

Presented at ***Southern Sources: A Symposium Celebrating Seventy-Five Years of the Southern Historical Collection***, 18-19 March 2005, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Story Upon Story

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18 March 2005

The pleasure of a great historical archive like the Southern Historical Collection is the pleasure of inspiration—inspiration in the sense of drawing in a deep breath that lets us feel the hum of thousands of voices not at all silenced by the passage of time. This is a great house of remnants. We come here as eavesdroppers on the past, and the period of time we call the antebellum years, from the 1820s to 1861, is a fascinating time to listen to. This is in part because antebellum Americans' lives often seem at a great distance from our own. Even as we try to know their world, antebellum people can seem intellectually convoluted and emotionally remote. Their habits and ambitions seem strange, their language brittle. But it is not always like this. Certain informal moments in antebellum writing, moments of irony, delight, or edgy self-regard, can make these folks seem surprisingly like us, and the gap between them and us closes. Such shifts in our relationship with antebellum southerners are mediated by authorship—theirs and ours—which I would like to reflect upon here. I would like to consider how both distance in time and shared authorship are shaped by commonplace archival and historiographical practices which seem merely organizational, but turn out to be conceptual. These practices yield stories, and conceal them, too.

For historians of the antebellum years, it all begins in the archives. Archives are home to texts and other artifacts that have somehow escaped acts of destruction, forgetfulness, and secrecy. These texts are all we have, and they will have to do. The anthropologists John and Jean Comaroff have written about such remnant texts and how we might make history from them. They write, “If texts are to be more than . . . scattered shards from which we presume worlds, they have to be anchored in the processes of their production, in the orbits of connection and influence that give them life and force.”^[1] That is, no matter how piecemeal are the antebellum texts that have somehow survived into *our* present, we need to remember that once they had their own present day. Antebellum texts were created out of a matrix of authors' decisions and hesitations, now lost. Traces of these survive, though, in the texts themselves, a cultural energy as charged as our own. We can reduce, at least to a degree, the distance between antebellum folks and ourselves if we think of them as our authorial counterparts in making the history that joins us. They had stories to tell, as do we.

The texts I would like to explore in this regard are homely ones, personal letters and diaries written with varying degrees of haste and concentration, heat and light. The frequency and care with which antebellum southerners wrote suggest how well such ordinary texts created the cultural “orbits of connection and influence” of which the Comaroffs speak. Indeed, the mundane quality of such everyday writing is its peculiar power and beauty. To be sure, personal letters and diaries allowed antebellum southerners to speak with high authority from what they liked to call life's “stage” in its full-blown,

Victorian setting. But such informal writing always includes softer tones, and shadows, which give personal texts their surprising grace and sudden clarity, bringing antebellum folks closer to us.

Some years ago I had the occasion to write about one such encounter with a text. I recalled working in the old reading room of the Southern Historical Collection, which occupied a space just below ground level in the Louis Round Wilson Library. Windows high-up on the walls showed a bit of sky. One afternoon, making my way through the Drury Lacy Papers, a passage in a mother's 1845 letter about her youngest son's first tooth seemed to jump out at me, and the century-wide gap between us snapped shut. "Singleton has a tooth!!" Williana Lacy wrote, inscribing a happy double-exclamation point in her letter to Singleton's older sister. "We had a squealing concert over it when we found it was actually coming through the gum, and Horace took him and marched in double-quick time all over the room to the tune 'Old Dan Tucker.' Singleton looked very wise . . ." [2] Writing then about how Williana Lacy's unguarded telling of her family news unexpectedly collapsed the distance between us, I reflected on all of the vagaries of document preservation—the amazing mix of purpose and accident—that permitted her letter to be put into my hands. I might have gone on to say more about how her free, open words, not intended for my post-bellum ears, had the curious effect of making her "modern" and accessible. Her desire to be the author of her own happiness by inscribing this small domestic event gave me a push to be the sort of author I wished to be.

