

Literary Roundtable: FACT + HEART

written by Guest Contributor | May 22, 2020



How the lyric poem can enable creative reimagining of a historical figure. Four poets discuss strategies and techniques, as well as the rewards and difficulties involved in writing a verse biography.

PARTICIPANTS: Gray Jacobik, Irène Mathieu, Penelope Schott, Juditha Dowd (moderator)

Juditha Dowd: In recent years my writing has taken an unexpected turn toward poetic biography. This has opened my eyes to new ways of inquiring into the lives of historical figures that intrigue me, including people from my own past. I've enjoyed exploring types of personae poems to deepen my understanding of a character, and what I gained in the process has influenced and enriched my work in other genres. Along the way it's been my good fortune to cross paths with some great writers who have also published lyric biographies. Today I'm talking with three whose work I particularly admire: Gray Jacobik, Irène Mathieu and Penelope Schott. Poets, each of us has published at least one lyric biography, and some have published several. Let me open our conversation by asking you to briefly describe one of those books. What inspired you to write about the life of this person or persons?

Irène Mathieu: My book, *Grand Marronage*, is heavily based on the life of my paternal grandmother. I wanted to examine the silences in family histories, particularly as they relate to class, gender, and race. My grandmother, who is 97 years old, was born and raised in Creole New Orleans, a culture steeped in patriarchal respectability politics. I was fascinated by the way she tells stories about her life, noticeably glossing over anything negative or unpleasant. I think there is a tendency at the national level, too, to focus

on the narrative that serves a particular telling of history and to sweep what is painful under the rug. For this reason I chose to interrogate my grandmother's stories as a microcosm of our country's (U.S.A.) historical amnesia, and an exploration of how reading between the lines might make us a little freer with each generation. This is important to me as someone who has benefited from the U.S. American system of racialized capitalism – telling the nuanced truth of my own family's history (which includes the enslaved and enslavers, Native peoples and immigrants, and many others) is a way to refute the myth of meritocracy, a myth that perpetuates very real harm and also obfuscates the truth of history. There's a middle section of poems in the voice of/inspired by the Harlem Renaissance writer and activist Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, too, whose background is similar to my grandmother's, in many ways, and whose life story spoke to me on multiple levels.

Gray Jacobik: I've never used the terms "lyric biography" or "poetic biography" but I see how my collection of dramatic monologues in Eleanor Roosevelt's voice (*Eleanor*, CavanKerry Press, 2020) fits into that category. The historian, Doris Kearns Goodwin, wrote a book called *No Ordinary Time* focused on the Roosevelts during World War II. Goodwin wrote the chapters in tandem: one about Eleanor, one about Franklin. I was riveted with interest when the chapter was about her, and much less so when it was about him. I was so curious about my own divided interest that I began reading biographies of Eleanor Roosevelt, then collections of her letters, essays, speeches, newspaper columns and a few of the more than three dozen books she wrote herself including four autobiographies. I was profoundly moved by the human being she was, by how much knowing her meant to me personally, how much her ideas and her example enriched my life, that I felt compelled to honor her memory the only way I knew – to do what a poet alone could do. I could imagine her subjective experience, her inner life, using the frame of history.

Penelope Scambly Schott: By the age of six I was already an historian. I believed that in order to understand anything I had to know how it started. My great childhood fear was that as we moved farther and farther away from the past we would be less and less able to learn about it. I was greatly relieved when I learned that new sources of information were still being found.

Of the poetry books I've published, four are historical narratives complete with extensive bibliographies. I have written about an early New Jersey settler (*Penelope: The Story of the Half-Scalped Woman*); a distant relative who had one of the last lobotomies (*The Pest Maiden: A Story of Lobotomy*); Puritan dissident Anne Hutchinson (*A Is for Anne: Mistress Hutchinson Disturbs the Commonwealth*); and a history of prostitution (*Lillie Was a Goddess, Lillie Was a Whore*). For each of these books, my process was basically the same: become accidentally intrigued by the story of some woman or women, read and read and read, visit available sites, interview relevant people, until the women in the stories began to speak to me in their own voices. Only then did I sit down and write.

My first poetic entrapment was with the story of Penelope Stout. She and I shared a name (yes, I admit I read *The Odyssey* with personal involvement),

and some Stout descendants were buried in a small town near me. Seventeenth-century Penelope had a long relationship with the local Lenape Indians, some of whose artifacts – tools, grinding stones, bowls, arrowheads – my neighbor had plowed up in his soybean fields. Penelope was asking me to tell her story. I went off to a residency at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts, research in hand, and came home with a finished manuscript.

