A LIFE OF LEARNING

Natalie Zemon Davis

Charles Homer Haskins
Lecture for 1997

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Introduction

Charles Homer Haskins (1870-1937), for whom the ACLS lecture series is named, was the first Chairman of the American Council of Learned Societies, 1920-26. He began his teaching career at the Johns Hopkins University, where he received the B.A. degree in 1887, and the Ph.D. in 1890. He later taught at the University of Wisconsin and at Harvard, where he was Henry Charles Lea Professor of Medieval History at the time of his retirement in 1931, and Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences from 1908 to 1924. He served as president of the American Historical Association, 1922, and was a founder and the second president of the Medieval Academy of America, 1926.

A great American teacher, Charles Homer Haskins also did much to establish the reputation of American scholarship abroad. His distinction was recognized in honorary degrees from Strasbourg, Padua, Manchester, Paris, Louvain, Caen, Harvard, Wisconsin, and Allegheny College, where in 1883 he had begun his higher education at the age of thirteen.

In 1983, to recognize Haskins' signal contributions to the world of learning in the United States, the ACLS inaugurated a series of lectures entitled "The Life of Learning" in his honor. Designed to pay tribute to a

life of scholarly achievement, the Haskins Lecture is delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Council by an eminent humanist. The lecturer is asked to reflect and to reminisce upon a lifetime of work as a scholar, on the motives, the chance determinations, the satisfactions and the dissatisfactions of the life of learning.

The Haskins lecturer in 1997 was Natalie Zemon Davis, Henry Charles Lea Professor of History Emeritus at Princeton University and, for 1996-1997, Northrop Frye Visiting Professor of Literary Theory at the University of Toronto. Born in Detroit, Michigan, she was educated at Smith College, Radcliffe College, and the University of Michigan, from which she received her Ph.D. in 1959. In positions at Brown University, the University of Toronto, the University of California at Berkeley, the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, the Whitney Humanities Center, Yale University, Balliol College Oxford, as well as at Princeton and the University of Toronto, Professor Davis has taught courses in the history of early modern France, and has also pioneered in interdisciplinary courses in history and anthropology, history and film, and history and literature; the study of women and gender; and the history of the Jews in early modern Europe and in Jewish studies. Her publications include *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (1975); *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983), the basis for the feature film; *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (1987); and *Women on the Margins. Three Seventeenth Century Lives* (1995).

Natalie Davis has been awarded honorary degrees from the Université de Lyon II and from several American institutions, and has been elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy. She has been president of the Society for French Historical Studies and during 1987 was president of the American Historical Association. She is currently first vice-president of the International Congress of Historical Sciences. She now resides in Toronto, Canada, where she is associated with the University of Toronto.Her husband is a professor of mathematics. She has three children and three grandchildren.

The particulars of jobs held, prizes won, and work published cannot

possibly convey the dramatic impact Natalie Davis has had on the profession of history in the United States, and in so many other places around the world. Professor Davis has written important books, but she is preeminently an essayist. She has developed the essay into an art form, developing her ideas historically and aesthetically in very small packages that have immediate attraction and impact. This talent has also made her perhaps the outstanding historical lecturer of the era.

For anyone who has had the pleasure of being Natalie's colleague, however, even her shining historical intuition pales beside her moral courage and conviction. She has written, and writes, about subjects that concern her deeply. She is one of the most emotionally intense historians in the profession, and recently she has reached out to film to enable herself to express even more richly the texture of her insights and feelings. She has been engaged, politically and morally, throughout her career, without ever compromising her scholarly standards.

Those who joined us in Philadelphia at the Benjamin Franklin Hall of the American Philosophical Society on that beautiful May evening will well remember the impact of her highly charged performance. It is our great pleasure to bring the 1997 Haskins Lecture by Natalie Zemon Davis to a wider audience.

A life of learning?" "But I've only begun," I protested to myself when I received Stanley Katz's kind invitation to deliver this year's Charles Homer Haskins lecture. Why such a reaction? I wondered after I had accepted. I have no shyness about my 68 years; I use them whenever it is to my advantage. I am not falsely modest about the knowledge I have acquired over the decades: I can tell the difference between the girl who sat cross-legged, reading *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* in her Smith College carrel, and the mature scholar who, absorbed in an archival register, gets stiff after only an hour of immobility. I am confident about the tools of my trade, and yet there are vast landscapes where I have to work like a neophyte to find my way. Recounting my tale this evening may help me discover where such a scholarly style comes from.

The historical past was not discussed around my dinner table when I was a girl in Detroit in the 1930s. The bookshelves were filled with the stories, novels and especially the plays beloved of my father and the popular ethical works that my mother found uplifting. That learned Talmudists had been ancestors to my mother in Russia I heard only years later from an elderly cousin in Tel Aviv. Born in the United States—my mother in Burlington, Vermont, my father in Detroit—my parents had the characteristic time frame of the children of immigrants of that period: loyalty to the present and the future. What was important was being an eminently successful American, while holding staunchly to one's Jewish identity: for instance, getting on the University of Michigan tennis team (as did my father), and then having to fight for your "M" because the tennis coach had never given a letter to a Jew before.

The past was a secret too unpleasant for children to know. My brother and I might get hints of it from the whispered word "pogrom" at grandfather's house, from post cards that sometimes came in with unrecognizable lettering and faraway stamps, and from the Yiddish my mother spoke to her older sister when she didn't want us to understand. Later when I visited Russia and Poland, I found out that the childhood foods that I had thought were distinctly Jewish—rye bread, sour cream and cottage cheese— were just standard Eastern European fare. Later I even discovered that my family had a nineteenth-century American past. They were settlers in out-of-the-way places: Lake Champlain peddlers on my mother's side, founding the first synagogue in Burlington in the 1880s; and with my paternal great-grandfather running a general store in Elk Rapids, Michigan in the 1870s-1880s, buying land from the Ojibwa Indians, and, when he wanted to be part of a Jewish *minyan* on the Sabbath, riding the twenty miles to Traverse City before sundown.

My father, Julian Zemon, was a businessman, selling textiles wholesale to the automobile manufacturers around Detroit. My mother, Helen Lamport, stopped working at the family office, and devoted herself to her children, her family's interests, her garden, her golf, Hadassah. My parents bought a house distant from the Jewish quarter and we lived a few *landsleit* scattered among the gentiles. Sometimes it was easy to

put my two worlds together, as when I rooted for the Detroit Tigers: Mickey Cochrane, captain of the team, lived around the corner while the Tigers' homerun hero was Hank Greenberg. Sometimes the worlds strained in opposition, as at Christmas time, when the Zemon house was one of the few without lights along the street. I shook my head at the stubborn wrong-headedness of our neighbors, and hoped that the true Messiah would come in my day to enlighten them.