I might have gone on to say more, too, about the particular ways our ordinary, taken-for-granted archival practices frame antebellum authors of personal texts, and, in a subtle way, set the terms for our authorship as well. In an archive such as the Southern Historical Collection, with its high standards of organization, integration, and interpretation, my research has been facilitated countless more times than it has been foiled. But, either way, the smallest archival practices shape our stories by framing how we meet up with antebellum people in the first place, and do much to determine how wide is the initial gulf between us. Intriguingly (and maybe a little perversely), having to take the long way around in some textual encounters adds savor to the story we ultimately tell.

In approaching a collection of family papers, I usually begin with a broad narrative aim—I may want, for example, to be able to say something about sibling relationships as they are expressed by letter writers; or about people's views on material possessions and race; or about small-talk among antebellum country physicians—gossip about patients, drugs, travel. Like most historian-patrons, I browse through the archival guide or catalog description which most times lets me easily move into a collection of letters: I feel oriented when the description is succinct, detailed, and includes some of the people's own words.

Other times, though, I've encountered archival practices that proved more challenging. One such practice I call the Big Umbrella. Consider, for example, how the public papers of a well-known politician are meticulously described at length by an archive, sometimes letter-by-letter, when they pertain to the landmarks of his career or to mega-events such as secession and Civil War. Then comes the big umbrella description: "Box 10: Miscellaneous family papers." That's it. No details, not even the most basic breakdown of the box's contents. Clearly, the big umbrella assumes that the important story to be told is the one about the political man's career, not the one about his family relationships. To venture into Box 10's undifferentiated mass of family items—full-scale letters, unsigned notes, fragments of diaries—under the big umbrella of "miscellaneous papers" means making a long textual trek with a minimal map. And yet: making the map yourself means you will see every step of the way, through your own eyes, and when you reach the end of Box 10, you will have taken its full measure.

Consider a second archival practice, less common now but still in evidence, yielding similar sweet-sour pleasures of the search—the Nesting Dolls practice, where a text, like one of those hollow, wooden dolls, is found nested within a larger one. One of my favorite examples is the discovery I made deep

inside the legal and political papers of North Carolina politician John Steele Henderson. Number 3 on the list of “Volumes” included in the collection guide turned out to be, as noted, the diary of Henderson’s mother, Mary, covering broken spans of time from 1854 to 1861. Yet the brief description of the diary’s contents—“largely concerned with the serious illnesses of her children”—scarcely prepares the reader for the intense yearning, religious anxiety, and personal loss captured in its pages. Here, to my surprised delight, nested deep within the problem-solving, problem-creating papers of a public man, was a “private” woman’s text unmatched in the entire collection for showing how deeply one person can feel responsible for another, as Mary Henderson did for her children.

A third practice is one we might think of as the Don’t Bother archival note, the description of a collection that actually seems to dissuade us from proceeding further. The SHC’s older guide to the papers of the mid-nineteenth-century Alabama physician John Young Bassett, for example, noted hopefully that the papers cover “many aspects of medicine.” But the description of the collection itself was like nineteenth-century medicine’s “cold water therapy,” where a fevered patient was doused with a bucket of cold water—more than one if necessary. The description made note of a few genealogical details, a few letters were itemized, but, overall, the tone was notably discouraging: “The letters are scattered and unrelated, and with few exceptions contain information which would be of interest mainly to the above-mentioned families.” If you are not a Bassett, a Thompson, or a Davidson, that is, you are probably wasting your time. Still, I was not put off by this cold water. I moved into the Bassett correspondence, and, as it turned out, was glad I made the trip. The “many aspects of medicine” turned out to be fascinating and Dr. Bassett’s happy misanthropy a kind of tonic of its own.