JD: Like Gray, I was inspired while reading a book by somebody else—Richard Rhodes’s biography *John James Audubon: The Making of an American*. By page 50 my interest had shifted toward a secondary character, the naturalist’s wife Lucy Bakewell—a more reserved but equally compelling personality who’s received far less attention. I wondered how she, an educated woman born into English gentry, viewed the couple’s life of misfortune and poverty on the American frontier, the hard months she spent on her own with young children while he was off chasing wildlife and hoping to someday publish his drawings. I ended up reading widely about the Audubons, including compilations of his writings edited by others and a biography of Lucy by the late Carolyn E. De Latte. I learned that she had become the primary financial support for the family, working as both a ladies’ companion and a teacher on several plantations along the lower Mississippi. These poorly-paid, domestic servant positions were among the few respectable jobs open to women in the early 1800s. By now Lucy had won my heart. I admired her bravery, resilience, and resourcefulness. Her story of helping an obsessed husband achieve his dreams, and of eventually becoming her own woman against considerable odds, deserved to be better known. I couldn’t resist.

So why choose poetry as a biographical framework instead of writing a non-fiction or fictionalized account? Does poetry offer advantages in terms of freedom, emotional range and complexity? Any drawbacks to this approach?

GJ: The short answer is that I chose poetry rather than prose because I am a practicing poet and my practice has moved, over the years, to writing in the dramatic mode. The greatest difficulty, I’ve found, is enfolding narrative content into a voice that’s as compressed and lyrical as one associated with the speaker in a strong lyric poem. In my case, I wanted Eleanor to sound like a living woman speaking more or less conversationally, yet her imagined voice is burdened, non-stop, with moving the story forward. As the writer, I struggled constantly to enrich the “story” with imagery, metaphor and other figures-of-speech, form, line break, enjambment and all other sound devices available to the poet. I may have failed to find a good balance: too much story, not enough song, and conversely, too much song, not enough story. I hope my Eleanor leads others to the prose biographies several significant historians have published. I’m interested in knowing if anyone else thinks in terms of “advantages” . . . I sure can’t see a single advantage poetry has over prose.

JD: That’s interesting, Gray—I suspect we’ve all wrestled with how to achieve this balance you describe. Your Eleanor does sound to my ear like a living woman, candid and conversational, her voice unburdened by the narrative. Early on I decided the intimacy I was after for *Audubon’s Sparrow* required poetry rather than prose. The heightened and condensed language of poetry

would make that intimacy easier to achieve—or so I hoped. When the book begins Lucy is seventeen, when it ends she's in her forties. Poetry offered the tools and range I needed to let Lucy express herself over an extended period of change and personal growth. But it took considerable experimentation to find the right mix of form and style. Eventually I settled on a variety of personae poems—letters, diary entries and dramatic monologues. Though they're lined poems, the letters and diary entries read closer to prose. The monologues have a more lyric feel, some open and airy, spread across the page. This combination gave me plenty of room to explore thoughts, emotions, and important events. I wove the poems into a narrative, its timeline secured by dating the letters and diary entries and by including a chronology at the end. I did worry about keeping the story clear and moving forward, and tried to achieve this in several ways, a main one being to borrow bits from Audubon's own published work to help ground the action.

IM: I think you absolutely achieved that intimacy in *Audubon's Sparrow*, Juditha. That's such a great way to describe the advantage of poetry for this kind of storytelling; sometimes less is more. In my case, writing my grandmother's (and Alice Dunbar-Nelson's) stories via poetry allowed me to take some creative license in imagining what fills the gaps and silences in the narrative I know about her life. This "informed imagining," I'll call it, was based on stories from other family members as well as nonfiction, historical texts about the social context of early- to mid-twentieth-century New Orleans and DC. I also spent a lot of time reading Alice Dunbar-Nelson's collected journals and bits of various biographies about her. Ultimately, I was more interested in the emotional truth of these women's stories (and my own; the last section of the book is in the voice of a contemporary speaker) than in the factual details of their lives. When I started writing I actually envisioned producing a work of historical fiction, but I found the details of world- and character-building distracting, when what I really wanted to focus on was the emotional charge of those narrative silences, and how silence percolates through generations. For the same reason (and because of the weight and ethical/relational implications with family) memoir felt like a daunting and also unnecessary genre for this project, although I briefly considered it as well. Although I shared Gray's struggle with finding the balance between "song and story," the writing process of this book seemed to confirm my decision – I had moments of spooky duende and spiritual closeness with Alice, in particular, that really caught me off-guard.

