

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of the Liberal Arts

**WOMEN WRITING WAR:
THE EVOLUTION OF THE GIRL REPORTER 1845-1945**

A Dissertation in

English

by

Verna Kale

© 2010 Verna Kale

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2010

The dissertation of Verna Kale was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Robin G. Schulze
Professor of English
Dissertation Co-Advisor
Co-Chair of Committee
Department Head

Sandra Spanier
Professor of English
Dissertation Co-Advisor
Co-Chair of Committee

William L. Joyce
Dorothy Foehr Huck Chair and Head Special Collections

James L.W. West III
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of English

Mark Morrisson
Professor of English
Director of Graduate Studies for the Department of English

* Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation traces the evolution of the “girl reporter” in modern American literature and culture. I examine how nineteenth-century writers like journalist and philosopher Margaret Fuller, popular columnist Fanny Fern, and “stunt reporter” Nellie Bly employed the rhetoric of sentimentality, domesticity, and the captivity narrative to create new and popular forms of women’s writing that allowed for greater participation by women in the public sphere. The second half of the project looks at how these same tropes emerge in war correspondence—during World War I, the Spanish Civil War, and World War II—by Nellie Bly and by modernist writer Martha Gellhorn. I also examine representations of the girl reporter in fiction, drama, and in a variety of visual media: advertisements, comic strips, and film. I explore how the physically attractive “girl reporter” plays upon tropes of sentiment and the female body at risk to gain access to the front lines and how this sexualized, emotional image precludes the possibility of modernist impersonality and journalistic objectivity. The project reconsiders the idea of impersonality as a defining criterion of modernism and instead locates modernist innovations in the girl reporter’s commitment to social justice through storytelling, through sentiment, and through the redirection of the gaze away from combat and toward the effects of war on the bodies of real people—including the body of the reporter herself.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.	v
Introduction: Women Writing War: The Evolution of the Girl Reporter 1845-1945 . . .	1
Chapter 1: Margaret Fuller, Fanny Fern, and a Feminist New Journalism.	34
Chapter 2: Nellie Bly, Stunt Reporter	62
Chapter 3: Nellie Bly, War Correspondent.	111
Chapter 4: Martha Gellhorn, <i>Collier's</i> Gal Correspondent	136
Chapter 5: <i>His Girl Friday</i> and <i>Brenda Starr, Reporter</i>	164
Epilogue	190
Bibliography	200

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project began in the fall of 2004 when I was a student in Dr. Robin Schulze's graduate seminar on New Womanhood. I was also, at that time, working with Dr. Sandra Spanier as the graduate research assistant on the Hemingway Letters Project. While tracking down information about Martha Gellhorn's career as a war correspondent for the project, I became curious about the link between New Womanhood, New Journalism, and women war correspondents, and the initial idea for this dissertation took root.

Many people have assisted and supported me in the intervening five and a half years. First I wish to thank my dissertation advisors, Dr. Schulze and Dr. Spanier. They have steered me in the right direction, but they have also given me creative control over the project. They encouraged me to write in my own voice and have not allowed me to forget that I am telling a story. I also wish to thank the other members of my committee: Dr. William L. Joyce, Dr. Mark Morrisson, and Dr. James L.W. West III, all of whom were instrumental in fostering my interest and expertise in archival research and periodical culture. They, too, have allowed me to retain ownership of the project. The strengths of my work I owe to this excellent assembly of mentors and teachers; any weaknesses in the project are my own.

The financial assistance I received from the Pennsylvania State University and from outside funding sources made this work possible. I am grateful to the College of the Liberal Arts and the Department of English for my six years of graduate funding, including numerous travel grants supporting research trips and conference presentations of this work, to George and Barbara Kelly for a summer fellowship and course release, to Katherine Young for the fellowship in honor of her late husband, Philip Young, to the

Modernist Studies Association for the funds to travel to MSA 10 where I workshopped part of Chapter Four, and to the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center for a Dissertation Fellowship that allowed me to travel to the University of Texas at Austin to complete my archive of primary sources.

There are many other friends and colleagues who have helped me along the way: I owe a great debt to Jean M. Lutes, author of *Front-Page Girls*, whose groundbreaking work on Nellie Bly is foundational to this project and who generously found time to read and offer comments on Chapter Two; William S. Brockman, Paterno Family Librarian for Literature, helped me to locate and procure essential primary source documents; my friend, Dan Hicks, a historian located in the Washington D.C. area, assisted with the tedious job of spooling reel after reel of microfilm at the Library Congress and with locating the earliest Brenda Starr comics in the *Chicago Tribune*. I am grateful to the staff at the Penn State libraries, especially Sandra Stelts, curator of rare books and manuscripts, and to staff at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, the Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin, the New York Public Library, and the Bortz Library at Hampden-Sydney College, especially Gerry Randall. I also owe a debt of thanks to LaVerne Maginnis, associate editor of the Hemingway Letters Project, to Robert Trogdon, to Carl Eby, and to my other colleagues in the Hemingway Society whose meticulous study of all things Hemingway facilitated my research on Martha Gellhorn.

I would also like to thank my friends and cohort at Penn State. When I found myself completing this project from a remote outpost in Southern Virginia, they came to my aid—not only by sending me research materials, but by keeping in touch and always

making me feel like I was still part of the gang: Gregg Baptista, Michael DuBose, Niamh O’Leary, Katie Owens-Murphy, Shawna Ross, and Emily Sharpe. I would like to thank my colleagues at Hampden-Sydney College who welcomed me into the English Department and Rhetoric Program and cheered me on as I finished the project; I am especially grateful to Claire Deal, Sarah Hardy and Cristine Varholy.

I owe a special thanks to Stacey Sheriff who gave me a place to stay during my trips back up to Penn State and who read and commented on Chapter One and to Dr. Hester Blum, whose seminar on nineteenth-century periodical culture inspired the project that would become Chapter One. More importantly, both Stacey and Hester have been friends and mentors, demonstrating that a woman can be both an accomplished “authoress” and a devoted mother; Fanny Fern would be proud.

I would like to thank my family for their love and support over the past six years as I missed weddings and funerals, birthdays and baptisms to do this work. I would like to extend a special thanks to my mother, herself an accomplished English teacher and the person who is single-handedly responsible for turning me into a reader, writer, teacher, and scholar. Thanks also go to my brother, Clayton, a journalist who knows first hand the challenges print journalism faces in the years ahead, and who read and commented on my Epilogue.

I offer my most heartfelt thanks to my husband, Steele Nowlin, who assisted me with this project in so many ways: not only reading drafts, listening to ideas, suggesting changes, and locating sources but also cheering me on and cheering me up. He uncomplainingly let the project steal me away for weeks at a time while I kept strange

hours, showing up every now and then to eat meals he had prepared before disappearing again. He has been a devoted husband, colleague, and friend.

It is to Steele and to our daughter Betty—born sixty-five years to the day after Martha Gellhorn stowed away in a hospital ship to land on Omaha Beach—that I dedicate this book.

“I believe that, at present, women are the best helpers of one another. Let them think; let them act; till they know what they need [...] And so the stream flows on; thought urging action, and action leading to the evolution of still better thought.”

--Margaret Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*

INTRODUCTION:

WOMENT WRITING WAR: THE EVOLUTION OF THE GIRL REPORTER 1845-1945

In 1945, *Editor and Publisher*, “America’s oldest journal covering the newspaper industry,” asked “Are Women War Reporters a Nuisance?” Two side by side columns, one by an anonymous male “veteran war correspondent” and one by Ella Winter, correspondent in Russia for the *New York Post*, argue yes and no, respectively.¹ The anonymous correspondent’s arguments are the same old chestnuts often used to deny women accreditation: women require special treatment “at latrines,” and their mere presence makes the men “self-conscious” about language, thus robbing the other correspondents of their stories. “When you’re teamed up with a woman correspondent you lose a lot of time arranging details for her, looking after her, carrying her typewriter,” the anonymous reporter argues, and “women have not been able to get a really good grasp of military affairs.”

They are “brave enough,” though, he avers, “possibly because they [don’t] fully understand their danger,” but they are all “beating their brains out” to get to the front lines “because they realize what kind of a play a woman’s front-line story would get.” Their real talent, he suggests, lies with human interest stories: “On a certain part of the war they have done a terrific job...a lot better than we could. Like reporting rehabilitation of wounded soldiers, hospitals, Red Cross, refugees. It’s when they get up to the front that they’re so out of place.” In reply, Winter argues that women, who “know the attitude that exists about them” “lean over backward to avoid causing trouble,” and

¹ Ella Winter and Anonymous, “Are Women War Reporters a Nuisance,” *Editor and Publisher*, February 17, 1945, 8.

she denies that any special treatment was expected or given except that “[all correspondents] went on more and better trips than ever.” Furthermore, she argues, “The women looked after [the male correspondents] when they were sick.”

Winter and her anonymous colleague argue two different sides of the issue, but there is some degree of consensus in their replies. The woman war correspondent, nuisance or not, is remarkable for her ability to gain access to previously off-limits, male-dominated spaces: the profession itself and the theater of war. Yet in her stories and in her personal experience she is cast as a nurturer—taking care of her fellow reporters when they are ill and writing stories about the wounded and displaced. As the *Editor and Publisher* feature shows, the praise extended to women war correspondents typically falls into two categories: “Invariably they have a different outlook and approach to a war story than a man. They turn a fresh point of view onto material that a man will overlook as commonplace” and “It’s an unquestioned fact that on occasion they are able to get places, see people not previously accessible.”

There exists no unqualified praise for the woman war correspondent or the kind of work she produces. For all the soldiers’ worries that they must “take it easy on the language” when there’s a “gal” among them or the male correspondent’s annoyance at the “certain amount of Sir Galahad” in himself and others, the figure of the woman war correspondent is also cast as a sexual being, and this sex appeal is an integral part of the woman war correspondent’s professional identity. The feature article that accompanies the debate between Winter and her colleague, “The Ladies Cover the War Fronts,” is divided by two subheads: “Hard to Get” and “Male Admiration,” and both express a

double entendre.² The first subhead introduces text noting the difficulty of obtaining a war correspondent's position as a woman, but it also implies that the woman war correspondent herself engages in the sexual pageantry of playing "hard to get." The second subhead introduces a variety of accolades—"she's swell"—directed at women correspondents from their male colleagues. Its double meaning, however, is also clear, suggesting that the woman correspondent earns "male admiration" for her physical qualities. The feature profiles a handful of women war correspondents and their "qualifications" including Ruth Cowan of the Associated Press, who, before she became a reporter, was the first teacher in her school district with bobbed hair; Iris Carpenter, whose editor at *The Boston Globe* attests that she writes "as swell as she looks"; Judy Barden of the *New York Sun* and the North American Newspaper Alliance who previously worked as a fashion model; and Rita Hume, reporter for the International News Service who was voted "'Miss Anzio Beachhead,' beating out Wacs and nurses [...] another argument for looks in a war correspondent."

The woman war correspondent is a complicated and contradictory figure. She is simultaneously nuisance and nurturer, nurturer and sex symbol, sex symbol and professional. In just these two pages of copy, women war correspondents are called "newspaper women," and "women war reporters," but they are also called "ladies," "newspaper gals" and "gal correspondent[s]." They are praised for their writing, their daring, and their dedication, but, just as much, they are praised for their bodies. And, lurking in the background, is the same criticism that plagues all professional women: whatever and wherever they are, they are *not* wives at home. "[B]eautiful Iris

² Dwight Bentel, "The Ladies Cover the War Fronts," *Editor and Publisher*, February 17, 1945, 8-9, 56.

Carpenter” for example, was “a housewife, with two children” who had “resigned to marry and devote herself to her home” until the war brought her back into the profession. It is a profession that leaves no room for home life. “[I]f a gal correspondent is a rare sight on the battle front, she’s a rarer sight at home,” the article claims, and once the woman war correspondent goes on assignment, she hesitates to make any gestures towards domesticity: “sensitive of their unusual status, feeling on perpetual trial both with their papers and the military, [women war correspondents] are reluctant to take leave” for fear that they will not be sent back.

The *Editor and Publisher* piece, published near the end of World War II, provokes some interesting questions (and not just the patronizing question posed in its headline): Is hers a new feminist rhetoric or does the woman war correspondent merely take on the sentimental subject matter—the poor, the sick, women and children—that her nineteenth-century precursors claimed as their own? Can we talk about the writing apart from the reporter herself? Does her professional status preclude any chance at a home life? Does the “girl reporter” represent the failings of New Womanhood or its fulfillment?

It is with these interconnected issues that this dissertation is concerned, and, like the field of periodical studies itself, this project has “both focus and breadth.”³ In this examination of four key figures in American journalism—Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), Fanny Fern (1811-1872), Nellie Bly (1864-1922), and Martha Gellhorn (1908-1998)—I tell a story of the “newspaper gals” that stretches over 100 years, from Fuller’s *Woman in*

³ Sean Latham and Robert Scholes, “The Rise of Periodical Studies,” *PMLA* 121.2 (2006): 520.

the Nineteenth Century (1845) to Martha Gellhorn's play *Love Goes to Press* (1945).⁴

Despite a troubling tendency by editors, advertisers, the popular media, and even the reporter herself to emphasize the sexuality, physical attractiveness, and stylishness of the woman war correspondent, these journalists made real strides in gaining women's access to a male-dominated profession. The conflict, however, lies in the ambivalence with which the woman war correspondent performs both feminism and femininity, and it is in explaining the evolution of this fraught figure that this project is concerned.

As I will argue, the origins of the woman war correspondent lie with the focus on affect, sympathy, and storytelling that characterized the sentimental traditions of the nineteenth century as well as with the implied threat of physical harm that characterized the "girl stunt report," a short-lived but influential genre of investigative reporting pioneered by Nellie Bly. Despite its roots in long-established traditions of women's writing, the rhetoric of the stunt reporter, and, later, the woman war correspondent, is a new form of feminine discourse that adds a twist—in the form of bodily risk—to the earlier model of female conversation and sympathy. Because the precedent of the modern woman war correspondent lies with, first, the stunt reporter, and, further back, with the sentimental and its embodied, affective rhetoric, there is no separating the body of work from the body itself. One problem that arises from this matrix is the issue of the reporter's dependence upon her sexual presence. Because she is a sex symbol, the reporter must represent feminine attractiveness and availability, and yet she can never herself be married. It is not merely that the girl reporter cannot take herself out of the pool of available women (though that, too, is a factor); rather, the fundamental appeal of

⁴ Gellhorn and fellow journalists Virginia Cowles first registered the copyright of the play in 1945. It premiered in London in 1946.

the girl reporter is that she puts the female body at risk. If she becomes a wife and, likely, a mother, the body she puts at risk then becomes the family body. To endanger that body is antithetical to the project of sentiment and thus incompatible with the rhetorical model that lies at the heart of the reporter's ethos.

In this sense, the stunt girls, women war correspondents, and other "girl reporters" represent both a fulfillment and a failure of New Womanhood. In a professional capacity they are successful—they make the job of the girl reporter mainstream. It is, in fact, due to this very success that the girl reporter is also a failure of New Womanhood. The girl reporter becomes so familiar that she is reduced to recognizable instantiation of a marketable commodity—a brand. Her affective rhetoric, the literal embodiment of a long and storied rhetorical tradition, becomes a product to be consumed. With this idea in mind, the last chapter of this study is an analysis of two fictional girl reporters—Hildy Johnson in the 1940 Howard Hawks film *His Girl Friday* and comics-page icon Brenda Starr (1940-present)—that offers a rather dark view of the girl reporter's failed feminism. But all is not lost. I close with a surprisingly optimistic epilogue that refuses to mourn the "death of print" or the reality of the sex appeal of a woman in a flak jacket, and I point to some striking similarities between journalism at the turn of the last century and journalism today.⁵ Our own decade is, I argue, a new "golden age of periodicals," and the woman war correspondent—and her legacy—plays a crucial role in the way American periodical culture is remaking itself to stay viable in the twenty-first century.⁶

⁵ For just one of countless recent articles debating the inevitability of the "death of print," see Howard Kurtz's article on Washingtonpost.com "The Death of Print," May 11, 2009. Accessed 06 Dec. 2009.

⁶ The *New-York Mirror* 1840 quoted in Susan Belasco Smith and Kenneth M. Price, introduction to *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Charlottesville and

Shallow Criticism on Lady-Books: Defining the Sentimental

“Sentimental” writing is a fraught and multi-valent term that I use throughout this project, and as Fred Lewis Pattee rightly noted in 1940, “‘Sentimentalism’ changes its definition with every new younger generation.”⁷ Older estimations of sentimental literature (including Pattee’s) equated its “debased religiosity” which “must end with the downfall of the male” with “the great mass” of readers “for the most part women” who “did not think at all.”⁸ But as Fanny Fern wrote in 1857, “we have had quite enough of this shallow criticism on lady-books,” and in the years since the publication of such landmark studies as Nina Baym’s *Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels By and About Women in America* (1978), Jane Tompkins’ *Sensational Designs* (1985) and Cathy N. Davidson’s *Revolution and the Word* (1986), the conversation about the definition and importance of sentimental literature in American literary history continues to be revised.⁹ “New readers bring to [a] book the changing interests and tastes of their own critical moment,” writes Davidson in her preface to the 2004 expanded edition of *Revolution and the Word*, and she is referring as much to the critical studies of women’s literature

London: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 5 and Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History, 1690-1960* 3d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 341.

⁷ Fred Lewis Pattee, *The Feminine Fifties* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1940), 283.

⁸ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of Culture* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 6; Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Stein and Day, 1982), 90; Pattee, *Feminine*, 307.

⁹ Fanny Fern. “Male Criticism on Ladies Books,” in *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*, ed. Joyce W. Warren (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 286.

produced in the years since the first edition of her own book as to women's literature itself.¹⁰

The criteria defining sentimental literature are various, but typically the sentimental is understood to feature a “high wrought [...] plot, the story of female trials and triumph”; it produces “feelings [...] tangibly present in the flesh of the reader”; and includes tropes of “the dying child; the destruction of families by death, slavery, poverty, and intemperance; and the unnecessary suffering of marginalized figures.”¹¹ Often employed to describe any piece of nineteenth-century women's writing that makes strong pathetic, even bathetic, appeals, the term has been reappropriated by feminist critics to include a more nuanced understanding of the political and rhetorical significance of sentiment. In *Sensational Designs*, Tompkins questions the fundamental principles of canon formation, arguing that sentimental writers encoded activist messages in the language of emotion, spirituality, and domesticity in work that was “anything but domestic, in the sense of being limited to purely personal concerns. Its mission, on the contrary, is global and its interests identical with the interests of the race.”¹² Nineteenth-century women writers with controversial ideas did not “rejec[t] the culture's value

¹⁰ Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America, Expanded Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), x.

¹¹ Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 209; Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 32; Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler, introduction to *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 9.

¹² Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 146.

system outright,” Tompkins argues, but “appropriated it for their own use” in order to influence social change.¹³

Subsequent studies of sentiment as a “social phenomenon” have built upon these ideas, recovering and reinscribing the sentimental as an important category of political consciousness.¹⁴ In *Touching Liberty* (1993), which examines the intersections of corporeality and political identity, Karen Sánchez-Eppler notes that the sentimental, relying as it does “on the body as the privileged structure for communicating meaning” plays into the same “troubling relation between personhood and corporeality that underlies the projects of both abolition and feminism.”¹⁵ Far from being apolitical, sentimental literature embodies the political through the portrayal of and inducement of affect. Scholars following Sánchez-Eppler have built upon this idea. Elizabeth Barnes in *States of Sympathy* (1997) argues that “sympathetic identification,” the ability to sympathize with others and to imagine oneself in someone else’s place, was “one of the foremost elements of sentimental literature” and key to the formation of a collective “American” identity.¹⁶ Sentimental literature is not merely, as earlier generations of scholars have taken for granted, “written by, for, and about women,” nor can sentimentality be simply “equated [...] with femininity.” Instead, Barnes argues, “sympathy contributes to a sentimental vision of union that eventually becomes the ideal

¹³ Tompkins, *Sensational*, 161.

