Toward a Theory of Nonfiction Narratives in Social Networks

Alison Booth

Note: This is based on a talk for a panel organized by Susan Lanser, "New Directions in Narrative Theory," March 27, 2014 Narrative Conference, Boston. Speculative and compressed, with inconsistent citation form, it somewhat overlaps with argument or detail in recent or forthcoming publications in collections of essays on my digital project. The talk accompanied a PowerPoint slideshow, from which a few images are included. I began with an introduction to Collective Biographies of Women.

Today, everyone is immersed in a deluge of digital life narrative that challenges the ideas of the private and the individual. But even so, and in spite of postmodern theory, we tend to claim identity and a personal life story as unique properties, and resist seeing how very standardized our lives, at least our stories, are. Feminist, queer, postcolonial, and other perspectives have favored a conception of the subject as constructed from intersecting positions, and have suggested a positive ethics of sharing identities.[1] Collections of life narratives, from pantheons and hagiography through printed books, gossip magazines, and databases, exhibit lives in overlapping contexts and roles, placing even more than the usual pressure on all life narrative to assimilate personal details into narratable forms. Any biography shapes the profile according to social and generic conventions that guide audience response. Collections of brief lives (narratives, not reference entries) enhance this co-location and colloquy. Remarkably little narrative theory or formal study has been devoted to third-person factual narratives, or to nonfiction in general. Among the possible reasons for this neglect I would include this bias toward individualism and resistance to prescriptive texts that have designs on the future of the audience.

Biography is full of the rhetoric of exemplification and analogy, which pulls one instance into a network of illustrations of a precept. Since ancient times, lives have been collected in comparative sets, which may be called prosopography. In my book on prosopography, *How to Make It as a Woman*, I have written about the history of

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1. Hazel R. Markus writes of "self-schemata," and, with Paula Nurius, "possible selves," as noted in M. Angeles Martinez, "Storyworld Possible Selves and Narrative Immersion," *Narrative* 22: 1 (2014): 110-31.

representations of women that we can rediscover in the more than 1200 English-language books that collect female biographies, published mostly between 1830-1940. The annotated bibliography and database of [Collective Biographies of Women](#) (CBW) provides access to the study of the various types of these books, the varieties of historical women, and their authors and publishing history, along with tools for interpreting social networks formed by the women grouped in these books. CBW can be seen as a prosopography of prosopographies, in several meanings of the term. Prosopography can be defined as collective biography, as I generally use it. *Prosopon* is the ancient Greek concept that becomes the Latin *persona*, with the latent meaning of face or mask; *graphy* of course refers to writing. Although at one time *prosopography* referred to a description of a one person's appearance, it has most commonly been used to refer to a scholarly method of representing plural *personae*: reconstructing the life histories of members of certain social groups, usually from eras before printing and public record-keeping were well established.[2] Prosopographies are now commonly digital projects, which can cope with large variable datasets. In addition to its multiple-personae form, prosopography's rhetoric tends to be elegiac as well as exemplary, and tends to acknowledge that many ancestors have been forgotten. Yet in a large corpus, the effect can be one of surplus. Over time and across many texts, the same individual receives many different discursive treatments and comparative alignments with many other persons, adding to the sense of subjectivity as a field of sliding signification rather than identity.

The CBW project examines the virtual relationships among personae as constructed by this corpus of books in relation to historical changes in gender, class, and nationality. The personae are representations of women who inhabited the real world of the writers and readers of these texts, and the narratives refer to events that are considered factual. (There also are many collections of the lives of women in the Bible—albeit claiming to be true—as well as some mythical and legendary women and imaginary lives

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2. The method of prosopography insistently focuses on individuals only for the purpose of studying groups. K.S.B. Keats-Rohan's research program eschews modern-era collective biography, claiming prosopography as a quantitative method of aggregating standardized profiles of individual lives. Keats-Rohan, K. S. B., "Biography, Identity and Names: Understanding the Pursuit of the Individual in Prosopography," in *Prosopography Approaches and Applications A Handbook*, Prosopographica et Genealogica 13 (Oxford: Occasional Publications UPR, 2007), 139–81, http://prosopography.modhist.ox.ac.uk/course_syllabuses.htm.

of literary heroines.) In this paper I feature the narratological aims of the project: the preliminary findings of an experiment with an XML markup of texts in samples of these collective biographies. Digital studies are particularly adept at comparing variant versions of large bodies of texts. Biography should be read intertextually, socially, and historically rather than as a small canon of linguistic icons about individuals. The study of a genre should take in social and temporal dimensions in order to comprehend its *use*.[3]

At the core of this literary project on the representation of historical women is a study of nonfiction narrative, biography in particular, using digital tools of interpretation. The study of persons and their networks intertwines with an investigation of genre. The same person may be represented many ways, as in dissimilar portraits or divergent accounts of the life's events or character. Joan of Arc, for example, has a Featured Subject site (a set of in-depth studies in an earlier phase of CBW), in which we unite CBW's materials on her life. Joan of Arc's life is well documented and yet it elicits many reinventions in nonfiction versions, as in a graph of publication rates in collective biographies (countless more biographies could be traced outside of CBW, at different peaks of interest in Joan, including a biography in 2014). We know of 68 short biographies collected in books published in English. An individual woman such as the Victorian nurse, Dorothy Pattison, who called herself Sister Dora, generates a range of comparable retellings of her life, with significant variations according to the presenter and the theme or context of a collection. Searching for this one person in the database can yield cross-sections of a genre and a publishing history. Sister Dora's page shows the author and the title of each book in which she appears, but this genre downplays the text and foregrounds the protagonists of the chapters; our database emphasizes persons and interconnections. Each of these books might include one or two dozen other women's lives alongside Dora's.