PSS: Years ago, I published a novel and a few short stories. Then I started to feel that prose was too long-winded. I wanted to get rid of the he-saids and she-saids and to put only the heart of the matter on the page. Much of the filler that didn't go into the historical poems could be taken care of by including a bibliography. Although I occasionally write essays, these days I am mostly a poet. Poetry seems to allow for what Irene so aptly calls "informed imagining"—the freedom to enter that inner space that brings a character to life. Once I have immersed myself in background research, it's almost as if I have to get out of the way and let the people I am writing about come stand before me and speak their lines. As it turns out, they speak in poetry.

JD: When writing historical biography we often encounter challenges with language: the diction and vocabulary of another era, for example. If this was an issue, how did you approach it?

IM: Since the main voice of this book is a character based on my grandmother, I simply wrote in a style similar to her speaking voice. I used direct quotes as epigraphs and occasionally even embedded her (and other family members') quotations directly into some of the poems. For the poems in the voice of Alice Dunbar-Nelson, I drew heavily on her journals, which of course are in her voice. I was lucky to feel close enough to my subjects that this particular aspect of the writing was not much of an issue.

GJ: Irene, I love your phrase "informed imagining": what a perfect way to describe how historical facts can serve as a basis for invention. The facts are someone else's and yet the imagination is the poet's. Roosevelt made a careful distinction between her personal life and her public life, to such an extent that even in her autobiographies, she deflects much of what must have been the case (given she was merely human, even if a great and important one). So I made up that part, or rather, called up that part from my own experience: what ends up on the page is a blending. For this reason, I chose not to use her diction, her colloquialisms, her manner-of-speaking, unless I did so through osmosis (unconsciously). Plus, the lady digressed by contemporary standards. When I'm reading the poems in performance, I think that 'she' sounds like 'me' (or how I think I sound), only her experience is far other than mine historically, but actually mine emotionally.

JD: Reading *Grand Marronage*, Irène, I was interested in how you handle New Orleans Creole in your poem "[translation]." I found myself sounding out the phrases, syllable by syllable. No doubt my pronunciation was incorrect, but just feeling the words on my tongue had an effect, making it easier to envision the people who may have spoken them. I'd love to hear you perform this poem! When I was a child my family had books that once belonged to my father's parents and grandparents. Though musty with age, they were beautifully made, with gorgeous illustrations. Most were intended for adults, but I loved to read them. And yes, to sound out the words—because many I'd never encountered before. Possibly because of this experience, the habits of nineteenth century written English—British and American—have always felt familiar. In researching *Audubon's Sparrow* I had access to letters written by Lucy and John James, as well as to his published writings (including some she may have edited). The tone of Lucy's letters to friends and family was particularly helpful in my efforts to reimagine her voice. I didn't attempt to duplicate their language, relying on more modern usage. But I kept in mind the vocabulary, conventions and turns of phrase that, while still in use, evoke an earlier era.

PSS: Once in a while I've been lucky enough to find actual quotes I could use in the poems, but mostly I've tried to invent language that either is period-appropriate or else doesn't reveal its age. My historical narratives have covered various time periods. When an individual poem had a contemporary setting, I have felt free to use modern slang as a sort of period setting. My nineteenth-century heroines can wear bodices, my late twentieth-century heroines can refer to craigslist.

JD: In the books we're discussing here, ancillary characters make an appearance, some of them with speaking parts, others referred to or quoted. In my case, I found it unexpectedly hard to tell the Audubons' story entirely from Lucy's perspective. Often apart, their lives were in sharp contrast to one another for long periods—showing this was essential to what I wanted to accomplish. In the end it seemed best to let John James speak for himself; I wrote a few monologues in his voice, incorporated bits of his journals. This reduced Lucy's responsibility for the narrative and allowed her to focus on herself. I'm wondering how you dealt with secondary figures, whether they made the process easier or created their own complications.