It was a middle-class life that we lived, the Depression hardly leaving a trace on these comfortable houses into which people of color entered only to clean, iron, or serve at the table. But politics erupted there nonetheless. On the radio, when in between listening to Jack Benny and Fred Allen, we heard news of the bombing in Spain and the sounds of Hitler's German tirades. In the grade-school yard, where the first German refugees appeared, two Jewish boys in the exotic garb of lederhosen, who spat when children were mean to them. On the sidewalks, where a classmate came up when I was walking with my girlfriends and pointed his finger at me: "*You* are a Jew," he said. "So what?" I answered. My first memories of the Europe that would one day be my historian's home were full of terror.

My parents decided to send me to a private girls' high-school in the suburbs of Detroit—Kingswood School Cranbrook—my brother Stanley following to the boys' school a few years afterward. Kingswood was an exclusive school in those days, with girls from wealthy Detroit families and a quota of about two Jews per class (it was somewhat higher at the boys' school). Now my two worlds had little overlap. On the one hand, I plunged into life at the school, making good friends, trying to do my best at hockey and on the tennis court, and becoming, to my delight, president of the student council. On the other hand, we high-school girls were beginning to date and it was unthinkable on either side that a Jewish girl could go out with a non-Jewish boy. My social life was with Jewish young people from the public schools in Detroit. At the weekly Christian chapel at Kingswood, I crossed my fingers during prayers and hymns lest my Old Testament God be angry at me.

I loved my studies at Kingswood: the Latin and French, the Shakespeare plays, the algebra, and especially the surprises of history,

from the ancient civilizations to modern Europe to the history of America. I liked to underline, to outline, to memorize facts and time charts—all the things that are supposed to turn high-school students off and make them hate history. Even better was to learn about Athenian democracy, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the AmericanRevolution! I had never realized the extent of human aspiration in the past, the hope to make things better, an important counter-weight to the war raging across the Atlantic. As for Jewish history, a Detroit boyfriend urged me to read a biography of the Zionist founder Theodore Herzl, which helped me understand why my maternal grandmother had left America for Palestine. But the ancestral home I felt closest to was Europe.

My high school years were also a time of ethical and political growth, strands of development that wind in and out of my life of learning. I had come to Kingswood with a strong sense of community service—mostly acquired in years of summer camp—of volunteering with alacrity, of being a good sport. How to put this together with my intense desire to excel, to get the best grades, which made me ever the competitor of, rather than the cooperator with my cohort? I read Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Compensation" at the suggestion of my Religion teacher, and found an approach that undermined strict rankings. "The farmer imagines power and place are fine things, but the President has paid dear for his White House." There are many ways to contribute to society, each to be respected; the important thing is to excel wherever you are placed.

The rankings for which I had no tolerance were those constantly made by the Detroit bourgeoisie, which for me was the Jewish bourgeoisie I met at parties and at the country club. From my isolated perch, I inveighed against their materialism, constant ranking of clothes, automobiles (I refused to learn to drive), and money. I condemned heavy pancake makeup and nose operations with as much vigor as a Renaissance treatise against the hypocrisy and masking at a princely court.

There were options, however. I began to get to know some of the really smart students at Central High, virtually an all-Jewish school, and some of the young people clustered around a Jewish leftist teacher at

Wayne University. And in my own house, my father usually voted Democratic and subscribed to *PM*, where I devoured the liberal views of Max Lerner and I. F. Stone. In the fall of my senior year, there was a mock election in my class at Kingswood, and my best friend and I were the two Democrats against 41 Republicans. At the last moment I deserted her and voted for the Socialist Norman Thomas. That spring and summer, all of us were out in the streets of Detroit to mark the end of the war in Europe and then in the Pacific and to wonder at the mushroom cloud that had suddenly entered our lives.

Smith College was an exhilarating place in the years right after World War II. Young women came there from all over the United States and beyond, and a significant number of them were on scholarships. Jews were a minority—maybe ten percent of the freshmen—but still more numerous than at Kingswood, and for the first time there were a few young women of color in my circle. We were activists, the class of 1949, concerned about the rebuilding of Europe, supporting the new United Nations, and creating a lasting peace in the face of the atomic bomb. Even after events began to split us along political lines—the beginnings of the Cold War, the establishment of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia, HUAC and the Hollywood Ten—hope for the future was not extinguished and friendships remained strong. The mood was in contrast with the silences that fell only a year after we graduated, with the start of the Korean War and the intensification of the Red Hunt.

My psychological and intellectual economy was carried over from my high-school days, but now with some structural differences. I still wanted to be part of the center of the community and also to be its critic, but now the source of the critical spirit came from seeing myself as part of an intellectual elite and from a more fully developed political-ethical vision. Sometimes when I wrote songs for the annual Rally Day shows (a Smith College carnival), I could do both things at the same time. I still felt as if I belonged to two worlds, but now it was not so much being Jewish that created the tension between them, but being part of the political left.

Marxist socialism was a revelation when I heard about it in my

freshman year from Judy Mogil, herself fresh from Music and Art High School and all the sophistication of New York City. Here was a solution to the ferocious competition that set one individual against the other, one nation against the other; here was a way to obliterate crass materialism and allow people to enjoy the work they did. I imagined a future where changed structures truly transformed human behavior; "from each according to his ability to each according to his need" (today we'd say his or her) seemed a better slogan than Emerson's Compensation. So along with serving on the college Judicial Board, I joined organizations like the American Youth for Democracy, the Marxist discussion group, and the Young Progressives, not exactly mass movements at Smith. "You're just the kind of person they'd put away," one of my professors said to me, holding up the Stalinist camps as a rebuke to my activities. He was right, of course, I would have been a prisoner if I'd lived in the Soviet Union, but Russia was then a distant and for me unimportant example. America was near, and within the frame of my Utopian idealism, I worked with my comrades on the concrete issues of racism, union rights, and free speech.

The free realm for me, however—the privileged realm—was my studies. English, Russian and French literature: I lived in the *maison française* and we talked excitedly of André Gide and Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. And especially there was history with my teacher Leona Gabel, a Bryn Mawr PhD of years before, who was editing the *Commentaries* of Pope Pius II and teaching what were then vanguard courses, informed by the scholarship of European emigrés. With the utmost decorum, sometimes even lecturing in a hat, Leona Gabel told us of the wondrous aspirations of Renaissance philosophy, of Pico della Mirandola's observation (which I believed and still believe) that "man" could fall to the level of the beasts, but also rise to the level of the angels; of Machiavelli's hard-boiled politics; and of Luther's courageous call to another path. In seminar, she led us quietly through a comparison of the turbulent English, French, and Russian Revolutions and their dénouement in dictatorship. Now I began to read primary sources, following the French Revolution day by day through *Le Moniteur*, which seemed to me even more fascinating than Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Satisfying both political loyalties and scholarly appetite, I chose the most radical possible philosopher for my senior honors thesis: the rational Aristotelian Pietro

Pomponazzi, who denied the immortality of the soul and who (interestingly enough for a double-minded person like myself) deflected persecution by a two-truth theory. Marx's thought also offered some big ways to organize the past, a vision quite missing from our courses, and even led me to Giambattista Vico's *New Science*, with its proto-anthropological view of culture. Before I graduated, I also read Marc Bloch's *Strange Defeat* and learned that an historian can be a hero.