These three small archival practices (any archivist or patron can readily think of others) are “negative” ones in a sense, hindrances to a smooth day in the reading room. And yet each one gives to a research project something of its distinctive character and feel. In a small way, each one contributes to the distance between us and the antebellum years, and yet each one pushes us to overcome it. Aiming only to be organizational, archival practices in effect do conceptual work by accentuating, underestimating, or otherwise shaping temporal distance—indeed, such practices become a concrete representation of that distance. And they remind us that to “discover” something in an archive does not mean we researchers are mere observers and our “sources” perform for us. We historians make our moves as well. Mapping Box 10’s “miscellaneous papers,” discovering Mary Henderson’s nested diary, going past the Don’t Bother sign—none of these had anything to do with what antebellum folks intended or imagined. But negotiating each stubborn practice, in a minimal but memorable way, allowed these people to speak to me and helped to make *my* sense of what I wanted to do and say. Each one invested me in a developing relation with a long-dead person in a way akin to how our present-day relationships are storied by the most commonplace markers: where we met, who was late, was it raining or not. In such encounters is the recognition that what our “subjects” said about their world, occurs in a setting of *our* making, too, flooded with our own desires to acquire and preserve, to be patient, and, finally, to recognize and to write.

Thinking in this fashion about the remnant nature of antebellum texts, and how we encounter them in archives, lets us consider how similarly plain, commonplace history-writing practices also shape our efforts to tell our stories. If our goal as historians is to contribute something to a larger historical narrative, to say something, for example, about social change among urban southerners or about the continuity of folk medicine among African Americans, archival moments are radical ones: they remind us that the larger historical events we seek to write about can be approached only through the immediate, vexing, heartfelt relationships that moved people who had no way of imagining us and our aims. These relationships always are richer than the events we reduce them to, and we must respect and wonder at this disparity. For we, like antebellum folks, have different stories we tell to different persons at different

times. Just as antebellum relationships are inscribed in certain practices of expression, of words and occasions that came to hand, so our own stories are inscribed in ours.

Any current practice of writing history, of course, is marked by its own historicity as well as by the talents of each historian. The poet and critic Randall Jarrell once wrote of admiring a writer who is able to “see, feel, and think with equal success,” who is able to “treat with mastery that part of existence which allows for mastery, and experience the rest of it with awe or sadness or delight.”^[3] In recent years, historians have taken a hard look at how well we do this—how well we tell our stories and keep our silences. Concerns about a shrinking public audience (who’s actually reading us academics, anyway?) has driven much of the new-found interest in narrative and in historical practice generally. But concern, too, for how narrative devices common to our writing of history actually *make* the past also has gotten attention.

We are now more than ever aware that historical practice is a strange business of technique and wish. Our skills are laced through with imagination. We respect our sources, but we manipulate them. We seek thickets of detail and nuance, but then we work to lay them bare. As we study our subjects we make our own subjectivity; as we seek to reduce the distance between ourselves and our subjects, we sometimes accentuate it. As a result, I think it is safe to say that most historians now accept (albeit with some uneasiness) that *the facts* are not very solid things at all. Rather than free-standing “evidence” awaiting discovery, facts are instead composites of something much more interesting: all of the insights, decisions, and fantasies that are beneath whatever is, at any moment in time, reality—including the historian’s own. The linguist Hans Kellner remarks upon a cartoon in which one man says to another, very seriously, “My feeling is that while we should have the deepest respect for reality, we should not let it control our lives.” This is humorous because it highlights an ironic distance between *our lives* and something else called “reality”—not unlike the distance we historians traditionally have discovered—or created—between ourselves and our *subjects*. The social scientific style of historical research and writing that has been so powerful since the beginning of the twentieth century assumes that this distance simply exists. The “facts” are the trophies that careful researchers *mine* from the mother lode of the past and bring back to the present. It is a rather uncomplicated effort: getting the story straight.^[4]

