pahlavi shah in power. Whenever I found something that seemed illuminating, I made a note to ask Sattareh if it reflected what she herself remembered. Simultaneously, I was scanning the passages I had transcribed for clues to the kind of child she had been, what had been important to her, and her most powerful feelings about the world around her and the people it contained.

AFTER ROUGHLY TWO MONTHS, I DECIDED THAT I WAS FINALLY EQUIPPED TO BEGIN WRITING. I hoped to structure the chapter by expanding the opening paragraphs of Sattareh's own manuscript, which outlined the circumstances surrounding her birth and the consequences for her family of her father's arrest and imprisonment by the new regime. This was the subject that, both in her own narrative and in our interviews, had elicited the strongest feeling tones: the veneration and wistful longing of "Satti"—Sattareh's childhood nickname—for the powerful, benevolent, but aloof and aged prince who had dominated the lives in the compound. Everything she had written and said made it clear that

she had regarded her father—who was known to his wives and children simply as "Shazdeh, or the Prince—as the supreme inspiration of her life. *Shazdeh's Daughter* was the title Sattareh had given her manuscript (it was also one I hoped we could use for the book).

Surely, I thought, the simple, obvious fact of her love for that distant patriarch was the key I needed to the book's voice. This was what had all her life pressed most insistently at her heart. The school she had founded to help the poor had been a self-contained community not unlike the compound, with Sattareh herself at the head of a small army of idealistic young reformers. Indeed, in some respects she had run her school with the same authority that Shazdeh had run the compound—modeling herself on him in order that he might continue to live on in his remarkable daughter. And *that*, I suddenly realized, was the simple thing I had been trying to understand all along. That was "the insight, the wisdom, the thing she had come to say."

Unlike transcribing, writing is a messy, intuitive process, and despite knowing what I wanted to accomplish and my careful preparations, I was uneasy about beginning. Finally, aware that I had done my homework and that doing more research was not going to add anything to what I now understood, I decided simply to sit down with a pencil and a pad of paper and trust that if I

had guessed right, the words would come. Gradually, out of the welter of information, interview statements, and notes I had accumulated, some scattered phrases coalesced into statements. The first was, "When memory haunts me, above all it is him that I remember," and the second was, "In the world in which I moved and lived, he ruled supreme." It was as if someone had breathed on the back of my neck. Half afraid that "Satti" would vanish if I neglected her voice, I wrote these words down as fast as I could.

SEVERAL MONTHS LATER, we submitted an opening chapter and an outline of the book to a number of editors. Only one, Lisa Healy of Crown Publishers, shared my enthusiasm for a memoir of Iran, but one was all we needed.

I believed that I had found the narrator our book required. True, she was a literary version of my co-author's actual voice, but I hoped that the real-life one—who, apparently out of politeness, refrained from offering any opinion on what I was doing other than to say, when asked, that "it seemed fine"—would consider her literary avatar an acceptable representation of herself. Satti was an appealing narrator who exhibited many of the qualities I found in Sattareh and was certain Sattareh had possessed when young. She could be imperious, but she was also direct, down to earth, and practical. She had humor and

tremendous energy, as well as her original's deep affection for people she held dear. She also had Sattareh's passionate commitment to the poor, and as a narrator she was able to move easily from describing personal situations and her feelings about them to giving vital information or an opinion about a political or historical development. Those opinions were not those of an expert or political insider, but they were honest, straightforward, and well informed.

Daughter of Persia: A Woman's Journey from Her Father's Harem Through the Islamic Revolution—our publisher insisted that no American could remember a word like *shazdeh*—took nearly five years to see the light of day: four years of interviewing, writing, rewriting, a transcript that eventually grew to around a thousand single-spaced pages, and the vetting of an eight hundred page first draft by one Iranian and two American scholars. Sattareh herself sat patiently and with much grace through a hundred and fifty hours of interviewing, went over everything as soon as I sent it, made suggestions and corrections, added information or clarifications she thought we needed, and answered countless tiresome questions. She never tried to dictate what I should include or leave out of the book or how to write it, and I was pleased when, as the book was going into production, she called me after reading it from beginning to end and exclaimed with delight that "We had written the

whole story of Iran for young Iranians in this country to read!"

*

Daughter of Persia WAS WARMLY RECEIVED BY REVIEWERS AND SUBSEQUENTLY PUBLISHED IN FIVE FOREIGN LANGUAGES—including, ironically, in a pirated Farsi version put out by an Iranian publisher. To date it has been read by well over a quarter of a million people around the world. Occasionally I wonder how best to refer to it: should it be classified as a memoir, as historical journalism, a nonfiction novel, or simply as "biographical nonfiction"? Whatever it might be called, its story has not only helped inspire others who have tried to carry on her work but has helped to build bridges that remain desperately in need of building.

Author's note:

A different version of this article appeared under the title, "Enchantment and the Biographical Passion," American Imago *54:4 (1997), 377-397 (© The Johns Hopkins University Press), portions of which have been adapted here with the permission of The Johns Hopkins University Press.*