1-2004

Looking for Sappho: Review of *Sappho's Leap* by Erica Jong, *The Sappho History* by Margaret Reynolds, and *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* by Anne Carson.

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behind what W. E. B. Du Bois called the veil of American life. But what compels her subjects to offer up, for free, such intimate information, a precious commodity in this confessional age of Oprah and reality TV? Without forums to tell their stories in their own voices and on their own behalf, the poor often must depend on well-intentioned advocates to champion their cause for first-class citizenship. In *Flat Broke With Children*, Hays knows her subjects share their stories to achieve social visibility and inclusion. "They had heard more than once the stereotypes labeling them as lazy, dependent, ignorant, promiscuous, and manipulative cheats. They told their stories, therefore, with the hope that they would be recognized not simply as a composite of clichés, but as whole persons." If, as I suspect, the same is true for LeBlanc's subjects, then she betrays them.

While her tightly woven, insular narrative—its focus on one extended family, its lack of social context—mirrors brilliantly the circumscribed world in which America's poor live, poverty and its attendant ills become an island of societal dysfunction that the mainstream can experience from a distance. If not daunted by book's end, middle-class readers may feel let off the hook, as if the problems of the so-called ghetto are just that, in the ghetto.

In *Flat Broke With Children*, Hays argues that the pressures that constrict the lives of the poor have a stranglehold on us all. Over the last 30 years, she notes, the economic strain of advanced capitalism downsized manufacturing jobs, depressed wages, and destabilized families. Women entering the labor force in the 1970s depressed salaries even further as employers, succumbing to sexism and economic exigencies, no longer felt the need to pay a "breadwinning wage" that would sustain a family. People began to marry later, for shorter periods, even while continuing to welcome children into their lives. The result for many was an increase in divorce and single parenting, "the feminization of poverty," and a rise in welfare usage.

Juggling work and family amid such flux is tough with a two-income household. For the most vulnerable among us, poor women with children, it's almost impossible. This classic argument of structural inequality Hays complicates by examining the cultural, rather than political, significance of reform. As she says, she "join[s] the conservative critics of welfare reform in focusing squarely on the question of values" to indict, not the poor, but the system and policies that make them so. Her analysis focuses on the inherent conflict between two quintessential American values: independence and the common good. Until the 1970s, Hays argues, this tension was resolved through stark gender roles of breadwinning husbands and stay-at-home moms. The massive changes in work and family life dashed this dubious bargain, and policy-makers, reeling from upheaval, looked for scapegoats rather than solutions. Welfare reform, consequently, bought into assumptions like those of Charles Murray in *Losing Ground* and Lawrence Mead in *Beyond Entitlement* that old policies encouraged "bad behavior"—namely, lazy freeloaders cynically choosing single parenthood over marriage to get a handout.

Of course, this scapegoating logic obscures the law's contradictions. The Pavlovian rewards and sanctions it uses to coerce women into the narrow and untenable "vision of independent, working motherhood" (that is, if the plan of finding a breadwinning husband fails) subvert the very principles the law claims to champion. The low-wage jobs and exploitative workfare assignments won't support independence for one, much less a family. And, as Hays notes, "by no stretch of the imagination" could one argue the new rules—such as unconscionable "family caps," or the refusal of aid to children born to mothers already on welfare—promote "family values." The ineffectual pursuit of deadbeat dads often alienates good men who don't have money but do spend time with their kids and antagonizes violent ones whose abuse caused many of the women on welfare to seek public assistance in the first place. Phantom childcare subsidies never materialize or practically require the sacrifice of one's first born to obtain.

Perhaps the greatest fallacy about reform is that women on welfare hold deviant values. In fact, Hays argues, "[p]oor mothers' support for welfare reform is the single most striking indication that welfare mothers are not the social 'outsiders' portrayed in the Personal Responsibility Act." Over the three years she researched the way the new rules played out on the ground, Hays encountered clients and caseworkers who endured an increasingly unwieldy bureaucracy and pointless hassles for the sake of the common good that reform supposedly represented, even as it became clear that the policies would never lead to independence or family stability. Hays' finding correlates with LeBlanc's description of Coco's experience at a shelter for women on welfare: "Coco.... was eager to devise a plan for her future and was open to the help [the shelter] offered, even though it was often unclear how it applied to her life." Hays breaks with liberal tradition when she concedes that her research reveals that a very small percentage of mothers on welfare do hold "values that are distinct from the 'mainstream,'" but even the least sympathetic of welfare recipients reflect larger cultural patterns, she argues. They are no worse than the tax evaders, insurance frauds, and corporate criminals among us.