Given my interest for the last twenty-five years in the history of women, I ask myself whether I felt any deprivation in my undergraduate days because my Smith College courses virtually never talked about women. I don't recall that I did, and thinking about our attitudes and situation in those years, I understand why. In my circle in the post-war 1940s, we felt we had the same political and intellectual interests as men, and any group of smart men and women with the same political values would see the world in the same way. If I had read Mary Beard's *Women as Force in History* when it came out in 1946, I would have appreciated how she drew on Jacob Burckhardt and others to show women as historical and civilizing actors, but I would have been troubled by her separating them from men, by what I would have seen as historical fragmentation.

And yet, Leona Gabel and the Smith setting were providing us women with some of the sense of difference and support that we needed if we were to survive later as intellectuals and professional women. Whatever the discourse was about Renaissance "man," it came from the lips of a woman, was heard by women's ears, and discussed in a classroom of women. Women could evidently decide what was true. And I suspect we took, and at some level were intended by Miss Gabel to take, the symbols of "man's" potentiality and applied them to ourselves. Somehow we saw our female bodies inscribed inside Leonardo da Vinci's famous circle (immodest though that pose was for a woman) and sensed ourselves as free agents.

In the summer of 1948, at the end of my junior year, my agency was put to the test when I met Chandler Davis. I had gone to Harvard Summer School to study the philosophy of science, and I came across Chan at a meeting of Students for Wallace (the Progressive Party

candidate for President). He had been in the Navy V-12 during the war and was now in his second year of graduate work in mathematics at Harvard. He was handsome, smart, on the left, and liked intelligent women. Besides math and science, he was interested in music, poetry, and science fiction, so we had much to talk about. He was also the first radical male student I had met who enjoyed what I considered "normal" activities like tennis and ping-pong. But he was not Jewish: his ancestors were old Massachusetts Unitarians and Pennsylvania Quakers. And he was not rich: his parents were professors and teachers. After three weeks Chandler proposed to me; after six weeks we got married at the Boston City Hall. I was 19; Chan had just turned 22.

Needless to say, this was a scandal. Chandler's family welcomed a Jewish daughter-in-law into their fold; their household was always crowded anyway with Jewish refugees and Jewish leftists. My parents, and especially my mother, were horrified that I should marry a non-Jew. We remained in good touch with my brother, now a student himself at Harvard, and finally with my father, but it was many years before my mother accepted my marriage or even my role as a scholar.

Now such events must be told for a *woman's* life of learning. On the one hand, I embarked on my graduate work without a female cheering section. Even Miss Gabel feared my marriage tolled the knell of my history career, though she never said it right out. Her generation had taken a different path; how could I ever be a scholar if I were traipsing after my husband amid the clutter of children? On the other hand, I had a husband early along, who truly believed in women's careers; and who was genuinely committed to sharing household tasks and parenting. We began a lifelong conversation about politics, history, science, and literature. And now it seemed to me my vocational path was set. I had planned to get a doctorate in history, but was thinking of putting it to work in documentary films. Since Chan was going on to university teaching, I thought, "OK, I'll become a professor instead."

My graduate training first at Harvard and then at the University of Michigan marked a shift in my historical focus from the history of ideas to social history. My first scholarly subscription was to the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, but now when I wrote a seminar paper for

Myron Gilmore on the French scholar Guillaume Budé, I linked his ideas on philology, politics and education to the social position of the humanist and to his arguments for patronage for scholars like himself. Then suddenly I discovered that scholars, princes, and preachers were not the only subject of history. I had been reading Marc Bloch's *Feudal Society*, and was all ready when W. K. Jordan urged me take Ket's Rebellion in sixteenth-century Norfolk as a topic of research. And there were the "people" and "class struggle" in the mountains of books Chan helped me carry home from Widener Library. Not archives yet, but excerpts from archives, family records, and gild registers, which showed artisans and peasant families engaged in religious and political action to try to change their lives.

I was hooked. The next year in Ann Arbor, I wrote a paper on Christine de Pizan as the first European professional literary woman (a project suggested, to his credit, by my seminar teacher Palmer Throop), but her courtly life raised her far above the classes I wanted to concentrate on. In the writings of Henri Hauser from the 1890s, I came upon the turbulent *menu peuple* of Lyon in the sixteenth century, their grain riots, the strikes of the printing workers, and the Protestant uprising of 1562, intended to turn the city at the confluence of the Rhône and Saône into a "new Jerusalem." Here was my thesis topic. Lyon had everything I needed. Here I could test the ideas of Marx on religion as a super-structure reflecting material interest and of Max Weber on Protestantism as encouraging the capitalist spirit. And the sixteenth century was appealing to me more generally as what I then saw to be the birthplace of our modern ills and adventures: ferocious competition and capitalistic greed, but also hopes for change and the seeds of democracy.

I left in the spring of 1952 for six months of research in Lyon. France in that first look was a fairyland whose beauty I could never have imagined as I groped for words at the *maison française* a few years earlier. The rich fields, so carefully delineated, the borders of poplars along the horizon, ancient-roofed houses clustered in village patterns, flowers everywhere—in front of houses, on walls, in windows, in fireplaces. The food, prepared with such attention and grace, delicious at the smallest country inn—even, so it seemed to us, good at the student restaurants where we hung out. The politics, so different from

the suspicion and pressures in McCarthyite Cold War America. I rushed around Lyon upon arrival to find a monument to Marc Bloch, discovering only a more general one in the Place Bellecour to all the *fusillés*. Our friends, of every leftist hue—Catholic, Communist, socialist—told us stories and sang us songs of the Resistance, and accepted Chan and me as American allies quite different from the "Yankees" targeted in hostile slogans on all the walls. Every once in a while I smelled a whiff of anti-Semitism—"don't call yourself *Juive*, say Israelite"—but on the whole, I felt completely at home. I even looked like everyone else, a small Mediterranean person. Only in the 1980s, during the Klaus Barbie trial, when I saw photos of my beloved Place Bellecour draped with swastikas, did I realize how I had hidden from myself in that first visit the dangerous face of France.