But, as Kellner goes on to say, what if we see our work instead as getting the story *crooked*; that is, see it not as a matter of making a leap over the distance between ourselves and those whom we study, as if that distance were thin air, but rather to see this space as *filled* with stories and possible stories. The stories we might tell as historians are there, as are the stories of others, those whom we call our *subjects*. In this view, the deepest respect for reality is to acknowledge that reality is *made*, imperfectly and therefore ironically. And by telling stories about the past we are doing more than hunting and gathering in someone else’s reality and then returning to report on the expedition. The adventure of doing history is that it is *not* (to quote Jerome Bruner) a work of science “to make a world that [is] invariant across human intentions and human plights.” Rather, history is a work of the humanities, “which seek to understand the world as it reflects the requirements of living in it.”^[5] The histories we write *our stories* are part of these requirements and thus part of what makes the past real. When the facts seem to be “speaking for themselves” what is really happening is that we have discovered the best story we can tell.

I am mindful that there are differences of opinion among historians about such things. Some find that disciplinary self-scrutiny slides quickly into self-indulgence. Others are simply nostalgic about the idea that there are hard, indisputable facts. But I would urge us to have the stamina to stay with our critique of the fact-driven, academic style of doing history. For it is a style based on something more problematic than even the limited appeal of discovering “the facts.” It is a style that has privileged something called objectivity as if it were a far simpler quality than it is. The drive for objectivity is not the same thing as

the effort to be accurate, or, more subtly, the effort to be fair. The drive to be objective is a way of thinking that Peter Novick some years ago described, with approval, as “purging . . . consciousness of every vestige of . . . bias.”^[6] It is a drive that betrays a questionable urge to put the histories we make beyond the imperfections of their manufacture—that is, beyond authorship. The ultimate aim of the objective mode is to know it all, but to be no one in particular. Once a sign of trustworthiness, the omniscient voice of the historian is now fast becoming a relic, a top-heavy practice that needlessly adds to the distance between present and past. Yet its appeal persists, especially among historians who are uneasy with closing that distance because distance keeps the past at a predictable, comfortable remove.

Along with seeing all facts as “crooked,” and along with the desire to escape from the need to appear omniscient, another recent influence on historical practice is the attraction of other systematic ways of knowing the world which intersect with the discipline of history. Every intellectual slant on life has its privileges and comforts, and each group of scholars gathering in its own disciplinary circle still thinks of itself (like members of an insular society) as “The People” and everyone else as exotics. But much has changed and is changing, as historians are now engaging literary critics, anthropologists, natural scientists, and even our living “subjects” across the disciplinary divides. For us historians there was, and still is, more than a little vertigo in thinking about the stuff of history as akin to a work of fiction, an anthropological site, or popular memory. Yet, despite some doubts, we have opened up the historical discipline to other kinds of methods and questions as never before, and we have discovered that our familiar *mines* of archives and documents have morphed into a fascinating array of metaphors, palimpsests, and dramas for our interpretive delight.

So, where do such practices of both archive and history-writing take us in our thinking about the distance between us and antebellum times? If our roundabout encounter with historical texts—already remnants—is channeled into further flux by the contingencies of facts, points of view, and academic discipline, then how might we conceive of doing history amid this oscillation of time and perspective? How can we keep hold of the sense that despite the distance separating us, there are moments in the writing of antebellum folks that draw us close, that seem to speak to us? I think a sense of *authorship* holds the promise of an answer—a paradigm, if that does not dignify it too much. For, as I suggested earlier, what we share with our “subjects”—what in effect makes none of us more or less of a subject—is the reality that all of us are authors. We all traffic in language and expressive form, imagined audiences, and in an array of writerly practices: persuasion, play, nonchalance, desire. The people we study were authors of their own lives long before we arrived on the scene, and our own purposes are unavoidably written into our histories of them. Thus it makes sense to apply certain fundamental “first questions” to both the people we study and to ourselves: who does this writer *think* or *hope* or *fear* might read her words, and how might these things have shaped the particular text I am reading (or writing)? If every form of text—personal letter, public speech, academic essay—is a kind of vessel into which authors pour their sense of being read, then we must ask: how does this vessel give shape to what is being said or not said? Such questions, condensed so as to focus on the act of authorship, become these: what is being made here? what is being pushed against in order to make it?