Despite these blatant failures and contradictions, polls indicate that the majority of Americans consider welfare reform a triumph, as they've watched the rolls decrease from 12.2 million in 1996 to 5.3 million in 2001. Hays argues that what people are celebrating is a symbolic end of poverty and so-called moral decline that ostensibly saves taxpayers more of the money that we have less and less of. But welfare reform placates anxieties without addressing the systemic reasons we are increasingly a nation of superwomen who can't do it all, men floundering for purpose, and no one minding the children.

Though nothing about the rhetoric of reform supports its outcomes or social reality, Hays insists that there were "good intentions" behind it ("or at least a mix of good intentions, harsh realities, and incomplete moral reasoning"). For instance, the ten to 15 percent of former clients who gained permanent jobs with a living wage because of the legislation can't be dismissed, she believes. This tactic of emphasizing values over politics to speak to a wider audience causes Hays to shortchange her analysis of controversial points like race, even as she dutifully notes its role in keeping poor women at the bottom. And sometimes her polemical tone belies this generous, let's-take-the-law-at-face-value stance. But for once, an advocate for the poor is not preaching to the choir. In creating a cultural space in which to talk about the traditionally conservative turf of values, Hays encourages the mainstream to consider these social problems not only with more empathy but with self-interest. Reform ultimately will fail us all, she says, and not simply because continued suffering will cost taxpayers in the long run. The ethos (and illogic) of personal responsibility denies our mutual interdependence.

Looking for Sappho

by Meryl Altman

Sappho's Leap by Erica Jong. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003, 320 pp., $24.95 hardcover.

The Sappho History by Margaret Reynolds. New York: Palgrave/MacMillan, 2003, 311 pp., $27.95 paper.

If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho by Anne Carson. New York: Vintage, 2003, 416 pp., $27.50 hardcover, $14.00 paper.

"*Who wrongs you, Sappho?*" Aphrodite asks, ready to come to her devotée's defense in Sappho's fragment 1. Surely 26 centuries later Sappho no longer needs defending? Yet as recently as last summer, the magisterial *New York Review of Books* opined, "It is safe to say that none of these fragments...would arouse a great deal of excitement were it not for the fact that Sappho was a woman, and... that she wrote about desire." Counterweights to such dismissal, all three books under review, the latest Erica Jong no less than Anne Carson's long-awaited translation and Margaret Reynold's sprightly lit crit, are labors of love on behalf of the poet all three find inspirational. But Sappho's poems have always needed defense *especially* against her defenders. (Would Aphrodite wish her ode to spend eternity immortalized beside the "zipless fuck"?)

Baron Gros, *Sappho*, 1801. From *The Sappho History*.

We don't know much about Sappho, and most of what we know is wrong. As Yopie Prins shows in *Victorian Sappho*, Joan de Jean in *Fictions of Sappho 1546-1937*, and as Reynolds vibrantly argues, later writers fill in the white space around the fragments of papyrus and pottery that have come down to us, "make her up" to be what we need to see. This is still true of Sappholatry today: 141 Amazon.com hits revealed (among other things) a handful of rivalrous, and widely divergent, translations; a revival of serious scholarship; links to second-wave and later feminist theory and practice *(Sappho Was a Right-On Woman, Sappho Goes to Hollywood* (lots of pix of Garbo and Dietrich), *Sappho Goes to Law School* (critical legal theory); other women poets, Greek and non-Greek; the Sappho T-Shirt Calendar (sold out); lesbian formula romances from pulpy to earnest; a young adult book, blessed by an eminent gay historian; and a DVD, "The Witches of Sappho Salon." Customers who bought this last also bought "Sin Sisters" and "Vampire Vixens," whereas customers who bought Willis Barnstone's translation of Sappho's poems also bought *The Golden Notebook*, Colette, and *The Second Sex*.

