

[Tanya Domi:](#)

Hi this is, Tanya Domi. Welcome to the Thought Project recorded at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, fostering groundbreaking research and scholarship in the arts, social sciences and sciences. In this space, we talk with faculty and doctoral students about the big thinking and big ideas generating cutting edge research informing New Yorkers and the world.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

Nancy K. Miller is a distinguished professor of English and Comparative Literature at the Graduate Center, CUNY. She's the author or editor of more than a dozen books, most recently a memoir titled *My Brilliant Friends*, which tells the story of her deep friendships she formed with Carolyn Heilbrun, Naomi Schor, and Diane Middlebrook. Colleagues in the academy, and all of whom poignantly died during the years of 2001 through 2007.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

During the writing of the book, Miller is confronted with her own mortality when she is diagnosed with metastatic lung cancer, perhaps confronting the end of her life without her dear friends. These friendships are complicated, and interlocking, foundational to Miller's life in her identity as a scholar and as a feminist, which were forged at the seminal beginning of second wave feminism during the 1970s. Welcome to the Thought Project, Professor Miller.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

Thank you, Tanya.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

There is a saying that you can judge a book by its cover, and I fell in love with this cover. To me these whimsical drawings of you and your friends that were prepared by, Jojo Carlin are just absolutely, they give a lightness to I think memoirs can be very heavy, and this topic is heavy because your friends have died. I thought what an unorthodox cover design. Now, why did you ... How did this appeal to you?

[Nancy Miller:](#)

Okay. It's something of an accident. Jojo Carlin is a graduate student here in English, but she's also a fantastic artist. After her orals, she felt that she wanted to give me a present so she came to my office and she gave me a frame of the three drawings, and I just thought they were wonderful. At that point, my book was in production. I sent them to my editor saying, "Look aren't these cool?" I wasn't really thinking, "Oh, this should be on the cover." She liked them so much, she sent them to the designer, the designer liked them so much that that's what happened.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

One of the back stories is that Jojo worked from author photos so that in a way these women are already posed as writers in their own world.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

Yes, I love it. I noticed I was on your website because I was researching for this conversation and you have an area on the website of sketches of yourself in cancer treatment. Do you sketch?

[Nancy Miller:](#)

Yes, but I'm not really very good. I consider myself a cartoon ... Well, somewhat of a cartoonist and an outside artist. I don't think that my drawings would have

passed master for the cover of a book, but in the cartoon outside or art category, I can get away with it, and it's also on a website that has some context around it, but I think it would not have worked on a cover, I don't think.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

Well, I just think it's interesting, you're a writer, you're an author of more than a dozen books, and sometimes we get to this ... And, I actually sketch myself. I'm not. I'm an amateur, complete amateur, but I find that it's an interesting thing that writers sometimes turn to. It's just an interesting idea, and it's very different in terms of a book jacket when you walk into the bookstore and you see that book, it just pops.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

I'm happy to hear it, I think I will report it to the designer. I will say one thing about the cancer drawings is that when I got my diagnosis, I was of course shocked the way everyone is with a cancer diagnosis. I normally as a writer would have been writing about it, but I didn't want to. I started out of nowhere, making these sketches and I think it was a way of expressing a feeling without really naming it and getting at some of the ... I entered another world with the illness and at some level that's why I entered another medium.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

That seems logical to me and you're living with this disease.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

Yes.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

A lot of people are now which is an interesting aspect of the 21st century and cancer treatment.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

Well, it's interesting I am going to be on sabbatical next year and I had to write a fellowship proposal, my proposal for my next book, if it's really a book will be about living with ... My tentative title is living with. So, the notion of we do now in cancer and many, many illnesses live with them in a way that no one would have foreseen till now. I'm interested in it as in a way it is a literary problem is how do you tell an interesting story that has no shape? Day by day, by day, you're living with an illness, and yes, there's a beginning but after that, it's very uncharted so that interests me.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

Yes, this is the new, new. This is the new, new, right?

