ary value revealed the nationalism of post–World War II literary criticism, Parrish's transatlantic contextualization of literary value reflects the global emphasis of our own literary historical moment. "To perceive [Beverley's] experience of the world and the reasons he constructed his *History* the way he did," she writes, "one must place Beverley within an imperial transatlantic geography rather than a protonationalist American one" (xi).

In reading this excellent introduction, I occasionally craved further discussion of how Beverley's Edenic rhetoric—his perpetuation of the myth of inexhaustible natural resources—might be situated within an older tradition of promotional writing. I would also have found interesting a more thorough discussion of the reception history of Beverley's book. That said, there is no question that Susan Scott Parrish's new edition of *The History and Present State of Virginia* is not only very fine work but also a substantial and welcome contribution to the cognate fields of colonial American history and early American literary studies. Thanks to Parrish's painstaking work and the support of the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, we now have a reliable scholarly edition of a book that has the distinction of having being written by a native-born Virginian who was both buoyed and buffeted by the vital currents that circulated through the early eighteenth-century transatlantic world.

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Book of Ages: The Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin

JILL LEPORE
New York: Knopf, 2013
442 pages.

Ring the bells that still can ring.
Forget your perfect offering.
There is a crack in everything.
It's how the light gets in.
—Leonard Cohen, "Anthem" (1992)

So reads the epigraph to John Demos's *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America* (1994), which focuses on the captivi-

ties of the eminent Puritan divine John Williams, who eventually returned to Massachusetts from Canada after his ordeal, and his daughter Eunice, who did not. While John recounted his experiences in *The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion* (1707), Eunice converted to Catholicism, married a Kahnawake man, and forgot how to speak English: she was the unredeemed captive. John Demos and Jill Lepore are among the best-known narrative historians of early America, but they share another connection. Demos taught Lepore, and from her first book, *The Name of War* (1998), to her latest, *Book of Ages* (2013), she too peers through the dim crevices of history to illuminate and dignify the hitherto lost lives of everyday people.

In this case, Lepore privileges Benjamin Franklin's favorite but little-known sister, Jane, and alchemically transforms her hardscrabble life of poverty, child rearing, and instability into something precious. The letters that passed between them throughout their lives, augmented by a range of supporting artifacts and newly recovered material, provide a strong sense of her voice, beliefs, and personality. Jane was not very well schooled, but she read as much as she could and pondered public and private matters. Hence the book's subtitle, *The Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin*. Jane was the youngest of seven girls and Benjamin the youngest of ten boys born to Josiah Franklin and his first and second wives, Ann and Abigail. Brother and sister were devoted to each other (the family referred to them as Benny and Jenny) and Benjamin taught Jane to love reading and writing. But she married a ne'er-do-well, Edward Mecom, at fifteen and spent decades caring for him, her children, and her ailing parents, as well as several grandchildren and even great-grandchildren, while Benjamin left home to find his fortune. Yet despite their radically different lives, they remained extremely close. In the end, they were the only ones left, having outlived their spouses and siblings; Jane outlived most of her twelve children too. Throughout his life, Benjamin found ways to assist Jane. He encouraged her to write (most girls were taught to read but not necessarily to write), he sent her money and books, he helped her children, and in his will he bequeathed her the house she was living in, which he owned, and an annual income of fifty pounds (29, 227).

Both Demos and Lepore contribute to a rich store of narrative that is especially concerned with recovering the marginalized, the muted, and the masked, such as women, persons of color, and the working classes. In order to do so, they often need to use unconventional historical evi-

dence and innovative storytelling techniques. For some, narrative history remains problematical because it smacks too much of the fictional and the frivolous, instead of the factual and the weighty. Yet in addition to a steady stream of books, the discipline now boasts a book series and a journal all its own: New Directions in Narrative History from Yale University Press, edited by Demos and Aaron Sachs, and *The Appendix*, which appeared online in December 2012 and which describes itself as a "quarterly journal of experimental and narrative history" (see http://theappendix.net).

Lepore herself has reflected on historiography in publications and presentations for general readers as well as academics. She is, for example, a regular contributor to *The New Yorker* and published a fascinating essay there on the links between history and fiction, "Just the Facts, Ma'am" (Mar. 24, 2008). Tracing the rise of fiction and the evolution of historical writing, she refers to the eighteenth-century British novelist Henry Fielding: "For Fielding, there are two kinds of historical writing: history based in fact (whose truth is founded in documentary evidence), and history based in fiction (whose truth is founded in human nature)" ("Just the Facts" 81). Paradoxically, the latter sometimes reveals more than the former. As Tim O'Brien memorably puts it in his semiautobiographical short story collection, *The Things They Carried*, "I want you to know why story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth" (179).