All the happy and sad complications of 21st century lesbian and feminist culture and identity can be read off this list; as de Jean says, "fictions of Sappho are fictions of the feminine." To judge by Jong, the feminine seems to be in more of a mess than ever: Is the representative Woman a singer or a sexpot? Must she choose? "When a woman is standing on a cliff about to jump into the wine-dark sea, her life does tend to flash before her. But the times get all mixed up." What if Jong's *Fear of Flying* heroine Isadora Wing—bright, funny, angst-ridden, good with words, impelled urgently in every direction by "the divine delta, that juicy fig, the powerful phallus, that scepter of state"—had lived in Ancient Greece? Jong has produced a picaresque portrait of the artist of the sort usually called "raunchy," "campy," or a "romp," where plausiblity and verisimilitude seem utterly beside the point. As her afterword explains, she sees Sappho as a cross between Sylvia Plath and Madonna.

Like everything Jong writes, *Sappho's Leap* is explicitly feminist; although as blurbs from Naomi Wolf and Anne Roiphe signal, the kind of feminist who shops at the ancient equivalent of Bloomingdale's,"and what's wrong with that?" If you enjoy Jong and her other avatars you'll enjoy her Sappho, too; if you find them annoying or embarrassing, you won't. I find Jong interesting because she continues to work unsolved second-wave problems—how to reconcile erotic, ambitious, and maternal longings; how to give public voice to the most private of experiences—long after they've stopped being theoretically fashionable. But the problems are still with us, and therefore so is she.

Meanwhile, *Sappho's Leap* has more plot than a soap opera and more facts than a History Channel miniseries. Jong poohpoohs Ovid's influential story that Sappho committed suicide out of unrequited love for Phaon: Her Phaon is a spoiled, annoying boytoy, not the *homme fatal* who turned the first lesbian in world cultural history into the first "has-be-an." Jong's Sappho is hardly "woman-identified," though: The real love of her life is her first teacher, the phallic and golden poet Alcaeus. While looking for him she has more adventures than Odysseus, accompanied throughout by her faithful slave and sort-of-girlfriend, Praxinoa. (Praxinoa puts up with a *lot*: painfully branded on the forehead, abandoned when anyone hotter turns up, addressed throughout as *'Prax!'*) A visit to the country of the Amazons leads to a full-blown allegory of '70s and '80s femi-

nism: Separatism Doesn't Work, because Amazon daughters turn out to like cock more than their grim-faced matronly leaders had figured on.

Jong has done her homework, and I enjoyed watching her shimmy around controversies that have bedeviled scholars for centuries. Was Sappho homosexual or heterosexual? Yes. Was she a public poet or a poet of private emotion? Yes. Was she in tune with her culture, or opposed to it? Yes. Was the ritual aspect genuine or just a form into which physical passion could flow? Yes. Did she run a girl's singing school, or an erotic academy—well, why not both? Everything works out for the best: If Aphrodite can't be present herself, she sends magic dolphins or Pegasus or crafty advice. Shrinkless in Syracuse, our heroine meets the wise Aesop, whose fables do just as well as Freud. And as usual there is lots of steamy and *detailed* sex: with men, with women, with her *olisbos* (guess).

The actual Sapphism here is a great improvement upon that in Jong's *How to Save Your Own Life*, where Isadora's experiment with an East Side ice queen yields the revelation: "Gentle reader, it did not taste good." But it never regains the symbolic capital of that in *Fear of Flying*, where she fantasizes avenging herself on Columbia's English department (and on patriarchy in general) by making public love to Colette during her PhD exam. I'm tempted to read the progression of Jong's novels as an allegory of early straight feminist oscillation between the idealized lesbian as feminist heroine and the real thing as anxiety-producing and faintly yucky, with *Sappho's Leap* happily resolving everything under the big tent of queer: "If you are lucky enough to love, who cares what decorative flesh your lover sports?… We are all hermaphrodites at heart, aren't we?"

Jong's biggest problem—unevenness of tone and uncertainty of diction, especially in dialogue—may result from revoicing unfamiliar material. (We don't know much about Sappho, but we're pretty sure she wasn't Jewish.) Yet it's an oddly didactic, almost dissertation-like, book, so much so that it's hard to feel anything for the characters. Do I need to know that "Syracuse was founded by the Corinthians, who worshipped Artemis?" Would Alcaeus really write, "When I think of beautiful green Lesbos, it merges in my mind with a vision of violet-haired Sappho—or Psappho, as you call yourself in our beautiful Aeolic dialect"? The story is framed by Olympian kibbitzing and interference: Aphrodite claims a woman (Sappho) can be a great singer; Zeus wagers she will be derailed by sex and love; and both try to stack the deck.