IM: Because *Grand Marronage* is meant to be a multi-generational story about how issues of race, gender, and class morph through time and space, secondary figures were crucial to the book. Alice Dunbar-Nelson's story complemented and contextualized my grandmother's, and the contemporary speaker in the last section offers a twenty-first century lens. *Grand Marronage* is also an examination of what we inherit and which cycles we choose to break. Therefore, it felt necessary to include more than one speaker, just as you did, Juditha. I struggled a little with how to make Alice Dunbar-Nelson's section fit into a narrative that was otherwise clearly about my family history – and that section easily could have stood alone as a chapbook. The more I worked on the poems in her voice, however, the more I was convinced that she belongs in *Grand Marronage*. For one thing, I found it ironic that the school where my grandmother worked as a substitute teacher for many years, Dunbar High School, is named for her far more famous second husband, and was known to be a mecca of education for Black students during segregation. I also have heard that her family and mine may have been friends several generations ago in New Orleans, although a more direct connection is tenuous. However, her work as a writer and activist offered a particular perspective on the issues I examine in the book; in research terms, reading and writing a bit of Alice's story was a way of triangulating data about the sociological phenomena I was exploring.

PSS: In my narratives all the ancillary characters are seen and presented from the heroine's viewpoint. Somehow, the deeper I have gotten into the soul of a character, the more I have gotten into the head of that character. In some odd way, I stop being me and become her so that all the perceptions and descriptions emerge in her voice.

GJ: The major conceit of *Eleanor* is that Eleanor Roosevelt, at some point near the end of her life, is reflecting on her personal experience to an unidentified silent interlocutor. I consider the interlocutor to be a character too, although one about whom I've made few assumptions beyond that he or she is deeply curious and is someone with whom ER feels sufficient comfortable to be completely open and honest. And I'm aware, that throughout the process, I sometimes thought of the interlocutor in other ways: as an ideal reader, as compassionate and generous interviewer, a journalist perhaps, or a graduate student working on a dissertation who somehow had gained access and befriended Eleanor. There are no allusions to the interlocker: he or she is present only by inference, but I cannot begin to tell you how important this secondary character was to me. His or her

presence (or is it absence?) constitutes the frame wherein is hung the portrait.

JD: Is there more we want to say about the role research plays? Personally, I'm always concerned about not letting facts overwhelm my character.

IM: I actually never set out to attempt to write a biography, per se, so I never felt overwhelmed by the facts. I was more interested in writing about certain themes, and the characters simply served to illustrate those themes. Research added another layer of understanding to their stories. For instance, sensing that I had inherited a classed and raced legacy of respectability politics based on things my parents and grandparents have said is one thing. But reading about how respectability politics circumscribed Creole girlhood in New Orleans as a way of creating racial and class distinctions, and as a form of attempted protection in a patriarchal society, deepened my understanding of my family's and my experiences. Learning the history of Creole people of color in New Orleans, pre- and post-Louisiana Purchase, and the ways that they resisted Jim Crow and other forms of oppression contextualized both my family and Alice Dunbar-Nelson's stories. I was less concerned about the facts of my characters' lives than I was about accurately portraying the emotionality of our experiences, and how these experiences reflect(ed) broader, national stories. So research was just another form of input (along with stories, memories, and interviews) that informed the writing of this book.

PSS: Unlike Juditha and Irene, I am quite factbound. Obviously no matter how much research I do before writing, and I do a lot, I can't possibly learn enough to make a complete story so I do have to invent detail, but no detail I invent will ever contradict or be incompatible with the known facts. My wildest leap in *Penelope: The Story of the Half-Scalped Woman* was to have Penelope's portrait painted by a somewhat famous woman artist who lived in Holland at the same time she did. I invent a scene in which Penelope weeps against the artist's bosom while telling her that the family is moving to New Amsterdam. My made-up scene led to a very odd consequence: some distant descendant of Penelope's wrote an outraged review on Amazon because she thought I was accusing her ancestor of being a lesbian. Geez, lady, I guess I had better stick to the facts!

JD: I began writing before I had any structure in mind and while I was still doing research. First came poems about John James, followed by poems about Lucy. In effect these were an "on ramp," keeping me engaged. (Most never made it into *Audubon's Sparrow* and were published elsewhere.) But I don't want to leave the impression I'm a casual interpreter of established fact. In our current environment of "alternate facts," I believe it's especially important to respect legitimate research done by others. The *Audubon's Sparrow* narrative follows generally accepted accounts of the naturalist's life and times. I leaned heavily on Audubon experts, including Richard Rhodes, Carolyn DeLatte and Christoph Irmscher. Like Penelope, I wouldn't contradict what I knew to be true. But I might well concern myself with *why* it's true, if that aids the story.