Our aim is not to create digital editions of these texts or to validate a more complete biography of each individual, but to interpret clustered narratives in many versions within popular circulation over time. The database pursues our interest in the

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3. Lauren M. E. Goodlad and Andrew Sartori, "The Ends of History: Introduction," *Victorian Studies* 55, no. 4 (2013): 591–614.

tables of contents that reveal networks. How do versions of one woman's life align with biographies in one collection or a type of collection, or among the variety of persona types that we find in this corpus? And Biographical Elements and Structure Schema (BESS), our stand-aside XML schema, is designed to locate types of narrative elements in samples of these books in different eras. This mid-scale digital study (neither close reading nor distant data mining) hopes to contribute to structural models of nonfiction narrative.

Perhaps there is little separation between fictional and nonfictional narrative. No one has yet identified infallible markers of whether a narrative is nonfiction, though libraries, booksellers, and data miners operate with some confidence.[4] Many sources, including the entry on biography in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, agree that boundaries between imaginative and nonfictional writings cannot be fixed in formal terms.[5] In the later twentieth century, considerable energy went into blurring the distinction, emphasizing the form of nonfiction and recognizing that there is "a poetics of factual narration," in Monika Fludernik's words.[6] Amid a tendency to consider everything to be narrative and to view all narratives including histories as fictive, most narrative theory nevertheless focused on a small canon of printed prose fiction, now and then defining referential narrative as a boundary that helps to shape fictionality.[7] If it

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4. I point to posted pdfs of studies by David Bamman and Noah Smith, Computer Science, Carnegie Mellon: "Unsupervised Discovery of Biographical Structure from Text" and "Mining Biographical Structure in Wikipedia." [check status of these papers] Mike Conway, "Mining a corpus of Biographical Texts Using Keywords," LLC (01/2010) 25:23-35.

5. "Formal characteristics alone do not normally provide sufficient evidence for determining the fictionality or factuality of a biographical account"; this may be determined by an investigation of "the author's intention and a study of how the text reworks the facts it relates" (Thomas Kindt, *Routledge* 43). Eric Heyne affirms that nonfiction may be identified by its extra-textual reference and possible revision or falsification, "Where Fiction Meets Nonfiction: Mapping a Rough Terrain," 330. In biographies as well as a variety of narrative prose such as historiography, memoir, travel writing, case studies, or oral histories, one encounters standard narrative techniques, including a balance of scenes and dialogue with summary or description, and a repertoire of digression, flashback, direct address or free indirect discourse, among other devices familiar from novels.

6. Monika Fludernik, "Factual Narrative: A Missing Narratological Paradigm," 122, in *Germanish-Romanische Monatsschrift* 63, no. 1 (2013): 117–34. Further citations parenthetical in text.

7. Paratext is key to determining status as nonfiction. Since New Criticism, both intention and reference have been downplayed, as Fludernik reminds us (131).

seems indisputable that "a quite different model…is required" (Fludernik 129) for a theory of nonfiction narrative,[8] there is still little formal study of third-person life narratives, whether as monographs or short collections. Dorrit Cohn and Fludernik's formulations of nonfiction are particularly useful, but even they neglect biography.

While nonfiction relies on narrative techniques familiar in fiction—and I will offer some examples—I want to pursue Fludernik's goal of a different model, and extend it in formal and rhetorical study of prosopographies. A theory of nonfiction life narratives needs to modify standard narrative theory in several interrelated ways. First, nonfiction's referentiality and verifiability generate a special status for versions. Second, the distinctive relation of author-narrator and audience in nonfiction affects how we conceive the narrative phenomena of voice, levels or story worlds, and temporality, in turn requiring modification in the fiction-based standard model of story and discourse. Here, I will have most to say about versions, as the CBW project affords measurable study of the morphology of a genre and comparison of multiple texts referring to the same life and to networks of associated lives.

Multiplicity of versions is not unique to nonfiction. Adaptation is of course widespread for fictional narratives (including folk tales) as well as for myths, religious or tribal/national traditions that we consider to be non-factual.[9] But there are distinctions between the iterations of a documented-to-be-true narrative and adaptations of a work of