> Aphrodite: "Sappho's life matters! Someday she will be called the "tenth muse" by a great philosopher, not yet born, named Plato."
> Zeus: "Plato, schmato! These mortals are no more than dust…."
> (p. 272)

(Like Homer, only different.) Some will find this cringe-making, others will find it funny and fun to read. It was obviously enormous fun to *write*.

So, it seems, was *The Sappho History*. Informed by countless hours in international archives, its breezy style nonetheless clearly invites a general (lesbian?) readership. "Sappho's speaker may, or may not, have once felt the desire she describes, but through the contrivance of her words, she makes a new feeling, which is authentic. I know it is. Because it is mine. Yours. Ours." Those seeking a survey of recent scholarly work on Sappho and her reception might be better off with Prins, or de Jean, or Ellen Greene's two anthologies, *Reading Sappho* and *Re-reading Sappho*. For others new to Sappho, I'd suggest starting with Reynolds' own capacious *The Sappho Companion*, which does enormous service by reprinting many later "versions" of Sappho, helpfully contextualized by informative and thorough historical headnotes. Work on the earlier book seems to have left Reynolds with a reserve of delightful anecdote and a praiseworthy awareness that a linear progress narrative of responses to Sappho across the centuries simply won't wash.

But as a result, *The Sappho History* is a bit of a grab bag. Reynolds jumps from century to century and country to country providing what she calls "snapshots," linked by dramatic claims that lack of synthesis is the *point*. "Sappho is nobody. She has no body." "S - - - - o is a space. For joining up the dots. Filling in the blanks. Making something out of nothing." Page du Bois and others argue similarly that "Sappho" is a fiction, a cathexis, a conflicted and contradictory locus of self-authorization down through the centuries; and the sheer variety and contrariety of Reynolds' examples proves it anew. So it's clear why she would renounce the search for the "real Sappho." It is less clear how this harmonizes with her mystical claims to authentic connection.

Reynolds capably shows how Sappho's image and narrative have been mobilized simultaneously on all sides of every question. Male painters of the Napoleonic period used Phaon as an excuse to show heroic male nude beauty (and Sappho disconsolate); in the same period, women painters and writers invoked Sappho as an enabling foremother, in the face of Rousseau's directive to tend to their needlework. Some snapshots are in clearer focus than others: I loved hearing about Lady Hamilton, who in the late 18th century transformed herself from bought concubine to respectable lady and artist by performing Greek "attitudes" in Naples for her husband's guests; but the connection to poet Mary Robinson, and thereby to Sappho, is sketched metaphorically rather than demonstrated. The account of Tennyson and Hallam is interesting in itself, but the link to Sappho hangs on a very slender textual thread. Reynolds' broad historical sweep means she can't engage fully with scholarship in each period, which may leave experts peevish. (For example: The finer points of understanding H. D. may not be of general interest, but those who care may find Eileen Gregory's elegant and sensible *H. D. and Hellenism: Classic Lines*, and other recent works, more careful and better informed.)

"Feminine jouissance is perhaps a clue to Sappho's persistence." Perhaps. But the mobilizations of narrative and image Reynolds catalogues—"imposter phantoms that throng into the spaces between the fragments of the text and her story"—leave Sappho's *poetry* curiously untouched. Reynolds' leaping enthusiasms take her farther and farther from Sappho's restrained poetic mastery, the overcoming of desire's tyranny through form. I find slightly overwrought gush an unsatisfactory substitute for closely reasoned argument. "Sappho has given me much pleasure. As she has pleasured others before. In my imagination she comes to me, she comes for me. I have looked at her with desire. I have imagined that she looks back at me." Still, readers who would be put off by "drier" literary criticism may be pleased and instructed by both of Reynolds' books, and will turn back to Sappho herself, which is all to the good.

Charles Auguste Mengin, *Sappho*, 1877. From *The Sappho History*.

But to which Sappho should they turn? Noted classicist and acclaimed poet Anne Carson has provided a spare and elegant rendering of every word of Sappho's that has come down to us, including single-word scraps quoted by ancient grammarians. The ancient Greek is here on facing pages, but textual apparatus is minimal, and gaps in the papyrus or the translation are indicated by a backwards bracket. Large stretches of white space are so integral to these poems that to offer compressed quotations would betray their spirit. The impression is of finely honed thought and deep feeling through self-restraint—and of loss, of meaning torn briefly and hopefully from a surrounding field of silence. Some of the results are conventionally beautiful, meaningful speech; others are haunting, mute, or surreal. Carson explains, "I like to think that, the more I stand out of the way, the more Sappho shows through. This is an amiable fantasy (transparency of self) with which most translators labor."