¹⁴ Julie Ellison, *Cato’s Tears and the making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 5.

¹⁵ Sánchez-Eppler, *Touching*, 33.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), iv-x.

for both men *and* women.”¹⁷ What sentimental literature teaches us, Barnes suggests, is that “to be *truly* American, that is truly sympathetic, [men] must learn to be more like women: more suggestible, more seducible, more impressionable readers of both literature and human relations.”¹⁸ Even though, as Paula Bernat Bennet notes in *Poets in the Public Sphere*, “sentimental rhetoric was widely used [...] by male and female prescriptive authorities to encode the gender notions” that “defined [women] only in relation to their social location within the home,” and, indeed, the designation of writing as “sentimental” has often effectively doomed a work to obscurity, in its own historical moment the use of sentimental rhetoric has proven a powerful tool for re-calibrating the values of the public.¹⁹ “Using the power of public suasion,” Bennett argues, “women

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13. Julia Stern makes a similar argument about a different era of American literary history, arguing that literature in the earliest years of the Republic (1789-1799) “contemplate[s] the possibility that the power of genuine sympathy could revivify a broadly inclusive vision of democracy” [*The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 2.] Chapman and Hendler locate male readers of sentiment even earlier, arguing for a pre-Republic “affective androgyny, encompassing the republican discourses of both manly virtue and benevolent motherhood,” [*Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 3].

¹⁸ Barnes, *States*, xi.

¹⁹ Paula Bernat Bennett, *Poets in the Public Sphere: The Emancipatory Project of American Women’s Poetry, 1800-1900* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 9. In her work, Bennett draws a distinction between what she calls “literary sentimentality,” “the vague, idealizing romanticism [...] characteristic of the sentimental or genteel lyric” and “high sentimentality,” “an ethical/epistemological discourse of social reform.” The sentimentality with which my project is concerned fits into the latter category of Bennet’s rubric, though I should note that although there are similarities in the way the nineteenth-century poets of Bennett’s study and the nineteenth-century journalists of my project employ the tropes of sentimentality, the trajectory of these two genres splits in the twentieth century. Bennett argues that modernist women poets reject their predecessors as “irremediably inferior artists” [13]; twentieth-century women journalists, I argue in Chapter Four, continue to draw upon the sentimental tradition, and it is partly for this continued association with the nineteenth-century form that writers like Gellhorn have been ignored as important contributors to modernism.

[...] could take advantage of the public sphere's transformative mechanisms to alter radically their own situations." The writers I examine in this study are able to argue for social reforms by putting those arguments in the vocabulary of the sentimental. In so doing they advocate not just for women, children, and the poor but also for themselves, forging for themselves a place in the public sphere.

Blackwell's Island: Margaret Fuller, Fanny Fern, and Nellie Bly

This reactivation of sentimental structures is evident in work by three of the most influential journalists of the nineteenth century: Margaret Fuller, Fanny Fern, and Nellie Bly. Because Fuller, Fern, and Bly all wrote about the public facilities at Blackwell's Island in New York City (in 1845, 1858, and 1887, respectively), the Island proves a useful point of comparison for the evolution of women's journalistic rhetoric and is the starting point of this study. Located in the East River, Blackwell's Island, two miles long and 800 feet wide, was purchased by the city of New York in 1828 for public use. A penitentiary there (1832) was followed by the New York Lunatic Asylum (1839) and later a hospital, workhouse, almshouse, and other facilities for the public welfare. Blackwell's Island, as it was called from 1686-1921, is situated in plain view of Manhattan and easily accessible to anyone via the 26th Street ferry, but for over 100 years it nevertheless maintained an aura of separation and infamy. As one former inmate of its asylum noted, "Blackwell's Island, notwithstanding its beauty, has no very good name [...] the Penitentiary was the first building erected upon it, and the island for a long time was known only as the site of that abode of crime."²⁰

²⁰ [W.H. Davenport], "Blackwell's Island Lunatic Asylum," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, February, 1866, 273. The island was known from 1921-1973 as Welfare Island. In 1973 the name was changed to its current appellation, Roosevelt Island. For a

Judges committed members of New York's "disordered and disorderly" to the facilities there arbitrarily, often conflating the categories of criminal, insane, and indigent.²¹ Many of the inmates were single, immigrant women who, after spending their lives working as domestic servants, had no pension or families to support them in their old age; many others were prostitutes.²² Almost from the beginning the facilities faced overcrowding, and Blackwell's Island was a frequent topic in the New York papers. Recognizable themes emerge in these news, feature, and opinion pieces on Blackwell's Island. Writers often comment on the natural beauty of the surroundings and contrast the trees and running water to the dreary buildings; the more benevolent writers demonstrate compassion for the inmates and remind readers of God's universal love; many writers are not critical of the facilities at the island so much as the social conditions of New York City that necessitate the overcrowding; and many writers take a special interest in the female patients. Blackwell's Island attracted attention from specialists in criminal justice and in medicine, and case studies frequently appeared in the professional journals of both fields.²³ The facilities also aroused the scrutiny of more prominent writers as well, including Fuller, Fern, and Bly.

detailed, multimedia history of the island see NYC10044.

<http://www.nyc10044.com/timeln/timeline.html>.

²¹ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 508.

²² *Ibid.*, 778-9, 804-7.

²³ Cf. William P. Buel, "Part First. Original Communications," *New York Journal of Medicine*, January 1850, 9; Irenaeus, "The Insane of Blackwell's Island," *New York Observer and Chronicle*, 29 March 1845, 50; Knickerbocker, "Management of City Prisons—Action of the Board of Ten Governors," *New York Times*, 22 June 1854, To the Editor; "Lunatic Asylum, Blackwell's Island," *The National Magazine*, October 1855, 314; "Miscellany: The Prison at Blackwell's Island," *The Liberator*, 28 October 1842, 172; Paul Prowler, "Glimpses of Gotham," *The National Police Gazette*, 31 January 1880, 14; "Randall's and Blackwell's Islands," *The Independent*, 27 September 1849,

Fuller was best known for her literary criticism, editorship of the transcendentalist journal *The Dial* (1840-1842), and her feminist treatise *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Fuller was also a regular contributor of social commentary to Horace Greeley's New York *Tribune* and is generally regarded as the first American woman war correspondent for her reports to the *Tribune* from within the besieged city of Rome in 1849.²⁴ Despite her prolific contribution to the *Tribune*, Fuller was ambivalent about newspaper culture in general with its "small print," which she viewed as too ephemeral for better literary work deserving of the "clear type" of journals or books.²⁵ Nevertheless, Fuller seemed to enjoy the larger audience for her work that the *Tribune* offered compared to the 300 subscribers to *The Dial*: "I am truly interested in this great field which opens before me and it is pleasant to be sure of a chance at half a hundred thousand readers," and she was committed to the idea that reading—by men and women alike—"must and will be wherever true civilization is making its way."²⁶

While she certainly distinguished between works "of amusement" and those "of a solid and permanent interest and value"—with journalism perhaps falling into the former

172; "Sanatory Condition of Prisoners on Blackwell's Island, Near N.Y.," *Water-Cure Journal*, 15 February 1847, 51.

²⁴ Fuller had been in Europe on an extended holiday, and what began as a travelogue evolved, as revolution broke out in Italy in 1848-9, into what can be counted as the first war correspondence by an American woman. Though her dispatches from Italy lie outside the scope of this project, they are notable as examples of Fuller's continuous project to educate her readers, in this case about the plight of a would-be democratic Italy threatened by Austrian and papal hegemony. She was also at work on a book that sought to give a complete history of the Italian conflicts from the perspective of its citizens. The manuscript of this book is presumed to have been destroyed in the shipwreck that took Fuller's life. [Margaret Fuller, *These Sad But Glorious Days: Dispatches from Europe 1846-1850*, eds. Larry J. Reynolds & Susan Belasco Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 27.]

²⁵ *Ibid.*, viii.

²⁶ Quoted in Reynolds & Smith, *These*, 5.

category—Fuller nevertheless believed that periodicals are the “most important part of our literature” because they are “the only efficient instrument for the general education of the people.”²⁷ Though they appeared in print at almost the same time, the *Tribune* article on Blackwell’s Island and the feminist treatise *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* feature two very different rhetorical strategies. These differences highlight important characteristics of an evolution in women’s writing toward a rhetoric of public advocacy enacted through the use of familiar tropes of sentimental writing and, relatedly, an emphasis on the importance of storytelling as a public and social action. Although Fuller openly disliked “sentimental” writing (her word) by women whose work is “one continued utterance of mere personal experience,” preferring instead a pursuit of “the Christian Idea” and “things which are good, intellectually, universally” she employs many of the tropes of sentimental literature in her most important work, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.²⁸

The journalists I examine in this project were all writing for an audience of both men and women and with the exigency, implicit if not stated outright, to make the audience see and feel for themselves the suffering of others. Barnes claims that “sympathy [is] the foundation of democracy”; thus it makes sense that women war correspondents, advocating for social reforms and reporting on wars waged, ostensibly, for the protection of democratic ideals, the first female journalists should turn to the sentimental to be heard and that, with this precedent, women war correspondents should

²⁷ Margaret Fuller, *Things and Thoughts in America and Europe* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, and Company, 1856), 122; Margaret Fuller, *Papers on Literature and Art*, Part II (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846), 138.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

turn to the tropes of sentimental literature in arguing for peace.²⁹ Fuller scholars Judith Mattson Bean and Joel Myerson suggest that “women, especially in times of national redefinition, recreate for themselves new identities that challenge prescriptive cultural norms against political activism,” and feminist critics—among them Bean, Annette Kolodny, Elaine Showalter, Julie Ellison and others—have argued that Fuller’s alternative rhetoric and original aesthetic signal the emergence of a new feminist discourse.³⁰

Indeed, this new discourse is key to understanding the shift that occurred in American journalism by women in the second half of the nineteenth century. As women writers blurred the boundaries between the domestic and the public spheres, between public and private discourse, and between political and personal concerns, they created a recognizably female journalistic aesthetic that, because it appealed to a broad readership across class and gender lines, assured the incorporation of progressive, feminist discourse into mainstream American journalism. As a form practiced most visibly by upper-middle class white women, the politically conscious sentimental is not without problems. Lauren Berlant calls sentimental literature “a politically powerful suturing device of a bourgeois revolutionary aesthetic,” something that relies upon “the centrality of affective intensity and emotional bargaining amid structural inequity,” and Berlant deals in her work with

²⁹ Barnes, *States*, 2.

³⁰ Cf. Judith Mattson Bean, “Conversation as Rhetoric in Margaret Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*,” in *In Her Own Voice*, ed. Sherry Lee Linkon (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), 27-40.; Annette Kolodny, “Inventing a Feminist Discourse: Rhetoric and Resistance in Margaret Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*,” in *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, ed. Andrea A. Lunsford (Pittsburgh and London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 137-166; Elaine Showalter, “Miranda and Cassandra: The Discourse of the Feminist Intellectual,” in *Traditions and the Talents of Women*, ed. Florence Howe (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 311-27.

the inequities of sentimental rhetoric in regard to race and class.³¹ Similarly, this project continuously confronts the difficulty with issues of gender and reconciling the *feminist* with the *feminine*.

Though Fuller implored, “[l]et it not be said [of women writers], wherever there is energy or creative genius, ‘She has a masculine mind,’” that is nevertheless how Fuller was often received by her contemporaries, such as journalist Charles T. Congdon, who wrote in praise of Fuller: “I was so astonished and spellbound by her eloquence, by such discourse as I had never before heard from a woman, and have never heard from a woman since.”³² Fern, on the other hand, has been criticized for being *too* feminine. In the 1936 omnibus *Ladies of the Press: The Story of Women in Journalism By an Insider*, former *New York Herald Tribune* reporter Ishbel Ross acknowledges Fern’s importance as “the grandmother of all the sob sisters” who “helped to open up the way for the newspaper women who came after” (39). But Ross’s praise is qualified: “Fanny was the first to wail and sob and drag her widow’s weeds through the public prints,” Ross notes, criticizing Fern’s subject matter and overtly feminine self-presentation:

Fanny Fern wanted all the world to know that she was a woman—and an oppressed one, too. Her paragraphs gushed forth with the freedom of an undisciplined mind. She exploited her own personality. [...] Fanny was always on the side of law, order, and the black wool stocking. Her style seems slightly anachronistic today. It had none of the dateless literary quality that makes Margaret Fuller, Grace Greenwood, Gail Hamilton and Kate Field as readable now as when they wrote for their papers more than half a century ago. But none of her contemporaries could touch Fanny in popularity. (39)

³¹ Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint and the Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 20.

³² Margaret Fuller *Love-Letters of Margaret Fuller 1845-1846: With an Introduction by Julia Ward Howe to Which are Added the Reminiscences of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Horace Greeley and Charles T. Congdon* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903), 317.; Charles T. Congdon quoted in Fuller *Love-Letters* 223-4.

Fanny Fern, pen name of Sara Payson Willis (Eldredge) (Farrington) Parton, was born into a literary family, but her success as a writer was of her own making.³³ Her father, Nathaniel Willis, founded the *Youth's Companion*, and her older brother, N.P. Willis, was a prominent poet and editor, but, as she describes in her autobiographical novel *Ruth Hall* (1855), her family offered her little support after the death of her first husband left her destitute. Unable to support herself and her children through the conventional means of sewing or teaching, Fern, who had published humorous essays in a Hartford newspaper as a schoolgirl, turned to writing. She asked her famous brother to help her place her articles, but he refused on the basis that her pieces “trench very close on indecency.”³⁴ Fern persisted without him, and in 1851 she published her work in Boston's *Olive Branch* and *True Flag* under her soon-to-be-famous pseudonym. The fresh new voice received immediate attention, and her work was frequently reprinted in other publications, including N.P. Willis's *Home Journal*. In 1856, Fern, with several commercially popular collections of essays to her name, signed on with the *New York Ledger* as a regular columnist.

The *Ledger* was an up-and-coming story paper that prided itself on its expensive, exclusive contracts with prominent writers. Fern's widely publicized \$100-per-installment starting salary for the serial rights to her new novel *Fanny Ford* (1856) made her the highest-paid writer, male or female, in journalism, and the \$25-per-week exclusive contract that followed made her the first woman writer with a contracted,

³³ Throughout this project I follow the convention of referring to Fern by her pen name.

³⁴ Joyce. W. Warren, *Fanny Fern: An Independent Woman*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 93.

weekly newspaper column.³⁵ Fern's three-part series on Blackwell's Island in the *New York Ledger* (1858) is witty, impassioned, and speaks openly of prostitution and other taboo topics. Fern moves away from both Fuller's more traditional rhetoric and from her esoteric philosophy toward a new ethos of vernacular speech, wit, and sensationalism. If Fern seemed self-congratulatory to Ross, and her style dated, it is because the standard of objectivity to which Ross's generation of newspapermen and women held themselves had not yet been established as the professional norm.

Indeed, with the rise of sensational journalism—in the form of the so-called New Journalism and the “yellow press”—journalism would actually become even less objective as newspapers competed with one another. Chapter Two examines how Bly, in her breakthrough piece about Blackwell's Island in the *New York World* (1887) disguises herself as a “lunatic,” gets arrested, and reports on the conditions of the asylum from the inside. As a pioneer of “girl stunt reporting” for Joseph Pulitzer's *World*, Bly was an influential figure in the Pulitzer-Hearst circulation wars of the late nineteenth century. A method of investigative journalism in which the intrepid reporter goes undercover in order to expose some injustice, stunt reporting, though relatively short-lived, was one of the defining elements of what Matthew Arnold, in 1887, dubbed the “New Journalism.”³⁶

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 146-7. Unless otherwise cited, biographical information on Fern is gleaned *passim* from Warren's excellent biography.

³⁶ Karen Roggenkamp. *Narrating the News*. (Kent, OH and London: The Kent State University Press, 2005), xii; Journalism historian Frank Luther Mott includes stunt reporting as one of six defining elements of the New Journalism, the others being: a mixture of hard news and sensational local stories; a strong editorial page; size (the bigger the better); illustrations; and reader-centered promotions and contests. *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years 1690-1940* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), 436-439. Today the term “New Journalism” usually refers to a style of journalism popularized in the 1960s and 1970s by writers such as Tom Wolfe and Hunter S. Thompson. Infused with the writer's

With the exception of the damsel-in-distress aspect of her method, Bly's work bore some similarity to the kind of work that men were doing as investigative reporters, and this kind of exposé work was common in the daily papers in the last quarter of the century. Journalism historians explain the trend as a recognition by publishers of "the attraction of investigative reporting to readers disgusted with the social ills wrought by industrialization."³⁷ Additionally, "one of the most important aspects of journalism" in the Pulitzer-Hearst era was that "reporters were, for the first time, actors in the drama of the newspaper world."³⁸ The self-mythologizing of the newspaper reporter was characteristic of the age: "The popular appeal of Nelly [sic] Bly going around the world in eighty days, Henry Morton Stanley finding Livingston in Africa, or the war correspondence of Richard Harding Davis added greatly to the esprit that attracted young men and more and more young women to the world of journalism."³⁹ What set Bly apart from her male contemporaries was her femininity—in her self-presentation and in her rhetorical models.

Bly's two-part asylum series was a sensation, and though Bly did not invent the idea of the stunt report, her prominent place in the *World* standardized the form—with a feminine twist—and she quickly became one of the paper's biggest stars. Chapter Two

personality and characterized by narrative techniques more frequently found in fiction than in news, the work of Wolfe, Thompson, et al. owes some debt to the stunt reporting of the original "New Journalism"—so, too, do the self-proclaimed "New New Journalists" with their "innovative immersion strategies." Robert S. Boynton, *The New New Journalism: Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), xiii.

³⁷ James L. Aucoin, *The Evolution of American Investigative Journalism* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 27.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁹ Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 69.

compares Bly's asylum series to an article in *Harper's* by a male author and former inmate of the asylum who, though he reports many of the same factual details about the asylum as Bly, does not give his article the same sensational character. Bly draws from the context of older, fictional forms such as sentimental novels, ghost stories, and the captivity narrative in telling her story, and she incorporates a multiplicity of voices—not just her own—into the narrative. The resulting piece, with its indictment of the judges, doctors, and other professionals whom she fooled, casts doubts on the viability of scientific knowledge and impersonal objectivity.

As Walt McDougall, the illustrator who provided Bly's articles with the soon-to-be iconic images of the small-waisted, curly-haired Bly, explained: “[h]er appearance was at the precise moment when sensations were coming so fast and so plentiful as to begin to pall and a fillip was needed. This was supplied by femininity.”⁴⁰ Bly's femininity was an asset that the *World* exploited from the first column inch. Her precursors in stunt reporting had included British journalist James Greenwood, known as the “Amateur Casual,” and in the subhead to Bly's first piece she is billed as a “Feminine ‘Amateur Casual.’” It is the “feminine” aspect of the performance that made girl stunt reporting so popular, because it added an additional layer to the reporter's story—that of the innocent young woman in harm's way. This, too, is what makes the woman war correspondent so appealing, and, as is the case with Bly, or with other reporters, like Lee Carson, a World War II correspondent who got her start as a stunt girl at the *Chicago Daily News*, stunt reporting provided the credentials the reporter needed to enter the field

⁴⁰ Quoted in Brooke Kroeger, *Nellie Bly: Daredevil, Reporter, Feminist* (New York: Random House, 1994), 104. Unless otherwise cited, biographical information on Bly is gleaned *passim* from Kroeger's excellent biography.

of war correspondence.⁴¹ With stunt reporting as the precedent for war correspondence, female correspondents, when tasked with bringing the female gaze into the theatre of war, challenge the value of objective reporting itself.