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8. Among the few considered examinations of nonfiction narration are Dorrit Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction.* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), to be cited further parenthetically in the text. Mieke Bal, *Narratology*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).   Rob Nixon, "Literature for Real," *The Chronicle Review*, March 12, 2010, B14–15. Eric Heyne, "Toward a Theory of Literary Nonfiction," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 33, no. 3 (1987): 479-90; Eric Heyne, "Where Fiction Meets Nonfiction: Mapping a Rough Terrain," *Narrative* 9, no. 3 (2001): 322-33. Daniel W. Lehman, "Mining a Rough Terrain: Weighing the Implications of Nonfiction," *Narrative* 9, no. 3 (October 2001): 334-42. James Phelan, *Living to Tell about It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005). The controversies over postmodernism included the fallout from Hayden White's *Metahistory* and postmodernist theory, recalled by Lubomir Dolezel in *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History* (19-24). Studies have focused on so-called natural or everyday narratives and on some genres of factual or nonfiction narrative, primarily historiography and memoir.
9. Many legends such as Faust or Cinderella migrate in various versions (and characters such as Dracula escape their original texts to function in new versions). But biography has a particularly interesting relationship between the ur-text of an actual person and the personae presented in various representations of the life.

imagination or tradition. Most plainly, factual accounts claim to refer to matters outside of the text, the non-discursive originals of real persons and events in time and space. (This referentiality is a matter of degree, since of course many fictions incorporate factual matters.) It follows from claimed reference to extra-textual matters that any version of a known life (or historical events) potentially could be verified or improved by further research. As Dorrit Cohn puts it in *The Distinction of Fiction,* "Referential narratives are verifiable and incomplete" (16). The many nonfiction versions of the life of Joan of Arc, unlike adaptations of the Cinderella story, claim equal descent from actual events and potential confirmation according to available documentary evidence; there is a theoretical wholeness to the original events that is only an implicit effect in realist fiction. This is not to say that life narratives are objective. Quite the contrary; they are shaped narratives. If nonfiction were merely neutral reporting, or if the past were completely accessible, there would be no motivation for the retelling. Gaps in the account prompt readerly recreation, in referential as well as imaginative narratives.

The agency that produces the life narrative affects the status of versions. Autobiography and memoir are understood to be voluntary self-expression, original texts that no subsequent person can equally redact. Biographers, in contrast, are necessarily derivative, often indebted to previous autobiographical texts such as letters or memoirs. Any third-person life narrative must concede that it competes with other potential accounts. Among nonfiction genres more broadly, biography, often termed a subset of history, arguably has more "experiential" effect than history, more closely resembling the narratives of a life we might choose to live (a "storyworld possible self" in the words of Martinez [see note 1 above]).

Many of the short biographies of women in the CBW project are quite free with seeming sign-posts of fictionality, as well as historiographical and conjectural moves. Other signals, including paratext, passages of description, direct address to readers and statements we tag as "precepts" and "evaluation" clearly guide readers as to the genre they hold in their hands: factual narratives referring to historical individuals that at the same time, like all life narrative, gesture toward the model of a well-designed life. Significantly, Cohn proposes a distinction of nonfiction narration that dissents from the

established view that the techniques of referential and imaginative writing are indistinguishable. She claims that fiction specializes in the inner life of characters; free indirect discourse and other devices of psycho-narration are "unavailable to narrators who aim for referential (nonfictional) presentation" (16); the latter must use "conjectural and inferential syntax" when nonfiction focalizes individual experience: as in, *he must have felt* (27). But here are three paragraphs of focalization and free indirect discourse in a short biography, "The Serpent of the Old Nile," in Terhune's *Superwomen* (chapter 7 paragraphs 20, 26-27; italics added). (The BESS analysis viewer, in beta, provides improved access to this text and its interpretation.)

> 20 This scurrilous information was quite enough for Cleopatra. She had her plans accordingly. *She would see Cæsar. More to the point, she would be seen by Cæsar. But how?* Cæsar was in Alexandria, the stronghold of her enemies….
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> 26 It was Julius Cæsar's first introduction to a super-woman; to the super-woman of super-women; to a woman beside whose snub-nosed, plain face, under its shock of red hair, *the memory of the Roman beauties who had so often charmed his idle hours grew dim and confused*.
>
> 27 Cleopatra, on her part, saw nothing so impressive as an elephant-tiger-dragon monster. *She beheld a thin, undersized man*, nearly sixty years old, hawk- nosed, inscrutable of eye, on whose thin gray locks, to mask his fast-growing baldness, rested a chaplet of laurel leaves.

At other points, Cohn acknowledges biographers who dispense with cautious adherence to facts for the sake of readability (28), and she reads closely some hybrid forms. The scrupulous, footnoted monograph that never invents undocumented feelings or weather is an exception in the wide circulation of biographical narrative.

Both Fludernik and Marie-Laure Ryan share in the consensus that fiction offers more immersion or powerful make-believe than nonfiction, which functions more as a report (Fludernik 133). Yet many kinds of biographies encourage immersive

identification.[10] Granted that the past is lost and that texts are not transparent. Nonetheless, narratives referring to real events and people can elicit real-world responses such as modeling behavior. Readers can respond to the conviction that they share with the author and the persons in the diegesis a common physical world albeit at different times or places (Fludernik 126).[11] Some kinds of nonfiction are as unlikely to fire mirror neurons as an article in a statistical or computer science journal. But other kinds of writing about real places, travels, and lives, as in homes and haunts or travel literature, invite readers on a nonfictional aesthetic journey, inducing them to bond with an available landscape or imagine the experience of individuals portrayed from third-person perspective.