Paradoxically, "standing out of Sappho's way" means leaving traces of the translator's labor on the page. "Brackets are an aesthetic gesture toward the papyrological event.... Even though you are approaching Sappho in translation, that is no reason you should miss the drama of trying to read a papyrus torn in half or riddled with holes or smaller than a postage stamp." Notes provide clues toward interpretation ("Sappho's poem threatens the woman with an obliteration which it then enacts by not naming her") and explain "correption" and the force of the particle *"de."* But Carson never pretends that implacable puzzles can be complacently solved; she provides matter for interpretations that may counter her own.

This makes Carson's an ideal edition for someone like me, who has just enough Greek to follow happily: The white space tempts me to treat it like a workbook. But readers for whom the Greek is, well, Greek may find Carson's abstinent but encyclopedic approach frustrating. They might prefer to begin with Mary Barnard's more reader-friendly modernist version, first published in 1958 and still deservedly in print. When Victorians saw space, in a text or in a drawing room, their instinct was to fill it up with bric-a-brac; then high modernism cleaned the house of poetry with a blowtorch. What Mary Barnard showed for Sappho (and Richard Lattimore for Homer) was that Ancient Greek material could be enjoyed without scholarly attainments, but also without too much lying or embroidery. Whenever Jong or Reynolds lifted me out of my chair in irritation—"Sappho would never say *that!*"—the internal voice I heard, even though I knew better, as "Sappho" was actually Barnard's. Because it was the first I encountered? Because my lover gave the book to me? Because liking modernism had prepared me to value Barnard's simple directness, to hear the underlying rhythm of her free verse as a dance? I suspect all readers, even the savviest, carry within ourselves a version against which we measure the others, defensibly or not.

Perhaps with patience *If Not, Winter* could work that way too. Even the briefest fragments are more polished than they first appear, and, without grandstanding, the results are poetry. Here's desire, from the middle of Sappho's fragment 31 *phainetai moi* [He seems to me]: "No: tongue breaks and thin/ fire is racing under skin/ and in eyes no sight and drumming/ fills ears// and cold sweat holds me and shaking/ grips me all"—I prefer this to Barnard's more sedate "If I meet/ you suddenly, I can't// speak—my tongue is broken; a thin flame runs under/ my skin; seeing nothing,// hearing only my own ears/ drumming, I drip with sweat;/ trembling grips my body..." Carson's syntax comes closer to the physical dissolving; also, Barnard's "If I meet you suddenly," while helpful, is not exactly in the Greek. But *both* seem magnificent in light of this moment's history: Reynolds reports that Boileau omits any reference to "sweat" as "indelicate"; that the "matchless Orinda" transforms it to "dewy damps"; and that Germaine Greer (overcompensating?) suggests the overexcited poet has simply *wet herself.* Yes, all translations are fictions. Yet to say with Reynolds that all imaginary Sapphos are created equal disables the intellect. No version is perfect but some are worse than others.

Carson's discreet notes are helpful, but her main interpretive work on Sappho is elsewhere, in well-regarded scholarly articles and, most memorably, *Eros the Bittersweet*, an incandescent thesaurus, or anatomy, of the paradoxes of human desire, which takes off from *phainetai moi* and ranges throughout Western culture ancient and modern. In that work, she often responds to and reworks other writers in her own poems and sequences, in a direct, personally involved, gripping way. *If Not, Winter* is different.

The effort here is to rescue lyric from the irrelevant pressures of narrative. "Controversies about her personal ethics and way of life have taken up a lot of people's time throughout the history of Sappho scholarship. It seems that she knew and loved women as deeply as she did music. Can we leave the matter there?" After so much noise and drivel the wish seems utterly coherent. Given the art Carson's made before by taking liberties with the lives and lines of others, what she wants now, it seems, is to respect distance and difference, not to force intimacy on her poet—to take Sappho as an end in herself rather than a means to an end. Isn't there a form of love that consists in knowing when to be quiet? She does not flatter or pressure the reader—no attempt here to package Sappho or to sell her—having reached the point perhaps where even, or especially, the beloved's imperfections seem beautiful.