[Nancy Miller:](#)

Yes.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

Because, when I was growing up, or even just 15 years ago, 20 years ago, it was almost a death sentence.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

Definitely. My mother died of lung cancer. It was delivered to her as a death sentence. I was in the room, the doctor said, this is the old style way of discussing illness, "Put your affairs in order," he never pronounced the word cancer. Of course, my experience was very different, even though I did get a diagnosis like that in terms of saying incurable but treatable. Just to hear

incurable is not a good thing to hear, but of course, it is a very different. I am alive and this is my seventh year, so.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

Good for you. Good for your doctors too. You've referenced the F word, and you talk about how we all in the past 25, 30 years began to refer to feminism as the F word because it became so pejoritized and marginalized and it was almost a stroke of courage to stand up and say you're a feminist. Being a feminist during those years was hard, but the F word in this memoir is certainly about women's friendships.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

You underscore friendships primacy, by citing Hannah Arendt's seminal thoughts as well known the ancients thought, friends, indispensable to human life, indeed, that a life without friends was not really worth living. In a blink of an eye, you lost all your friends in less than a decade.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

Yes, it was very shocking. I guess it was a prelude to my own diagnosis. One of the things that I discovered when I was working, when I began to see this would be a book, was to see what there was really written about friendship. It's Hannah Arendt notwithstanding most the canonical tradition about friendship begins with Aristotle and ends with [inaudible 00:08:47], and the model of friendship really it's male, but that's not, maybe the most important thing about it, but it's really about being identical to your friend within a very particular social context. It's a very idealized model of friendship of a kind of perfect. They use the word perfection, and I think that women's friendship has to negotiate with a situation in which women don't have a comfortable place in the world. The way they did in Athens, when Aristotle was making up his model for friendship.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

So, I think friendship is at the heart of feminism. It's also ... It was a leap, for those of us who grew up in generations before feminism, of course, we had friends, but we, I would say on some level, we didn't value our friends enough. For example, in the 1950s people would say like if you had an arrangement with a girl friend to do something and if "a boy" "asked you to do something," of course you would do that.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

There was just no sense that your relationship with a woman, a girl, we were girls, could ever be the central dynamic of your life or a major dynamic, not the sole dynamic and that that was a part of a quest to exist in the world or even just to be happy.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

Absolutely, that women friends were always ancillary to the primary relationship which was presumed to be hetero normative, so it'd be a man.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

Yes, it would.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

Without a doubt. So absolutely. So the launch of second wave feminism really began to shift that for women.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Yes, we had a women's group. We started it in, January 1971. In fact, we started it inspired by an article in the New York Times, and it's Sunday Times Magazine by Vivian Gornik about consciousness raising. Until then, really, I had never heard the expression. I had no idea what it meant, but the article was very persuasive.

[Nancy Miller:](#) I called a friend, one of my brilliant friends who's still alive Hester Eisenstein, and I said, "Did you read this article?" She said, "Yeah,." Like, "Well, why don't we have a group?" And suddenly within a week, we had found enough friends to create a group, and the group lasted just about the whole decade of the 70s.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Yeah, this was the medium that feminists took upon themselves to organize and I actually was in high school at that point, but I got to school a couple years later, and that was definitely a dominant discourse about consciousness raising groups.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Well, you know, the Italian feminists theorists, Teresa de Lauretis says that consciousness raising is feminist theory, I mean that it's through feminist. It's through the practice of consciousness raising that we create feminist theory. That's a bold statement, and I think actually, I don't know whether people would experience it that way now, but certainly it was the case then.

[Nancy Miller:](#) The experience of letting other people's lives into yours and seeing how they were connected, and they're connected through the state of being women.

[Tanya Domi:](#) And, this is theorized.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Yes.

[Tanya Domi:](#) That's interesting.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Well, we need a theory.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Of course, of course. Well, that must have been also an exciting time, and at that point you were at Columbia and you had obtained your PhD in French Literature and had started your scholarly career in the English department meeting, Carolyn Heilbrun and later not getting tenure. With the same outcome for your other friend Naomi Schor. Columbia University sounded hellish from your writings of that time.