GJ: This issue is at the heart of what we're talking about: poetic (or

lyric) biography. It's as if those two terms (poetic) and (biography) are oxymoronic. "Poetic" (whether wisely or not) suggests taking imaginative liberties, and "biography"—to quote Joe Friday from *Dragnet*—"give me the facts, Lady, just the facts". As Juditha expressed it, I too, was constantly worried about not letting the facts overwhelm my character's emotional truth, so those that made the cut were highly selective. After I'd read several biographies, letters, and many other Roosevelt's authored texts, I made a list of what I called "crisis points" in her life, moments when something significant impacted her and changed the direction of her life. Sometimes these were major historical events, sometimes they were quiet, inner events, that came to her through inward reflection. Each item on my list became the ostensible subject matter of a poem I then set out to write. Of course, the items on my list evolved, some were put aside, others were combined, new ones emerged, but "crisis points" was my guiding star.

JD: Our biographies all concern historical women. Is this coincidental or are we part of a broader trend?

GJ: I venture to guess we're all feminists: that is, our ideology has been profoundly influenced by Second- and Third- Wave Feminist Theory and political actions, and part of that mandate was, and is, the reclamation of the lives of women who lived before us, for our soul's sake, and for that of our daughters and granddaughters, particularly those women written out of history because of gender and racial prejudice. My grandmother was a contemporary of Eleanor Roosevelt's, and like Roosevelt, devoted her life to public service as many women of that generation did. Every single social reform of the 20th century was begun by that generation (child labor laws, anti-slum and public safety laws, settlement houses, birth control reform, public health and sanitation, free public education, anti-lynching legislation, minimum wage, old age pension, etc.). My daughter, born in 1968, grew up without any sense of being limited by the gender barriers that my generation had to identify, struggle against and transcend (I was born in 1944). I want women who were born in the 1970s, 80s, 90s, and onward, to know who this remarkable woman was, what she risked in order to make significant contributions to social justice and world peace (most specifically her role in framing The Universal Declaration of Human Rights). I don't think this (our each writing about historical women) is coincidental in the least: I think it's closer to being inevitable.

IM: I'm interested in stories that aren't part of our dominant cultural narratives, so when we think about the past (and to some extent, unfortunately, the present), the voices of women and femmes are often disproportionately absent from the official record. I saw this in my own family — my grandfather always talked more than my grandmother, and even when I asked her direct questions about her life, she always avoided saying anything negative or controversial. I was fascinated by these omissions and silences. The stories of men are everywhere, but the stories of women (especially of color) are much more hidden. As a result, those stories are far more interesting to me. I do think we're also seeing a renaissance of interest in the stories of historical women that, for a long time, were not taught or discussed.

PSS: Yes, indeed, the stories of men are everywhere, while until recently the stories of women have mostly been nowhere. When I was young enough to want to be a hero (no, I didn't think "heroine"), my models for women heroes were Amelia Earhart and Joan of Arc. Well, we all know how those stories ended. I sang about Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer going down in his-story, and wondered if I would go down in my-story. The stories I have told in poetry are, except for Anne Hutchinson who has been under appreciated, mostly stories that haven't been told elsewhere. They called out to be told.

JD: I love how grandmothers keep entering this conversation—Gray inspired by her grandmother's life of public service, and a section of Irène's book written in her grandmother's voice. I dedicated *Audubon's Sparrow* to my maternal grandmother, with whom I lived during World War II. She was basically my mother for much of my early youth, and we remained close until her death at age 99. When I recognized my debt to her, as well as the ways her life and marriage resembled Lucy Audubon's, I knew she was at the root of my devotion to Lucy. It was then I began to truly inhabit my character, something that had previously eluded me. Obviously, our own histories can act as both motivator and resource.

Is there anything more you can add about the pitfalls and rewards of depicting a life through poetry?

GJ: I've had many middle-of-the-night fear-and-anxiety fests over the hubris I've assumed in writing about an historical person of such significance, especially writing about Roosevelt's adultery, her love affair with a woman while she was First Lady., and some of the less-than flattering things I've said about Franklin Roosevelt, who acted, at times, in truly despicable ways that caused great suffering in the world. I'm sure I will have offended some of her descendants, and perhaps some historians. In the notes I specify that this "text is a work of literary imagination" and claim I haven't "hesitated to interpret Eleanor Roosevelt's subjective experience." In terms of the rewards: I was overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude toward her. I wanted most of all to honor who she was not only as a political leader, a truly global thinker, a peacemaker, a stateswoman, but also as a human-being: wife, mother, lover, self-created whole-hearted human dynamo. She was astonishingly tireless in acting on behalf of the least-advantaged, the most oppressed and downtrodden. I just had to say something.