Studies of fiction have favored the terminology that distinguishes the narrator from the real person who wrote the text. In CBW's collections as in many forms of nonfiction, the person named on the title page, the voice of the preface, the implied author, and the teller of the narratives in the chapters are so similar that the distinctions have little use.[12] Fludernik adds the further insight that the authorship of much nonfiction appears to be corporate or diffuse, as in committee reports, institutional histories, or Wikipedia articles; nonfiction has a higher rate of "we" pronouns (130).[13] Of course there

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10. Martinez reviews research that considers storyworld possible selves (SPSs) that are desired, feared, or past, including those based on previous literary experience (123-6). Though signals of referentiality may keep the reader aware of an extratextual self, the possible selves represented in biography seem all the more plausible than those in fictitious genres.

11. For narratology of nonfiction, we reverse narratology's preoccupation with the narrator and diegesis of fiction, focusing more on the author's engagement with the audience in "the communicative context" (Fludernik 127, 132-33).

12. Fludernik and Cohn both indicate the minimal value of a distinction between narrators and authors in nonfiction. Cohn writes of "historical biography," as of histories, philosophy, "cookbooks, travel guides, program notes," that "the ideas and judgment…are unquestioningly attributed to the author whose name appears on the title page" (*Distinction* 86). Rhetorical models of fiction tend to bracket the flesh-and-blood author and flesh-and-blood reader in order to focus on a textual communication between an implied author—the reader's inference of the intended norms or meanings of the text—and the corresponding implied reader. Response to various kinds of nonfiction allows no such bracketing. Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). Phelan, *Living to Tell About It*.

13. Most analyses of voice, distance or levels have engaged with fictitious utterance (as in the use of metalepsis, direct address, first-person plural, or second person in Victorian novels or contemporary short stories). Digital studies of large corpora of narrative open up possibilities for analysis of voice. BESS tagging of Discourse types includes grammatical person. CBW, a prosopographical database, in a sense studies voice at the thousandth degree: persons (names,

are famous biographers or historians, and the narration always makes unique choices. Yet the circulating anecdotes or the archival evidence that get reworked in life narratives in print or online seem to come from shared utterance, in the sense that others could repeat the research or the compilation.[14] Readers tend not to focus on the biographer but on the eponymous subject of the biography. Along with the principles that the author-narrator distinction is effaced and that nonfiction is referential and elicits versions, we should add a modification of the related narratological distinction between story and discourse. Nonfiction's fabula or story is not a reconstruction from the text's discourse but is believed to have really happened. Accordingly, Cohn suggests a tripartite model for nonfiction, reference/story/discourse (111-12).

With BESS analysis, we can measure and compare the order of the discourse with the original chronology of actual events (to the extent these can be known), and quantify the frequency of key or incidental events in different versions. As in any narrative, a potential sequence of events can be compared with the textual sequence: how does the telling arrange or order chronology, and in nonfiction, how does it select from sources? CBW is developing visualizations of the textual elements that we have tagged using BESS terms for types of StageOfLife, Events, PersonaDescription, Discourse, and Topos. Editors locate types of these elements in paragraphs across the short narratives and record these in XML documents keyed to those paragraph numbers (in other words, the markup is not inside the TEI XML file of the text itself). This analysis of textual elements shows us the order and selection of events and interrelated textual features in particular versions of the same tale or tales of related lives. This is a screenshot visualization of the StageOfLife (chronology) of Sister Dora's life in one version; note that the "End," i.e. her death, is narrated in early paragraphs and near the end of the text. This result also shows types of Event, PersonaDescription, and Discourse.

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portraits, narratives) represented in groups. See Martinez 113-14 on variable frames of voicing, including generic "one." Matt DelConte, "Why You Can't Speak: Second-Person Narration, Voice, and a New Model for Understanding Narrative," *Style* 37, no. 2 (2003): 204.