Lepore goes on to point out the fallacy of the factual: since histories have arbitrary beginnings and ends, they are inherently incomplete; since historians always write from their own viewpoint, they are unavoidably subjective; and since primary information is inert and cannot be revivified by its original producers, it is clearly unreliable. She therefore concludes that fiction "can do what history doesn't but should: it can tell the story of ordinary people" ("Just the Facts" 82). She elaborates further in "Methods and Sources," appendix A of *Book of Ages*, "This book is a history, a biography, but, in the spirit of the age in which Jane lived, it borrows from the conventions of fiction" (269). However, despite her attempts in the book "to call attention to the conventions of different kinds of writing about lives—history, biography, autobiography, and fiction," she argues that Jane Franklin's life "doesn't fit neatly into any one of those genres. Nor do most lives" (270). In other words, almost all lives are complex, even humble ones.

But Lepore certainly does not advocate a wishy-washy kind of historical

storytelling. In "Historical Writing and the Revival of Narrative," an address given at the Nieman Narrative Journalism Conference back in 2001, she draws on the comments of British historian Lawrence Stone, who asserted that the best narrative history should be guided by a "pregnant principle." Such work moves beyond exposition to a cohesive, regenerative interpretation of the data provided. It bonds narrative power with analytical rigor. She also references the comments of Peter Burke, a historian at Cambridge, concerning the anthropological technique of thick description. Historical thick narratives—microhistories—simultaneously weave together an individual's story with historical context. As she admits, this is no easy task.

Indeed, given the many obstacles and omissions Lepore faced in writing *Book of Ages*, she sometimes despaired that she would ever be able to do justice to Jane's story, and she even abandoned the project for a while (269). Simply finding facts about Jane was difficult, considering, for example, that Ben kept none of her letters for the first three decades of their sixty-three-year correspondence even though she kept his. Interviewed by Diane Rehm on National Public Radio, Lepore likens this disparity to "having one shoe" and trying to walk (http://thedianerehmshow.org/shows/2013–11–18). In order to find enough evidence to avoid a severe discursive limp, Lepore had to get creative. And she did. The resulting book not only brings Jane to life but provides "a meditation on silence in the archives" (269).

To flesh out Jane's story, Lepore uses a variety of source material including Jane's "Book of Ages," a sixteen-page foolscap booklet where she recorded her twelve children's births and deaths, public records, newspapers, genealogical data, and a tabulation of the books Jane read or owned throughout her life. Lepore's strategies in utilizing this information are also innovative. For example, she admits to constructing as dialogue some of the letters the brother and sister exchanged, and she says that occasionally, adapting chronological fidelity to her own ends, she used a later letter of Jane's to describe events during an earlier time frame.

Lepore adopts other ways to contextualize Jane's life, too. Take, for example, the explanatory sections on aspects of eighteenth-century culture that pertain to the people in her book. Speculating on why Jane's husband was constantly in debt, Lepore explores the function of paper credit in the eighteenth century. Discussing Jane's ornate lettering in capitalizing the

title nouns of her birth and death registry, "Book of Ages," Lepore points out that the "lavish, calligraphic letter *B*" and the "graceful, slender, artful *A*" are written in the Italian style known as the "Flourishing Alphabet" (49). That observation leads to a discussion of contemporary writing manuals, which could have been where Jane encountered this kind of lettering. Lepore observes that these two letters were not written in Jane's usual hand; they are unlike any other samples of her writing and bestow formality and importance on the contents of her little booklet. Other topics require more detailed examination: for example, the places where Lepore contemplates whether Jane's family suffered from tuberculosis and particularly whether the disease caused or exacerbated mental illness, which affected Jane's husband and several of her children (120–26).

Another contextualizing technique involves Lepore's description of other "Janes" who act as foils to Jane Franklin. In chapter 6, she contrasts Jane Franklin's restricted educational opportunities with the fortunes of Jane Colman Turell, daughter of the minister of the church where Jane Franklin's uncle worshipped. Jane Colman Turell composed poems and hymns which were published after her premature death; whereas Jane Franklin Mecom's only literary remains were her "Book of Ages" and a few other documents riddled with misspellings and colloquialisms. Lepore observes that Jane wrote to her brother Benjamin assuming the same role that Jane Colman Turell used when she wrote to her father—as "a student writes to a tutor"—thereby making an apt connection between the two female contemporaries (28). In chapter 38, Lepore describes how a young Jane Austen compiled her parody of English history but later went on to write sophisticated novels. "In the eighteenth century," she writes, "history and fiction split. Benjamin Franklin's life entered the annals of history; lives like his sister's became the subject of fiction. Histories of great men, novels of little women" (241). *Book of Ages*, of course, provides the history of a "little" woman.