[Nancy Miller:](#) That's a fair adjective. It was a time, I have a God daughter who's a philosopher and a social theorists who's I guess at her early 50s, and when she read this book and Carolyn Heilbrun's novel, detective novel Death In A Tenured Position, she said, "I can't, I have trouble believing this. Believing that there were times when there were no women or one woman in a department. When women were expected to do all the administrative work with no reward. Where

routinely women weren't kept." She said, "It sounds like slavery," and she works on dystopian novels.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

It has a sort of unbelievable feel to younger people, but it was "normal" that there would be the chair would be a man, that he would determine everything, that the one woman or the two women, and there was, I think maybe three in English, there was one in French that were there. They were tolerated. They were never central. We did not, we had no idea how we would make a future basically.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

Yeah. You say you, you write in the book that your future is one woman tenured.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

Yeah.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

Which I was like. "Wow, that's very stark." Now, it's such an interesting time as well, because while it's terrible on campus, there are a lot of things going on. Actually, I think one of the things that I found out me too having graduated from Columbia is that PhD candidate, Kate Mullet actually wrote sexual politics, got it published and deposited it in front of her dissertation committee. I mean there was a groundbreaking treatise.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

It definitely was and it was extraordinary. It influenced me. I had not started writing when her book came out, but everyone knew about it and it was a whole sort of excitement around the idea that a Columbia dissertation had become a book that had gotten so much attention.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

My advisor, one of my advisors said, "Don't try to be a second rate, a second Kate Mullet, she wasn't first rate to begin with."

[Tanya Domi:](#)

So, she was pejoritized obviously.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

Whereas in the world she was being celebrated and she had opened so many eyes and so many doors. At Columbia was this is really not, at least in the French department, of course, would feel superior to the English department anyway.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

Of course.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

Yes.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

Having worked with the French diplomatically speaking I can absolutely believe that. At that time, I remember even when Kate Mullet's book was published. I mean, it was a big deal, and then I found out about how it was published and she just gave it to her dissertation committee. I thought that is really bold, very bold.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

We have to say, though, she did have an extraordinary advisor.

[Tanya Domi:](#) This was?

[Nancy Miller:](#) Steven Marcus.

[Tanya Domi:](#) I see.

[Nancy Miller:](#) He was interested in sexuality in the Victorian era and in Victorian novels, so that made him I think, I don't know what made him so ... He also had a very powerful wife. Maybe that's what made him be able to be open to this.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Sure. Well, it was quite a moment. I mean, I'm not going to forget that time period. At that time, you meet, Carolyn and you name her as your mentor, protector, and witness. What did you mean explain that to our listeners?

[Nancy Miller:](#) Well, by the time I met, Carolyn, I already had finished my PhD, so she wasn't my advisor. Which is there's a somewhat of a different relationship between an advisor and a mentor.

[Nancy Miller:](#) So, we were in a context in which I had been given a fellowship by a committee that she was on, and after I was told that I had a fellowship she told me that she had fought for me to get this fellowship. Because I was feminist and because she wanted a feminist colleague because she did not-

[Tanya Domi:](#) Of course.

[Nancy Miller:](#) One of the provisions of this very fancy fellowship was to encourage teaching between senior and junior faculty, and so she asked me if I would teach with her. Of course, I was terrified in two ways. One, she was super famous and she also had a reputation for being ferocious. The second thing was that she had a reputation of being difficult. Men have reported this not women, and I was nervous. I was afraid. I was kind of afraid.

[Nancy Miller:](#) I was also ... I was going to say, seduced, I mean that's too strong a word, but I was really taken with this idea of knowing someone much, she was 15 years older than I was, who was accomplished, had a life, a life in many ways I envied and other people resented because she was married, she had all these children's, she lives on Central Park West, she had real art. I mean, I thought, "Oh, well, there's somebody amazing," and so we started to work together and then that evolved into a working relationship and also finally, a friendship.