The love affair that has continued without complication was with the archives. My first days under the dim lamps at the Municipal Archives were traumatic. I had done my inventory searching well and knew all my call numbers, but my teachers had not warned me about the difficult handwriting of sixteenth-century notaries. They had never used such materials themselves. As David Pinkney has reminded us, before World War II most American historians of France worked from printed sources. John Mundy, sifting through the archives in Toulouse right after the war, was part of new generation of researchers, as was I a few years later. The Lyonnais were pretty surprised to see me, too: "Why aren't you studying your own history?" they asked. Meanwhile, a kind archivist came to my aid with an introduction to sixteenth-century paleography and I began to compile a quantitative social-history portrait of who the Protestants were in Lyon, their occupation, their quartier, their taxes, their status—a quest that I had never seen undertaken before. When my eyes needed a rest, I moved over to the Réserve for "qualitative" evidence (as we called it): printed pamphlets, playlets, sermons, and polemics connected with the Protestant and Catholic movements in the city.

When it came time to pack up my 100s of 3 x 5 cards, I realized that I had a powerful memory association with the Lyon archives, one that I would have many times again whenever I worked in a local archival setting. The room itself became closely identified with the traces of the past I was examining: the smell of its old wood, the shape of its

windows, the sounds from the cobblestone streets or running stream. The room was a threshold in which I would meet papers that had once been handled and written on by the people of the past. The room was like Alice's mirror, the Narnia wardrobe, or—to give the Huron metaphor—the mysterious hole under the roots of a tree through which one falls for a time into another world.

Back in Ann Arbor, my life of learning was changed in two important ways. First, two FBI agents arrived at our little apartment and confiscated our U.S. passports. Second, I was pregnant.

Though acting now with relative independence of any organizational base, my husband and I had continued to be deeply concerned about politics, especially protesting violations of academic freedom and civil liberties. Before going off to France, I had done all of the research and most of the writing for a pamphlet called *Operation Mind*, attacking the unconstitutional activities of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. It was published anonymously by the University of Michigan Council for the Arts, Sciences, and Professions, but as treasurer of that expiring group, Chandler had signed the check for the printer, who passed on this information to the FBI. That pamphlet had been a main trigger for the allegation that we were Communists and the seizure of our passports, and it would play a role in Chandler's interrogation before HUAC in the spring of 1954. (The sexism of the House Committee members worked to my advantage in this instance: like legal authorities in early modern Europe, they assumed that if a married couple did something together, only the husband was really responsible.) Chandler had availed himself only of the first amendment in his testimony in order to bring a constitutional challenge of the Committee. It took six years for the story to run its course: his firing from his position as Assistant Professor at the University of Michigan, his trial for contempt of Congress, his blacklisting by American university administrations even while his fellow mathematicians offered him much support (to their credit, Columbia University and the New School gave him temporary posts), the denial of certiorari for his case by the Supreme Court, his serving his six-month sentence in 1960 at Danbury Correctional Institution. (A former HUAC chairman, J. Parnell Thomas, had earlier pulled his time at Danbury for padding his

payroll.).

For my scholarly work, the most difficult part of that period was the seizure of my passport. I was in despair at being cut off from the archives in France, where I thought all my answers lay. This turned out to be—I won't call it a "blessing in disguise"—but at least an event that forced me to turn down a new path. Living in the New York area, as we then were, I could get to several great rare book collections: the New York Public Library, the Pierpont Morgan, Columbia University, and the Graduate Theology Union. I examined every book I could that was published in sixteenth-century Lyon. Now I was looking not just for expressions of Protestant and Catholic doctrine or polemic, but for any lesson I could learn from the object I held in my hands: from its binding, dedicatory matter and frontispiece to its colophon and marginalia. Without prior intention, I had started to think about the history of the book and how I could put it to use for social history. The results were important for my dissertation: I could now see, for instance, how printers disguised Protestant propaganda so as to slip it by censors and inquisitors. But I also began to write on independent subjects. Struck by the poetry and dedicatory matter inserted in books of commercial arithmetic, I published articles on honor and shame in regard to sixteenth-century business. So began for me, somewhat by accident, a lifelong style of research, in which I have combined archival work with the study of printed texts of multiple genres, an especially important move if one wants to understand the *menu peuple* and "popular culture."

During the 1950s, we also had our three children. The joys of childbirth and childrearing far outweighed the political travail we were going through. "How did you manage both babies and scholarship?" my students sometimes ask me as they try to plan their own futures. I wonder about it myself when I see how busy our children are today with their youngsters. The key, besides shared parenting with Chandler, was closely connecting the two registers of life, in action and in thought. I got very good at instant transition from sand-pile to study room, from reading a Calvinist tract to *Pat the Bunny*. Sometimes I typed with a child on my lap. Interruption became a way of life, good training for my professorial years much later. Having children helped me as a historian. It humanized me; it taught me about psychology and

personal relations and gave flesh to abstract words like "material needs" and "the body'; it revealed the power of family, rarely treated by historians in those days.

In 1959, I sent my dissertation, "Protestantism and the Printing Workers of Lyon," back to my committee at the University of Michigan. It was shaped in relative isolation from any academic community, but that gave me more freedom to develop my own view. Reformation studies in the 1950s were still primarily conducted as confessional history: Protestants wrote about Protestantism; Catholics about Catholicism. Though scholarly and sometimes immensely lively (I think of Roland Bainton's biography of Luther, *Here I Stand*), these writings told the story from one point of view. Socio-economic causes, when cited, were narrowly conceived: resentment at the wealth or economic teachings of the Catholic Church, rather than the more complex connections proposed long before by Ernst Troeltsch and Max Weber. Doctrinal dispute was central, but was treated usually as a debate about authority among theologians rather than about ideas with social and psychological meanings in the minds of Christians.

In my thesis I took a different tack. I was Jewish and without confessional loyalties to defend. I might have been rooting in a large sense for "the people" and for "progressive" movements that favored literacy, but the Reformed Church, with its hierarchical reservations about the untutored Christian, could not be the simple hero of my tale. My social and occupational portrait of the male Protestants showed that they were drawn from all the social orders of Lyon—that economic enemies, as in the strike-ridden printing trade, were religious allies. In terms of occupation, however, the Protestants were a distinctive group, drawn from the trades newer to Lyon, those with more complex technology and with higher literacy rates. The social dimension of the Reformation thus seemed to me to be organized not around the axis of economic class, but around the axis of emotional-spiritual class, of laity against clergy, a struggle central in all the religious polemic. The appeal of the new teaching to the urban Protestant laity was to be sought in its central doctrines, justification by faith and truth through Scripture alone. Printers, with their literate confidence and their role as disseminators of God's Word, found very plausible a world where priestly intervention was unnecessary and they could approach

God directly with their faith.