Lepore uses yet another Jane, Lady Jane Grey, to open her book as a way to comment on women who loved reading and writing (as did Jane Franklin Mecom). Lady Jane Grey, the grandniece of Henry the Eighth, became queen for nine days and was then overthrown and executed. Segue to the village of Ecton, Northamptonshire, where a daughter, Jane, was born to Thomas Francklyne in 1565 but died within a month. Thomas and his wife then had four sons, one of whom was Henry, the grandfather of

Benjamin and Jane Franklin (the spelling of the name had changed over the years) (3–8). While the links may sound tenuous in my summary, rest assured that Lepore makes the connections far more convincingly and elegantly. Going back historically to a point that only superficially seems removed from the topic at hand is a further tool in the narrative historian's arsenal. Its use reinforces the notion of a continuum of causes, effects, and connections and dramatizes the difficulty of ascribing any definitive beginning point to a project. I see it as a historical analogue to intertextuality.

Organizing so much disparate material must have been challenging, yet for readers the end result is easy to follow. The book divides into five main parts, "Jane," "Her Book," "Letters," "History," and "Remains," with the last third of the volume given over to seven appendixes. They focus mostly on Jane but also on historians of the Franklin family, starting with Lepore herself (her section on "Methods and Sources" is fascinating), and include scholars from previous academic generations such as Jared Sparks and Carl Van Doren. In my view, the appendixes are not traditional add-ons. Because of the evidentiary spaces in Lepore's project, these later sections aptly fill in material that she did not have room to detail earlier, such as more on Jane's reading in "Jane's Library" (appendix F) and information on the Franklin and Mecom families in "A Franklin Genealogy" and "A Jane Genealogy" (appendixes B and C). Within the book's main portion, Lepore effortlessly interlaces the biographies of Jane and Benjamin, analysis of their writings, and contextual data. Also scattered throughout *Book of Ages* is a series of illustrations. If you look at the table of contents, you will not see them itemized in a separate illustrations list because they are such an integral part of the text.

In addition to adopting a reader-friendly organization for her book, Lepore writes in an engaging, impassioned, and sometimes lyrical style. The following extract that tries to convey Jane's exhaustion in rearing her young children is a particularly good example:

> Her days were days of flesh: the little legs and little arms, the little hands, clutched around her neck, the softness. Her days were days of toil: swaddling and nursing the baby, washing and dressing the boys, scrubbing everyone's faces, answering everyone's cries, feeding everyone's hunger, cleaning everyone's waste. She taught her children to read. She made sure they learned to write better than she did. (66)

Does *Book of Ages* have any faults? Not for me. I can see, however, that some readers could take exception to the very enterprise of writing a biography when the data are so limited, because the historian inevitably fills in some blanks with conjecture. I think this would only be a problem if the writer overgeneralized, drew hasty conclusions, or made definitive statements. Instead, Lepore takes great care to make unreliability or suggestion overt. She is honest about uncertainty even as she furnishes circumstantial evidence to support her arguments.

In *Poor Richard's Almanack* for 1838, Benjamin Franklin quipped, "Read much, but not many Books." Lepore's volume is one you *should* read. Painstakingly researched, well argued, deftly organized, remarkably comprehensive, and beautifully written, *Book of Ages* casts light on the famous and the forgotten alike as well as the gendered society that produced both a Benjamin and a Jane Franklin.

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Biography and the Black Atlantic

Edited by LISA A. LINDSAY and JOHN WOOD SWEET
Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014
370 pp.

The two parts of this volume's title would seem to pose the problem of critical redundancy. "Biography" and the "Black Atlantic" have been critically entwined with one another for quite some time. Paul Gilroy's influential formulation, in which racial identities are structured on mobility and cultural exchange ("routes" as opposed to "roots"), has informed the burgeoning scholarship on black life writing, written or related, during the long eighteenth century. The study of the early Black Atlantic has proliferated over the past decade to the point where Olaudah Equiano and Phillis Wheatley are no longer the only household names in the literary and historical canon. It includes many other black subjects whose textual lives—in journals, memoirs, spiritual and conversion narratives, letters, and lyric poetry, among other genres—now appear in scholarly editions and anthologies. These texts constitute the backbone of the early Black Atlantic.

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