Typewriter Soldiers: Nellie Bly and Martha Gellhorn

In his social history of American newspapers, Michael Schudson describes the evolution during the nineteenth century toward the “‘information’ model” of newspapers that would come to dominate twentieth-century journalism.⁴² He defines “objectivity” as “the belief that one can and should separate facts from values,” and he defines “values” as “an individual’s conscious or unconscious preferences for what the world should be.” Bly’s stories were successful because she offered precisely these kinds of value judgments with a healthy dose of sensationalism and humor. By placing herself in harm’s way, and putting the sanctity of the white, female body at risk, Bly reinforced the values of her readers and managed to inspire sympathy for women, children, and the poor and to arouse suspicion of public institutions like the public asylum and the city jail.

After her rapid rise to fame, which peaked with Bly’s triumphant race to circumnavigate the globe in less than eighty days in 1889, Bly disappeared from the papers almost as suddenly. She took a break from news writing and went to work writing serial fiction for *The New York Family Story Paper*. Unlike Fern, whose two novels had met popular success and brought Fern substantial earnings from serialization in the

⁴¹ Lee Carson’s first reporting job was as a stunt reporter at *The Chicago Daily Times* where she took the wheel in an automobile race. Later she went to work for INS in Washington where *Newsweek* dubbed her the city’s “best-looking woman correspondent.” [Nancy Caldwell Sorel, *The Women Who Wrote the War* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1999), 213-4.] Though the term “stunt reporter” was out of fashion by World War II, Sorel’s book includes other examples of women war correspondents whose early journalism experience would qualify as stunt work.

⁴² Schudson, *Discovering*, 5.

Ledger, Bly failed as a fiction writer. Her novel, *The Mystery of Central Park* (1889), had not been a success, and despite the storytelling abilities she displayed in her stunt reports, she proved unable to hack it as a serial fiction writer. Her contract with the story paper fizzled when Bly proved unable to come up with viable plot lines. McDougall writes in his memoir that Bly had “no plot, characters or ability to write dialogue”—a surprising circumstance for someone of Bly’s experience.⁴³

In need of a steady income, Bly briefly returned to the *World* where she scored hard-to-get interviews with politicians, high-profile athletes, and criminals. When she once again left the newspaper business, this time to marry an aging millionaire, the headline in the *World* nodded to Bly’s still-famous reputation as a stunt reporter: “Mr. and Mrs. Nellie Bly / the World’s Famous Reporter Marries an Aged New York Millionaire. / This Is Not an Expose [sic] This Time.”⁴⁴ The marriage proved a disaster, and in 1912 the widowed Bly found herself with growing debts and an unreliable income. Embroiled in a protracted court battle to keep the milk jug factory she inherited out of bankruptcy, Bly was advised by her friend Arthur Brisbane, editor of the *New York Evening Journal* and her former colleague at the *World*, to return once again to the business she knew best. As a journalist, he told her, she could be “doing much more useful work than making tin cans.”⁴⁵

Her first story for the *Journal*, published June 22, 1912, was a detailed account of Bly’s attempt to catch a glimpse of former president Teddy Roosevelt in his private rooms at the Republican National Convention. Focusing on the author’s own adventure

⁴³ quoted in Kroeger, *Nellie*, 191

⁴⁴ quoted in Kroeger, *Nellie*, 260

⁴⁵ quoted in Kroeger, *Nellie*, 363.

in the pursuit of a story more than on the story itself (Bly saw Teddy—he looked tired), and casting her again in the once-familiar role of the plucky girl reporter, Bly’s account of her mild flirtation with a policeman and her ability to charm the crowd of fellow reporters is reminiscent of her stunt reports for the *World* more than twenty years earlier. In the piece, Bly stands out among the crowd of “serious and despondent” reporters, gaining special favor with the policeman guarding Roosevelt’s door and using the officer’s “broad chest” for support as she writes a note to “Teddy.” Bly reports that she inspired in “[e]verybody” “a sudden desire to turn their manly chests into writing desks,” and the policeman vowed to hold back the crowds to protect Bly and to help her gain the best view of Roosevelt.

“They seemed to take us into partnership,” she writes of the insider status she and her colleague, famed illustrator Nell Brinkley, received. “We were no longer some of the crowd that had to be kept back. We belonged to them and shared their secrets.” In Brinkley’s accompanying illustration, Bly, as small-waisted and fashionably dressed as ever, leans against the policeman she has charmed while the curious crowd looks on. Brinkley, whose iconic depictions of lithe young women had replaced the Gibson Girl as the model of modern womanhood, gives readers of the *Journal* a portrait of Bly that makes up in appeal what it lacks in accuracy. In 1912 Bly was forty-eight, widowed, and no longer a “girl” reporter except in the long memories of fans who recalled her record-breaking trip around the world. It seemed as if little had changed in the intervening twenty years: the Roosevelt article reads like vintage Bly, and Bly still had enough star power to put her name in the banner headline. Nevertheless, journalism *was* changing, and Bly would have to change with it.

Bly got her chance to restart her career when she, not-coincidentally, found herself in Austria on the eve of World War I. Despite an industry-wide shift toward more objective reporting, however, Bly approached her war correspondence in much the same way she did her stunt journalism—framing the suffering of soldiers and refugees with personal tales of her own hardships, no matter how trivial. But because Bly positions herself as writing from the older tradition—with no expectation by her readers of objectivity or of a separation of her personality or opinions from the report—Bly’s visible biases, frequent soliloquies and asides make journalistic sense even in a new era of objective reporting.

Chapter Three examines Bly’s war correspondence from Austria-Hungary and the ways in which Bly remains dependent upon an older model of journalism—one that privileges storytelling, affect, and sentiment—to convey to readers the suffering of soldiers, families, and refugees who are the victims of a war waged, Bly insists, not by common people but by heads of state. In her brief stint as a war correspondent, she trades on her stunt reporter fame, but, eventually, interest in her as a field reporter wanes, and she once again re-invents herself, this time in a more matronly role. Bly’s dispatches from Austria-Hungary eventually devolve into appeals for charity that border on propaganda. Her writing loses its power, and she returns to the United States to embark on the final and least memorable stage of her career. In her final career move, Bly transitions away from war correspondence and the now-outdated model of stunt reporting toward a role as a columnist performing charity work. As a columnist and quasi-social worker, Bly spends the remains of her career doling out advice, advocating for veterans, and arranging the adoption of numerous orphans.

The culmination of Bly's long career illustrates that woman's work from the field only works as long as people are interested in the body at risk; the older Bly—widowed and stout—cannot continue that work. In her obituary (January 28, 1922), prominently placed on page two of the *New York Evening Journal*, Bly is described as a “special writer” on the staff of the paper, but the piece focuses mainly on the stunt work performed at the *World* decades earlier—a significant detail given that the *World* was the *Journal*'s fiercest competitor.⁴⁶ The first subhead of the obituary, “Aroused the World,” indicates Bly's ability to command an emotional response from her readers, and the obituary recounts Bly's “journalistic exploits” [sic] such as “her famous trip around the world,” the madhouse series which “attracted country-wide attention,” and other stunts:

Nothing was too daring for her to undertake to get a “good story.” She went down into the sea in a diving bell, up in the air in a balloon and attempted and carried out numerous other feats in order to be able to give a vivid first-hand story of her sensations and observations to her thousands of readers.

In the same issue, a piece by editor-in-chief Arthur Brisbane calls her “A Courageous, Able, and Kind-Hearted Woman” and points to her late-career project of taking in orphans as the “work of which the world knew nothing,” despite its being regularly reported in Bly's articles in his paper. Though the accolade “THE BEST REPORTER IN AMERICA” strays toward hyperbole, the editorial recognizes Bly for her altruistic projects: “the entire record of her life as a newspaper worker [...] proved that her ‘heart was ever with the weak and miserable poor.’” Despite its attempts to remind readers of Bly's charity work, the editorial, like the obituary, gives way to a focus on Bly's earliest

⁴⁶ “Last Rites for Nellie Bly To-Morrow,” *New York Evening Journal*, January 28, 1922. Following convention, citations for newspaper articles in this study do not include page numbers; to improve readability, citations are provided only on first mention or when the reader cannot determine from context to which article the text refers. Full citations are provided in the bibliography.

stunts. Throughout her career—as stunt girl, as war correspondent, and as columnist—Bly stayed on message, but it was only when that message was accompanied by her physical participation that Bly was remembered. Coincidentally placed alongside an editorial demanding better conditions for Pullman workers, Brisbane’s piece makes no mention of Bly’s important coverage of the 1894 Pullman strike. Instead, as always, Bly is remembered for “shamming insanity” and living “among the maniacs as one of them, often in danger.”

Bly is able to be inconsistent, even hypocritical, in her war correspondence—writing about her luxury accommodations in a piece about ramshackle huts strewn with cholera sufferers, for example—because in the tradition from which she emerges, there is no problem with personality journalism. Instead, Schudson claims, “there was as much emphasis in leading papers on telling a good story as on getting the facts,” and Bly, famous woman reporter, was part of the story she was telling.⁴⁷ But as Pattee notes, “Following the World War, sentimentalism and Puritanism were excommunicated as devils which had haunted and enfeebled literature.”⁴⁸ Gellhorn’s war correspondence from the Spanish Civil War and World War II, therefore, differs more noticeably from that of her male peers than Bly’s did from hers. In Bly’s time, even as late as World War I, sentimental and investigative work was still begun by male journalists as well, whereas by the 1930s, male writers had assumed a posture of objectivity, and women were left alone to cover what was by then known as the “woman’s angle.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Schudson, *Discovering*, 5

⁴⁸ Pattee, *Feminine*, 283

⁴⁹ Martha Gellhorn, *The Face of War*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988), 86.

Chapter Four argues that stunt reporting had not simply disappeared when trends shifted towards more objective forms; instead its sensational and sentimental traditions—and its exigency of advocating for the voiceless—manifest in women’s journalism of the sort that Gellhorn pursued. Gellhorn had no college degree and no formal training in journalism besides a brief stint on the *Albany Times Union*. Gellhorn’s main writing experience, besides some minor successes with her fiction, was as an ethnographer whose quasi-fictional study of Southern poverty, *The Trouble I’ve Seen* (1936) was favorably mentioned in Eleanor Roosevelt’s syndicated column *My Day*.⁵⁰ Gellhorn went to Spain as *Collier’s* “special correspondent” not because she meant to become a hard-hitting war correspondent, but because she needed the accreditation in order to follow her social conscience to where the action was.⁵¹ She soon recognized the importance of the quotidian scenes that she recorded in her notes. At first she doubted the importance of what she was writing, but another journalist reminded her that the hungry children and the lingering smell of explosives in the marketplace were “not everyone’s daily life,” and should be shared with her American readers.⁵² Thus Gellhorn was unapologetic about any political bias inherent in her work. Though she would have likely balked at being labeled “sentimental”—a word she claimed not to understand—neither was she interested in writing what she called “all that objectivity shit.”⁵³

⁵⁰ Caroline Moorehead, *Gellhorn: A Twentieth-Century Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003), 91.

⁵¹ Moorehead, *Gellhorn*, 107.

⁵² Quoted in Moorehead, *Gellhorn*, 121. Ernest Hemingway, whom Gellhorn would later marry, is usually credited with encouraging Gellhorn to submit pieces about civilian life to *Collier’s*.

⁵³ “Now sentimentality is something I do not quite understand; I do not know what makes it. [...] [W]hen I write I always see what is okay about [people] or how they got to be un-okay, and that makes my writing too kindly towards the human race. Maybe that is

Schudson argues that the ideal of objectivity in the news was not so much an ideal *reached* in the first decades of the twentieth century as one that was *invented*, in much the way that coeval literary modernism also publicized an ethos of objectivity and impersonality. The fact that modernism was not, despite its self-created image, “something new,” but rather “the culmination of entrepreneurial, self-oriented individualism that, in the nineteenth century was identified by many popular women writers as especially masculine” was obscured by the myth that modernism spun about itself.⁵⁴ But this perceived privileging of objectivity, gendered masculine, is only half of the rather bleak narrative of women’s writing after World War I. As Susan Gubar argues in “‘This Is My Rifle, This Is My Gun’: World War II and the Blitz on Women,” the Great War had provided opportunities for women writers that were revoked in World War II with a “resurgence of patriarchal politics.”⁵⁵ Gubar quotes Bryher’s statement that “[t]he First War had opened a few doors but [...] the Second slammed many of them shut again.”⁵⁶ This backward step is due in part, Gubar argues, to the disappearance of a “safe home front” and its attendant domestic sphere, among other factors, but, more importantly, to propaganda on the Allies’ own side that depicted the woman as “bounty”

sentimental too.” [Martha Gellhorn to William Walton, Cuernavaca, 30 January 1950, *Selected Letters of Martha Gellhorn*, ed. Caroline Moorehead (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 202.]; quoted in Moorehead, *Gellhorn*, 111.

⁵⁴ Susan Gubar, “This Is My Rifle, This Is My Gun: World War II and the Blitz on Women,” in *Feminism and American Literary History: Essays*, ed. Margaret R. Higonnet (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 205.

⁵⁵ Margaret R. Higonnet, *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 227.

⁵⁶ Bryher *The Days of Mars: A Memoir, 1940-1946* quoted in Gubar, “This,” 228.

in constant threat of sexual violence at the hands of the enemy and which simultaneously reinforced the idea of separate spheres, with women isolated on the home front.⁵⁷

In Gellhorn's *Love Goes to Press*, one frustrated officer remarks about women war correspondents, "They act as if the war was some sort of special coming-out party [...] Any decent woman would stay at home. There are plenty of quiet useful civilian jobs for women."⁵⁸ The officer is angry, a fellow correspondent later explains, because he's "been away from England for three years, fighting to protect womankind from the horrors of war. And then womankind walks in on him. He might as well have spared himself the trouble."⁵⁹ Propaganda encouraging women to join the workforce or the women's armed forces relied on sexualized images of glamorous women, like the familiar Rosie the Riveter, and the professional woman was identified as much by her sex appeal as any particular skills set. Gains in women's rights during the Great Depression and World War II had more to do with the economics of survival than with "any self-consciously described women's or feminist movement."⁶⁰ With many of the goals of New Womanhood and second-wave feminism attained—the right to vote as well as widespread acceptance of smoking, drinking, working outside the home, and experimenting sexually—the new generation "found the efforts of their mothers and grandmothers on behalf of women's rights unnecessary and even embarrassing."⁶¹

⁵⁷ Gubar, "This," 230-1; *Ibid.* 256.

⁵⁸ Martha Gellhorn and Virginia Cowles, *Love Goes to Press* (1946 ; with an Introduction by Martha Gellhorn, edited and with an Afterword by Sandra Spanier, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 10.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶⁰ Lisa M. Fine, "Women's Movement," in *The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson and Linda Wagner-Martin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 937.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

It thus comes as little surprise that in this period of retrenchment that the woman war correspondent should, despite some important gains—such as the possibility of securing official accreditation—find herself cast in a role in which professional success depends upon her ability to conform to a sexual role. Gellhorn, herself the fashionable, cigarette-smoking, sexually liberated daughter of a suffragist, demonstrates this social realignment of the New Woman in her own life and in her fictional portrayals of women war correspondents. Gellhorn’s life and writings reflect the uncomfortable relationship between political activism and the female reporter’s sexuality, and in Chapter Four I examine the conflict between the woman war correspondent’s work as a socially conscious advocate of human rights and her public image as a glamorous “war tourist” whose presence amongst troops and other correspondents makes her “a nuisance”—albeit a very beautiful one.⁶² In a sense, the woman war correspondent was able to be one of the boys only by emphasizing her feminine qualities, and this sex appeal gave her a certain power.

A Very Handsome Commodity: *His Girl Friday* and *Brenda Starr, Reporter*

The conflict between sex appeal as a source of power and sex appeal as a forestallment to serious journalism makes for an incoherent narrative in *Love Goes to Press*, and, indeed, one that proved an insurmountable flaw according to the play’s American critics who panned the show, but it was a theme visible in Gellhorn’s own life as well. Gellhorn’s tenure at *Collier’s* suggests that women in the 1940s might be even worse off than women in the 1930s. The magazine, which during the 1930s had marketed Gellhorn much as it did any of its journalists, by the end of World War II was billing the

⁶² Moorehead, *Gellhorn*, 122; Gellhorn and Cowles, 29; Bentel, “Ladies,” 5.

thirty-seven-year-old as its “girl correspondent” and capitalizing on her blonde-haired and long-legged image. One piece, in which Gellhorn goes up in a fighter plane to describe “what it’s like up there,” bears a clear resemblance to the stunt work of a previous era.⁶³ The trend is visible elsewhere in the magazine as well. In the later years of World War II *Collier’s* cover art made the transition from cartoon illustrations to photographs of professional fashion models wearing various forms of military dress. This kind of female martial image was part of the World War II iconography. As Gubar notes, in “bunks, barracks, bombers, and artillery tanks named after women, movie stars and models clearly represented what men were fighting for.”⁶⁴

These hypersexual images that conflate war and the female body have much to say about the role of women at war. “Media texts do not present messages about our culture; they ARE culture” writes Lana Rakow, arguing that it is similarly impossible to separate “women” and the “representations of them” from one another. One of the fundamental assumptions of this project is that mass market periodicals, rapidly produced, ephemeral in nature, and widely circulated, are ideally suited for shaping mass opinion, fomenting and reflecting cultural shifts, and thus the representation of the girl reporter in the 1940s proves a troubling one.⁶⁵ In the 1920s and 1930s, women tried to negotiate the trappings of second-wave feminism, but what had earlier served as markers of protest—such as pants and cigarettes—by mid-century were commodities and, indeed, the trappings of another brand-name commodity: the girl reporter herself. My final

⁶³ Martha Gellhorn, “Night Life in the Sky,” *Collier’s*, March 17, 1945, 19.

⁶⁴ Gubar illustrates her point with a photograph of actress Rosalind Russell standing beside a bomber dubbed “Russell’s Raiders.” Russell played girl reporter Hildy Johnson in *His Girl Friday*, the subject of Chapter 5.

⁶⁵ Lana F. Rakow, “Feminists, Media, Freed Speech,” *Feminist Media Studies* 1.1 (2001): 42.

chapter examines how mid-century images of the girl reporter in popular culture—reporter Hildy Johnson in the film *His Girl Friday*; funny pages icon *Brenda Starr, Reporter*; and a 1944 Camel cigarette advertisement featuring real-life woman war correspondent Pegge Parker—protect their “brand” by continually deferring the reporter’s chances at domestic bliss.

Feminist historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg would argue that the girl reporter represents a failure of feminism because she rejects the politics of the New Woman in favor of a kind of lifestyle feminism that ruins women’s political viability by making her liberation superficial.⁶⁶ Where Smith-Rosenberg’s theories do not apply, however, is that girl reporters do not actually subscribe to gender norms even if, in their high heels and tailored uniforms, they look as if they do. All of the women I study in Chapter Five *could* get married, but they choose not to. Indeed, the trappings of femininity may be the journalist’s disguise as she takes on a role in the biggest stunt of all: finding out “what it’s like” to be a girl reporter.

In its examination of an iconic figure, this project is an intervention, not a recovery; it is a re-telling of an already familiar narrative. I explore how the physically attractive “girl reporter” plays upon the tropes of sentiment and the female body at risk to gain access to the front lines, and how this sexualized, emotional image precludes the possibility of modernist impersonality and journalistic objectivity. The project reconsiders the idea of impersonality as a defining criterion of modernism and instead locates modernist innovations in the girl reporter’s commitment to social justice through storytelling, through sentiment, and through the redirection of the gaze away from

⁶⁶ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 246.

combat and toward the effects of war on the bodies of real people—including the body of the war correspondent herself. As Brenda Starr says: “Brenda always gets her man.”⁶⁷

What *exactly* she means by that is part of the contested mythos of the girl reporter.

⁶⁷ Dale Messick, “Brenda Starr: Reporter,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 30, 1940, B11.