[Tanya Domi:](#) She feels like a power house to me. As I'm reading it, to sort of jumps off the pages. It makes sense that this strong older woman, a feminist, self identified feminist would be disdained by men in that department at that time. It must have been really hard for her.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Tanya, I will tell you that on some level I would say she never got over it. Despite the fact that she had success in the world, she had a title, she was titled

professor, named professorship. She had accolades, she had everything, but the way she was treated, the way she was isolated was a traumatizing experience that she I think pretty much was underlying the suicide ultimately.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

One of the things that, Carolyn wrote just before she left Columbia in the early 90s was that she felt like a battered wife. Which is an extremely strange expression from her, considering that it had nothing to do with even remotely with her own life, but that that's what the atmosphere had made her feel.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

That's really sad actually to be such a great scholar, probably had this really incredible presence, and she was disdained for it. It's really awful actually when you think about it.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

Well it was, there's no getting around it. Of course, I will say one other thing though that mitigates it which is she was beloved by the students who worked with her, she was beloved. We had an event here and it became clear that Columbia wasn't going to do anything after she left. This was '92, so at the grad center Jane Marcus who's no longer with us.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

Yes.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

Jane Marcus was the head of Women's Studies, and she and I organized a colloquium to honor, Carolyn. It was called Out Of The Academy, Into The World and was in the old building. We had a whole day devoted to her, and it was they were friends, but also many, many, many students, and the students from several generations of students came and it was a joyous event. It was really an extraordinary event, and we were glad to be able to have done something to mark her career.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

Many years later, actually, I think it was 2006, some women colleagues at Columbia decided it was time to honor her and had an event about ... What was it called? Feminists Rights, Feminists Lives, something along those lines, but it came a little late.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

Yes. They're slow uptown on certain things. Not surprised, I hate to say. At the same time you meet, Naomi Schor.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

Right.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

You're both really close in age, or you refer to the fact that she's younger than you at the same 10 months that your sister's younger than you.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

Well, she was younger than I was, but she was ahead of me because-

[Tanya Domi:](#)

You always talk about catching up, actually.

[Nancy Miller:](#)

Yes.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Go ahead.

[Nancy Miller:](#) We met, we had actually some friends in common, so that gave us a point of departure, and she ... So I was still a graduate student, but and she had finished her dissertation at Yale, but the chair, the [inaudible 00:22:53] at Columbia who was my advisor, didn't think that her work was good enough, so she was starting over.

[Nancy Miller:](#) In a way, the fact that she was ahead of me was mitigated by the fact that she had to start to write another book, that her dissertation wasn't good enough to make into a book. It wasn't, I think the difference in rank wasn't that important because we were both in a state of high anxiety because of the atmosphere, but what compensated for that was we were both passionate about our work. In a way I learned to be passionate about my work from her, because I had never had a friend with whom I shared anything like that, and I was almost 30. That's a surprising development in one's life.

[Tanya Domi:](#) You refer to her as the friend.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Yes.

[Tanya Domi:](#) The friend in that you write, " We didn't believe in miracles," I guess you were looking around at what you were facing at Columbia but you believed in each other.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Yes.

[Tanya Domi:](#) So, you were each other's port in a storm.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Yes, we were, and that was an extraordinary experience and it was ... I never, I've never had a relationship like that since then, and it was unique then. I do think it was very, the good part, which was mainly the good part had to do with both of us developing feminist consciousness. The tough part really had to do with what we had inherited as emotional patterns.

[Tanya Domi:](#) From family and society?

[Nancy Miller:](#) Yes, and it was very hard to take yourself seriously. That was such an effort that you would feel very insecure about any accomplishment you had. So you really needed the other person to support-

[Tanya Domi:](#) Affirm you.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Yeah, exactly.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Right.

[Nancy Miller:](#) There was that, so there was a kind of back and forth between fearing and celebrating, and fearing and celebrating and struggling. Of course, because of the economy of scarcity with which most women grow up, there was also a moment when I thought, well, if she gets this, I won't get it, or ... And, there were-

[Tanya Domi:](#) Right, because there's only one.

[Nancy Miller:](#) There's only one.

[Tanya Domi:](#) There's only one. I've lived this. I've lived this. Yes, you talk about the rivalry and potential envy that's part of the dynamics because of the way ... Actually let's just say it, the way the patriarchy has set it up.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Yes.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Right?

[Nancy Miller:](#) It's completely right. We were always compared, and we were compared. We were always compared to each other.