"There is no Sappho" may be the most modest of standpoints or the most arrogant. How about, "Nobody owns Sappho?" Then, to quote the fragmentary end of *phainetai moi*, "all must be endured, since even a beggar..."

Although—there are a few disputed words in there—it may mean *all must be dared.*

Rethinking Helen Keller

by Kim E. Nielsen

The Story of My Life by Helen Keller, edited by Roger Shattuck with Dorothy Herrmann. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003, 471 pp., $21.95 hardcover.

The Story of My Life by Helen Keller, edited by James Berger. New York: Modern Library, 2003, 343 pp., $19.95 hardcover.

As the recently published centennial editions of Helen Keller's 1903 autobiography *The Story of My Life* make clear, we continue to be fascinated by the famous deaf-blind woman who died in 1968 at the age of 88. Despite our fascination, we know so little about her that it is hard to imagine her as anything but innocent, inspirational seven year old taught by Anne Sullivan at the famous Tuscumbia, Alabama, water pump. Like most of us, however, Keller had a life past childhood—and grew to be one of the most influential and widely recognized women of the 20th century, whose primary interests were political but whose political life has been largely ignored. Our shared cultural memories of her generally omit her interest in radicalism, her critique of capitalism, and her passionate internationalism. The sentimentalized story of the young deaf-blind girl has trumped the adult Helen Keller of political passion.

Helen Keller and "Phiz." From *The Story of My Life* (Norton).

This historical erasure began while Keller was still alive. Throughout her lifetime, hindered by attitudes about disability that mired her in childhood regardless of her age, and attitudes that assumed her debilitation, she faced charges that her disability rendered her incapable of forming her own political opinions; indeed, incapable of generating her own thoughts, her own *knowledge*, her own selfhood. As Roger Shattuck puts it in the afterword to his new edition of her biography, she was charged with plagiarizing "her very personality," of relying upon a "prosthetic identity."

The Story of My Life was and continues to be an immensely popular book. At its initial publication it quickly became an almost unparalleled best seller. By 1954, the book, which has never gone out of print, was not only being sold in what Keller's editor referred to as "the regular foreign language translations," but also in Arabic, Assamese, Bengali, Burmese, Debuano, Chinese, Greek, Hiligayon, Hindi, Icelandic, Ilocano, Indonesian (just to name the first part of the alphabet). These two new editions restore the book to much of its original state by including commentary and letters by Keller, Anne Sullivan Macy, and John Macy omitted from the editions of the last several decades.

The Story of My Life begins with Keller's recognition that, "It is with a kind of fear that I begin to write the history of my life." The 23 year old chronicles her acquisition of language and subsequent education, the very reason the world considered her worthy of autobiography, via Anne Sullivan Macy, Perkins School for the Blind, and eventually Radcliffe College. She concludes by explaining her daily activities, joys, and the process by which she *knows* the world.

The palpable fear caused by her highly publicized 1892 plagiarism "trial" at Perkins and lifelong charges of incompetence is omnipresent. From childhood, critics had charged that her disability rendered her incapable of genuine perception and that all she knew, all she was, must have come from others. During her college years, the skeptical interpreted any physical ailment of hers as evidence of a nervous and physical breakdown due to overwork, proof that her body was unable to withstand the rigors that college demanded of even the *normal* female body. In response, Keller frames the narrative as an explanation and justification of her intellectual development and self. The inclusion in the original 1903 edition and these contemporary editions of letters by Anne Macy about Keller's educational process, coupled with letters from the child Helen that illustrate Macy's pedagogical reflections, and John Macy's account of "Helen Keller's life and education" heightens this focus.

Keller experienced education as emancipatory, but not because it freed her from her disability. Instead, it freed her internally from what others thought of her disability. The disciplined development of her intellectual self, along with Descartes' maxim, "I think, therefore I am," strengthened her previous but internally tenuous claim that she was completely human. Those "five direct, emphatic words," she wrote in 1929, "waked something in me that has never slept since." Because she could think, her perceptions, analyses, and senses of the world were legitimate. Though she was deaf and blind, she could metaphorically and literally read the world accurately. This claim, legitimated by the paragons of Western philosophical thought, was revolutionary to the young woman. The success of *The Story of My Life* caused Keller to dream of almost unlimited opportunities and of life as an economically self-sufficient author.

Joining the Socialist Party of America in 1909, she became an advocate of