14. An over-emphasis on a few famous literary or political biographies has obscured the fact that the overt intentionality of biographies does not entail a unique, *ab ovo* authorial agency.
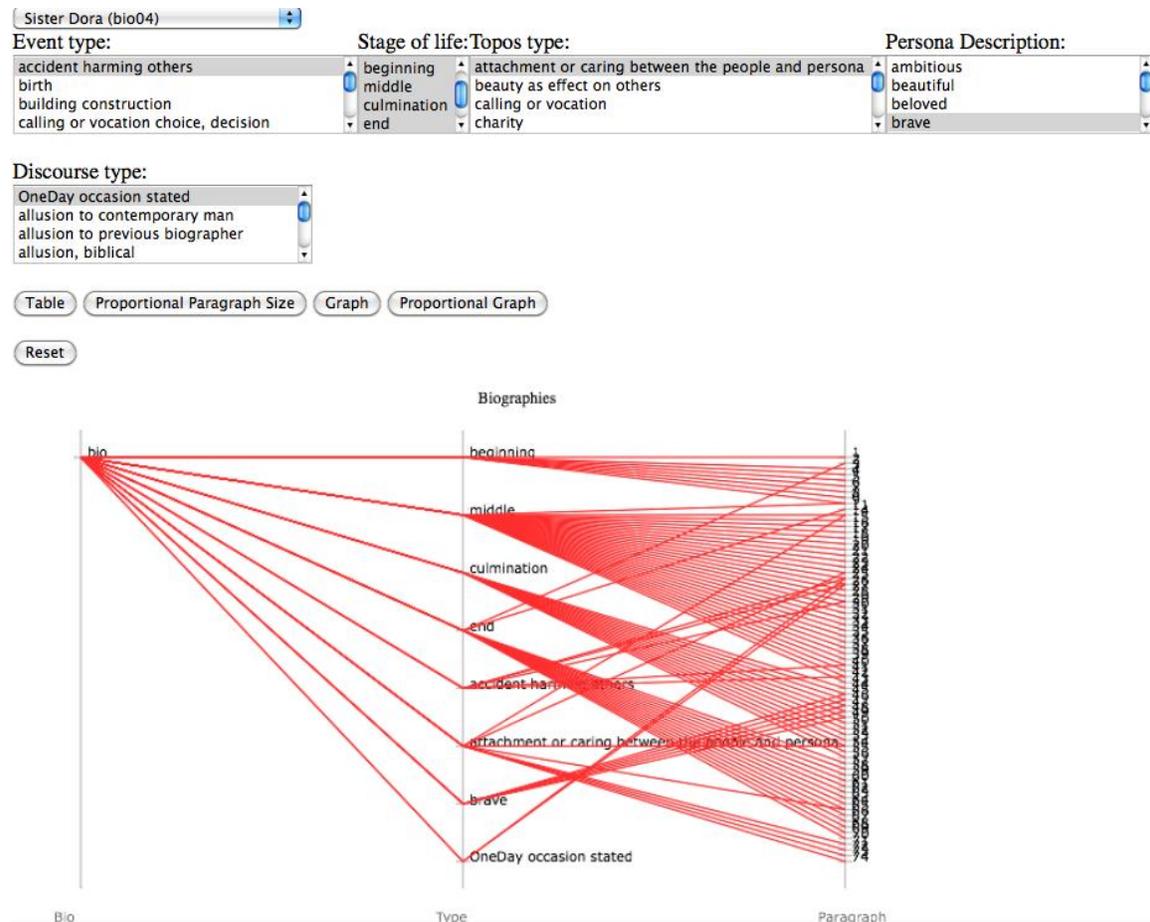
Short biographies tend to order the discourse chronologically, but there can be the kinds of temporal reorderings that have been common since Homer. The above biography begins:

> 1   *Born* at Hauxwell, near Richmond, Yorkshire, January 16, 1832.
>
> 2   *Died* at Walsall, December 24, 1878.
>
> **SISTER DORA.**
>
> 3   Five years before the beginning of the Victorian era, in a far village in the north of Yorkshire, Dorothy Wyndlow Pattison was born.

It continues:

> 4 **Times have changed since then,—railways and penny postage, steamships and bicycles, have brought English people very much nearer together than was possible in those days; but the little village of Hauxwell is almost as unknown now as it was then, except for the interest attaching to it as the**

> **birthplace of Sister Dora. And even that fact is comparatively little known, as compared with the world - wide notoriety of Walsall, where she lived and laboured and died. Life in the 'Thirties was a very different thing even in a country rectory,** and the delicate child had largely to make amusements for herself, as she was not strong enough to enter fully into the frolics of her brothers and sisters. There were no less than twelve little Pattisons—two boys and ten girls,— and of these Dorothy was the youngest but one. A bright and happy party they were, full of energy and fun, and all devoted to the youngest girl, whose frequent illnesses seemed but to endear her to the sturdier members of the family.

The temporal frame expands along with the geographical in the phrases in bold above. In the BESS analysis, this is marked as a common Discourse type in biography, *periods or times compared.* This paragraph includes StageOfLife *after* (i.e. narration of posthumous times) as well as *beginning*.

Other versions of this saintly woman's life also begin by stating her birth, one adding an epigraph from Wordsworth to a fairytale opening:

1   "A perfect woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command."

CHAPTER I. "LITTLE SUNSHINE."

2   In the Yorkshire village of Hauxwell, near Richmond, there lived, half-a-century ago, a good clergyman and his wife, named Pattison, and their large family of twelve children. The eldest and youngest of these were sons, and all the rest daughters.

3   The youngest of the ten girls was little Dorothy, or Dora, as she was commonly called, a winsome creature, gifted with extreme beauty, a merry spirit, and sweetness of temper, that made her the pet and darling of her older sisters; whose tenderness and care were frequently called into requisition by the attacks of illness to which Dora was subject during the whole of her childish days.

All versions of Sister Dora's life are indebted to her own version of her childhood and to a controversial biography by Margaret Lonsdale (1880), a close associate of Sister Dora. Beatification was under way during and after Sister Dora's short career as a hospital administrator and nurse serving the victims of industrial accidents in Walsall, near Birmingham.

DOROTHY WYNDLOW PATTISON.
("SISTER DORA.")
From a photograph by F. Brown, in the possession of Mr Kirby.

CAROLINE HERSCHEL.
From an original oil-painting, by M. G. Tielemann, now in the possession of
Sir William Herschel, Bart.

Our study pursues not only narrative voice and focalization, events and the ordering and selection in nonfiction versions referring to an individual life, but also the alignment of types of personae in prosopographies or collective biographies. In the same volume, similarly lauded women of very different achievement can tend to resemble each other. Both Sister Dora and Caroline Herschel are known as "sisters," Herschel as the sibling of a great astronomer; Herschel discovered many comets and received a royal pension. The same author and the same editorial production reduce their differences in narrative and image, praising their notable but in a sense uneventful lives as unmarried women who achieved in medicine and science.