CHAPTER ONE:

MARGARET FULLER, FANNY FERN, AND A FEMINIST NEW JOURNALISM

Margaret Fuller had become interested in prison conditions while researching her 1845 feminist treatise *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, and that same year she toured the prison, asylum, and almshouse at Blackwell's Island, writing about the experience in one of her regular social commentaries for Horace Greeley's left-leaning New York *Tribune*. She concluded that the main impediment to suitable conditions at the island was party politics. In the piece she blames a political system in which "nothing effectual can be achieved while both measures and men are made the sport of political changes".⁶⁸

It is a most crying and shameful evil, which does not belong to our institutions, but is a careless distortion of them, that the men and measures are changed in these institutions with changes from Whig to Democrat, from Democrat to Whig. Churches, Schools, Colleges, the care of the Insane, and suffering Poor, should be preserved from the uneasy tossings of this delirium. (103-4)

Like many other published accounts of Blackwell's Island, Fuller's piece draws attention to the overcrowding, lack of personnel, and improper treatment of female inmates. The article—with numerous references to seeing, looking, and to the eyes of the inmates and visitors alike—attempts to shift the reader's gaze toward the public facilities, prominently located within view of Manhattan but too often overlooked. The island, she maintains, should serve as a visible reminder to New Yorkers of death and the vagaries of Fortune, in much the same capacity of "the skeleton at the banquets of old" and "should be looked at by all" (99-98).

⁶⁸ Margaret Fuller. "Our City Charities. Visit To Bellevue Alms House, to the Farm School, the Asylum for the Insane, and Penitentiary on Blackwell's Island," in *Margaret Fuller, Critic: Writings from the New-York Tribune, 1844-1846*, ed. Judith Mattson Bean and Joel Myerson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 103. All subsequent references are to this edition, and page numbers are cited parenthetically in the text.

Significantly, Fuller twice mentions “ophthalmia,” as one of the health concerns of the inmates. An eye inflammation, ophthalmia can also be used as a synonym for “disordered perception” (100, 101).⁶⁹ Thus it is not merely the inmates who suffer from ophthalmia—it is the public too, and “[t]he Country, the State should look to it” that competent people are placed in charge of Blackwell’s Island “apart from all considerations of political party” (104). Fuller “could not help but observe the vast difference between the appearance of the insane here and at [the private Manhattan asylum] Bloomingdale [...] where the wants and difficulties of each patient can be distinctly and carefully attended to” (101). At Bloomingdale, “the eye [of the patient], though bewildered, seemed lively [...] but *here*, insanity appeared in its more stupid, wild, or despairing forms[...] they had no eye for the stranger” (101).

The importance Fuller places on the act of seeing is an element of transcendentalist philosophy, often depicted metonymically as the “transparent eye-ball” described by her friend Ralph Waldo Emerson, but it is also indicative of the particular role Fuller creates for herself as rhetor—she mainly functions in the piece as an outside observer.⁷⁰ Unlike Fanny Fern’s articles on the prison two decades later, Fuller does not become a participant in the scenes she describes. Her persuasive piece is carefully structured around the leitmotif of vision/seeing and organized so it is bookended neatly by allusions to the New Testament parable of the prodigal son.

1845 was an important year for Fuller’s development as a rhetorician and a feminist, but this development does not necessarily stand out in her work for the *Tribune*. Fuller’s innovations are better seen in a work contemporaneous to her *Tribune* piece:

⁶⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, online, s.v. “ophthalmia.”

⁷⁰ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (Boston: J. Munroe, 1836) 4.

Woman in the Nineteenth Century.⁷¹ A revised and substantially expanded version of her 1843 *Dial* essay “The Great Lawsuit,” *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is regarded as one of the earliest and most important pieces of American feminist criticism. The long essay argues that men and women are “two halves of one thought,” that “the development of one cannot be effected without that of the other,” and thus “the conditions of life and freedom” must be “recognized as the same for the daughters and the sons of time” (5). Fuller completed the work in late 1844, right before beginning her tenure at the *Tribune*, and the book was published in February by Horace Greeley, her *Tribune* editor. In a sense, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* and the *Tribune* essay, written at about the same time and both published by Greeley, are “two halves of one thought” as well. Both demonstrate Fuller’s “emerging egalitarianism” and a “reformist” social agenda, but rhetorically they differ in significant ways.⁷²

In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* we can see the emergence of what would become a popular and recognizable form of women’s public writing. Fuller was aware of the importance of her project, deeming “even the slightest achievement of good” “an especial work of our time.” Although the edition of 1500 sold out in a week, it was not unanimously well-received by critics, and the genius of the book would, in many ways,

⁷¹ The conventional structure of Fuller’s pieces in the *Tribune* provides further indication that the organizational “flaws” of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, are, as Kolodny argues, carefully chosen rhetorical techniques. See Annette Kolodny, “Inventing a Feminist Discourse: Rhetoric and Resistance in Margaret Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*,” in *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, ed. Andrea A. Lunsford (Pittsburgh and London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995).

⁷² Larry J. Reynolds, preface to *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, by Margaret Fuller (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1998), x.

go overlooked.⁷³ Contemporary reviewers criticized *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* for lacking a linear argumentative structure. They characterized its conversational style as an example of the “great talkative powers” typical of women, and misread its multiplicity of voices and synchronic organization as a flaw deriving from the author’s sex.⁷⁴ Annette Kolodny has argued that these supposed weaknesses in Fuller’s argumentation and organization are actually carefully crafted manipulations of traditional rhetorical strategies, and that they represent a “feminist public discourse,” one in which conversation, not persuasion, is the goal.⁷⁵

This rhetorical model—arguing from example—was already in use by women writers working in the sentimental tradition, and as Jane Tompkins and Lauren Berlant have argued, women’s sentimental writing was often used as a powerful political tool.⁷⁶ Fuller uses the numerous allusions and examples, both familiar and esoteric, the way sentimental writers use emotional, religious, and domestic scenarios: to “tap into a storehouse of commonly held assumptions, reproducing what is already there in a typical and familiar form” and thereby influencing an audience through immersion in ideas rather than argumentation (Tompkins xvi).⁷⁷ When Fuller’s critics wondered where to

⁷³ Larry J. Reynolds, note on the text to *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, by Margaret Fuller (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1998), 137.

⁷⁴ Orestes Augustus Brownson, *Brownson’s Quarterly Review* 1845 quoted in Kolodny, 140.

⁷⁵ Kolodny, 150. All subsequent references are to this edition, and page numbers are cited parenthetically in the text.

⁷⁶ Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Lauren Berlant, “The Female Woman: Fanny Fern and the Form of Sentiment,” *American Literary History* 3 (Autumn, 1991): 429-454. All subsequent references are to these editions, and page numbers are cited parenthetically in the text.

⁷⁷ Kolodny notes that Fuller mentions some of these writers, such as Angelina Grimké and Abigail Kelley Foster, by name in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, a further

find her argument among the allusions, fictions, and conversations of the book, they neglected to appreciate the arguments already embedded in those pieces, which, as Julie Ellison argues, locate “the feminine soul in the founding texts of Western culture.”⁷⁸ In this way, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is both groundbreaking and part of an already existing tradition, and it contributes to a larger, ongoing conversation by and about women (Kolodny 161). The simultaneous development of that conversation and of a recognizable—and popular—women’s journalistic ethos is the focus of the rest of this chapter.

Like the quasi-fictional heroines of her novels, *Ruth Hall* and *Fanny Ford*, Fanny Fern understood from experience the importance of financial independence for women and the necessity of education for young girls. In her columns Fern weighed in on these and other social issues, often offering contradictory opinions from one installment to the next. Sometimes the variety of opinion is ventriloquized through voices other than her own: conversations between Fern and a husband, friend, critic, or reader; snatches of conversation ostensibly overheard and reprinted; and even a negative review of Fern’s *Fresh Leaves* (1856)—written by Fern herself.

The multiple positions and voices Fern takes on in her columns make it impossible to extract the “real” Fanny Fern from “the various fictions of self-representation.”⁷⁹ This difficulty is exacerbated, argues Elizabethada A. Wright, by the

indication of their influence—and, I would add, a metatextual contribution to the collection of examples Fuller builds into her essay [137].

⁷⁸ Julie Ellison, *Delicate Subjects: Romanticism, Gender, and the Ethics of Understanding* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 278.

⁷⁹ Laura Laffrado, “‘I Thought From the Way You *Writ*, That You Were a Great Six-Footer of a Woman,’: Gender and the Public Voice in Fanny Fern’s Newspaper Essays,”

uncertainty about which of Fern's contradictory statements should be taken as ironic, and, then, how the irony should be interpreted.⁸⁰ It helps to keep in mind that though Fern published many of her columns together in collections such as *Fresh Leaves*, the pieces were typically created and read serially, and thus not intended to stand together as a cohesive whole. As Laura Laffrado notes, however, despite the contradictions, and the fickle nature of the genre, over time a composite Fern "emerges rhetorically from [her] engagement with the fictive stories of selfhood created by the dialogue between Willis and her readers' images of Fanny Fern" (84). That public persona is further shaped, and complicated, by *Ledger* promotional materials and other publicity, from the various collections of Fern's work (which include some pieces previously unpublished), and from her quasi-autobiographical novels.

The seeming incongruities in Fern's writings are thus not failures by the author to take a consistent stance on the issues, but a circumstance of genre and a reflection of the tensions the public writing woman experienced in bringing together the public and private spheres, both in her writing and in her own life. Similar to the way in which feminist scholars have read the many voices in Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, as "open[ing] the space for the subjectivity of another woman" and "challeng[ing] the customary ethos of a unitary, nonfictional self," the multiplicity of voices in Fern's work provides a "subversive subtext," in which Fern gives voice to an

in *In Her Own Voice: Nineteenth-Century American Women Essayists*, ed. Sherry Lee Linkon (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), 82.

⁸⁰ Elizabethada A. Wright, "'Joking Isn't Safe': Fanny Fern, Irony, and Signifyin(g)," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 31 (Spring 2001): 103.

otherwise unrepresented “female ‘other.’”⁸¹ Taken together, the various positions and personalities in Fern’s columns create “a wide range of advocacy positions within sentimental culture, from the nostalgic maternal to the prophetic feminist” making her, like Fuller, a “metanarrative strategist.”⁸²

Woman in the Nineteenth Century was criticized for having “neither beginning, middle, nor end,” and Fern’s columns also disturbed some of her contemporary critics who preferred the linear conventions of more formal writing.⁸³ One anonymous reviewer disliked Fern’s quick topic changes—and her subject matter: “while a perfect sketch, artistically wrought out, and disfigured by no defects of style or coarse innuendoes, partially filled a column, the same column often contained another article, full of those blemishes.”⁸⁴ Fern even pokes fun at precisely these qualities—and her critics—in her satirical review of *Fresh Leaves*, in which she mocks her own “halloo-there effusions” and “bold expressions” that run counter to the “gentleness” and “timidity” expected of a “woman’s book.”⁸⁵ Fern’s readership, however, appreciated the conversational twists and turns of Fern’s work and her unconventional opinions. Circulation of the *Ledger* during the first year of Fern’s tenure rose to 180,000, making it the most widely-read

⁸¹ Mary E. Wood, “‘With Ready Eye’: Margaret Fuller and Lesbianism in Nineteenth-Century Literature,” *American Literature* 65:1 (1993): 12, quoted in Judith Mattson Bean, “Conversation as Rhetoric in Margaret Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*,” in *In Her Own Voice*, ed. Sherry Lee Linkon (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), 29; Bean, 32; Joyce W. Warren, *Fanny Fern: An Independent Woman*, (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 200.

⁸² Berlant, “Female Woman,” 432; Ellison, *Delicate*, 278.

⁸³ Orestes A. Brownson. “Miss Fuller and Reformers,” review of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, by Margaret Fuller, in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Larry J. Reynolds, (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1998), 213.

⁸⁴ quoted in Joyce W. Warren, introduction to *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*, by Fanny Fern (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1986), x.

⁸⁵ Fanny Fern, *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*, 290.

paper of its day.⁸⁶ Also like Fuller, who responded to earlier criticisms of “The Great Lawsuit” in the expanded essay, anticipating and rebutting further arguments, Fern often responded directly to her readers in her columns, answering both fan mail and criticism. Fuller’s consideration of the opinions of her audience, Bean argues, shows a “cooperation” with her readership that “rejects a rhetoric of control” (32). The genre of the newspaper column allowed for such conversation even more effectively than Fuller’s book-length treatise could do, and this intimate engagement with her readers is a likely element of Fern’s success.

When Fuller, a highly educated public intellectual, who was at one time herself an instructor of rhetoric, deviates from classical argumentative strategies in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, we recognize it as a deliberate rhetorical strategy and not a lapse of skill. Her other writing—in *The Dial* and in *The Tribune*—shows her capable of writing that, in its construction if not always in its content, does not deviate from journalistic norms, and, as Kolodny has shown, even in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller remains faithful to many of the concepts of argumentation set forth in *Whately’s Rhetoric* (1828, 1832), the text she used while a teacher at the Greene Street School in Providence, Rhode Island. Fern’s reputation as an intellectual, however, was (and is) much less secure, and her skill as a rhetor requires closer examination in order to demonstrate that its perceived weaknesses—sentiment, vulgarity, informality—are part of a carefully executed rhetorical strategy.

⁸⁶ Joyce W. Warren, “Uncommon Discourse: Fanny Fern and the *New York Ledger*,” in *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, eds. Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 59.

Fern, like Fuller, was well-educated, receiving a better training in rhetoric and composition than most women of her generation, and her work indicates a greater fluency with classical rhetoric than has previously been acknowledged. Many of the techniques Kolodny identifies in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*—argument from example, direct engagement of an adversary, anticipation and rebuttal of claims, understatement, and repetition among others—are also visible in Fern’s columns.⁸⁷ As a student at Catherine Beecher’s Female Seminary in Hartford, Fern benefited from Beecher’s progressive pedagogy, built upon the conviction that the “great defect” in American education is the focus on “committing to memory words, instead of acquiring ideas.”⁸⁸ It should not be surprising, then, that behind the folksy wisdom of Fanny Fern lies a rigorous training that prepared Fern to make important contributions to an emerging literary form.

Not only did Beecher’s pedagogy prescribe instruction in how “to think, to reason correctly, to invent, to discover and [...], to communicate ideas in suitable language and with clearness and facility,” but it also prepared for the far-reaching social and political opportunities in training women in rhetoric (13). “[G]reat springs of action in the political world [are] put in motion,” she writes, “by the secret workings of *a single mind*” (52). The problem, however, is a tendency in mankind to be “governed by motives that *men are ashamed to own*,” but “the dominion of women may be based on influence that the heart is proud to acknowledge” (52-3). Beecher, who anticipates the possibilities of a

⁸⁷ Cf. Kolodny 152, 149.

⁸⁸ Catharine E. Beecher, *Suggestions Respecting Improvements in Education*, (Hartford: Packard & Butler, 1829), 12. All subsequent references are to this edition, and page numbers are cited parenthetically in the text. Fuller shared Beecher’s conviction, and during her own brief stint as an educator, she advised her students to learn their lessons “by mind” instead of “by heart.” [Fuller quoted in Kolodny, 144.] I would like to acknowledge a debt to Warren’s chapter in *Fanny Fern* on the Hartford Female Seminary for pointing me toward Beecher’s *Suggestions*.

strong female voice in the public sphere, prepared her students for precisely the kind of work that Fern would do, and while some scholars see Fern as vacillating between the political and the sentimental, these are not mutually exclusive concepts. In her columns Fern uses “the influence of the kind and generous emotions of the heart” to make political statements, but as I will show in the rhetorical analysis of Fern’s “Blackwell’s Island” series that follows, she does so in a way particular to the precocious young woman who had been Beecher’s “torment and her joy.”⁸⁹

“Get Out of My Way While I Say What I Was Going To”: Fanny Fern

In 1858 Fern toured the facilities at Blackwell’s Island and published a three-part series of columns in the *Ledger* that ultimately indicts upper- and middle-class New Yorkers for their hypocrisy towards the poor, criminal, and insane in general, and toward prostitutes in particular. The first piece describes the prison at Blackwell’s Island, the second the lunatic asylum, and the third focuses on the source of inmates of both: the men of New York City who patronize prostitutes and the women of their acquaintance who ““have no business with his private life, so long as his manners are gentlemanly.””⁹⁰ Fern never uses the word prostitute, instead referring only to the “roué” and his “writhing victim.” Even in taking on the taboo subject, she obeys the convention that prostitutes are “women not to be named.” Nevertheless, her subject is clear. She argues in the piece not only for sympathy for the women of Blackwell’s Island, but for consideration of wives who have a “right to expect *healthy* children.” Others, like Fuller, would suggest

⁸⁹ Beecher, 52-3; Beecher quoted in Warren, *Fanny Fern*, 32.

⁹⁰ Fanny Fern, “Blackwell’s Island. Number Three,” *New York Ledger*, August 28, 1858. Following convention, citations for newspaper articles in this study do not include page numbers; to improve readability, citations are provided only when the reader cannot determine from context to which article the text refers. Full citations, including page numbers, are provided in the bibliography.

political reforms to solve the problems at Blackwell's Island, but Fern goes straight to the economics of supply and demand, imploring "no more human traffic in those gilded palaces," and, on the part of women, "the cold shoulder to any man [...] who would degrade her sex." "Then," she insists, "this vexed question would be settled; there would be no such libels upon womanhood as I saw at Blackwell's Island."

In its basic organizational principle, Fern's Blackwell's Island series resembles an argumentative strategy that Fuller employs on a smaller scale in introducing new topics in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Bean has shown that part of Fuller's conversational style is the use of verbal cues that move the argument "from personal observation to understanding and finally to belief," much in the way that a dialogue naturally progresses from anecdote to mutual understanding (34). Fern does something similar in her three columns on Blackwell's Island, proceeding from observation in "Blackwell's Island Number I," to understanding in "Blackwell's Island Number II," to belief in "Blackwell's Island Number III." In the three installments Fern also employs three different ways of seeing and writes in three distinct voices that gradually shift from the objective in Number I to the highly personal in Number III where she sounds most like "Fanny Fern."

"Blackwell's Island Number I," published August 14, 1858, shares with Fuller a motif of vision/seeing. Fern looks around at the island and is able to offer her readers her perspective as a tourist cheered that the inmates are "located on this lovely island." But Fern is also able to offer a sympathetic view from the perspective of the inmates themselves. Immediately Fern contrasts her own experience—of a person free to enjoy the sight of the river "that plashes against the garden wall below, flecked with white sails, and alive with pleasure seekers"—to that of the inmates "shut up in a cell" to whom such

surroundings “mak[e] very little difference.” Like Fuller, Fern criticizes the disordered perception of New Yorkers: she calls the law “short-sighted”; she condemns the “eyes” of reformers “that have watched” only for the failures of those they would help, “never noting, as God notes, the steps that did *not* slip”; and she sympathizes with the criminals whose “moral perceptions” have been “blinded” by misfortunes. Fern laments her own disordered perception as well. She “cannot see that mournful procession of men, filing off into those dark cells” without wishing for an angel to enter with them too, and she feels physical pain when the “shining eye-balls” of the inmates return her gaze and “peer” at her through the bars of their cells.

The problem as Fern sees it is not necessarily with party politics and the management of the prisons, as Fuller had suggested—Fern praises the management of the facilities—but with the system that focuses only on punishment and not on reform. The “loose screw” in the system is in the failure to watch over the prisoner after he has been released, and Fern presciently suggests a solution where the recently released can find shelter and employment in order to prevent recidivism. Anticipating her audience’s skepticism at these progressive ideas—“You may tell me that I am a woman, and know nothing about it”—Fern implies that a woman’s sympathy is particularly suited for the task of reform, and she makes a transitional move from the observation that characterized this first installment in the series toward the understanding that will characterize the more sentimental middle piece: “I tell you that I *want* to know.”