[Tanya Domi:](#) You were put in competition with each other.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Yes.

[Tanya Domi:](#) You didn't seek that but it was not foisted upon you.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Completely.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Yes. Yeah, because there can only be one.

[Nancy Miller:](#) There can only be one.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Wow. That's really powerful. You talk about rivalry and envy intermittently throughout the memoir in, I guess in relationship to, Carolyn, it must have been different because she was older, established, and you were protected by her more or less.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Right. I think, yes the envy, I think the question of envy really was not part of my relationship with Carolyn. As you say, because of the age difference and they were just, we were just very different in many other ways. So the question of comparison didn't make any sense but it's true that I thought, "Well, what I ever have what she had." So would I ever have such a nice husband, three children, which of course I didn't have any.

[Tanya Domi:](#) A nice house.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Nice house.

[Tanya Domi:](#) At Central Park West. Weekend home, that kind of thing.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Yes, right.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Will you make it?

[Nancy Miller:](#) Yes.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Will you make it, right?

[Nancy Miller:](#) Right, exactly.

[Tanya Domi:](#) I have to say you situate Diane Middlebrook in your chapter on friendship after 60. I loved that title because it actually gives me hope too. You define her as a late life friend, which I can really appreciate. Tell us about the way that she became your friend.

[Nancy Miller:](#) I didn't expect to make after ... It's after the death of Naomi and Carolyn that had been these two very powerful relationships in my life.

[Nancy Miller:](#) I never really thought that I would have the ... Well, maybe not the friend but someone that was a kind of counterpart that I could share work and life with. When I met, Diane, Carolyn wasn't dead yet, but so it's not that I was all those two friends were dead, but I was feeling the need, Carolyn was now looking back I realize that she was building towards the suicide in ways that it just seems so obvious now, but it did not seem obvious then. That she was kind of withdrawing into herself and feeling very pessimistic about the culture, about feminism, where it was going or not going, and that she was kind of running out of steam.

[Nancy Miller:](#) She herself was already writing things saying that she wanted to kill herself, so definitely it was a sense of this friendship is not forever.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Right.

[Nancy Miller:](#) I mean, not by my choice, obviously.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Right.

[Nancy Miller:](#) When I met, Diane, it was kind of a surprise. I wasn't, I had heard of her. I knew who she was. She had tremendous success with her biography of Anne Sexton.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Right and she was at Stanford.

[Nancy Miller:](#) She was at Stanford.

[Tanya Domi:](#) So, that's Ivy plus.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Yes, so I did know about her, and she actually knew about me, but I didn't know that at the time. We met at this conference, a conference on life writing, and, Diane always was extremely self confident, especially in public. I met her, and I watched her give her first paper. I know this might sound odd, that part of these relationships include people perform, watching your friends perform and be, so there was a public aspect.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Persona.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Yeah.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Yes, absolutely. I'm familiar with that because I am in the academy too, and so you see your friend presenting. One of the ways you described her is that she always wore a red shoe. I just, I think she's an iconic class, just by showing up that way. It's very, it made me smile. It just made me smile.

[Nancy Miller:](#) She was a beautiful woman, and she was very bold. She liked, so she would wear one black shoe and one red shoe and you liked red, but you don't see that much in academia.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Right.

[Nancy Miller:](#) This particular lecture that she gave, was she was wearing a red leather jacket, a tight fitting red leather jacket and these shoes. She walked up on the stage and it was clear that she was going to hold the stage like an actress performing and she made this very strong statement about biography. I wasn't that interested in biography at the time, although now I'm much more interested in because on some level this book is in part biography.

[Nancy Miller:](#) She made a statement to the effect that, "The dead," she said, "Have no wishes, they only have wills." The notion being that it doesn't matter what a dead person might want you or not want you to say, the only thing that exists is they have a will and they can leave things to whomever they want, but they can't control what people are going to say about them.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Interesting thought.

[Nancy Miller:](#) The people in the audience were very uncomfortable.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Really?

[Nancy Miller:](#) Yes.

[Tanya Domi:](#) They didn't like that.