Though I would reformulate these conclusions today, there are a few things I still like about the efforts behind them. I like the concept of multiple axes around which the same society is organized and moves, as contrasted with my earlier two-dimensional Marxist model. I like thinking about an idea as operating or having meaning simultaneously in several fields: social, cultural, psychological. I like insisting that somehow one's interpretation should square with what our subjects have actually said in the past: though we may want to read beyond their own self-description, we must always come to terms with it.

During the 1960s, I carried my social history approach as far as I could. I was 30, I was Dr. Davis, our children were starting to go to school—and lo, after a new ruling by the Supreme Court, I got my passport back! I embarked on a series of short research trips to Lyon and Geneva, where I expanded enormously my archival base on urban and religious history: consistorial records, wills, marriage contracts, court cases, hospital and charity records, and more. I still have not exploited all I found in that hungry search.

To my delight, I also began to teach. Earlier I had been at the front of a classroom only once: teaching history at night for a term in 1956 in Columbia University's School of General Studies, a real baptism by fire. Rosalie Colie, in the English Department at Barnard, gave me dinner before my class and helped me remember I was a scholar as well as a mother. Soon after I followed Chandler to Providence, where he was editing for *Mathematical Reviews*, and taught briefly at Brown University. Then, with Chan's prison term behind him, a real break-through: he was offered a professorship at the University of Toronto and we moved in 1962 to Canada. Eventually I, too, obtained a post at the University of Toronto, first in the Department of Political Economy and in 1968 in the Department of History. So began my 38 years of teaching, a practice central to a scholar's life of learning, as we all know. I have always felt I have received from my students at least as much as I have given to them.

After my years of isolation, Toronto also brought with it the experience

of belonging to a scholarly community, or for me communities. There were my economic history colleagues in the Department of Political Economy; my Renaissance and Reformation colleagues in many departments; and finally my younger colleagues in the History Department, that is, Jill Conway and those Europeanists newly converted to social and quantitative history. Thinking back on these connections, I realize how important communities of discourse can be in influencing the direction of one's research. Our topics grow out of long and short-term issues internal to our work; they grow out of general concerns floating through the politics and culture of our time; they grow out of the conversations that we have by word or letter with sodalities to which we belong. So one of my major monographs of the 1960s, "Poor Relief, Humanism, and Heresy," drew upon my effort to use evidence from Lyon to rethink the dicta of Marx and Weber—in this case, whether Protestantism was the sole mother of new forms of welfare—but it was no accident that I turned to this material in the decade of the hotly-debated American "war against poverty." Further, the argument of the essay—which wove together business values, Christian humanist beliefs and sensibilities, and Protestant conviction as multiple sources for welfare reform—was also a response to exchange with fellow teachers in economic history and with my friend Jim McConica, Basilian novice and specialist on humanism and policy in England.

The best example of my commitment to classic social history was a 1966 essay, "A Trade Union in Sixteenth-Century France." I had found a trial in the Geneva archives that gave the earliest description we have of the inner workings, rituals, and strategies of a European journeyman's organization, the *compagnonnage* or Company of the printing workers of Lyon. I analyzed the journeymen's values in terms of where the men came from and the kind of work they did in the shop; I described their baptismal ceremonies and forms of punishment as useful in holding them together in a clandestine and illegal organization; I pointed to the journeymen's success in keeping their wages relatively high, an example of the agency of the *menu peuple*. The only sign of unease with the evolutionary approach that was part of the vanguard social history of the day (I think for instance, of Eric Hobsbawm's *Primitive Rebels*) was in my last paragraph:

> The quest for a sense of family and brotherliness [found in the journeymen's Company] is often thought of as a vestigial survival from the pre-capitalist past. I think we should see it rather as permanently creative in societies where impersonal contractual relationships threaten to dominate. We cannot consign to the past the sentiment which led the printers' journeymen to say that they "laboured not as slaves, but as free men, working voluntarily at an excellent and noble calling."

"A Trade Union" was published in England in *The Economic History Review*, not in France. At that date, the great studies of the *Annales* school were on regional or rural history, not urban labor or religious history. As for the *compagnonnage* and its customs, they still smacked too much of the folklorism and right-wing populism of the Vichy régime. I read Pierre Goubert's *Beauvais and the Beauvaisis* and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Peasants of Languedoc* and even Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* with my graduate students, and brought Goubert and Le Roy Ladurie to my campus to speak. But despite the impressive discoveries of this *histoire totale*, especially in demography, mobility, and material culture, it could not serve as a model for what I wanted to do. My next moves were toward anthropology and toward the incorporation of women into my historical account, and here I had to follow other paths.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were a time of the world-upside-down, both in Berkeley, where I spent two quarters in 1968 as a visiting professor, and in Toronto, where political protests ranged from day-care centers to the war in Viet Nam. Surely this was part of the background to my turn to festivity, politics, and the carnivalesque. But in 1969, when I started writing "The Reasons of Misrule," what was uppermost in my mind was a cluster of customs and organizations in sixteenth-century Lyon, whose significance I could not uncover by any of my usual social history habits: the charivari and the Abbeys of Misrule. I was unwilling to dismiss them as frivolous play, unimportant for historians, or as the pent-up people blowing off steam. But what *was* going on here?

Somehow (perhaps advised by a friend in the Toronto anthropology department) I found my way to a set of books in the anthropology section of the University of Toronto library: Arnold Van Gennep's *Manuel de folklore français*, organized around the stages of the life cycle and the seasonal and ceremonial year. There I learned about rural youth groups and their noisy masked demonstrations in connection with marriages in France and throughout Europe. The essay I produced used only historical evidence, and—in contrast with the static unchanging portrait of ceremonial and customary life presented in Van Gennep—pointed to shifts in Misrule Abbeys and the uses of charivari, both in regard to marriage and in regard to political protest. Festive life could be, as Mikhail Bakhtin said in his just-translated *Rabelais*, a temporary reversal of the everyday, a way to imagine something different. It could provide a release that sustained community values; it could sometimes be an effort to change them.