Like Fuller, she concludes her piece with an allusion to New Testament scripture, but the allusion functions differently here. In Fuller’s piece the reference to the prodigal son served to structure the article, bookending it with an opening remark about

prodigality in general. Fern's use of scripture has the opposite effect, negating the importance of what has come before and motioning toward the next installment and toward a progressive future. She suggests that the Blackwell's Island authorities remove the current inscription over the door—"The way of transgressors is hard"—and replace it with a new sign—"Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more." Both statements are well-known pieces of scripture: the first, from the Old Testament book of Proverbs, and Fern's revision from the New Testament Gospel of John, from a story in which Jesus forgives an adulteress. Fern's choice of scripture is significant, and not only for its subtle reference to adultery. By substituting the Old Testament with the Gospel, Fern highlights a doctrine of Christian forgiveness—forgiveness that trumps Old Testament eye-for-an-eye law. The imperative is meant as much for Fern's readers as for the inmates at Blackwell's Island, as she asks them to change their gaze from one that can see only the external beauty of the prison and the criminal deeds of the inmates to one that can see the circumstances that may have brought the inmates to the island. How those circumstances might in the future be prevented is the subject of her next two columns.

"Blackwell's Island Number II," published August 21, 1858, continues the motif of vision/seeing, but it relies more heavily than the first piece upon the sentimental language of empathy. Arguing by example, and depending more heavily on the first person, on conversation, and on humor (which had been entirely absent from the first column), the second installment is more personal than the first. Whereas the first piece described to readers the outside of the prison, this installment takes them inside the asylum. (The third and final piece will go even further by invading the private sphere of her New York readers.)

In “Blackwell’s Island Number II” Fern commands her audience repeatedly to “mark” and “see” the happily contagious effects of a “bright eye” on invalids or weary travelers, but she also recognizes that the outside world contains its own share of flaws. “Do you like us, your friends, to come from the city to see you?” she asks one woman whose “sharp reply”—“When you don’t stay too long, and talk too much”—violates common courtesy with its brutal honesty. The woman’s answer amuses Fern, as does the confidence of each inmate that he or she alone is sane: “I have known many people out of a lunatic asylum give the same convincing proof of their qualification to be in it!” Fern quips. Fern’s remarks suggest that the line between sanity and insanity is permeable, and people apply more “fibbing and flattery” to keep the “wheels of society” quietly turning than is really necessary. What society needs, Fern argues, is plain speech. Fern, with her own reputation for stating her mind in her weekly column, thus aligns herself with the “lunatic” woman who does not refrain from “speaking out in meetin’.” Yet “Blackwell’s Island Number II” does not totally abandon convention. In particular, Fern employs several key tropes of sentimental literature in the piece, especially in her conclusion, which increases the reader’s emotional investment in the topic as the series progresses toward its third and final installment.

In Fern’s columns there is a tendency in the writing not only to generate sympathy for the unfortunate but to evoke empathy as well—not only for the plight of the subject but for the experience of the author in gathering the story. Other tropes of sentimental literature particularly visible in work by Fern include a reinforcement of “widely-held cultural beliefs about the special properties of childhood and the sanctity of the home” and of religious values that, along with related issues of progressive reform, are

“subsumed within the domestic ideology.”⁹¹ In other words, sentimental writers are able to pursue an agenda of reform by presenting progressive values in terms of benefit and responsibility to family and God.

“Blackwell’s Island Number II” draws upon these conventions of sentimental literature in two main ways: first, it describes the physical and emotional sensations of the protagonist—in this case, Fern herself. Though Fern does not actually enter the “secure building” holding the “more violent” of the inmates (as Nellie Bly will do in her Blackwell’s Island series), she dreams about them later that night. The nightmare of their “pale hands” “extended through the gratings” causes her sleep to be “broken and unrefreshing.” Fern’s physical interaction with the inmates is not great, but she goes a great deal further than Fuller does in her involvement, taking her interest in Blackwell’s Island to a visceral level.

If Fern’s reaction—a poor night’s sleep—seems comically egotistic, it is important to recall that the mere proximity of the author to the inmates challenges existing notions of propriety. Fern’s reaction is appropriate for a well-bred woman. It is also an indication of the empathy she feels, presented to the reader in a way that discusses physical sensations in socially appropriate terms. In Chapter Two we will see in Bly’s account of the asylum an escalated focus on the physical response of the privileged, white female’s body at risk, but even Fern’s brief account requires an emotional investment from her readers—one that asks them, if they cannot be empathetic to the inmates at Blackwell’s Island, at least to be empathetic to *her*.

⁹¹ Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 13; Nina Baym, *Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978), 41.

A second important trope of sentimental literature that Fern engages in the piece is the image of the angelic child. “A spiritual force,” the figure of the child in sentimental literature represents not only innocence and family, Tompkins argues, but it “binds the family together so that it becomes the type and cornerstone of national unity, and an earthly semblance of the communion of the saints” (14). In “Blackwell’s Island Number II” Fern uses the figure of a sleeping child to conclude the piece: “One pretty little creature lay nestled on a bed alone by itself, with its little fat arms tossed gracefully above its rosy face, as if some sculptor had laid it there. And so He had! [...] though I know not why He should have lain it on that pauper bed, instead of the downy one which plenty delights to deck for its own.” She also writes of “the pride of motherhood” even on the “coarsest face.”

If the child is a symbol of the family, and the family a necessary component to national identity, Fern’s use of that image here is particularly well-placed, because the next and final installment in the Blackwell’s Island series scrutinizes the American family and blames hypocritical attitudes in polite society for much of the crime and poverty afflicting New York. “[M]others and children,” “uniquely capable” in the project to “redeem the unregenerate,” play a standard role in “Blackwell’s Island Number II,” reminding the reader of innocence and of the mysteries of God (Tompkins 128). In the next installment, however, Fern will upset this trope by calling into question the morality of wives and the innocence of children. The middle piece is arguably the most recognizably “sentimental” of the three, and the escalation of feeling and the invocation of familiar tropes of domesticity and spirituality are necessary as Fern prepares to reveal the reader’s own personal involvement in the issues. In “Blackwell’s Island Number III”

Fern will bring into her readers' homes an issue that, in the first installment, had started out on a distant shore.

The third installment and culmination of the series, published August 28, 1858, exhibits a sharp change in tone from the other two pieces. Having proceeded from observation to understanding, in the third installment Fern aims to change her reader's beliefs. Here the differences between Fuller's piece on Blackwell's Island, and even with *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, are most keenly felt. In the Blackwell's Island series we get a glimpse at the way female public journalistic discourse itself was evolving, particularly in the deviation of the third piece from the first two installments and the older literary forms they represent. Indeed, one of the topics of the third piece is the right of a woman to speak in public. Before Fern takes on the issues of prostitution, hypocrisy, venereal disease and separate spheres, she asserts her right to speak at all, and the opening line of the column dares her reader to listen up: "You can step aside, Mrs. Grundy; what I am about to write is not for your over-fastidious ear."

Whereas Fuller was careful to avoid impugning her imagined opponents, and chose instead to offer numerous arguments by example in pursuit of "mutual agreement rather than direct confrontation of differences," Fern challenges her hostile audience directly (Bean 28). Invoking the proverbial busybody and prude "Mrs. Grundy," Fern not only confronts her opposition by name, giving the piece the tone of a real argument between two people, she sets her readers on the defensive—if they disagree with Fern, then they have proven themselves "over-fastidious."⁹² Fern will have to struggle to

⁹² Mrs. Grundy, a minor figure in Thomas Morton's play *Speed the Plough* (1798), represents conventional, even prudish, opinions. The allusion would have been familiar to Fern's contemporary audience. Fern, who portrayed herself as having no patience for

convince her readers of her unconventional opinion, but by opening the piece as she does, her readers, if they would challenge her, must re-establish their own ethos or risk being labeled a Mrs. Grundy.

Kolodny has argued that Fuller, wishing to avoid the rhetoric of persuasion that would “undermin[e] the collaborative conversation” she pursues in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, thus avoids certain classical rhetorical strategies, such as proceeding from dispassion to sentiment, appealing to pathos, and establishing her own authority (158).⁹³ She also avoids the “suggestively sexual” connotations of “an organizational structure that purposefully ‘raise[d] the feelings gradually to the highest pitch’” or climax.⁹⁴ Not only does Fern aggressively pursue a climax, she engages several taboo subjects to get there. Fern’s willingness to take on the rhetorical devices Fuller had avoided suggests not only important differences from Fuller, but also reminds us again—in spite of the folksy persona she cultivates for herself—of Fern’s own training in rhetoric. But it is precisely the folksy persona that allows Fern to state her more progressive opinions in a mass market periodical without alienating her readership. If Fuller ignores ethos, Fern plays against it with wit.

A key element of Fern’s wit is her use of slang and dialect. In “Blackwell’s Island III,” Fern, who throughout the series had written in a standard if plain style, shifts into a sudden outburst of vernacular speech peppered with slang when her imaginary opponent

busybodies and convention, invokes Mrs. Grundy in other columns for the *Ledger* as well.

⁹³ These choices are significant departures by Fuller from the rhetorical strategies advised in Whately’s *Elements of Rhetoric*, the rhetoric textbook that Kolodny argues was highly influential in both Fuller’s teaching and especially in “inventing a discourse appropriate to feminism” [Kolodny, 159].

⁹⁴ Kolodny, 158; Whately quoted in Kolodny, 158.

suggests ““Oh, you don’t know anything about it; men are differently constituted from women; woman’s sphere is home.”” Highly incensed, Fern replies, “that don’t suspend the laws of her being. That don’t make it that she don’t need sympathy and appreciation. That don’t make it that she is never weary and needs amusement. Fudge.” Though Fern’s columns were popular with the expanding demographic of a new and egalitarian reading public, they stand in sharp contrast to the tastes of an older, gentrified literary establishment—such as Fern’s own brother N.P. Willis—still very much present, primarily gendered male, and worried about the effect of slang on language and culture. As Kenneth Cmiel notes, “[t]he grammarians’ opposition to dialect, the lexicographers’ wariness about slang—these were more than matters of expressive choice.”⁹⁵ They represent resistance to a changing profession and a changing society. Fern’s ability to slip into informal, vernacular speech is not just a way of connecting with her audience, it is an indicator of the fragmentation—of language and of the self—that will come to characterize the language and literature of modernity.

Fern also employs sarcasm and irony, elements that work to lighten the tone of the serious piece but that also convey her critique of society to a possibly skeptical audience. Humor is able to “destabilize certainties and force new understandings,” but it is also a form of deferral, softening the critique or even allowing readers to ignore it altogether.⁹⁶ For example, when Fern lists the various excuses given to justify the necessity (or inevitability) of prostitution—““a necessary evil,”” and ““always has been, and always will be,”” she sarcastically refers to one excuse in particular—““that pure

⁹⁵ Kenneth Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence: The Fight Over Popular Speech in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: W. Morrow, 1990), 93.

⁹⁶ Wright, 92.

women would not be safe were it not so” —as “this beautiful tribute to manhood.” In another instance, she interrupts her lecturing of “Mrs. Grundy,” who has replied ““why do you talk to *me*? [...] I am as virtuous as St. Paul,”” with a wry aside: “St. Paul was a bachelor, and of course is not my favorite apostle.” Humor is not a trope of sentimental literature; indeed, to provoke laughter rather than tears seems the antithesis of the sentimental. As with sentimental literature, however, there is a political message contained in the seemingly light, humorous statement.

When Fern invokes St. Paul she reminds readers of previous columns in which she makes fun of bachelors (a favorite target), but she also takes a stab at the notoriously anti-woman saint. It is funny—but also not surprising—that Fern should not be a fan of the apostle who would make women’s silence a matter of church doctrine: Paul writes in I Timothy 2:12, “I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.”⁹⁷ We should remember that, in the previous week’s column, Fern had specifically praised the concept of “speaking out in meetin’.” Ironically, however, though Fern defends plain speech, her use of humor may operate, as Wright argues, as a “strategy” to diffuse resistance to opinions that, stated outright, may have alienated her audience. Fern’s ironies are appropriate for popular audiences willing “to try on safe forms of feminism” in the guise of humor when they might otherwise balk at similar ideas written in a higher style of rhetoric (Wright 101-02). Similar to the way Fuller uses a conversational style and frequent allusions to suggest ideas without stating them herself, humor in Fanny Fern’s columns allows Fern to make bold statements but with the

⁹⁷ 1 Tm. 2:12 Noah Webster 1833.

safety of allowing her words to be interpreted with as much or as little irony as her audience desires.

Any mention of prostitution, however, was taboo enough to be risky. Prostitution was an open secret in New York City: not to be mentioned in polite company, it was nevertheless a huge industry with an estimated 7,000 prostitutes in the city and annual revenues anywhere from three to seven million dollars.⁹⁸ When Lydia Maria Child reviewed *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, she warned that it “contains a few passages that will offend the fastidiousness of some readers; for they allude to subjects which men do not wish to have discussed, and which women dare not approach.”⁹⁹ Like Fern, Fuller engages the subject without calling it by name: “a subject which refined women are usually afraid to approach, for fear of the insult and scurril jest they may encounter [...] I refer to the degradation of a large portion of women into the sold and polluted slaves of men” (78).¹⁰⁰ Fuller’s and Fern’s arguments against prostitution are remarkably similar. Both target lawmakers who shrug their shoulders and declare it ““a necessary evil””

⁹⁸ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 804.

⁹⁹ Lydia Maria Child. “Woman in the Nineteenth Century,” review of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, by Margaret Fuller, in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Larry J. Reynolds, (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1998), 220.

¹⁰⁰ Fuller takes on the issue of prostitution again in the *Tribune* (also 1845), in a book review of Charles Burdett’s *Wrongs of American Women*, and in this piece, too, she resists naming the problem, referring to prostitutes as “the wretched slaves of sensuality” [235]. This piece bears yet another striking similarity to Fern’s later work in its argument (anticipating not only Fern but Charlotte Perkins Gilman as well) that “Were the destiny of Woman thus exactly marked out, did she invariably retain the shelter of a parent’s or a guardian’s roof till she was married, did marriage give her a sure home and protector, were she never liable to be made a widow [...] we would still demand for her a far wider and more generous culture than is proposed by those who so anxiously define her sphere” [234]. “The Wrongs of American Women. The Duty of American Women,” in *Margaret Fuller, Critic: Writings from the New-York Tribune, 1844-1846*, ed. Judith Mattson Bean and Joel Myerson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

(Fern); ““a necessary accompaniment of *civilization*”” (Fuller 78). Both allude (again, not by name) to the attendant evil of venereal disease: “a right to expect *healthy* children” (Fern); “natural harmony broken and fineness of perception destroyed in your mental and bodily organization” (Fuller 78). Both seem to reach the same conclusion, that men and women alike have a role to play in reforming the family: “Let both be equally pure” (Fern); ““the world would never be better till men subjected themselves to the same laws they had imposed on women”” (Fuller 80).

Where Fern and Fuller’s arguments diverge is in their rhetorical strategy toward making these points. As I have described above, Fern addresses her readers directly, engaging them in debate. Fuller relies on allusion and historical precedent to make arguments by example. For this difficult subject she draws upon a range of personalities from ancient to contemporary, historical to literary: “Oriental” traditions and those of “the natives of this continent,” “Paladin” and “the Poet,” Milton’s Comus, Nymphs, Bacchus, Circe, Canova, Beethoven, Michael Angelo, King Nestor, Sir Philip Sidney, the English peerage class in general, several well-known imminent personages in particular, Edmund Spenser, Adam and Eve, Lydia Maria Child, Eugene Sue, George Sand, and other, less famous personalities. She also includes an original poem and quotes extensively from a letter by John Adams. Fuller’s own stance, however, is difficult to pin down, and her use of allusions only makes it more so. Above I have written that Fuller and Fern “seem” to reach the same conclusion, and I do so because Fuller here, as elsewhere in the text, resists making one argument and instead considers many different sides. Her earlier conclusion, that chastity ought to be practiced by both men and women,

is not, in fact, given in her own voice but in a third-hand quotation by “a foreign artist” that Fuller had heard from “a man” (80).

Doubling back, Fuller gives up on men—and, apparently, on the power of further allusions: “I might accumulate illustrations [...] drawn from acquaintance with the histories of women, which would startle and grieve all thinking men, but I forbear [...] let those [men] who are convinced of the practicability and need of a pure life, as the foreign artist was, advise the others, and warn them by their own example if need be” (89). But Fuller does not give up the argument entirely, and calls out the hypocrisy of a father who might not allow *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* into his home because of its content on this very subject but who allows a man “whose shame is written on his brow” “if rich enough” to marry his daughter (90). As Fuller drifts away from the subject of prostitution, she asks women to “see whether she does not suppose virtue possible and necessary to man,” and like Fern, Fuller would see personal reforms in the domestic sphere set a precedent for the greater good: “The passions, like fire, are a bad master; but confine them to the hearth and the altar, and they give life to the social economy” (91).

Fuller’s progress toward this conclusion, if indeed it is a conclusion, meanders through continuous deferrals. Fern, on the other hand, tries an entirely different tactic. She makes an argument so direct in its statements, so transgressive in its ideas, that it must be regarded as satire meant to serve as a straw man before leading to her ultimate conclusion. Namely, she suggests to her readers that if men visit prostitutes because they need diversion, and if women’s lives are more monotonous than men’s, women, even more than men, ought to seek pleasure outside of the domestic scene. It is a crazy idea, and Fern rebuts it herself as soon as it is proposed: “But enough for that transparent

excuse,” she writes, “The great Law-giver made no distinction of sex, as far as I can find out, when he promulgated the seventh commandment [forbidding adultery], nor should we.” Fern’s readers’ hair might be standing on end at this point, but to argue with her now would be to argue with the ten commandments.

Though Fern would write frequently in other columns about women’s need for an active intellectual and social life, her statement here that “women lead, most of them, lives of unbroken monotony,” is secondary to her main argument. Nevertheless, the statement reveals some interesting distinctions between Fern’s and Fuller’s approaches to progressive reform. The line may be an explicit allusion to transcendentalist (and Fuller’s *Dial* co-contributor/co-editor) Henry David’s Thoreau’s famous statement that “the mass of men live lives of quiet desperation” (*Walden* 1854).¹⁰¹ If Fern’s argument that women need more excitement in their lives is a straw man, then her allusion to the transcendentalist thinker further illustrates not only the philosophical differences between herself and Fuller, but also a significant departure by Fern from the sentimental tradition. Though they do so in different ways, both the transcendentalists and the sentimentalists privilege metaphysical and spiritual needs, respectively, over physical concerns while Fern commits herself to worldlier matters.

Tompkins uses the example of New York City’s Tract Society to illustrate the importance of Protestant Christianity to the sentimental project of elevating people out of the physical to the emotional and spiritual realms, a project in which “the arena of human action [...] has been defined not as the world, but as the human soul” (151). She argues

¹⁰¹ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden: Or, Life in the Woods* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1893), 15; For a discussion of Fern and transcendental philosophy, see Carol Moses, “The Domestic Transcendentalism of Fanny Fern,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 50 (Spring 2008): 90-119.

that sentimental writing “shares with the evangelical reform movement a theory of power that stipulates that all true action is not material, but spiritual” (151). Fern, however, criticizes the Tract Society in “Blackwell’s Island Number I” on precisely the grounds that the physical needs must be met in addition to—or even before—the spiritual: “how many times when their stomachs have been empty, some full-fed, whining, disciple, has presented them with a Bible or a Tract, saying, Be ye warmed and filled.” Fuller may be guilty of a similar, if more secular, approach to charity.

Throughout *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* Fuller’s arguments for women’s rights focus neither on domestic nor economic concerns but rather on woman’s right to intellectual equality—with the assumption that equality in the domestic and public spheres will follow. Shortly after her visit to Sing Sing prison, Fuller organized the donation of books to the female inmates there in order to “form [their] minds to a love of better pleasures than [they] have hitherto possessed.”¹⁰² The gift was intended to provide “proper food for the mind and heart.”¹⁰³ The books were kindly meant, and Fern, too, understood the importance of education toward progressive reform.

