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Author



many I actually read before outgrowing

biographies, using only direct quotations. Reproductions of her paintings are included, as is a very complete bibliography.

Biases, however, were still apparent in the writing of the time period. For example, Tobi Tobias and Michael Hampshire, for the most part, created an acceptable picturebook, *Marie Curie*, with drawings done in soft, muted browns, whites, yellows, and oranges. The writing style is serviceable, though not particularly lively. However, the widely held assumption of a woman's role comes through in this line: "Maria's ballet career was a success, but her marriage to Mr. Balanchine had become very unhappy. Like most women, she wanted to have children."⁹

And in a 1983 biography of Sally Ride, *Sally Ride: America's First Woman in Space*, which does a good job of focusing on Ride's qualifications and contributions to the space program, author Karen O'Connor felt compelled to comment on Ride's appearance: "Before the session was over, trainers would hook the pretty, dark-haired astronaut by rope to a motorboat."¹⁰ I would be surprised to read similar comments about the appearance of male astronauts in books written during the same time period.

One biography that demonstrates how the writing style can hook a reader quickly is Florence Meiman White's 1980 book *Jeannette: The First Woman to Cross America Alone*. Here's how the story begins:

"Jeannette! Jeannette!" It was her father's voice, urgent.

Jeannette was about to mount her mare. Instead, she turned to see John Rankin hurrying toward the stables, leading his favorite horse by the reins. Why was he walking? She wondered. Was there something wrong? She ran toward him. As they drew close to each other, her eyes opened wide with horror. Blood was gushing from the horse's right side.

"What happened, Father?" Jeannette asked anxiously.

"Got caught on a barbed wire fence. Get a needle and thread, Jeannette. Quickly!"

As her father led the injured horse into the stable, Jeannette ran to the house. In a few minutes, she returned with strong thread and a darning needle, a large clean towel and a bucket of hot water.

The twelve-year-old girl got down on her knees, washed the open sore, then carefully sewed together the torn flesh. The wounded animal writhed in pain. "You'll be fine, boy," she whispered, as she laid a comforting hand on the horse's head. He turned his grateful eyes upon her.

"Good work, Jeannette. You've done a fine job." Her father's voice was filled with admiration.¹¹

I can't imagine any child not being drawn into a book beginning in this way.

Another biography written during this time that broke new ground in how the story is told is Richard Gibbs' *Marie Curie*, published in 1981. The writing is factual, though

somewhat opinionated, but what's the most fascinating is Gibbs' use of timelines, drawings, maps, and sidebars. This format, relatively new to the time, led to a more engaging and

first half of the twentieth century. The first, published in 1942, is called *Amelia Earhart: She Dramatized Flying*, a collection of an overview of eighteen women aviators. Earhart's chapter is titled "Amelia Earhart: She Dramatized Flying."

Author Jean Adams contends that Earhart's career

"has already been so completely revealed there is little left to say. For this reason we shall content ourselves here with highlighting a few spots in her meteoric life. Those who are curious to know more about Amelia Earhart must turn to both her own books and those of her husband, George Palmer Putnam."²¹

The book is written for older children, told matter-of-factly, but interestingly. The authors conclude that "today, therefore, it is very hard to decide whether Amelia Earhart was the greatest woman flier of her day or merely the greatest personality of her sex who ever flew."²²

The second Earhart book is devoted only to her life, *Amelia Earhart: A Biography*.²³

It is told in a novel-like fashion with liberties taken in dialogue and frequent editorial comments. Earhart's family life and personal shortcomings are shortchanged, but still, it is an interesting read. The book includes a bibliography with author, year, and title only, contains an index, and is the first biography on Earhart I've found with a chronology.

The third title, *Amelia Earhart: A Biography*, is part of the Childhood of Famous Americans series. Only thirty books in the 199-book series were about women. The Baldwin collection owns sixteen. Besides Earhart, they include Jane Addams, Sacagawea, Julia Ward Howe, Clara Barton, Pocahontas, Martha Washington, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Juliette Low, Lucretia Mott, Maria Mitchell, Molly Pitcher, Susan Anthony, Jessie Fremont, Dolly Madison, and Elizabeth Blackwell.

Like other books of its time, these are written in novel-like fashion, in a rather gushy, sappy, and dramatized style. The authors took liberties with dialogue, sanitized or ignored negative issues or character traits, and played up individualism, yet carefully retained their subject's sense of femininity and religious devotion. A scene from Amelia's first sight of a plane at a fair will illustrate the style:

Amelia stopped again. "Look at the beautiful paper hats, Papa. May we have one?"

"Oh, yes, Papa. Please!" Pidge [Amelia's sister] echoed.

"If you'll promise then to come with me to see the aeroplane with no more delay. I'll get you each one," Papa said.

Amelia and Pidge tried first one hat, then another. There were flat little circles covered with paper flowers. They tied under the chin with silk ribbons. There were bright bonnets with flower-trimmed brims. They were all so gay and pretty. It seemed wise to try each one on the counter. It was hard to make a choice . . .

"Will it fly again today, Papa?" asked Amelia.

"If the rain stops. But we'd better go home."

"Let's wait and see it fly again," Amelia begged. "Did you hear the whir of the engine? Did you see the wings tip like a bird's? I'd like to see it again."

Papa looked at her in surprise. "For a little girl who would rather ride the ponies or buy a paper hat, you've changed in a hurry, Melia."

"I just didn't understand about aeroplanes. I didn't know they would be so exciting. I'd rather see it than anything else at the fair."²⁴

No references are listed in the series, but often the author printed an acknowledgment at the beginning of the book noting people or written materials consulted. They all contain a chronology and an index and are illustrated with black-and-white sketches, which are listed near the table of contents. Early chapters establish the biographee's personality while the final chapter sums up her life's work. The books are amazingly similar in style and content, considering that they have differing authors, who all happen to be women.

Incidentally, fourteen of the original books are currently being reissued as the Young Patriots series published by Patria Press; four of them have female subjects, including one about Earhart. They retain the original authors, but employ new illustrators. Amazingly little has changed in the writing;

Amelia Earhart," were substituted for the final chapter. Other books in the series added afterwards, chronologies, and glossaries.

The two biographies of Earhart in the Baldwin Collection written in the mid-twentieth century did not vary much from earlier works. *Amelia Earhart: A Biography* by Adele de Leeu (1955) read much like the Howe books from the *Childhood of Famous Americans* series, only longer, with more details. And the second, written in 1962 by John Parlin, is a poorly written early reader, part of the *Discovery Book* series. It has full-page black, white, tan, and turquoise illustrations, and is only a barely serviceable title.

Two picturebooks present new layouts for telling today's readers about Earhart. In the first, Cynthia Chin-Lee's 2005 book *Amelia Earhart: A Picture Book*, the alphabet book format begins with Earhart. Chin-Lee notes that she alphabetized by the women's given names,

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