1   *Born in Hanover, 1750.*

2   *Died in Hanover, 1848*

CAROLINE LUCRETIA HERSCHEL.

3   Sisters have played an important part in the world's history.

4 Though eclipsed by their more brilliant brothers, there were none more ready to acknowledge their indebtedness than William Wordsworth, William Herschel,

Charles Lamb, and others, whose names stand out prominently in the literary roll-call of England.

5   And of these sisters, perhaps the one whose personal history is the most interesting is Caroline Herschel, without whose invaluable aid the success of her brother would have been hindered, if not prevented.

6   In the early part of the seventeenth century the Protestants of Moravia fled from the persecutions which were rife in that part of the Continent, and took up their abode in other less conservative quarters.

The chronological frame of an individual life expands in paragraphs 3 and 6, affirming the relevance of an individual female experience to European history. Paragraphs 7-14 largely concern Herschel's grandfather, father, and the latter's role in battles to establish Hanoverian succession, all before Caroline is born in paragraph 15. Interestingly, a person who was born and died in Hanover would have been understood as owing allegiance to the English monarchy, and Herschel's extended residence in England, including a phase as a musical performer in Jane Austen's Bath, cements this collapsed picture of Herschel's nationality: she is not quite a foreigner in CBW versions of her life.

The tendency of parallel lives in prosopographies to assume parallel structures can be confirmed as a large-scale pattern of variations when we have completed our BESS analysis. This process in a sense magnifies that of close reading of parallel texts, as in comparing editions of a single epic poem. Rarely do critics pay such attention to versions of biography or history. Even more unprecedented is a systematic comparison of biographical narratives about different subjects. To give an example of reading the texts (in TEI digital form, displayed in HTML on CBW's site): the beginnings of two biographies in the same collection, Louise Creighton's *Some Famous Women* (1909), chapters three and eleven. The common premise of childhood promise appears in lives of two very different figures, Saint Joan and the now-forgotten Victorian hospital reformer.

III JEANNE D'ARC, THE MAID OF FRANCE

1 **On January 6, probably in the year 1412, Jeanne d'Arc was born in Domremy, a little village in Lorraine, the great duchy which lies on the eastern frontier of France. Jeanne's father was a hard-working peasant. He owned horses and cattle and was one of the most respected inhabitants of his village. There were no village schools in those days and Jeanne never learnt to read and write. Her mother taught her** the creed and her prayers, as well as

sewing and the work about the house. **Like other peasant girls** she ploughed and worked in the fields and took care of the cattle. She played with the other children, and used to dance and weave garlands with them. Best of all she loved to go into the little church and pray, so that sometimes the other children laughed at her for her piety. **She used to nurse the sick**, and would even lie all night upon the hearth in order to give up her bed to some poor person.

2   France was at that time in a very troubled state. The whole land was divided into two parties, the Burgundians and the Armagnacs. The Burgundians had made friends with the English, who under Henry V. had conquered great part of France. Henry V. was dead, but his little son, Henry VI., had been crowned King of France, and his uncle, the Duke of Bedford, held Paris and many other towns in the north of France for him. The true King of France, Charles VII., had not been crowned yet, …

XI SISTER DORA

1   Dorothy Pattison, who was afterwards known as Sister Dora, was born in 1832 in a little village called Hauxwell, near Richmond, in Yorkshire, of which her father was the rector. She was the youngest but one of a family of twelve children, of whom ten were daughters. **They grew up in all the enjoyment of country life. Dorothy was delicate as a child and not allowed to do regular lessons, but she describes herself as having all the same been a great romp, as wild and merry as a boy, and good at all outdoor sports—** riding, rowing, shooting, swimming, and skating. **But even as a tiny child she loved to wash and nurse her dolls, and longed to be able to do the same for real people. When she talked over the future with her nearest sister she used to say, "I'll be a nurse or** a lady doctor and do everything for my patients." When she was twelve, one of her sisters fell ill, and Dorothy begged, at first in vain, to be allowed to sit up with her and nurse her, but at last she managed to slip into the room unnoticed, and once she was there, she was allowed to stay and helped to nurse her sister till she was well. A couple of years afterwards a fever broke out in the village, and an old woman whom Dorothy knew very well took it. She called at the house to ask how she was and found the old woman left quite alone. In a moment, she made up her mind,…

Creighton's selection of twelve women is almost exclusively British; the figures, all renowned in 1909, date from the Middle Ages to the recently-deceased Queen Victoria.

The last anecdote in paragraph 1 of chapter eleven above has some circulation in versions of Dora, a childhood experience of solitary nursing of a dying patient in defiance of her family, as in her later career. In other versions, the old woman has been replaced by a dying boy, an *anecdote of childhood promise* (a Discourse type) that appears in two

versions alongside the BESS analysis for those paragraphs in this image of two visualizations, indicating the types of elements editors have identified in these paragraphs.