Nevertheless, Fern, ever practical—and having experienced poverty herself first hand—refuses to settle for merely spiritual or philosophical victory or to ignore economic and physical realities. The last line of her final column in the Blackwell’s Island series thus leaves her readers with a visual image of extreme corporeal damage: only when the “human traffic” is ceased, will “our beautiful rivers [...] no longer toss upon our island shores ‘dead bodies of unfortunate young females.’” With this line, Fern skillfully

¹⁰² Margaret Fuller to the Women Inmates at Sing Sing, Early November?, 1844, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, vol. 3, 1842-44, ed. Robert N. Hudspeth (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 238.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

returns to the bucolic image that opened the series, that of a “blue [...] river that plashes” against the boundaries of the notorious island, but she has changed the way her readers look at the river and the island it surrounds, and, perhaps, themselves.

The Changing Face of Journalism

When Fern suggests in “Blackwell’s Island Number III” that her male adversaries “had better ‘tarry at Jericho till your beard be grown’” she challenges their authority in a way that sentimental writers and Fuller did not. How did Fern get away with it, week after week, and still count both men and women alike among her many fans? Fern’s success demonstrates her instincts about certain broad shifts taking place in American culture. Modeling changing cultural practices in her wildly popular newspaper column, Fern brought a highly personal yet politicized voice into the mainstream, and she helped shape how American audiences would come to understand the woman writer as a cultural phenomenon. A decade earlier, in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller had predicted this development:

Another sign of the times is furnished by the triumphs of female authorship. These have been great and constantly increasing. Women have taken possession of so many provinces for which men had pronounced them unfit, that though these still declare there are some inaccessible to them, it is difficult to say just where they must stop. (55)

Fern pushed boundaries in her work and in her personal-professional life, merging the domestic and the public spheres and re-defining what it meant to be a “bluestocking” or an “authoress.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Fanny Fern, “A Practical Blue Stocking,” in *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*, ed. Joyce W. Warren (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 232-35; Fanny Fern, “Tom Pax’s Conjugal Soliloquy,” in *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*, ed. Joyce W. Warren (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 268-69.

The term “bluestocking,” long a pejorative term for any woman with scholarly or literary leanings, was, by the 1850s, on its way out as a “way of reproach.”¹⁰⁵ When Fern uses it, she does so affectionately, re-defining it to describe a literary woman who nevertheless maintains her womanly qualities. Fern likewise appropriates the word “authoress” to describe the professional woman writer who maintains a writing career without sacrificing her feminine identity: “Never say of an authoress,” Fern admonishes, “oh yes—she has talent, but *I* prefer the domestic virtues; as if a combination of the two were necessarily impossible.”¹⁰⁶ No longer an “alternative” to “a crass industrial-commercial world,” the domestic sphere was part of that commercial world, as we can see in the *Ledger’s* commodification of home life through Fern’s successful column (Tompkins 144). Fern is authorized to speak about Blackwell’s Island and other political issues because, as she shows in the series, the politics of poverty, crime, and prison reform are intimately bound up with the politics of the home. Fern’s work shares with sentimental literature an exigency that is “anything but domestic, in the sense of being limited to purely personal concerns” and a “mission[...] identical with the interests of the race” (Tompkins 146).

¹⁰⁵ de Quincey quoted in *Oxford English Dictionary*, online, s.v. “blue-stocking.”

¹⁰⁶ “Amiable Creatures,” in *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*, ed. Joyce W. Warren (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 310-11. True to Fern’s tendency to contradict herself, there are also examples among her columns in which the domestic life *does* interfere with the writing life and vice versa, for bluestockings and authoresses alike. Cf. “Mrs. Adolphus Smith Sporting the ‘Blue Stocking,’” in which a wife, repeatedly interrupted by husband, children, butcher et. al. gives up on the story she is trying to write [in *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*, ed. Joyce W. Warren (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 265-66] or “Tom Pax’s Conjugal Soliloquy,” written from the perspective of the neglected husband of a famous newspaper columnist so intent on coming up with ideas for new columns that she sews the buttons of his shirt on the flaps rather than the wristbands. [in *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*, ed. Joyce W. Warren (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 268-69.]

The importance of the integration of the domestic and public spheres with the progress of American culture is a common trope in early feminist literature. Though Fern's work departs significantly from the sentimental tradition and from Fuller's metaphysical feminism, Fuller and Fern nevertheless contribute toward the work of later women writers, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who argues that

“[t]o reduce so largely the mere area of environment is a great check to race-development; but it is not to be compared in its effects with the reduction in voluntary activity to which the human female has been subjected[...] the smothering ‘no’ which crushed down all her human desires to create, to discover, to learn, to express, to advance.”¹⁰⁷

But Fern's influence is not limited to esoteric writings by activists; her influence is even more apparent in mainstream trends. Fern built a profitable and influential career around a public persona that refused to accept the “smothering ‘no.’” She is an important figure in a new female journalistic discourse that allows for subjectivity, a multiplicity of voices, and the blending of the domestic with the public, the personal with the political. That project, as the next chapter will show, continues as female journalists pushed the boundaries of acceptability even further. Fern wrote about the hands she saw protruding through the bars of the cells at Blackwell's Island. Nellie Bly would write about the experience of being locked up behind those bars.

¹⁰⁷ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1998), 34-6.

CHAPTER TWO:

NELLIE BLY, STUNT REPORTER

Nellie Bly, a petite and pretty girl looking to insinuate herself in the competitive world of the New York City newspapers, made headlines with her October 1887 exposé of conditions at the Blackwell's Island Lunatic Asylum. The two-part Blackwell's Island series was her first assignment for Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*, a top paper known for its sensational stories, progressive social agenda, and popular appeal. The first installment of the series, "Behind Asylum Bars" (October 9, 1887), describes at length Bly's preparations for the ordeal, her brief stay at the working-class boarding house where she began her performance of insanity, her interrogation at the police court, and the overnight stay at Bellevue Hospital that preceded her transfer to the Island. In the second installment, "Inside the Madhouse" (October 16, 1887), she offers a detailed look at the unsanitary conditions and abusive or oblivious doctors and nurses she encountered at Blackwell's Island, as well as portraits of the other patients—many of whom she insists were wrongfully committed. Bly's stunt made her an instant celebrity.

"We do not ask you to go there for the purpose of making sensational revelations," she reports her editors advising her, but, as they no doubt anticipated, that is precisely what she did.¹⁰⁸ Since their inception in the 1830s, the public charities at Blackwell's Island had long been a popular topic in the New York press, and recent scandals there and at other public facilities practically guaranteed the *World* the kind of

¹⁰⁸ Nellie Bly, "Behind Asylum Bars," *The New York World*, October 9, 1887. Following convention, citations for newspaper articles in this study do not include page numbers; to improve readability, citations are provided only on first mention or when the reader cannot determine from context to which article the text refers.

lurid headlines that sold papers.¹⁰⁹ Asylum officials did not welcome such stories, often presented in a spirit of altruism but typically more interested in relating salacious details of behind the scenes corruption and abuse. Isaac Ray, a leader in the field of forensic psychiatry and superintendent of asylums in Maine and Rhode Island, complained that “[a]ll our newspapers, the best as well as the worst, take intense satisfaction in pitching into hospitals on every occasion, with an utter lack of intelligence, fairness, and honesty.”¹¹⁰ Likewise, Thomas S. Kirkbride, a prominent psychiatrist, decried the sensationalism of the typical newspaper piece and rightly suggested that many such stories were generated “more from a belief that the public likes to hear stories of the kind, than from any desire to discover and correct abuses.”¹¹¹

Bly’s piece differed from other items in the press about Blackwell’s Island, even other stories by “insiders,” however, in that Bly herself, even more so than the poor conditions at the asylum, is the focus of the story. This move, Jean Marie Lutes argues in *Front-Page Girls* (2005), one of the only critical studies of Bly’s work, reflects a growing trend in women’s journalism during the late nineteenth century toward “self-reflexive authorship that involved not just reporting the news but *becoming* the news.”¹¹² Even before the story broke in the *World*, Bly attracted media attention as other papers ran

¹⁰⁹ See note 23 above and Brooke Kroeger, *Nellie Bly: Daredevil, Reporter, Feminist* (New York: Times Books, 1994), 87.

¹¹⁰ quoted in Gerald N. Grob, *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), 296. See also Grob, 146.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 296.

¹¹² Jean Marie Lutes, *Front-Page Girls: Women Journalists in American Culture and Fiction, 1880-1930* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 5.

articles about the mysterious “Pretty Crazy Girl” adrift in the charity system.¹¹³

Positioning affect against faulty methodologies of scientific observation, and promoting the youthful and confident writer as an alternative kind of expert and the defender of victimized women, Bly’s story captured widespread attention from *World* readers, other media outlets, and politicians. It inspired rebuttals from the maligned doctors and nurses, and helped to ensure the approval of extra funding for the Blackwell’s Island facilities the following year.¹¹⁴

The series also helped popularize “girl stunt reporting,” a method of investigative journalism in which the intrepid reporter goes undercover in order to expose some injustice. Lutes has argued that Bly and her imitators are innovative not necessarily because of *what* they wrote, but because they “modeled a new kind of authorship for their readers, synthesizing sentimental tropes of female authorship within a self-consciously professional version of the modern literary woman.”¹¹⁵ Stunt reporting thus works in mainstream periodicals because of similarities it shares with already accepted forms of women’s writing, like the sentimental, and because of the growing popular appeal of

¹¹³ *The (New York) Sun* October 14, 1887, quoted in Kroeger, 94. *The New York Times*, *The New York Herald*, and *The (New York) Evening Telegram* all ran stories on the mystery girl as well. See Kroeger, 91-92.

¹¹⁴ Bly publicly took credit for \$1 million in extra funding allocated to Blackwell’s Island the following year, naming the dollar amount in the Introduction to *Ten Days in a Mad-House*, an edited and expanded book version of the newspaper series published in December 1887. In reality, the budget for all the facilities at Blackwell’s Island (not just the asylum) was increased for 1888 by about \$840,000. The requested increase had been brought before the Board of Estimate even before Bly’s story ran, but the piece did attract a great deal of attention, and city officials consulted with Bly about the asylum before approving the final budget. Kroeger calls Bly’s boast “an allowable lapse into hyperbole” [97-99].

¹¹⁵ Lutes, 7.

sensationalism and personality journalism.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, stunt reporting offers a foil, in the guise of the intrepid girl reporter, to the (male-dominated) culture of experts in an age obsessed with science and technology—a dynamic that appealed to Pulitzer’s mass readership of women, immigrants, minorities, and the working poor.¹¹⁷ But stunt reporting is not significant merely because of its role in the professionalization of the female writer. While Lutes rightly reads Bly’s use of personality journalism as a challenge to a (white, male) culture of experts and reads in Bly’s performance a powerful new form of writing with the body, she neglects the power of Bly’s writing itself. Stunt reporting, as Bly invents it, relies not only on the journalist’s ability to act but also on her ability to tell stories—both her own and the stories of the women she meets while undercover. Without the journalist, their voices would never be heard, and her profession enables her to take on the important subject of women’s autonomy. Bly’s method of storytelling, which uses recognizable tropes of writing typically gendered feminine, allows her to confront a controversial issue—the wrongful incarceration of sane women in lunatic asylums—in a mainstream paper.

In Chapter One I examined the synthesis of the public and private spheres in women’s journalism, locating in work by Margaret Fuller and Fanny Fern a feminist public discourse that helped to make the celebrity newspaperwoman—and her reformist social agenda—not only possible but popular. By appropriating accepted forms of female writing, Fuller and Fern were able to advance controversial feminist arguments and to engage taboo topics, while at the same time they familiarized the American reading public with personality journalism and with the public writing woman. Like

¹¹⁶ Lutes, 5.

¹¹⁷ Lutes, 35.

Fuller's and Fern's work before her, Bly's asylum exposé contains multiple narratives. Bly's story of the suffering behind the bars of Blackwell's Island Lunatic Asylum is not just her own, but the stories of other women as well. She gives a voice to women wrongfully committed by unfeeling husbands, judges, and doctors and silenced by the male-dominated bureaucracy. Her depiction of insanity—in her own play-acting and in her portraits of her fellow inmates—fulfills popular notions of lunacy drawn more from fiction than from the pathology of mental illness, and therein lies the popular success and the significance of her piece. Bly makes insanity exotic and dangerous, but not ugly, and she creates sympathetic characters, giving her readers a sentimental context through which to view the experience. She is thus able to argue for the rights of women and the insane to a mass readership willing to share, vicariously, the sensations of innocent women thrown in harm's way.

In this chapter I argue that Bly's self-styling as an amateur who outwits judges, doctors, and other reporters, her hyperbolic sentimentality, and her use of tropes common to sentimental fiction, present feminine storytelling as an alternative rhetoric to objective male authority. Bly's rhetoric provides for a different kind of expert knowledge—not the empirical science of the doctors but the storytelling ability of the girl stunt reporter. Marketed as sensation, this transgressive feminist discourse advocating autonomy for women was thus able to flourish in the unlikeliest of habitats—a newspaper that, perhaps more than any other, represented (and dictated) the opinions of a mass market American readership.

In a recent study of the relationship between journalism and literary genre, Karen Roggenkamp argues that the penchant of the New Journalists for storytelling arose

primarily out of the “underlying assumption that newspapers should principally provide entertainment” and that the appropriation of literary forms was intended “to frame the news for readers” as a way of “dramatizing stories.”¹¹⁸ Her study of Bly suggests that Bly was neither a professional reporter nor an original personality but a product of the newspaper’s “corporate authorship,” manipulated by the paper in the manufacturing of “works of imagination.”¹¹⁹ Though Roggenkamp rightly sees this corporate authorship as crucial to the development of the American literary marketplace of the twentieth century, in downplaying Bly’s control over her own story, she overlooks how sensationalist journalism would have been attractive and/or conducive to work by women writers like Bly, for whom storytelling was an effective alternative rhetoric for bringing social change. The use of recognizable literary forms was not merely a means of making hard news more palatable to a mass audience, but was an important part of the feminine literary tradition that allowed Bly to tackle difficult subjects in a public forum. Fictionality provided a buffer between the woman writer and the wide, wide world.

In the following pages I examine Bly’s madhouse series, looking first at Bly’s self-positioning as a different sort of authority: one who is simultaneously expert and ingénue, news gatherer and news event, and who privileges personal communication over objective tests and scientific observation. I then show how Bly’s narrative, while seemingly a highly personal account of her own time in the asylum, is actually a collection of many women’s stories. Bly is careful to signal to her readers that she was not a very convincing lunatic, and she remains at a safe distance from the perils in her story, instead relying upon conventions of fiction writing to convey the horrors of the

¹¹⁸ Roggenkamp, xiii; xv.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

asylum. I then compare Bly's account of Blackwell's Island to another insider account by a male author who had also been a patient there. Though the two accounts contain many of the same basic facts, they differ significantly in the authors' interpretations. W.H. Davenport, who published his account of Blackwell's Island two decades before Bly, states that the idea of the sane person wrongfully committed to the asylum is the stuff of fiction, whereas Bly insists upon the sanity of many of her acquaintance there. Bly's version of insanity (both her own and that of the women she describes) fulfills a popular image and differs significantly from the ugly realities manifested on the faces and bodies of the insane in Davenport's piece. Bly's romanticized portrait, which uses storytelling to cast the victimized women of Blackwell's Island as familiar and sympathetic types, enables her to elicit sympathy for women rendered powerless by a bureaucratic system that frowned upon women unable to conform to traditional models of womanhood.

“I am off for New York. Look out for me”

Much the way Fanny Fern was a quasi-fictional personality and not just a pseudonym for Sara Willis, so, too, was Nellie Bly the invention of an unsophisticated girl from western Pennsylvania named Elizabeth Jane Cochran.¹²⁰ Born in 1864—a date that she would shift forward by a few years in the *World* and on her U.S. passport—Bly was destined for celebrity. She stood out from a crowd even in her babyhood, earning the nickname “Pink” for the bright pink clothes she wore among her playmates' drab muslin. When Bly's father died he left no will, and his assets were split sixteen ways among his widow and surviving children. Her mother remarried, but Bly's stepfather was often

¹²⁰ Throughout this project I follow the convention of referring to Bly by her pen name.

drunk and abusive, and at age fourteen Bly testified against him in divorce court. A male relative mismanaged her small trust fund, impelling her to drop out of normal school after only one semester. These early misfortunes may have contributed to Bly's determination to be self-reliant, and when she found work at the Pittsburgh *Dispatch* at the age of twenty she left her disappointing past behind her.

In later attempts to obscure her past and enhance her image, Bly would overstate (or allow others to overstate) her family's social standing, the extent of her formal education, her aptitude as a young child for reading and writing, and her talents as a horsewoman and musician, among other biographical details.¹²¹ Even Ishbel Ross's *Ladies of the Press* (1936), long the definitive history of women in journalism, gives voice to this romanticized picture of Bly's early life: "[Bly] was an imaginative child, fond of books and given to scrawling fantastic fables on their fly-leaves. She went to a boarding school in Indiana at thirteen but was brought home within a year because of her delicate health."¹²² Bly, like Fern, turned to writing after finding she had no other way of supporting herself, and took on a public persona of a woman of good breeding and

¹²¹ See Kroeger, 29-30. For someone who would become such an iconic figure, Bly is able to resist consensus on personal details about herself. Some details in the story—the fib about her age, a reference to her “hazel” eyes, the suggestion by an observer that she speaks with a Southern accent—make Bly out to be slightly younger and more glamorous than she likely was. The crowd at the police court argues about whether Bly has a Southern, Western, or Eastern accent. One man “asserted that he had lived South and that [her] accent was pure Southron” [*sic*]. Bly seems most willing to be taken for a Southerner, even suggesting that the cold air at Bellevue “began to tell” on her “Southern blood,” although Walt McDougall would later remember Bly's voice as having “that indescribable rising inflection peculiar to West Pennsylvanians” [McDougall quoted in Kroeger, 107]. There is also a lack of consensus about the color of her eyes. A nurse at Blackwell's Island reports that they are “gray”; McDougall remembers them as “gray-blue” [quoted in Kroeger, 107]; Bly herself says they are usually described as “brown or hazel.”

¹²² Ishbel Ross, *Ladies of the Press: The Story of Women in Journalism by an Insider* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1936), 48-9.

natural talents who is in the working class for the adventure of it. In reality, like Fern's, Bly's first concern was making a living. Even after she made a name for herself in the *World* she confessed that she would continue newspaper writing only "so long as this pays."¹²³ Throughout her life Bly kept careful track of her accounts, investing in business ventures outside journalism and never hesitating to sue anyone she felt had cheated her.

Bly landed her first newspaper job almost by accident. Struggling to find women's work that could support herself and her mother, she wrote a letter to the editor of the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* protesting a male columnist's assertion that a woman's "sphere [...] is defined and located by a single word—home."¹²⁴ Her straightforward reply, which argues for the plight of women compelled by their unfortunate situations to seek work outside the home, intrigued the editor so much that he commissioned a piece from Bly on "The Girl Puzzle." Bly's first attempt at journalism landed on the front page of the Sunday feature section—a prescient beginning for the girl who would soon enough be headlining the Sunday features at the *World*. It was at the *Dispatch* that Pink Cochran became Nellie Bly, the pseudonym she would use for the rest of her life. She soon grew bored with her assignments there, and took off for New York, leaving behind a note that read simply: "I am off for New York. Look out for me."¹²⁵

Just how exactly Bly secured her first assignment at the *World* is a matter of much speculation. Popular lore has Bly forcing her way past the doorman to confront Pulitzer directly. Ross restates Bly's own claim that she provided Joseph Pulitzer with a list of stunt ideas; other sources cite managing editor Colonel John Cockerill as originator of the

¹²³ quoted in Kroeger, 100.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

Blackwell's Island piece; still others give the credit to Pulitzer himself.¹²⁶ In any case, the exposé, Bly's first story for the *World*, ran on the front page of the Sunday feature section complete with illustrations and a byline, an unlikely honor for any cub reporter and unheard of for a woman. By the second installment her name was in the headline, where it would remain for the rest of her career.

