
Amy L. Wink. *She Left Nothing in Particular: The Autobiographical Legacy of Nineteenth-Century Women's Diaries*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001. 162p.

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The book's title comes from Virginia Woolf's short story "The Legacy," in which a man appraises his inheritance from his late wife: "To him, of course, she had left nothing in particular, unless it were her diary." Over against those who would marginalize the importance of private writing, Amy Wink offers the diaries of six women: two who went on Westward journeys to Oregon and Utah, two who were married sequentially to the same abusive man, and two whose husbands were away fighting for the Confederacy—a chapter for each pair. For all of them, "writing did provide a substantive conduit for self-assertion as they faced what were sometimes seemingly insurmountable situations, and it is through their continued use of writing that they retained some form of psychological control of their existence" (124).

While many scholars see the diary as a particularly feminine form of autobiography, Wink questions that view. She acknowledges that "through writing, women have been able to express and understand themselves within a patriarchal system which inhibits and discourages their self-actualization" (xiv), but she also identifies the danger in making an essential claim about diaries as "the feminine form of autobiography" (129). Wink points out that arguments privileging a woman's private voice play into the hands of those who would diminish the importance of a woman's public voice (xiii).

Suzanne Bunkers, an expert in women's diaries whose endorsement appears on the jacket of Wink's book, argues the diary can be read as "the most authentic form of autobiography because it is least subject to outside editing and censorship and because it most fully represents life as a process" (xii). Ironically, Bunkers' quotation in the Introduction draws attention to the fact that Wink herself does not use the original manuscripts for the diaries she discusses, but instead relies on transcribed and/or edited versions—typescript and published—of those diaries. In doing so, Wink cuts herself off from some of the elements that make a diary authentic and revealing: the nature of the handwriting, later insertions or deletions, and the materiality of the book itself.

Wink's use of transcripts is most problematic in the chapter "Narratives of Resistance: Negotiating Abuse and the Endangered Self," where she bases her discussion on a typescript of Henrietta Embree's diary. Wink admits only in the endnotes that the text "seems to have been edited during the transcription pro-

cess" (138). In a later endnote concerning Tennessee Embree, who became Dr. Embree's wife after Henrietta died, Wink writes, "Unlike Henrietta, who did not seem to record any specific incident of physical violence, Tennessee writes clearly of Embree's physical abuse [of their daughter]" (141). While a careful reader of Wink's endnotes might speculate that Henrietta's original diary was edited to exclude physical abuse, such significant matters should not be relegated to endnotes. If Wink intends to examine these diaries as genuine expressions of women's negotiating through difficulties, she should use the original manuscripts, or, if the manuscripts are no longer available, frankly discuss in her Introduction the possible level of distortion introduced by using typescripts and edited versions. Admittedly, even the original manuscripts are constructed texts, as Wink notes (xv-xvi); but with typescripts and edited versions, the typist's or editor's construction makes the original construction harder to discern.

Despite textual problems, the overall force of Wink's selections leaves the reader with little doubt as to the validity of her project. Wink's emphasis on "the stylistics—particularly the textual tools such as thematic repetition—that women have used within their diaries to confront and resist environmental and social constraint" (xvi) helps her overcome the limitations of using typescript and edited versions. The transcriber/editor of Henrietta Embree's diary, while possibly straining out depictions of physical abuse, allowed repeated instances of emotional abuse to remain; these Wink unpacks for us.

Wink's choice of the six diaries is extraordinary; the quoted passages resonate in such a way that Wink is able to bring them into a conversation with one another, indicating a great deal of careful selection. The first chapter, "Written into the Landscape: Negotiating Place and Identity," establishes the concept of displacement by relating two diaries of journeys from Illinois to Oregon, and from England to Utah, respectively. Lest the reader consider displacement only in physical terms, Wink explores emotional displacement in the second and third chapters. The third chapter, "'When shall this warfare in my soul be ended?': Negotiating Private Conflict and Public Crisis," provides a useful counterpoint to the Embrees' story presented in Chapter Two. Instead of the presence of an abusive husband, the husbands in Chapter Three have gone off to fight for the Confederacy. The men are physically absent, yet patriarchy persists in other ways, as the diarists themselves use language that reinforces the "public/political/masculine" and "private/domestic/feminine" bifurcations (109). The women's diaries in Chapter Three record how the Civil War forced them to cross the traditional boundaries and assume public duties, but, in "[w]riting these expressions of their femininity and their moral authority over the public conflict, these women reiterate

the very patriarchal and paternalistic social order on which they rely for their identities” (120-121).

Personal writing is a good way to introduce theoretical concepts of subjectivity and identity, making *She Left Nothing in Particular* a good starting point for undergraduate study. By the concluding chapter, “Something in Particular: Writing, Journals, and the Evidence of Presence,” we see the ways in which reading diaries can inspire teachers and their students in their own writing. As Wink writes of her own reaction to the diaries, “It is through their writing moments that I have come to write and to understand the person I myself am continually becoming” (130).

At the end of Virginia Woolf’s story, after reading his wife’s diaries and discovering that her death was really a suicide, the widower reflects, “He had received his legacy. She had told him the truth.” Such is the legacy of these six diaries; in bringing them to our attention, Amy Wink has articulated a profitable critical approach, applicable to all sorts of diaries. ✨