Keeping a sense of antebellum folks as *authors* means seeing them as people who knew how to employ a sense of audience, form, and writerly strategy, and, especially, seeing them as not making texts for *us*. It means being on the lookout for instances—again, the most ordinary ones—when someone’s authorship is especially self-conscious and thus open to view. Consider one familiar instance of this: a person writes about one event, but gives two different accounts of it shaped by two different textual venues or forms. So we see both event and writer in new ways. For example, I was working with the daily diary of an antebellum Florida physician named Charles A. Hentz, a text in which he recorded aspects of his medical work but many other things besides. A gregarious man with an eye for detail, Hentz favored short entries and superficial descriptions, but almost always ones that included places he visited and people he

met in his daily work. In November of 1860, Hentz wrote of duck-shooting with friends, of his Masonic rituals, of attending Methodist prayer meetings. He also mentioned, through a series of days, medically treating a neighbor woman, Mrs. Jesse Goodson, who was sick with pneumonia. We do not see much of her, but we hear daily how she's doing. She was "very sick" on the 16th, and "still very sick" a day later. She was "much better" on the 18th, but on the 20th, "I went again to Goodson's—Mrs. G. has got worse." On the 21st, "Mrs. G. very sick indeed—but I hope a little better." The next day, she was "in a very critical state," but by the 23rd she had "taken a change for the better," and the doctor wrote for the first time with emotion: "God grant its permanence." On the next day, the final entry: "discharged the case; Mrs. G. better." There is a hint of Hentz's feelings, but not much else is expressed here beyond keeping tabs on his patient's ups and downs.^[7]

It took a second, different kind of account of Mrs. Goodson's desperate illness to let me appreciate the meaning of the diary's terse bulletins. The second text let me see the doctor's work up close, his view of body and bedside, and how his medicine made a world different from the one where illness, prayer meetings, and duck hunting were mixed together. This second account is in Hentz's medical journal, a volume where he set down detailed descriptions of his most "interesting" cases—ones that confounded him as well as ones where his medicine succeeded. Mrs. Goodson appears in these pages, too. Here her perplexing, racked body is everything, speaking to all of the doctor's senses. He writes of her "slow" and "weak" pulse, of her rust-colored saliva, "muffled" breathing, "too free" bowels, and mostly of her skin: "cheeks lost flush before I left," "no flush to cheeks," "skin rather too relaxed & cool," "skin warm and pleasant." We see Hentz as a man who can see such things. Mrs. Goodson's body is a complex topography of surprise, a field for the swift unfolding of the drama of disease and the doctor's means. He gives her powerful drugs and then watches for the results: her easier breathing, her sweat and expectoration. Hentz writes as if he and his patient were the only two people in the world and her illness the world's only event.^[8]

Reading these detailed notes on his sickroom labors drew me to re-consider the meaning of Hentz's sparser, daily diary account. Both accounts give us Mrs. Goodson, and both give us the doctor at work. And just as the medical journal brings us close for a look at the afflicted body and Hentz's ministrations, so the daily diary inscribes Mrs. Goodson's illness as another kind of personal event for the doctor—a community event, really, and, not least, a potentially unnerving one with implications for the doctor's friendship with the Goodson family. At the same time that Hentz labored to write in clinical detail in his medical log, each spare entry in the daily diary became a different kind of touchstone for him. The diary was a testimony to his travels through his neighborhood and to ways of bearing witness: his patients, his neighbors, are "better" or they are "very sick" or they "take a change." Such entries echo, perhaps, the way the doctor pushed against the fascinating, stifling closeness of bedside work by carrying abroad to the community the news of who was sick and how they were doing.