“How Nellie Brown Deceived Judges, Reporters and Medical Experts”

Bly's first piece was an instant sensation. Part of Bly's audience appeal was the vicarious thrill the reader experienced at the suggestion of the white, female body at risk. The female journalists of the Pulitzer era, Lutes argues, “crafted a journalistic legacy by subjecting both themselves and their news reports to the stark glare of publicity,” and this legacy “intertwined the bodies of the news writers with the news itself.”¹²⁷ Meanwhile, Bly is careful to leave clues throughout both installments of the Blackwell's Island series assuring her readers that the risk remains imminent but never realized. Despite the ordeal, she remains ladylike, healthy, innocent, pretty, and well-bred. Though Bly was often uncomfortable, her body remains unviolated, and her character impeccable. Nevertheless, there are some truly dangerous moments, such as when a doctor forces her to take a dose of what is likely some form of laudanum to induce sleep. Bly, “determined not to lose [her] wits even for a few hours,” resists, and, when threatened with an intravenous dose, agrees to take the medicine orally—so that later she might “get rid of it” by seeing “how far down [her] throat [her] finger would go.” Despite moments like these that present real threats to her physical autonomy, when the stunt is over Bly bears no lasting marks of the ordeal—and her immunity is crucial to the success and

¹²⁶ Ross, 50; Kroeger, 86.

¹²⁷ Lutes, 2.

continuation of her work. Bly participates in dangerous stunts in order to report them, but to continue that work and to continue to have the same popular appeal she must remain untouched by what she sees. She must be, simultaneously, expert and naïf, observer and participant, and in so doing she also becomes both news gatherer and the news itself, maintaining strict control of her own narrative.

From the first, Bly's personality permeates her journalism, despite her litotic claim that "I merely tell in common words, without exaggeration, of my life in a mad-house for ten days." When Bly introduces herself to us, we learn right away that she has curly hair and that she considers her toothbrush and soap "a few of the most precious articles known to modern civilization." Despite staying up all night preparing for her performance of insanity, Bly reports herself "hungry enough to feel keenly that I wanted my breakfast." These details tell the reader that Bly is cute, clean, and healthy, and, at the asylum, when she goes without food and her standards of hygiene are compromised, the reader might recall that in real life Bly appreciates these things in her own comfortable home. Bly also emphasizes her youth and her innocence. She describes how she tries to keep herself awake all night at the boarding house on the first night of her adventure, and one tactic she uses to pass the time is reviewing, in her mind, the "past events" of her life. In a humorous passage Bly confesses: "I began at the beginning and, after living over again fifteen or twenty years of my existence, found I had only spanned over a space of five minutes." Bly's statement serves several purposes: it suggests that she is not at all worldly, having had experiences enough only to fill five minutes; it implies that she is not more than twenty years old (Bly is actually twenty-three in 1887—in the next installment she says she is nineteen); and it works to obscure any interest in

her past. From the first few column inches of Bly's first piece, she has already created a charming persona and one that has little in common with the older, wiser Pink Cochran.

Bly also loudly proclaims her honesty. Even though the fundamental concept of the stunt report requires fabrication, on several occasions in the two pieces she reassures the reader of her commitment to telling the truth—not only that she reports faithfully the details of her experiences but that, though she disguises herself and gives her name as Nellie Brown, she does not lie outright to the police or doctors. She simply omits enough information about herself to allow them to draw their own (wrong) conclusions about who she is, such as in the following exchange with a police officer: “When did you come to New York?” he asked. ‘I did not come to New York,’ I replied (while I added mentally, ‘because I have been here some time.’” At her first encounter with a doctor he tells her to stick out her tongue to which she replies “truthfully enough,” “I don’t want to,” and when she is examined by doctor number four, who asks her what the “voices” she hears at night say, she answers “truthfully” that “they talk about Nellie Brown and subjects that do not interest me half so much.” The doctor, of course, thinks she means the voices in her head, but her answer applies as well to the nurses who gossip all night long.

The nurses’ interest in Bly is one of many indications that shabby clothes or a refusal to answer personal questions cannot fully obscure the real Nellie Bly, and everyone but the clueless doctors can sense that there is something sensational about this particular crazy girl. Bly’s inability to repress her beauty and good breeding adds to the tension that she might at any moment be discovered, but it also serves to reassure her audience of her character. Judge Duffy, who hears Bly’s case and makes the order for

her to be sent to the asylum, is filled with pity for the girl who reminds him of his own late sister and, despite Bly's attempts to wear "old clothing," he declares that she "is well dressed and a lady" and speaks "'perfect'" English. "I would stake everything on her being a good girl" the Judge declares, and suggests that someone must be searching for her and that surely she has been drugged and kidnapped to the city. Miss Stanard, the matron of the boarding house who accompanies Bly to court, also insists upon Bly's innate ladylike qualities. When the police suggest sending Bly to Blackwell's Island, Mrs. Stanard begs for them to reconsider: "'Don't! She is a lady and it would kill her to be put on the Island!'"

Mrs. Stanard ought not to have worried. Bly protected herself and retained an aura of separation, difference, and even snobbery during her stay, personality traits that frustrated the nurses. In "All the Doctors Fooled," an unsigned companion piece to the series that ran the day before Bly's second installment, the nurses and doctors have a chance to rebut Bly's charges, and one nurse reports that a "saucy" Bly:

"[...] refused to wear the dress given her as it did not suit her complexion. She refused to walk with any patient except Annie Neville, who had always been her companion since she was admitted to Bellevue Hospital. I asked her if she could play the piano. She said yes, but she would not play here. I asked her if she would sew or do some work. She said no, not while here."¹²⁸

The nurse's account corroborates Bly's report—that the untuned piano in the hall at the Island "sent a grinding chill" through her and after one song she "refused all requests" to play on it, and that the poorly cut "coarse" and "cheap" fabric of the asylum uniforms made her laugh at herself and long for a mirror.¹²⁹ Bly, who we must assume appreciates

¹²⁸ "All the Doctors Fooled," *The New York World*, October 15, 1887.

¹²⁹ Nellie Bly, "Inside the Madhouse," *The New York World*, October 16, 1887.

a fine instrument and eschews cheap clothing, maintains the standards of her social status. At supper in Bellevue, for example, she “objected to the tin plate” so the nurse “fetched a china one” for her instead. Something about Bly inspires special treatment, and at Bellevue she is given milk and a cracker when the standard fare proves inedible and an extra blanket at night, “a favor rarely granted.”

The refined Bly stands in contrast to the nurses, who are far from ladylike with their flirting, gossiping, and cursing. One nurse, in particular, “nearly always interspersed her conversation with profane language, and generally began her sentences by calling on the name of the Lord. The names she called the patients were of the lowest and most profane type.” The nurses, whom Bly shows to be more interested in the doctors than in their patients, make “several attempts” to talk to Bly “about lovers” and asked her if she “would not like to have one,” but they find Bly to be “not very communicative on the, to them, popular subject.” Perhaps it is this hauteur that sets her apart from other patients, but something about her attracts attention from everyone she encounters on her adventure.

Even as she is escorted from the boarding house on the first day down to the police station a crowd gathers and follows them along, and another crowd watches her leave in the ambulance for Bellevue. At Bellevue the night nurses were “curious” to see Bly and “to find out what [she] was like.” The press, too, had picked up on some degree of difference in this prisoner, asking to interview her at the police station. A reporter turns up at Bellevue and asks to examine her clothing, and the next day the facility “was visited by a number of people who were curious to see the crazy girl.” Her last day at Bellevue brings “many reporters” “untiring” in their attempts to uncover her identity, and

a “mob of people” accompanied Bly’s transfer from the ambulance to the Blackwell’s Island boat. When she gets to Blackwell’s Island, she finds that the doctors and nurses there have already heard about her, having read “a long account of this girl in the Sun on Sunday,” and she claims to be “annoyed a great deal by nurses who had heard my romantic story calling to those in charge of us to ask which one I was.”

Bly’s minor celebrity serves her well during much of her trip through the bureaucracy, as she is able to command respect not offered the other less self-aware patients and thus to escape some of the physical indignities suffered by them. She avoids the touch of a “rough-looking” man who tries to load her into the ambulance, getting “gallant” assistance instead from a doctor and a policeman. Upon her arrival at Bellevue another “rough-looking” man tries to drag her out, and again a doctor steps in and performs the task, lifting her “carefully” out of the vehicle. Then, a “muscular” man grabs Bly by the arm—a familiarity she will not allow: “I forgot my role as I turned to him and said: ‘How dare you touch me?’” Yet again, the man desists and a doctor takes over. Bly also resists any insinuations against her character, and she is “heartily disgusted with” and “felt like slapping” the doctor at Bellevue who asks her if she is “a woman of the town.” This doctor, the second she encounters, inspires in Bly “a smaller regard for the ability of doctors than I had ever had before. I felt sure now that no doctor could tell whether people were insane or not, so long as the case was not violent.” This doctor, who diagnoses her as “positively demented,” demonstrates an utter lack of perception; easily fooled by Bly’s charade he goes even further to draw absolutely wrong conclusions about her character. For Bly that error robs him of his credentials and puts his entire profession up for scrutiny. Bly, as Lutes argues, calls into question the value of

the doctor's tests, "countering bureaucratic and scientific authority with her own truths based on physical sensation."¹³⁰

Once she succeeds in being committed to Blackwell's Island, Bly no longer needs to play at being insane, and in fact tries to convince the doctors and nurses there of her sanity to no avail. Only the other inmates perceive that there is nothing wrong with Bly; one inmate tells her upon arrival that her supposed insanity "cannot be seen in your face," the first example of many in which Bly gives more credit to the observations of the inmates than to the expert opinions of the doctors and nurses. The tests the doctors use, Bly reports, typically consist of a battery of questions "exactly the same" for all patients, and all the patients Bly overhears give the same answers. There is no room for individuality, and, furthermore, Bly declares that the questions she is asked "had no bearing on such a case" anyway. Bly also contends that often the doctors make their decisions with no evidence whatsoever. Like many of her fellow inmates who beg the doctors to reconsider their cases, Bly issues a challenge to prove her insane:

"There are sixteen doctors on the island, and, excepting two, I have never seen them pay any attention to the patients. How can a doctor judge a woman's sanity by merely bidding her good morning and refusing to hear her pleas for release? [...] Try every test on me [...] and tell me am I sane or insane? Try my pulse, my heart, my eyes; ask me to stretch out my arm, to work my fingers."

The doctor refuses, thinking Bly's challenge to be further evidence of her condition.

Interestingly, Bly demonstrates some scientific expertise here herself. Although she claims to have no knowledge of insanity, the tests she requests, and her complaints that the doctors use the same questions on everyone, indicate either a familiarity with current practices in diagnosing insanity or keen scientific instincts of her own. In *A*

¹³⁰ Lutes, 12.

Treatise on the Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity (1836; reprint, 1871), for half a century the definitive text in the growing field of forensic psychology, Isaac Ray describes both the symptoms of insanity and ways in which to discover if a patient were trying to fake those symptoms. Bly's challenge to the doctor's authority indicates a familiarity with these criteria of diagnosis, which include: rapid pulse, sleeplessness, immunity to opiates, "gusts of passion," and a "bold, unflinching look."¹³¹ These are the symptoms Bly asks the doctor to check, and they are the symptoms she had feigned to gain admission. Ray also argues that insanity is an individualized ailment and manifests differently in different personalities: "the abstract mental states, which are justly held to indicate lunacy in one, may, in another, speaking relatively to health, be the strongest proofs of perfect soundness of mind."¹³² The tendency to subject all patients to the same battery of questions, is, as Bly suggests, not a reliable way of diagnosing madness. If Bly had performed background research in such texts as Ray's before embarking on her adventure, however, she does not admit it, instead suggesting simply the superiority of her intuition over the doctors' tests and calling attention to their lack of sympathy for patients.

Besides the general ineffectiveness of the diagnoses offered by the doctors, Bly also questions their character, pointing to inappropriate flirtatious behavior between the doctors and nurses: "[the doctor] gave the nurse more attention than he did me, and asked her six questions to every one of me." The only one of the doctors that Bly likes is Dr.

¹³¹ Isaac Ray, *A Treatise on the Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity* (1836; reprint, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962), 250-53.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 111.

Ingram, with whom she develops a rapport.¹³³ He is the only doctor who listens to what she has to say, and she brings to his attention her concerns about the facilities. Here the tables are turned and the doctor seeks counseling from his patient: “‘What can I do? [...] What would you do?’ he asked, turning to me, the proclaimed insane girl,” a role reversal that “undermines the foundation of expert knowledge itself” and thus “countered an expert discourse that often disempowered women.”¹³⁴ Bly’s alternative expertise is an important example of her use of the feminist discourse I described in Chapter One—a discourse that privileges communication over scientific observation—and the significance of the young female reporter outsmarting a battery of doctors did not go overlooked.

The *World* was eager to tout its newest star, and her foiling of the supposed experts and their tests was a point reiterated in the “Press Comment” section printed alongside Bly’s second installment. Of the seven blurbs from other papers chosen to be included alongside Bly’s piece, six focus on Bly’s successful attempt at fooling supposed medical experts. Bly’s challenge to objectivity and the scientific method is what most surprises her colleagues in other media outlets, even more so than her revelations of neglect and abuse. Bly’s stunt attracts attention not only because it is a “piece of journalistic enterprise” that “may lead to reforms” (the Norristown, PA *Times*) but because it upsets convention, showing how “a young girl who, with no preparation for her work, no studies of authorities on insanity, succeeded completely in ‘pulling the wool’ over the eyes of the so-called medical experts” (the Trenton, NJ *Times*). Bly’s

¹³³ Bly and Ingram remained friends after the completion of her stunt; rumors even circulated of an engagement between them, but no definitive evidence of a romantic relationship exists. (Kroeger, 178 and 200).

¹³⁴ Lutes, 16.

expertise was in her innate ability to create a plausible character, and, following her instincts, to navigate the bureaucratic system in such a way that she could give her readers an authentic report of the dangers of the asylum without actually coming to any harm.

“I decided not to risk my health—and hair”

At the end of the second installment Bly confesses that while she had intended to penetrate the more dangerous areas of Blackwell’s Island known as the Lodge and the Retreat, areas reserved for the most violent or deranged patients, she decided she could tell her story without taking the extra risk. Two fellow inmates (whom Bly insists are “two sane women”), Mrs. Cotter, a veteran of the Retreat, and Bridget, a veteran of the Lodge, tell her how the nurses there subjected patients to verbal and physical abuse, including choking, beating, hair pulling and water torture. Bly repeats their testimony in lengthy quotations in lieu of providing her own first-hand account of these special facilities. In addition to choking and water torture, Mrs. Cotter reports that the nurses “took hold of my ears and beat my head on the floor and against the wall. Then they pulled my hair out by the roots so that it will nevergrow [*sic*] in again.” Bly was convinced: “I decided not to risk my health—and hair, so I did not get violent.”

Bly’s concern for her health makes sense, but her concern for her hair seems, at first, like vanity or a misguided attempt at humor. But it is not the first time in the articles that Bly mentions her hair, and, when viewed in context, the seemingly offhand remark tells much about the challenges Bly faced by going undercover. Bly’s hair is actually an important metonym in the piece representing the rest of her body: healthy, stylish, and feminine when the piece opens, Bly’s hair is subject to escalating

mistreatment as her adventure progresses. Her hair openly bears the suffering of her experience, so that the toll on Bly's body can remain unwritten and imagined. Bly's journey into the madhouse had begun at home in front of her mirror, and she reports gazing without blinking at her own face in an attempt to imitate what she imagines to be the "staring eyes" of the insane. The action of self-scrutiny has a visceral effect on Bly, and at the thought of the coming ordeal: "wintry chills ran races up and down my back in very mockery of the perspiration which was slowly but surely taking the curl out of my bangs."

McDougall's illustrations also use Bly's hair to signify her progression from reporter to lunatic and back again. The first illustration shows Bly sitting at her writing desk at home before the ordeal, her bangs curled and her hair neatly contained in an updo. In the next illustration, captioned "Nellie Practices Insanity At Home," Bly is posed in front of her mirror, her hair falling loose down her back as she tugs at her bangs, now straight and unkempt, with a clenched fist. In the illustration which depicts "Nellie Before Judge Duffy," Bly, in disguise, is shown with her hat tilted forward and a veil over her downturned face. The hat becomes a crucial prop in Bly's disguise. When she sees Captain McCullagh, a police officer she had once interviewed for the *Dispatch*, she pulls her hat as far down her face as possible in order to escape recognition, and when she arrives at Bellevue hospital she argues with a nurse about whether or not she must remove it. The nurse threatens to use physical force, and, ultimately, Bly acquiesces and takes it off; when Bly removes the hat it is the first time we see Bly give in to authority. Though she has lost her hat, it is of little consequence after she is transferred to

Blackwell's Island because, once there, she "made no attempt to keep up the assumed role of insanity." "I talked and acted just as I do in ordinary life."

In the second installment, the drawing of the woman next to the lead paragraph bears little in common with the picture of the elegant writer at her desk that had opened the first article. This girl, not necessarily Nellie herself but representative of the women of Blackwell's Island, wears her hair down and uncombed, and an unfashionable hat obscures most of her face. In another illustration depicting "Quiet Inmates Out For A Walk," two rows of women fade into the background. All wear the same "comical straw hats," and no visible hairstyles or other characteristics of beauty can be seen to distinguish any one figure from another. Worse for Bly than the uniform clothing all inmates wear is the experience of the communal bathtub. It is there that Bly, stripped of her own clothing and scrubbed with coarse soap, relinquishes the last vestiges of her old self—"even [...] my pretty hair." "I begged that my hair be left untouched," she writes, but "I got, one after the other, three buckets of water over my head [...] for once I did look insane."

The following morning Bly is subjected to the indignity of being "Combed with a Public Comb," an experience significant enough that it is advertised in the headline and in the section subheading, and one that again indicates Bly's loss of autonomy: "As I saw some of the sore heads combed I thought this was another dose I had not bargained for." Bly's hair "all matted and wet from the night previous, was pulled and jerked," and, as with her hat and her street clothes, her hairpins are taken from her. Instead of the updo to which she was accustomed, Bly's hair is "arranged in one plait and tied with a red cotton rag," but here the reader is given some reassurance as well because Bly's "curly bangs

refused to stay back.” Even as she has given up, momentarily, her autonomy, and even as her hair has been subjected to physical abuses, its natural curl cannot be suppressed. Bly reminds us not only of her good looks but of her resiliency. The curly bangs reassure us that she has not been injured. When Bly ultimately decides not to put her hair at risk by going any further—choosing to avoid the Lodge and the Retreat—she also protects her body and her looks, both key elements of the healthy, girlish persona that characterize the girl stunt reporter and both necessary if she wants to maintain her social standing. To do otherwise would be disastrous for Bly personally and professionally.

In addition to reassuring readers that she escapes the asylum physically unscathed, Bly also makes sure her readers realize that she is not a very convincing lunatic. Bly’s careful negotiation of conflicting interests—stepping outside her own social class and staging a successful stunt while maintaining an “emphatically virginal” image—suited the editorial slant at the *World*, one that itself navigated conflicting interests: supporting a reformist, populist agenda in order to court a broad readership of immigrants and the working poor while remaining, at heart, essentially conservative.¹³⁵ The two articles frequently assert that her looks are too pretty and her manners too good—“I am afraid of that chronic smile of yours” she reports her editor saying as she began her mission. She also is careful to tell her audience that she has no experience with lunatics or the public charities: “There were ways of getting into the insane ward, but I did not know them.” As with her apparent familiarity with the pathology of insanity, for someone who claims to be wholly unacquainted with the subject, she nevertheless knows exactly how to go about getting committed: “I might adopt one of two courses. Either I could feign insanity

¹³⁵ Lutes, 15.

at the house of friends and get myself committed on the decision of two competent physicians, or I could go to my goal by way of the police courts.” Bly is exactly right; these are the two main ways that one could legally be committed to a public asylum in New York.¹³⁶ Bly may have learned the specifics of the legal statutes governing commitment of indigent lunatics from Assistant District Attorney Henry D. Macdona, whom she consulted before attempting her stunt.¹³⁷ As with any research she had done into the pathology of lunacy, however, she makes no mention of this kind of technical preparation in her otherwise detailed narrative.

