training for particular professions. Groeger suggests that the Progressive Era should remind us that a "liberal arts" education has long been vocational. "Failing to acknowledge the role of our educational system in the distribution of economic benefits," Groeger contends, "will hinder efforts to liberate education for the pursuit of nonvocational ends" (253).

Groeger's book is an important contribution to the histories of the Progressive Era and education. It will be on my shelf for a long time.

The Biography of a Woman Erased

Nielsen, Kim E. *Money, Marriage, and Madness: The Life of Anna Ott*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020. ix + 131 pp. $22.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-0252085017.

Evan Elizabeth Hart

Missouri Western State University, St. Joseph, MO, USA

doi:10.1017/S1537781422000214

In *Money, Marriage, and Madness: The Life of Anna Ott*, Kim Nielsen calls biography "a powerful and effective tool" (105). In this somewhat sparse yet fascinating work, Nielsen tells the story of Dr. Anna Barbara Blaser Miesse Ott, a woman largely unknown until this book's publication. She was not a particularly noteworthy or significant woman in her own time, but that is exactly the point of Nielsen's biography of her: those who might seem unimportant are not irrelevant. Ott was "a woman whose life mattered and matters" (2), Nielsen argues. Ott immigrated to the United States from Switzerland in 1834. She married her first husband, Dr. Jonathan Miesse, a few years later. The couple divorced in 1856, leaving Ott with money and the medical expertise gained as a physician's wife. She married her sister's widower, George Ott, that same year. In 1873, he institutionalized Ott after she filed multiple divorce filings and complained of horrific spousal abuse. When he was not made Ott's guardian, and therefore failed to gain any control over her considerable wealth, George divorced her in 1881. Ott spent the rest of her days in the Wisconsin State Hospital. She died in 1893.

Although elements of Ott's life are noteworthy—having multiple divorces during the nineteenth century, claiming the title of "doctor" for herself, and being institutionalized—Nielsen convincingly argues that none of these events, in and of themselves, deviated far from the norms for midwestern women at the time. Nielsen's purpose is not to tell us about a remarkable woman, but to show how "law shapes lives and families, as well as the geographical and conceptual boundaries of a life, and that law itself reflects the power structures of historical periods and places" (2). Because of changes in the law regarding women's property, and the loosening of divorce statutes, Ott and Miesse were able to divorce, and Ott was able to retain control over wealth and gain custody of her daughter. The law also made it impossible for Ott to divorce her second husband despite clear signs

of abuse. Although frowned upon, the courts did not recognize abuse as grounds for dissolving a marriage. And her institutionalization was possible due to "the purposeful actions of others, her own nonconformity, the vulnerability created by the violence of her marriage, the development of psychiatric institutions by the newly created state of Wisconsin, the growing power of medicine, and the attention generated by the combination of her gender, money, and professional standing" (3). While there may not have been many women with two divorces, wealth, medical expertise, and decades of institutionalization, Nielsen notes that, as good biographies should, the story of Ott's life helps to "reveal much about the history of marriage and divorce, women's legal precariousness in the nineteenth century, the medical profession of the late nineteenth century, and the lives of those considered insane and institutionalized" (2). Nielsen expertly uses Ott's life to help her readers gain understanding into the context of women's lives during the late nineteenth century.

Nielsen does an admirable job reconstructing Ott's life. The outline is clear, but the historical record left what Nielsen calls a "frustrating void" (13). Historians will empathize with Nielsen's attempts to discover Ott in records and archives. Unfortunately, "her words, her motives, her desires, her being, even her physicality—was and remains, excluded from the historical record" (8). It is here that Nielsen makes an important and compelling argument: the lack of sources is not accidental. No one made a conscious effort to limit our access to Ott's life specifically, but the structures that impacted her life meant that she is largely absent from the historical record except through the writings of others. This alone renders this text beneficial to students. Teachers know that students often want all the answers. Nielsen's work shows that incomplete histories can also reveal much about the period and can demonstrate the many creative ways historians can approach the archives.

One of the most interesting sections of Nielsen's book focuses on Ott's institutionalization. Here Nielsen connects the story of Ott's life to the larger historiographies of medicine and disability. During her intake, "authorities characterized her body and behaviors, her very bodymind, as pathological and aberrant" (63). Ott's physical size, her alleged assault of another woman, her role as a physician, her alleged temper, and her decision to attempt to vote were all used as justifications for her institutionalization. Nielsen rightly points out that there is no way for readers to know Ott's psychological state, but she argues that they should not even ask. After all, she insists "diagnoses are historically situated expressions of cultural values that do cultural work. Questions about the accuracy of Anna's diagnosis replicate the power structures and assumptions that justified her institutionalization and illegitimization" (104). Broader forces—including the law—made it possible for her husband to commit her in the first place. Her diagnosis, mania, can only be understood in the context of the time. Furthermore, Ott's silenced historical record means that we cannot know how Ott felt about the many tragedies of her life.

Nielsen ends the book with a reflection on the importance of biography for historians. She encourages all of us to "embrace the unique potential biographies contain for deepening (and sometimes altering) historical understandings both structural and focused" (106). While perhaps not a completely unique take, Nielsen insists that biographies "of those who have been erased … have potential to be radical sites of rich and intersectional learning" (106). This slim biography does a great deal with relatively little and achieves the goal of hearing the voice, albeit a quiet one, of a woman erased.