One event, but two ways of authorship, each adding to the other: more dramatic, perhaps, than Hentz's examples are the two accounts written by another antebellum physician, Tennessean Lunsford P. Yandell, of the death of his six-year-old son Wilson in 1836. Here Yandell's authorship shifted not so much because the textual venue changed, but because the audiences for the two stories were so different. Dr. Yandell's first account of Willie's dying is in a set of despairing, almost daily letters written to his wife's parents as he struggled to heal the critically ill boy. The tone is raw, stripped bare. "Our dear little Wilson is still alive," he wrote in one letter, "but to all appearance, in the article of death! The trial . . . is indeed awful. Our hearts were bound up in the lovely boy." He prayed, "O Lord! have mercy on us," and confessed his fear that by having been a "lukewarm" Christian he might have brought down God's judgment on his family. And then, later, "It is all over. Even while writing the lines [above], [Willie] began to gasp for his last breath. He died at half past 8 in the morning . . . ^[9] As bad as this is, the terrible, personal force of these grief-stricken letters, and their peculiar oppressiveness, too, were not

fully brought home to me until I found Yandell's second account of Willie's death, this one written a few weeks later for a medical journal. Here, with the controlled prose of a clinical practitioner, Yandell transformed his beloved Willie into the anonymous "W. Y.," case number seven of nine cases bearing on a suggested new treatment for dysentery. Willie dies here, too, of course, "at half past 8 in the morning."^[10] But when Yandell wrote as physician, not as a father, he said nothing of his fears or his frantic efforts; nothing of God's punishment or grief. Instead, he spoke in the enlightened voice of a professional man, remarking on various therapies and telling how he tested them. Just as he had first authored his son's death in order to push against his sudden, personal loss, he now re-wrote it to push against his lingering grief, to look past it to the saving grace of becoming busy once more with his professional work.

The creators of the texts we read are only half of the equation as we think about authorship. The other half involves thinking more carefully about the *historian* as writer. All writing is in some way autobiographical, even when we aim to be disinterested. Being curious about ourselves as writers means not being satisfied with only the standard, professional answers to the question of why we choose to tell the stories we do: because they are part of a significant historical debate or because they contain "new" information. Being curious means realizing that we do not simply make a choice of what to study and then the meaning of the choice vanishes; in authorship, we continually revisit our choices as circumstances change. There is no need for lengthy self-disclosure; only that we give some thought to ourselves as actors in the stories we tell. In his book *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino has a wonderful sense of the bond between a traveler (or, let's say historian/author) and the past. This past is a real but protean thing, and *how* we seek it is always relevant: "the traveler's past changes according to the route he has followed Arriving at each new city, the traveler finds again a past of his that he did not know he had: the foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess lies in wait for you in foreign, unpossessed places."^[11]

If we think of ourselves as travelers of sorts, then what Calvino suggests is that in every study we undertake some past of our own lies in wait for us, and that we would be wiser historians if we acknowledge that the histories we write are not simply a *telling* but a *re-telling*. It is not only that we are making something from our "sources," pushing against their opaque and fragmentary nature, but also that we are pushing against these same things in ourselves. This premise can be taken to a pretty deep (and, for many, uncomfortable) place, for Calvino implies that as authors we should be as curious about the wellsprings of our own subjectivity as we are about our subjects' lives. But I will offer only the simplest of examples drawn from an encounter of my own with familiar historiographical practice.

In my first book on the gender and family experiences of planter class families in the antebellum South, I was drawn especially to writing by women. They seemed better at putting into words the kinds of things I was looking for, thoughts about emotional life, impressions of identity, longing. Women's authorship thus took on a certain momentum I began to rely on, a certain edginess that led them closer to the place where their words closed up the gap between us, as I sought to understand how antebellum women and men encountered each other, and love, and relation. So it was that I read the letters of Anna Page King, a woman in her fifties married to a wealthy Georgia sea coast planter, who pined throughout the 1840s and 1850s for her gadabout husband Thomas, and blamed him, too, and whose love for her son Butler was as close to romantic love as a mother's can be. She authored in her long, sometimes wandering letters a yearning for release from her burdens as boss of Retreat plantation, and along with it a sense of perplexed anger that never quite broke free from her more readily inscribed anxiety.^[12] So it was, too, that I read the letters of a woman thirty years younger, North Carolinian Bessie Lacy, who also wrote of her feelings and doubts in the same decades. Bessie did not tell about the disappointments of love, but about the wonder of it—a wonder open to her manipulation and so maybe

a kind of power. She wrote her lover Thomas to instruct him in the ways of courtship, but she wrote mostly of her amazement at being in love at all.^[13]

