



Telling Women's Lives: The New Biography

Linda Wagner-Martin

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Placing herself in the avid reader's chair, Linda Wagner-Martin writes about women's biography from George Eliot and Virginia Woolf to Eleanor Roosevelt and Margaret Mead, and even to Cher and Elizabeth Taylor. Along the way, she looks at dozens of other life stories, probing at the differences between biographies of men and women, prevailing stereotypes about women's lives and roles, questions about what is public and private, and the hazy margins between autobiography, biography, and other genres. In quick paced and wide-ranging discussions, she looks at issues of authorial stance (who controls the narrative? who chooses which story to tell?), voice (is this story told in the traditional objective tone? and if it is, what effect does that telling have on our reading?), and the politics of publishing (why aren't more books about women's lives published? and when they are, what happens to their advertising budgets?). She discusses the problems of writing biography of achieving women who were also wives (how does the biographer balance the two?), of daughters who attempt to write about their mothers, and of husbands trying to portray their wives.

Telling Women's Lives is the first overview of the writing and the history of biographies about women. It is a significant contribution to the reassessment of the work of the hundreds of women writers who have made a difference in our conception of what women's stories--and women's lives--have been, and are becoming. The book is a must read for anyone who loves reading biographies, particularly biographies of women.

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