IM: For me one of the major pitfalls was that the main character in my book is based on a family member. Like you, Gray, I experienced stress about how she, and the rest of my family, would react to my interpretation of various events. My grandmother's approval of this manuscript is what made me feel better about it all. I'm not sure what I would have done if she hadn't given her blessing, and I don't know if any of Alice Dunbar-Nelson's descendants have come across *Grand Marronage*. I'm not particularly interested in poetic biography as a genre; I'm more interested in certain themes that continue to reverberate in my poetry as well as the fiction and creative nonfiction that I'm also working on. Poetic biography was one good way to tackle these themes, but now I find myself drifting toward other types of writing.

PSS: My interest in history has never been in rulers, wars, treaties, but I

have been obsessed with real people's real lives. The truth is, I am a snoop and an enjoyer of gossip, new or old. Whether I was writing about an early colonial settler, a rebellious Puritan, a psychiatric patient, or a prostitute, I was trying to pry into those lives, to understand what these women thought and felt. Poets are always writing about their own lives. I wanted to explore someone else's life. If, however, I were to sit down with a shrink, I would probably discover that I was also finding a bit of myself in each of the women I have impersonated in my narrative biographical poems.

JD: Maybe Gray's words, "I just had to say something," speak for us all. We felt compelled to write about women who had deeply touched us and toward whom we had a sense of responsibility. And though we may have considered multiple forms, lyric biography felt like the way to go, a decision that was intuitive, carefully reasoned, or both. I'm fascinated by the variety of our perspectives here, though not surprised—because each of the lives we've discussed is unique, just as we poets naturally vary in our sensibilities, preferred approaches and techniques. I'm reconsidering a project that has long been stalled, and you've given me a lot to think about. Thank you for sharing your experiences. I hope we've encouraged others to consider lyric biography as a powerful way to bring a figure to life.



Juditha Dowd's verse biography *Audubon's Sparrow* has just been released by Rose Metal Press. rosemetalpress.com/books/audubons-sparrow/. The author of *Mango in Winter* (Grayson Books) as well as short fiction, lyric essays, and three poetry chapbooks, Juditha has received fellowships from Virginia Center for the Creative Arts and Vermont Studio Center. Her work has been included in *Poet Lore*, *Poetry Daily*, *Verse Daily*, *Florida Review*, *Rock & Sling*, *Kestrel*, *Spillway* and elsewhere. More at judithadowd.org.



Gray Jacobik, Ph.D., is a University Professor Emerita from Eastern Connecticut State University. A widely-published and anthologized poet, Gray is the author of several award-winning collections: *The Double Task* (Juniper Prize); *Brave Disguises* (AWP Poetry Series), *The Surface of Last Scattering* (X.J.Kennedy Poetry Prize), and *The Banquet: New & Selected Poems* (William Meredith Award for Poetry). CavanKerry Press published *Little*

Boy Blue: A Memoir in Verse (2011) and *Eleanor* (2020), a collection of dramatic monologues in Eleanor Roosevelt's voice. More at grayjacobik.com



Dr. Irène P. Mathieu is the author of *Grand Marronage* (Switchback Books), *orogeny* (Trembling Pillow Press), and *the galaxy of origins* (dancing girl press). Her poems have appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Narrative*, *Boston Review*, *Callaloo*, *TriQuarterly*, and elsewhere. A recipient of fellowships from Fulbright, Callaloo, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Irène works at the University of Virginia, where she is an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and affiliate faculty of UVA's Center for Health Humanities & Ethics. More at irenemathieu.com.



Penelope Scambly Schott's verse biography *A is for Anne: Mistress Hutchinson Disturbs the Commonwealth* received an Oregon Book Award for Poetry. Her other verse histories include *Penelope: The Story of the Half-Scalped Woman*, *The Pest Maiden*, and *Lillie Was a Goddess, Lillie Was a Whore*. She has also published several books of lyric poetry. Her newest is *On Dufur Hill* about her small wheat-growing town (pop. 623) in central Oregon. More at penelopescamblyschott.com