In the next decade, I went on to read in anthropology and folklore: E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, Sidney Mintz, and many others. (Simultaneously, I might note, Keith Thomas was using Bronislaw Malinowski for his *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, and Peter Brown was in contact with Mary Douglas and other British anthropologists for his pioneering study of the holy man in late antiquity.) I read eclectically, indifferent to conflicts within anthropology, for I was not looking for solutions, but for questions, processes, possible approaches, which could be used only if they made sense in terms of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European evidence. Now I could add categories of age to the social, economic, and religious groupings I had been thinking about before, including the grouping of the living and the dead. I wrote about Catholic and Protestant forms of burying and remembering their dead as contrasting ways for families to communicate between the generations. Now I could consider the social and cognitive meanings of symbolic and ritual forms of behavior, which earlier I had accounted for only in terms of group solidarity. I wrote about Catholic and Protestant feastdays, processions, and buildings as contrasting ways to mark city space, give rhythm to the year's time, and experience the presence of the sacred. Now I could look at the non-literate with more discernment than in my early Lyon printing-worker days, and take

more seriously the techniques and endowments of oral culture, such as proverbs and memory devices. I began to doubt my earlier commitment to a single "progressive" trajectory toward the future, assessing Catholic and Protestant paths as alternate forms of movement, rather than as just old and new, the traditional and the innovative. Indeed, I began to see the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as generating more than "modernity."

Several of the resulting essays appeared in a 1975 book I entitled *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, choosing a phrase which, if now outmoded, seemed quite fresh and anthropological at the time. I tried to hold on to the critical edge that I had given to my earlier social history. Had I written myself into a corner, I asked as I completed "The Rites of Violence"? By showing that the extreme and unsavory forms of murder and desecration accompanying religious riots in sixteenth-century France were not just an expression of the demonic, but were connected with ritual times and places, themselves a continuation of the ritual and festive action, did I seem to be legitimating them? Did I seem to be saying that anything goes, including the Holocaust (as one of my students challenged me), so long as it has a rationale behind it for participants? I concluded the essay,

> But the rites of violence are not the rights of violence in any *absolute* sense. They simply remind us that if we try to increase safety and trust within a community . . . then we must think less about pacifying "deviants" and more about changing the central values.

I also held on to certain classic features of social history. The social and geographical origins of actors were still important. Rational interest was a way to account for behavior some of the time; "ways of doing, thinking, and saying things"—"*façons de faire*, *façons de penser*, *façons de dire*"—made better sense another time. Conflict was part of the picture, not just community; resistance and opposition had to be inquired after as well as domination. The earliest essays I wrote on women and gender show this hope to build upon rather than abandon one form of history for another. "City Women and Religious Change" examined the kinds of women who became Protestant and the appeal to them of the new doctrine and liturgy; "Women on Top" explored the

multiple meanings and uses of festive cross-dressing and carnivalesque reversal of gender. Women and men were actors in both, but in the second the representational meanings of gender were at the fore.

Women's history was the other great event of the 1970s for me. Ever since I had put aside my Christine de Pizan essay in 1951 I had kept a folder called "women," into which I had placed historical references: sixteenth-century pregnancy dresses, baby food, times of weaning and the like. Politics was the first thing that swelled that folder into a filing cabinet. As I moved from post to post, I kept finding myself one of a tiny minority of women in a department. At many a department meeting I was the only woman present, and might have to suffer the indignity of some senior historian addressing everyone else as Professor So-and-so and me as Mrs. Davis. Now I was pretty tough, well seasoned by my years as "the only Jew" and then as outcast left-winger, and I also had support along the way. (I think of the wife of an elderly Brown history professor, herself with a PhD and publications in English history, but of a generation in which it was almost impossible for married women to get teaching posts. One day she bestowed upon me her doctoral gown, and I wear it with her in my mind wherever I go.)

All of this was teaching me that being a woman made a big difference, and that I had better attend to it practically and intellectually. Working with and improving the situation of women graduate students at the University of Toronto became one of my priorities in the mid-1960s. Then by the early 1970s, the women's movement was in full flower in Toronto influencing us all.

On the intellectual side, I met Jill Ker Conway, a pioneer in the new history of women in the United States, and began to see what riches lay ahead in rethinking the roles of women in the historical past. In 1971, Jill and I organized the first course in women's history in Canada, Society and the Sexes in Early Modern Europe and in America; I opened my section with Christine de Pizan and have been teaching her ever since. Oh, the excitement of that decade among professors and students, as we sought primary sources in rare book libraries and archives and exchanged bibliographies and syllabi across North America (all done with typewriters, ditto machines and mimeograph); as we attended scholarly meetings on women's history

expecting a few hundred people and found 2,000 in attendance. For me as for others, it was another interdisciplinary leap: the subject of gender was impossible to conceptualize without some sweep from biology to literature. It was also a historiographical stretch, for one was simultaneously writing women into the historical record (that is, simply finding out what they were doing), examining the range of relations between and concepts about women and men in different times and places, and re-evaluating the meaning of movements like the Reformation or the French Revolution.

My work in anthropology and women's history began in Toronto, but flowered during my six years of teaching at the University of California at Berkeley. Until 1971, my whereabouts had almost always been determined by my husband's positions: I had followed him from city to city, leaving behind a special teaching assistantship offered here, an instructorship offered there. I did this willingly— it never occurred to me that careers could be organized otherwise—although there were a few moments of despair when it looked as though I might never get a satisfactory teaching post. Then in 1971, the History Department at Berkeley invited me to become a professor there. Chandler and I talked about it and said to each other, "let's try it." Our youngest child was going into ninth grade, and we thought through leaves and sabbaticals, we could make a go of a commuting marriage. It was a challenge, and sometimes it seemed we were living with permanent jet lag, but nonetheless, we both loved the expansiveness and adventure of the years I was based in California. The openness to the outdoors seemed at one with the openness to new ways of doing history among my colleagues. Soon I had two interdisciplinary circles as well: colleagues with whom I was trying to found a women's studies program and younger colleagues in history, literature, and art history who would go on to found the periodical *Representations*. Without realizing it at first, I was also moving toward yet another metamorphosis in my life of learning.

Near the end of my Berkeley years, one of my graduate students showed me a sixteenth-century book from the Law Library by Judge Jean de Coras. Under the title *Memorable Decree*, it told the story of a celebrated case of peasant imposture in a Pyrenean village: a man

who seemed to be accepted as husband by another man's wife for three years or more. My first reaction was: "this has got to be a film!" Why such an impulse? Was this just a sudden effort to recapture the theatrical romance of my father's life and my own youthful hope to make documentary films?

I think it grew out of the practice of anthropological history. Most of my writing till then had explored issues or motifs—such as charivaris, mourning ritual, proverbs—over a few centuries. Though archival material came mostly from Lyon, texts and examples were drawn from over all France, sometimes all over Western Europe. What was missing was the close ethnographic observation of fieldwork, where the anthropologist could see personal interactions and the exact chronology of events and hear the way participants described what was going on. But my subjects were all long since dead, and I was not going to resort to a medium to consult them the way one of my Michigan professors had done many years before. Instead I invited the director René Allio to come to Berkeley and address French historians about the film he had made, *Moi, Pierre Rivière*, based on the murder confession of a nineteenth-century Normandy lad. (Michel Foucault and his students had edited the document.) Allio told us about living for months in the village where the events had taken place, about casting villagers in all the local roles, and discussing with them the story and the weekly rushes. I thought, What an opportunity to see history in a new way! The villagers were both surrogates for those that had lived through the events a hundred forty years before and present-day commentators. Making a film could be an approximation of the ethnographic experience.