These versions of the same incident reveal the near-plagiarism of narrated events with few sources: Jeanie Cochrane, *Peerless Women: A Book for Girls* bio02 and Rosa Carey's *Twelve Notable Good Women* bio07. Many biographical incidents necessarily are invented, supplied either by the person, admiring or hostile contemporaries, or posthumous interpreters of these preceding sources. When we have analyzed all the versions of one life in our database of this genre, we select from the thousands of actions in the narratives the recurrent events, assigning attributes to those event elements according to key id numbers, and rating them *kernel* (near-ubiquitous), *satellite, common* and *satellite, rare* (rough majority and minority of versions). Thus, E00020, Dying Village Boy Waiting for Dora's Return, occuring in 7 of the nineteen versions of her life published in collections before 1940, is a rare satellite. The measured comparison of versions in this project is a promising direction for assessing events in narrative according to frequency and distribution, not just causality and sequence in one version.

CBW's experiments in analyzing sample corpora associated with networks of female types (biographies in all the books that include a biography of Sister Dora, for

example) can be compared to Vladimir Propp's structuralist morphology of the Russian folk tale. Propp has been influential in pursuing the syntagmatic sequence of the thirty-one functions he identified in all the tales he redacted. In biography, as in the folk tale, interpretation can discern the paradigmatic as well as syntagmatic: the mythic or ideological structure subtending the overt sequential narrative. Our BESS analysis traces not only the explicit narration and discourse but also the topoi that would be difficult to detect algorithmically with topic modeling because they may not affect word usage or proximities. In any case, biography is a literate form of nonfiction; some facts and sequences as well as persons would resist Proppian types or sequences; character functions (such as *dispatcher* and *donor*) do not closely map onto actual people, and the propulsion of narrative runs up against the failures of life events to conform to plot patterns or closure. The divergence from paradigms of gender in collective biographies of women has been a primary motivation for my persistent exploration of this genre. Not surprisingly, biography of women as well as men does tend to follow a quest plot from birth to death. At the same time, CBW yields insight into the diversity among the lives of women recognized in this bibliography of books, and the degrees of factual specificity in these variations upon themes. Biographies want to be accurate, interesting, and instructive; slavish birth-adversity-triumph-death arcs can be moderately satisfying, but entirely predictable didacticism has become objectionable even in texts addressed to the young by the Victorian era. Well-known facts about women of the modern era can resist the arc or the moral lesson, sparking interest. But writers of brief biographies must omit many facts and episodes to summarize a personality and life. The levels of interest, plausibility, and exemplarity vary in significant ways, not always correlating with the apparent intention of the presenters. Various memorable individuals, even so-called good women, have been documented as doing irregular, even unique things, in no logical order. Individuals who are famous for rank, beauty, or wealth can be as monotonous as those who are honored for their documented, modest goodness. Few lives are duller than Queen Victoria's.

As CBW elicits narrative structure in a corpus of nonfiction, we also parse networks formed by these collections. Collective biographies form links among persons who may or may not have had historical interrelation. As nonfiction representations, the

narratives refer to specific time and place in ways favored in digital research that deals with social networks or other historical or sociological data. We would pursue the historical intersections of biographies that we study in depth, charting geospatial coordinates and standard dates for all the named events (such as Sister Dora's Dying Boy incident). Many of the women's lives intersect in events such as civil wars, epidemics, revolutions, or campaigns. Rates of publication of the collections apparently rise following such national and international events. So beyond our interest in the constructed documentary networks, we will reveal unexpected interactions that might not emerge from studying more obviously related persons (such as members of a literary society in Boston in 1895).
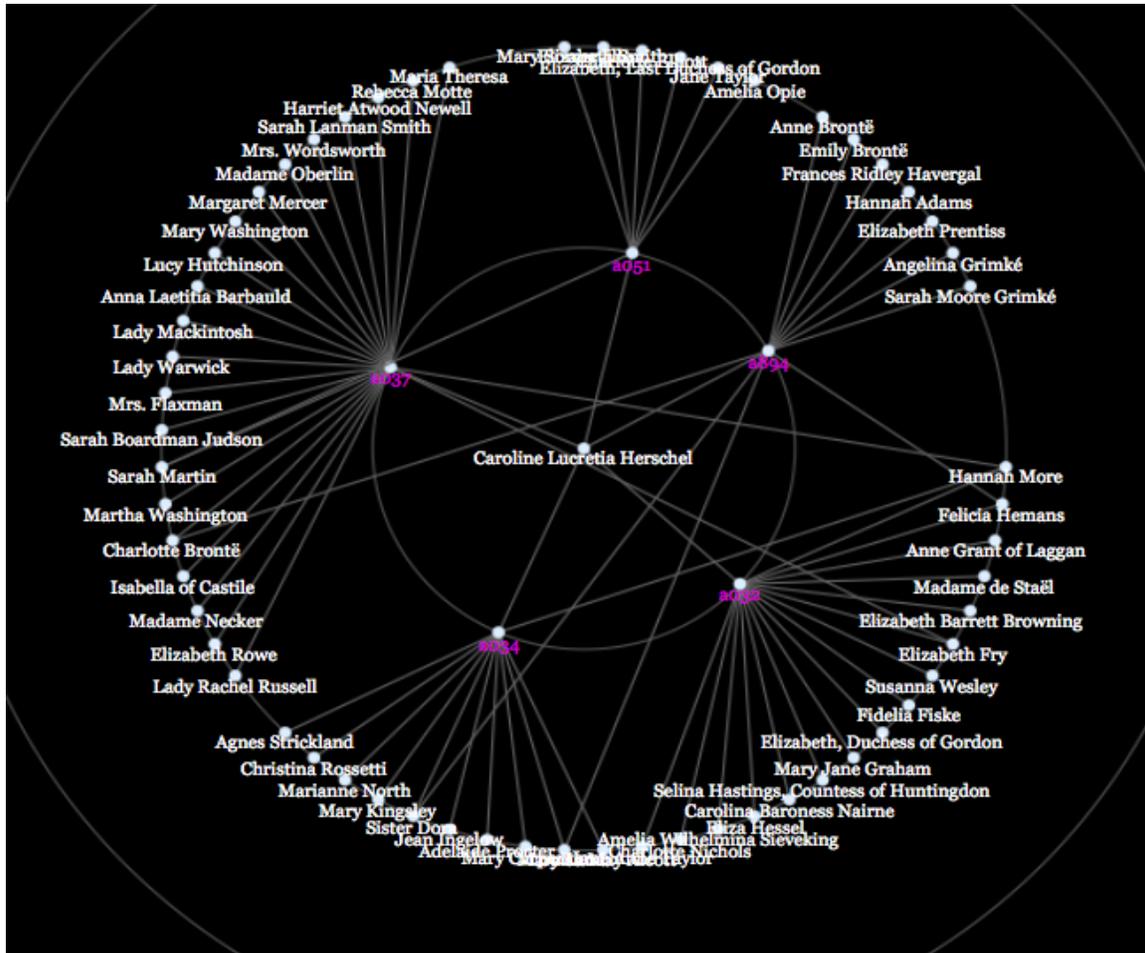
Screen Shot of R-Graph of "one degree of separation" from Caroline Herschel: "Siblings" are the women who share a volume. Here, we have selected from the sample corpus of books that include Herschel the five collections that we have assigned to the type "Good Character or Deeds" (a032, a034, a037, a051, a894). These siblings are well-