[Nancy Miller:](#) No, they didn't like the idea that there was not some sort of clear ethical pathway to writing about a person's life and there isn't in fact.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Yes, and your book is actually it's a testimonial on a number of ways, and it's also, it's a way to reclaim their memory to reclaim who they are, and to share it with a much broader audience.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Speaking of Carolyn, and you say, you look back and you could see how she was building towards a suicide. It must have been shocking, but at the same time, was it surprising to you?

[Nancy Miller:](#) Well, I guess that's a difference between shock and surprise. She said she would do it and she tended to do what she said she was going to do so. In that sense, no, it shouldn't have been surprising. Look, okay, so she was 77, which now is not considered to be ancient. It's definitely old since now I'm 78.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Sure.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Then there she was she with all the things that we enumerated before plus grandchildren and so on and so forth. It was hard to believe she would really, really, really do it even though she said she was going to do it, just because your mind just won't go there. Then she left no, she left a little tiny note that said, "Love to all, the journey is over." That was all, and a lot of us thought we would get a letter, we would get something from her, but nothing.

[Nancy Miller:](#) It was yeah I mean there's no way to get around the shock that had been, we should have been prepared but we weren't prepared because I think you can't prepare for suicide.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Sure, sure. Naomi for me I mean, there's a great deal of poignancy in reading this book, absorbing it. I felt at first glance, "Oh, that was the most poignant to be 58, to be taken at 58 with cancer." Which is a terrible, that terrible disease. That must have been very difficult.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Well, actually what she died of was she'd had cancer, but what she died of was a cerebral hemorrhage.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Yeah, right.

[Nancy Miller:](#) She had been ill a lot in her life, and this ... I forget which, she had a previous illness which meant that she had to take a blood thinner. She did have a kind of underlying blood disease, but what she died of was the hemorrhage, if you don't monitor blood thinners very carefully, you can have a bleed which is what happened, so it happened.

[Nancy Miller:](#) It was the same thing, I mean it's a shock. The only thing that wasn't a shock was watching somebody die of cancer, that's not a shock but this was a shock.

[Tanya Domi:](#) That's true.

[Nancy Miller:](#) This was a shock because it was from one day to the next and we had been on email I think two days before she died, and you're just not expecting that.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Of course. Diane the late life friend, she was older, you were older. That too must have been difficult.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Well, for the first year we didn't know she was ill, and what she offered in a way was very different. Well, first of all she's from the west. I'd never had a friend from the west. It felt like I have so much in New York, Jewish world. New York and Paris but not the west.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Right.

[Nancy Miller:](#) She had come from a very different background.

[Tanya Domi:](#) Culture. The culture is very different.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Completely different, and she also was a very different kind of writer. She had started out as a poet, and then she became a biographer, and by the time I met her, she was very, very well established as a biographer, and she was working on a biography about Sylvia Plath, and Ted Hughes.

[Nancy Miller:](#) In fact, that's what led her to make that statement about the dead because the estates of each of those Plath and Hughes were so impossible to get permission to quote anything that she finally decided she would not ask for anything, but she would work around it. And so she developed this concept, I mean it's a version of fair use, but she would call I'm just going to use snippets. So she would just take little parts of whatever material she had letters and archives and so on and build her case from that. Which is what she did, which gave her a sense of tremendous sense of autonomy.

[Tanya Domi:](#) For sure, yes. I think that I've read a lot of memoirs in my life, but you have written a really complex memoir. It's very textured, very layered. I think there's real poignancy present because we know your friends are going to die, and you say it up front, so you don't have to read it to the end to know-

[Nancy Miller:](#) Find out what happened.

[Tanya Domi:](#) To know this is what's going to happen. Death is indeed intrinsic to life, and my takeaway of your book is this is my wish for you and your friends is that you're all reunited someday in the next dimension. I want to thank you, Nancy Miller for being with us today.

[Nancy Miller:](#) Thanks, Tanya.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

Thanks for tuning into the Thought Project, and thanks to today's guest distinguished Professor Nancy K. Miller of the Graduate Center, CUNY.

[Tanya Domi:](#)

The thought project is brought to you with production, engineering and technical assistance by Sarah Fishman. I'm, Tanya Domi. Tune in next week.