Years later, having changed my focus from the history of courtship to the history of illness, I recalled these two women. I remembered that Bessie Lacy had written about her pregnancy and Anna King about her son Butler's sudden death, and I returned to their letters, this time as a very different sort of traveler in Calvino's sense, with new curiosities shaped by different questions. And so I found a different past as I read Bessie Lacy again. The woman I remembered as love's dreamer also wrote quite frankly about her body and her fears of pregnancy, and I rediscovered frank letters from her stepmother, too, who once was pregnant at the same time as Bessie. The two women talked about the "meat" of their bodies, and the older woman joked that during labor she was known to shout like a new-born Christian. Bessie feared that being pregnant, or "sick" as many women termed it, might kill her. But she also saw a kind of absurdity, if not exactly humor, in having to wait on her body taking its time. Anna King, too, I saw in different terms because I wanted to tell a different story from the one I had told previously, my own travels giving me different things to know. I looked for her body this time, too, and found it in her heart's palpitations, which worried her, and in her persistent "ringing in the ears," which she may have understood, as her doctors surely did, as the effect of heavy doses of quinine, proof against the summer fever. If the absence of her husband caught my attention the first time in her letters, this time it was the soundings she took of her body and the ills she feared percolating within.

These very physical women were there all along, but I had missed them. I was looking for one kind of thing, and not for another, which is to say I was doing what authors do, choosing to tell one story and so choosing not to tell something else. This is inevitable, of course; authorship always is more than the text produced, as Calvino reminds us. Authorship arises from unpossessed people and places, people and places we give up in order to be somewhere else, as well as from the places we have been and come to know. It is about our past and the past times we find in archives, and how we use them. Our writing, then, is not simply a telling or re-telling, but a kind of *co-telling*, a narrative made from what we discover from the words of others and from our own pasts which bubble up in the form of the questions that excite and inspire us. It is not simply a matter of "us" and our "subjects," but of authors inhabiting stories, making texts and the practices for keeping them. There is the distance created by the passage of time, and there are the words that close the gap. There is story upon story.

Notes

[1] John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1992), 34.

[2] From Williana Lacy to Bessie Lacy, 30 August 1845, Drury Lacy Papers #3641, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. See Steven M. Stowe, "Singleton's Tooth: Thoughts on the Form and Meaning of Antebellum Southern Family Correspondence," *The Southern Review* 25, no. 2 (1989), 323–33.

[3] Randall Jarrell, *No Other Book: Selected Essays*, ed. Brad Leithauser (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999), 121.

[4] Hans Kellner, *Language and Historical Representation: Getting the Story Crooked* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 24–5.

[5] Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 50.

[6] Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 101.

[7] Steven M. Stowe, ed., *A Southern Practice: the Diary and Autobiography of Charles A. Hentz, M.D.* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 353–5. The original manuscript is in the Hentz Family Papers #332, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[8] Charles A. Hentz, Medical diary, 16–24 November 1860, Hentz Family Papers.

[9] From Lunsford P. Yandell to Sarah Wendel, 12 and 13 June 1836, Yandell Family Papers, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Ky.

[10] Lunsford P. Yandell, "Cases of Dysentery, with Remarks," *Transylvania Journal of Medicine and the Associate Sciences* 9 (April–June 1836): 246–7.

[11] Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, [1974]), 28–9.

[12] Anna King's letters are in the T. Butler King Papers #1252, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[13] Bessie Lacy's letters of the 1840s and 1850s are in the Drury Lacy Papers. See also Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 192–223.