documented, famous women of the modern era, in the Anglophone orbit. What do Martha Washington and Anne Brontë have to do with Herschel?

Collective biographies have a range of implicit and stated principles for selecting subjects as well as different designs on their audience. Diverging networks of women form around a type that is considered antithetical to the unmarried nurse, saint, or scientist: the adventuress Lola Montez. The sample corpus of books that include Montez, with titles like "Gallant Ladies" and "Seven Splendid Sinners," are published in the same decades as Sister Dora books, 1880-1930 or so, but these types of collections favor ironic and flamboyant narrative voice, not unlike the tone of the paragraphs previously quoted that focalize Cleopatra and Caesar. Narratives of the notorious "Spanish Dancer" are crowded with newsworthy events that force her to flee one country after another. Versions of Lola Montez disrupt chronology and show recurrent "culminations." Analysis of Montez versions calls for event types never used to interpret the sisterly workers who assist and then master male occupations such as surgery and astronomy, and who never share a book with Montez. Events such as *coup d'etat, exile, seduction, performance*, however, do recur in lives of Cleopatra, a "sibling" of Lola Montez in three books (one degree of separation). In our working database, a search by person ID for two persons brings up the volumes that they share, for example:

Person: P14501 - Lola Montez
and
Person: P08525 - Queen Cleopatra

Both appear in these Collections
1. a712 - Dominant Women.
2. a788 - Superwomen.
3. a793 - Wild Women of History.

The networks among persons, persona types, and collections of different designs open new perspectives on trends in gender representation within the horizon of English-language publications addressed to literate audiences—implied readers varying from children and girls-only to working class religious classes to sophisticated men in their

clubs. The database and the visualizations of these relations complement the mid-range reading of narrative elements performed in our BESS experiment on sample corpora. For both networks and narrative analysis, we plan six sample corpora. In addition to Sister Dora and Lola Montez, we have chosen different representatives who are in nearer or more remote degree from them and who represent different roles, nationalities or contexts: Caroline Herschel, Queen Cleopatra, Frances Trollope, and Charlotte Corday. We can measure networks of names in the tables of contents and frequency of co-occurrence. BESS analysis, which draws as appropriate from narratology of fictional narrative and adapts to the specific traits of this mode of publication, can bring out the commonality and variation in all the versions (from 9 to 32 versions) of each of these six women and all the biographies of other women in each text (at least 2,125 narratives about an undetermined number of persons). The same persons may be siblings in several books, as Cleopatra and Lola Montez accompany each other in three volumes. And an individual person may be a sibling of more than one of the six nodes (Dora, Montez, Herschel, Cleopatra, Trollope, and Corday), so we will find sets of multiple versions of some of these subjects. The networks of interrelationship provide context for the results of BESS analysis, and will ensure that we avoid a morphology of a narrative genre that appears to claim universality. Particularly in the markup of Discourse types, including *direct address, use of "we"* or *free indirect discourse*, and in parsing the data on Event types according to frequency and distribution, this experiment will contribute substantial observation of changing conventions in biographical narratives about women in this context. It will help to extend narrative theory to nonfiction in general and third-person life narratives in sets and networks, or prosopographies, in particular.