Three years later, in 1980, I found myself working with the distinguished scenarist Jean-Claude Carrière and the young director Daniel Vigne on the script for *Le Retour de Martin Guerre*. We had come upon each other by good fortune the very week I was looking for a director for Martin Guerre in Paris and they had begun to plan together a film on the same subject. (This simultaneous independent interest in imposture shows how clues to subjects with hot cultural resonance exude themselves over a wide network.) Working on the film did indeed provoke an ethnographic consciousness. Imagining any scene—villagers greeting newcomers; sitting around a fire mending

tools, talking, telling stories; quarreling; responding to judges—sent me scurrying back to sources to find out what was likely, what was plausible. Talking to actors who had to play the sixteenth-century figures generated questions and a kind of "evidence" that were historically interesting. "I can't play this role as if all Pierre Guerre cared about was the money," said the experienced actor who played Martin Guerre's uncle, the first to denounce the impostor after he and the rest of the village had initially accepted him. "You're right," I said, and pointed to places in the film where Pierre Guerre expressed a wider concern about mistrust and cheating. "I can't believe that Bertrande de Rols waited till the very last minute to save herself from a charge of complicity in imposture," said Nathalie Baye as she prepared to play Martin Guerre's wife claiming she was deceived only the moment the real Martin Guerre walked into the courtroom. "She didn't wait that long," I answered; as a vulnerable peasant woman, she finally brought the case against the impostor and conducted herself so that whichever side won, she was likely to come out safe. I could not cite either of these actors as *proof* in the notes to the book I wrote, but their comments strengthened my conviction that I was moving in the right direction in interpreting the legal and village sources in the ways I did.

The 1982 film *Le Retour de Martin Guerre* was a very good one, I thought, with a beautiful creation of Pyrenean village life by Daniel Vigne and with fruitful collaboration between filmmakers and an historian. Early on, however, I knew that I had to write an historian's book on the subject. Bertrande was being simplified for the screen in ways which deprived her of agency and her full dramatic complexity; other elements in the story were being changed or omitted, and especially I kept finding remarkable things in the sources that could not be packed into or pointed up in a film. So rich in certain kinds of expressiveness, the cinematic medium—still young compared to prose—seemed unable to accommodate others, especially when it was confined to feature-film length of two hours.

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Carlo Ginzburg came to write their splendid microhistories—the 1975 *Montaillou* of the former, the 1976 *Cheese and Worms* of the latter—as an expansion of their prose. I came to microhistory (or what I called ethnography) via film. In my historian's book, I tried to make the "prodigious tale" of Martin Guerre

understandable in terms of everything I could find about village life. I tried to show how an extraordinary imposture was a version of identity formation, of "self-fashioning" as Montaigne named it, both among peasants and among the judges and other persons of wealth and rank who read Jean de Coras's book by the thousands. Influenced by thinking about cinematic narration, I decided to tell the prose story twice, first as it unfolded and was seen at each stage in the village, then as recounted by the storytellers: Judge de Coras, a young lawyer in the court, Montaigne and others. I hoped to suggest to readers some of the parallels between establishing what was true about identity and establishing what was true about history.

By the time the film was premiered and the book was first published in France in 1982, I had been a professor at Princeton University for almost four years. Our commuting life was much easier between Princeton and Toronto, the back and forth between the small town and the big cosmopolitan city very rewarding. As Berkeley had been a favorable site for my anthropological interests of the 1970s, so Princeton was a favorable site for my cinematic and literary interests of the 1980s. Princeton was intense, civil, local, a place that invited close ethnographic observation and attention to style. Lawrence Stone was directing the Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies, with all its intellectual excitement. Carl Schorske had founded a program in European Cultural Studies. I had treasured colleagues in the History Department, and also much exchange with colleagues in anthropology and especially in the various literature departments. One term I co-taught a course with Clifford Geertz. For the third time at my third university, I was part of a small band of faculty women struggling to make things better for "the sex" (as women were called in the eighteenth century) and to institute a Women's Studies Program on campus. Once again it was energizing to be part of such a cause, especially when we had so much student support and when we could see the connection between the presence of women students and faculty at Princeton (undergraduate women arrived for the first time in the fall of 1969) and the more general diversification and democratization of the University.

One surprise was in store for me at Princeton. Before coming there, I

had thought of it as the most "goyishe" of the Ivy League universities, my impression having been formed back in 1957 when that was surely the case. What could I do to *épater les goyim*? I had asked myself from Berkeley. Perhaps I could do a little teaching in Jewish history, using some of the autobiographical sources by Jewish women and men I had been exploring with my students in Society and the Sexes. Once at Princeton I realized the situation had changed: there was now what you might call a Kosher Eating Club (that is, a kosher dining room) and a young scholar named Mark Cohen had just been hired to teach Jewish history. We teamed up, together with another colleague, to teach the early modern section of his sequence, I designing the course around social, cultural, anthropological and gender themes and Mark Cohen providing the texts and the much needed specialist expertise.

This teaching was a revelation. Jewish societies were fascinating in their complexity and richness and also provided valuable cases for comparison with Protestant and Catholic societies in Europe. My colleagues and I published the autobiography of the seventeenth-century Venetian rabbi Leon Modena, translated from the Hebrew by Mark. For my essay, "Fame and Secrecy," I looked for the sources of Jewish autobiographical writing (claimed by some not to really exist before the eighteenth-century Enlightenment) as I had once looked for the sources of popular family history and autobiography in France. Especially I wanted to write Leon into the European historical record and show what difference that made to thinking about the past, just as I had been trying to do in my studies of women and gender. The rabbi's autobiography was a Jewish text, but it was also a European text. It shared certain features with the life written, say, by the learned Catholic gambler Girolamo Cardano and also showed a distinctive way of constructing the early modern boundary between the inside and the outside.

Literature and history were also the pair that beckoned me to my major writing in the 1980s. As in the Martin Guerre case, it was legal texts that got me started, this time hundreds of letters requesting royal grants of pardon for homicide. I had long used these documents for data on the social and religious history of Lyon, and admired the way French scholars were drawing from them new studies of crime and violence in late medieval and early modern France. But for me they

were also sources of storytelling, by men of all social classes and some women as well. The stories were shaped to fill the requirements of the law of pardon and to please the ear of the king and his men. They were filtered through the pen of chancellery scribes and recorded in a script that many of their tellers could not read. But still they reflected literary tastes and cultural strategies of persons in different milieux, both those seeking pardon and their neighbors, who would have to affirm them as truth tellers if the pardon were to take effect.

I called the book *Fiction in the Archives*, somewhat to the consternation of Lawrence Stone to whom it was dedicated (a great historian, and also a great raconteur). In fact, "fiction" referred not to falsification, but to the crafting element in everything we do and say. Rather than being on an extreme anti-foundationalist mission to discredit the archives, I was presenting them as a source of new evidence about the sixteenth century: evidence about how people told things, evidence we could interpret responsibly with all the crafting tools at our disposal. Once the book was published, I discovered as in earlier projects that I was not alone. On law faculties, the interplay of law and storytelling was becoming a hot subject; among historians "fiction in the archives" began to crop up everywhere.

Finally, in 1989 and the early 1990s, I came to a project that wove together all the strands of my past interests—social, anthropological, ethnographic, and literary—and yet also cast me out on new seas and territories. I felt very lucky to be working on *Women on the Margins*, as I came to call it. To start with, I wanted to take three figures from my Society and the Sexes course, and make their lives exemplary of a range in the experience of urban women in the seventeenth century. The Jewish merchant Glikl bas Judah Leib was from Hamburg and Metz; the Catholic artisan and teacher Marie Guyart de l'Incarnation from Tours and then Québec; the Protestant artist-entomologist Maria Sibylla Merian from Frankfurt, Nuremberg, and Amsterdam. All three were married for at least part of their lives and had children; all three left texts behind them: Glikl a Yiddish autobiography, Marie de l'Incarnation a spiritual autobiography and hundreds of letters about life among the Amerindians of the eastern woodlands, Maria Sibylla Merian letters and especially her studies of European and Surinamese insects. Here was a chance to evaluate the importance of gender and

gender hierarchies in their lives; to see what difference religion and occupation made; to examine different kinds of marriage and parenting. I would expand the single microhistory into a decentered comparison of three European lives. And for the first time I would be doing extensive research on figures outside the French-language grid that had claimed me for so long, learning to read Yiddish, for instance, the language of my maternal grandmother, and examining Jewish sources in the Germany that had held such terror for me as a girl. I was now a grandmother myself and here I was in libraries in Russia, Germany, the Netherlands, Québec and Suriname. I had chosen to do this, but it felt like a gift.

Fairly early in the project, I realized I had to deepen my conceptualization of it. How representative were these women after all? In their urban work style, perhaps, and in some aspects of their family life. But how many women crossed the ocean to found an Ursuline convent in Québec or, at age fity-two, paddled up the Suriname River into the jungles in search of caterpillars and butterflies? Even Glikl's autobiography had some distinctive features about it. I decided to turn this unusualness to an advantage and consider the sources of innovation, of creativity in seventeenth-century lives where one might not have expected it from the start. Maybe this could be useful for thinking about some men's lives as well. Now I began to play with the idea of "margins," an idea important to me not because of recent deconstructionist use à la Derrida, but because of my own lifelong ambivalence about centers. All three of these women were on margins, religious, social, geographical, either by choice or by placement. All three turned these margins into borderlands for discovery; all three redefined them as centers of a kind, or at least as places they preferred to be.

Could I leave my thesis at that? I wondered. Didn't I need to pay some attention to the paradoxical fact that the "self-realization" of Marie de l'Incarnation was part of the uninvited French intrusion into the American woodlands, that Maria Sibylla Merian's research helpers in Suriname were African and Indian slaves? And what about Glikl, writing unfeeling tales from Europe about "savage" people and good Jewish travelers?

It was about time I asked such questions. Non-European peoples, or at least European attitudes toward New World peoples, had played a small role in some of my earlier writing, but not in any way central to the argument. Back in the19 60s, French colonial history had seemed relatively cut off from exciting directions in French social history, in contrast with what was already happening with the history of New Spain and the Aztecs. By 1990, the picture had long since changed. I knew this from excellent colleagues in non-Western history and from the Shelby Cullom Davis Center, which I was now directing and which was devoting two years to Imperialism, Colonialism, and the Colonial Aftermath. For *Women on the Margins*, I decided, then, to devote considerable attention to the models for Others emerging from the writing of each woman; they varied in an interesting way from Glikl to Marie to Maria Sibylla. I also decided to introduce non-European women into the book, not just as silent objects of the attention of European women, but as active respondents to them. I tried to imagine from the Amerindian and African sources how Mother Marie's Christian converts looked at her, how Mistress Merian's African and Indian assistants would discuss the insects and plants that she framed in her published book of nature. I asked whether there were signs that non-European culture had penetrated Marie's writing and Maria Sibylla's describing.

Now that I have published this book, I feel permanently relocated as an historian of Europe. France is still the country to which I have my longest and strongest attachment, but now there are stories I very much want to tell about people who once lived in the rain forests of Suriname, or along the shores of the Saint Lawrence, or (in my new project on "cultural mixture") plied the caravan routes of North Africa.

I recount this life of learning with some confusion. On the one hand, the life seems to repeat itself. The margins and centers of girlhood get replayed again and again in different settings. I write workers into history, then women, then Jews, then Amerindians and Africans as if I were engaged in some rescue mission over and over again. Is historical writing just a writing of the self, no matter how hard we try to respect the texts the past has bequeathed to us? On the other hand, the life

seems so restless, so full of moving about from place to place and subject to subject. I have tried to tame it in the telling, by associating each change with a decade and a place, showing that each shift in method or subject grew out of my previous intellectual practice and, despite the role of chance, was connected with issues in the field and the politics and culture of the time. Still it makes me dizzy to recount it. Why no settling for a subject? Why this constant quest for novelty?

These are questions generated by my recital tonight, by my having to give account. When I think of how it *felt* to live the life of learning, the questions evaporate. The study of the past has been a constant joy, a privileged realm of intellectual eros. The necessary constraints under which the historian operates—to find evidence for every affirmation—I have accepted freely: that quest is what makes it so much fun. The mistakes I made—say, a project not finished (or as I like to say to myself, still remaining to be done)—seem trivial compared to really important mistakes, as those we might have made in parenting. Moreover, the study of the past provides rewards for moral sensibility and tools for critical understanding. No matter how evil the times, no matter how immense the cruelty, some elements of opposition or kindness and goodness emerge. No matter how bleak and constrained the situation, some forms of improvisation and coping take place. No matter what happens, people go on telling stories about it and bequeath them to the future. No matter how static and despairing the present looks, the past reminds us that change can occur. At least things can be different. The past is an unending source of interest, and can even be a source for hope.

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