Bly, unwilling to impose upon her friends, chooses to get to Blackwell’s Island by way of the courts. Here, again, Bly makes clear that the company she keeps normally has nothing to do with the populations that inhabit Blackwell’s Island: “I thought it wiser not to inflict myself upon my friends” who “would have had to feign poverty, and, unfortunately for the end I had in view, my acquaintance with the struggling poor, except my own self, was only very superficial.” Early in the article Bly cultivates an ethos that she would maintain throughout her career, that of a hard-working and down-to-earth reporter, but someone who nevertheless enjoys the customs, acquaintance, and fashion sense of the upper classes. As Fern had done before her, Bly controls her public image by keeping details of her real self secret, even as part of her appeal is the way in which her articles appear to tell all.

¹³⁶ “No person shall be committed to or confined as a patient in any asylum [...] except upon the certificate of two physicians [...] But no person shall be held in confinement in any such asylum, for more than five days, unless within that time such certificate be approved by a judge or justice of a court of record [...]. [Clark D. Knapp, *A Treatise on the Laws of the State of New York Relating to the Poor, Insane, Idiots and Habitual Drunkards* (Rochester, N.Y.: Williamson & Higbie, 1887), 355.]

¹³⁷ Kroeger, 89.

“Committed without ample trial”

One way that Bly gets around revealing too much about herself or too much about what she experienced while in the asylum—which, if too personal, might put her reputation at risk—is in telling, instead, the stories of her fellow inmates. And, as Fuller had done in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* and Fern had done in her *Ledger* columns, Bly appropriates other women’s narratives to tell a larger story, creating a feminist metanarrative that argues by example. The composite picture of Blackwell’s Island that emerges paints a darker picture than Bly’s own experiences of bad food, ugly clothes, and cold baths while protecting Bly’s authority, which depends upon her ability to report danger first hand while remaining unscathed.

The other women’s stories include details of physical abuse, such Bridget’s account of the infamous Lodge:

“The beatings I got there were something dreadful. I was pulled around by the hair, held under the water until I strangled, and I was choked and kicked. The nurses would always keep a quiet patient stationed at the window to tell them when any of the doctors were approaching. It was hopeless to complain to the doctors for they always said it was the imagination of our diseased brains, and besides we would get another beating for telling.”

Bly appears to have no doubts about the truthfulness of Bridget’s testimony, even assuring us that Bridget “seems to be sane at the present.” Indeed, most of the women Bly encounters either claim to be sane, appear to be sane, or were sane when they were admitted and are driven to madness only after their poor treatment in the asylum. This threat of wrongful incarceration is an ongoing theme in the piece, and, as Bly’s cast of

domestic workers and German and Irish immigrants suggests, working class or immigrant women—namely, the target audience of the *World*—are those at greatest risk.¹³⁸

Upon her arrival at Bellevue, Bly witnesses the unjust treatment of her fellow inmates as they beg the doctors for the chance to prove their sanity and her “heart ached” in sympathy for them. She writes that she “determined then and there that I would try by every means to make my mission of benefit to my suffering sisters; that I would show how they are committed without ample trial.” The status of these women, Bly argues, ranks below even that of a criminal “who is given every chance to prove his innocence.” Outraged by the injustice, Bly speaks for women like Mrs. Schanz, an immigrant who, unable to speak English, “is consigned to the asylum without a chance to make herself understood.” It is not so much the physical dangers inside the asylum that ultimately prove to be the focus of Bly’s exposé, but a system that robs women of any chance to defend themselves against wrongful imprisonment. Bly, aware of her unique power as a journalist, turns this legal and institutionalized violation of women’s autonomy into a news story, with sensation as its means and reform as its goal.

From the anecdotes she includes, Bly would have the reader think that she encounters very few insane women over the course of her adventure, neither at Bellevue nor on the Island itself. At Bellevue Bly meets seven other patients, only one of whom strikes her as particularly disturbed. Bly deems a second woman “quite silly mentally” but remarks that she has “seen many women in the lower walks of life, whose sanity was never questioned, who were not any brighter.” Another woman “did not look insane,”

¹³⁸ Grob reports that at Blackwell’s Island between 1847 and 1870, 77% of the 11,141 patients were foreign-born, primarily from Ireland (5,219) and Germany (2,056), demographics that corroborate Bly’s description of her fellow inmates. [Grob, 231].

but she spoke no English, so Bly was unable to interview her. Bly reports that a woman named Annie Neville, who became Bly's particular friend during her stay, is not mentally ill but merely "sick from overwork." Bly asks her upon their first meeting, "Is there anything wrong with you [mentally] as well?" and "[s]atisfied from various reasons that Miss Neville was as sane as I was myself," Bly accepts her answer: "The doctors have been asking me many curious questions and confusing me as much as possible, but I have nothing wrong with my brain." None of the women, however, is able to convince a doctor of their sanity.

One inmate, Tillie Mayard, elicits particular sympathy from Bly, and the reader follows Tillie closely as she travels the same path as Bly from Bellevue to Blackwell's Island. Tillie claims to be recovering from physical, rather than mental, illness, and was placed in the asylum by friends who could not afford a proper convalescent home. Unlike Bly, however, who can remain confident of her eventual return to her old life, Tillie has little hope of release, and the hardships she encounters eventually break her down. Weak, sick, and poor, but not initially insane, she cannot endure the treatment she receives, and her case illustrates—where Bly's stunt cannot—the vulnerability of women who lack the money and connections to protect themselves from the bureaucracy of the public charity system.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ According to patient medical records printed in the *World*, Annie Neville, "formerly in Utica Asylum [...] has delusions concerning religion, says she sees visions, hallucinations of sight, apparitions of visitors from heaven." Similarly, Matilda [Tillie] Mayard "thinks people have conspired against her," and "fluctuations in the case render it impossible to determine to what ward she should be assigned." How accurate the doctors' diagnoses were, and how faithfully Bly represented what she witnessed cannot now be determined, but a significant discrepancy exists between the two versions ["All the Doctors Fooled"].

The doctor at Bellevue refuses Tillie's claims that she is merely suffering "nervous debility" as a result of her recent fever, and Bly declares gloomily that "he left the poor girl condemned to an insane asylum, probably for life, without giving her one feeble chance to prove her sanity." The poor conditions soon take their toll on Tillie. On their first night in the asylum Tillie sings while Bly plays the piano, but things quickly go downhill. She, like Bly, is put into a cold bath later that evening, but she lacks the physical strength to endure it as Bly does. "Imagine plunging that sick girl into a cold bath when it made me, who have never been ill, shake as if with ague," Bly cautions. Later in the week Bly sees Tillie become "so suddenly overcome" at dinner by the horrible food "that she had to rush from the dining-room." Tillie "suffered more than any of us from the cold" and though she "tried to follow [Bly's] advice to be cheerful" her condition quickly deteriorates.

Tillie soon suffers from a "fit," which the doctor cures by pinching her roughly between the eyes, and "from that [moment] on she grew worse." The physical suffering and the heartlessness of nurses who tell the patients that public charity patients "could not expect even kindness" is enough to make Tillie insane, Bly argues, and sadly Bly "watched the insanity slowly creep over the mind that had appeared to be all right." Eventually Tillie turns on Bly, suffering from the delusion that "I was trying to pass myself off for her," which, in a way, the stunt reporter was. When Tillie's insanity becomes visible, Bly "kept away from her as much as possible," ostensibly to avoid making Tillie worse, but also typical of the separation Bly maintains between herself and the truly insane.

Bly tells of many other wrongfully committed women as well: “a Frenchwoman” who Bly “firmly believe[d] to be perfectly sane” who was committed to the asylum after taking ill at work and, because of the language barrier, was unable to understand the proceedings at the police station. Another woman, who “spoke so little English” Bly could only learn about her from the nurses, was committed to the asylum by her husband “because she had a fondness for other men than himself.” Bly concedes that the girl is “insane [...] about men” but criticizes the nurses’ tendency to urge the girl to flirt with the doctors. Yet another inmate claims to be merely a victim of overwork and poverty and puts Bly “at loss to see why she had been sent there, she was so sane.” Yet another “seems perfectly rational and has not one fancy,” and two more in her ward, the German immigrant Bly had met at Bellevue and another woman, “showed no obvious traces of insanity.” Of two newcomers, one is an “idiot” but the other, a German girl who had been working as a cook, has a “nice appearance and apparent sanity” and tells of being sent to the asylum after losing her temper when coworkers tracked dirt onto her clean kitchen floors.

Of the few obviously insane women Bly singles out for description she says relatively little, such as this short anecdote of abuse, which reads in its entirety: “One day an insane woman was brought in. She was noisy, and Miss Grady gave her a beating and blacked her eye. When the doctors noticed it and asked if it was done before she came there the nurses said it was.” Bly’s treatment of the more violent and deranged patients from the Lodge and the Retreat is likewise cursory. She writes only briefly of seeing the patients from the Lodge in their “queer dresses, comical straw hats and shawls,” who have “vacant eyes and meaningless faces” and whose “tongues uttered

meaningless nonsense,” and she is struck by “a thrill of horror [...] at the sight.” These women, so different from Bly and the less visibly disturbed women from her own ward, assault Bly’s senses, and she notes “by nose as well as eyes, that they were fearfully dirty.” Bly deems the “horror of that sight to one who had never been near an insane person before” to be “unspeakable.” Bly’s choice of words here—their faces and words are described as “meaningless,” their overall presentation “unspeakable”—is telling. It is not these women to whom Bly loans her voice in the public discourse, and the reader does not learn the individual names and histories of the residents of the Lodge or Retreat, excepting the “two sane women,” Bridget and Mrs. Cotter, whose stories of those wards had convinced Bly to stay away.

Bly’s selectiveness—telling the stories of supposedly sane women, while alluding only generally to those among the approximately 1600 patients who are indeed insane—is a rhetorical choice that evokes sympathy for the inmates at Blackwell’s Island by erasing the differences between Bly’s subjects and her readers. This approach stands in sharp contrast to a similar insider’s account of the asylum by a male writer, W. H. Davenport, who, two decades earlier, had published in *Harper’s* magazine an intimate glimpse at Blackwell’s Island. Davenport’s piece, while laudatory of the asylum itself, paints a harsher portrait than Bly’s of the physical manifestations of insanity in the faces and personalities of the residents. This common subject matter, presented by both authors as an eyewitness account, nevertheless produces two disparate versions of the asylum and thus illustrates the importance of Bly’s genre (the stunt report) and her rhetorical context (the sentimental tradition). Bly, drawing upon the tropes of sentimental fiction, produces a personal account of the island that tells the stories of its inhabitants while Davenport,

working neither from the context of the investigative report nor from the sentimental tradition, focuses on the place itself. Fundamentally, Bly and Davenport record the same basic facts; the difference in meaning is produced by the way that the articles are constructed. Because Bly's portrait of Blackwell's island is a collection of individual stories, including her own, her audience, attuned to poetics of sympathy, reads into Bly's piece a tale of moral outrage even as the same or similar details in Davenport's account construct a fond portrait, even a defense, of the notorious asylum. Though Bly and Davenport were not in direct dialogue with one another, this comparison demonstrates the power of affective rhetoric as a political tool.

“Romance Upon Romance”

Published twenty-one years after Fuller's *Tribune* piece on Blackwell's Island, ten years after Fern's *Ledger* series, and twenty-one years before Bly's *World* scoop, W.H. Davenport's article “Blackwell's Island Lunatic Asylum” in the February, 1866, issue of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, is neither a stunt report nor an exposé. It may be a response to the numerous “patient exposés” and “legislative investigations” published during the 1850s and 1860s that contributed to a “rising chorus of criticism” against asylums increasingly unable to deal with overcrowding.¹⁴⁰ Though the piece lacks the sensationalism on which Bly's madhouse series would capitalize two decades later, Davenport's description of the grounds, the routines, and the residents of the Island provides the reader with a portrait of Blackwell's Island unavailable to the average

¹⁴⁰ Grob, 265; 175. Davenport also contributed articles to *Harper's* on “The Workhouse at Blackwell's Island” [November, 1866] and “The Nurseries on Randall's Island” [December, 1867].

“sight-seer” “joyful at having ‘done’ the Lunatic Asylum” (278-9).¹⁴¹ It is not, however, a personalized account—the author pointedly offers no explanation of the “affection” that placed him in the asylum, which he mentions only “to show that [he has] ample means of seeing the details” of the facility. Unlike Bly (or even Fern), Davenport refrains from sharing his personal experiences, choosing instead to offer a detailed look at the infrastructure of the Island and at some of its more interesting characters.

Davenport’s depiction differs significantly from the portrait Bly would provide two decades later. Conditions that were for Davenport a logical element of life in a public charity, and are stated simply and without affect, inspire emotions of outrage, disgust, fear, or pity in Bly, whose article provides not only an account of what she sees but describes the sensations and emotions she experiences as well. Whereas Davenport presents a happy microcosm of society with its own economy, recreation, and opportunity for recuperation and eventual release, Bly’s madhouse is characterized by physical abuse, neglect, and corruption, and she suggests that many women are wrongfully committed and have little hope of ever leaving. Nevertheless, the two authors take up many of the same subjects. The food, the décor, the chain of command, and descriptions of individual inmates make up the subject matter of both pieces. Even allowing for the fact that conditions at the asylum had certainly deteriorated in the two decades separating Davenport’s and Bly’s respective incarcerations, during which time the population at the

¹⁴¹ [W.H. Davenport], “Blackwell’s Island Lunatic Asylum,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, February, 1866, 273. All subsequent page references are cited parenthetically in the text.

facilities doubled from 800 patients overall in 1866 to 1600 by 1887, many of the essential factual details remain consistent between the two accounts.¹⁴²

Davenport's description of the typical trajectory of an inmate from arrest to asylum is precisely the procedure by which Bly will get herself sent to the Island twenty-one years later: "friendless or poor" they "arrive, committed by the city magistrates [...] Manifesting dangerous symptoms in the street, they are arrested by the police, brought to the station-house, thence to the Tombs; the physicians there file a certificate, and the steamboat transfers them to the Lunatic Asylum" (277). The two authors' accounts of life once inside the asylum is also quite similar. For example, essentially they agree upon the content—if not the quality—of the food served there. Davenport writes:

The food [...] consists mostly of soup with spoon meat, the impracticability of allowing the insane the use of knives and forks rendering this essential. The bill of fare is not luxurious, though better than in other institutions upon the Island. Beef soup, really meriting great commendation, is served three times weekly for dinner; mutton and salt beef once. The soup is thickened with Indian meal, and contains a variety of vegetables. Occasionally, in the season, other vegetables, such as radishes, accompany the main dish; but this is seldom. The bread is very good, and of all edibles furnished there is always an abundance. Friday is a black day with those of squeamish stomachs, for mush and molasses is then provided instead of soup. The breakfast is composed of bread and coffee; the supper of bread, butter, and tea.

¹⁴² Davenport and Bly report these statistics in their respective articles [Davenport, 275; Bly "Inside," 25]. Grob notes that the problem of overcrowding was exacerbated by the diminished effectiveness of treatment in the increasingly crowded conditions. With less individual attention to patients, cure rates went down, making the problem worse [Grob, 308]. Davenport, a patient at the Island prior to 1866, found Blackwell's Island to be a therapeutic location, but by the time of Bly's incarceration the population was too large, and the various ailments too numerous, for individualized treatment. Although the number of patients at Blackwell's Island nearly doubled between 1865 and 1875, from 677 to 1069, the number of patients "discharged as recovered" stayed almost exactly the same: 110 and 109, respectively [Grob, 385]. It is also worth noting that by the 1870s, the asylum at Blackwell's Island served a population of women only [Grob, 225].

Bly finds the fare at the asylum inedible. Though her opinion of the food contradicts Davenport's account, the basic menu seems to be similar with breakfast consisting of:

a bowl of cold tea, a slice of buttered bread and a saucer of oatmeal, with molasses on it, for each patient. I was hungry, but the food would not down. I asked for unbuttered bread and was given it. I cannot tell you of anything which is the same dirty black color. It was hard, and in places nothing more than dried dough. I found a spider in my slice, so I did not eat it. I tried the oatmeal and molasses, but it was wretched, and so I endeavored, but without much show of success, to choke down the tea (9).

Unable to eat anything at breakfast or at the previous night's supper, which had consisted of "pinkish-looking stuff which the patients called tea [...] weak as water," buttered bread, and prunes, Bly reports being hungry enough to eat anything at dinner. There she found, "soup, and on a plate was one cold boiled potato and chunk of beef, which, on investigation, proved to be slightly spoiled. There were no knives or forks, and the patients looked fairly savage as they took the tough beef in their fingers and pulled in opposition to their teeth."

Bly fails to acknowledge, as Davenport does, that knives and forks might be a bad idea in an asylum, and her distress at the lack of amenities in the dining room provides one of many clues throughout the piece that Bly, though she may be able to fool the doctors into believing otherwise, does not fit in with the lunatics. If she realizes the reason for keeping forks and knives out of the hands of the insane, she does not mention it, instead adding the lack of proper flatware to her lengthy list of the ways the inmates are mistreated. Additionally, Bly notes that the table is "uncovered and uninviting" and instead of chairs is equipped with benches, "and over these [patients] had to crawl in order to face the table." The lack of cutlery is apparently as insulting to Bly as the spoiled food, and the *World* gives the same billing to the lack of amenities as it does to

the bad food and even to the physical abuse of patients. “No Knives nor Forks—Food Unsalted and Unfit” gets slightly higher placement in the lengthy subhead of the story than “Holding Them Under Water Until Half Drowned.”

In other ways, too, Bly and Davenport’s stories corroborate one another, even as their interpretations differ. Davenport had reported without additional comment that “[t]he tilling of the land, like most of the work about the Asylum, is done by patients under the guidance of a paid official,” as is “sweeping and dusting the boards daily, and thoroughly scrubbing them once a week” (275, 278). But Bly is disappointed to learn that the patients, and not paid employees, are expected to do much of the upkeep around the asylum:

After we were back to the sitting-room a number of women were ordered to make the beds, and some of the patients were put to scrubbing and others given different duties which covered all the work in the hall. It is not the attendants who keep the institution so nice for the poor patients, as I had always thought, but the patients, who do it all themselves—even to cleaning the nurses’ bedrooms and caring for their clothing.”

Likewise, while Bly criticizes the asylum’s practices of treating insomnia with laudanum, forcing the inmates to sit quietly for hours, and making frequent, disruptive bed checks at night, Davenport sees “sedatives and tonics, the freedom from active excitements, and the establishment of correct habits” as “treatment on which reliance is placed for cure” (277). The standard issue calico dress that Bly found so laughable is, to Davenport, a great improvement over “the striped cloth resembling that upon convicts in other buildings on the Island” formerly given to the patients, and makes sense given the “destructive natures” of some patients “necessitating stronger and less valuable attire” (276).

In Davenport’s piece, the characters of Blackwell’s Island make up part of the scenery, and function much like his description of the buildings and grounds, creating a

composite picture of the Island itself. Bly, on the other hand, includes stories of the other inmates to build a record of abuse at the Island and to serve as an extension of her own sensory experience. She feels sympathy for the women she describes, and their sufferings take the place of her own when pursuing the stunt any further proves too dangerous. Bly's fellow inmates, therefore, are not portrayed as anomalies or freaks, and instead are presented as a community of women not too different from those in the outside world, and they bear few symptoms of insanity—physical or otherwise.

Davenport's depiction of patients—both in his detailed descriptions and in his pen and ink illustrations that accompany the article—on the other hand, are of patients who are unquestionably disturbed. Their disease is manifest in their actions and in their physical presence: they are laughable, dirty—physically and, often, sexually—and prone to behavior that clearly marks them as deranged.

The pathology of insanity looks quite different in the two accounts. This difference is particularly visible in the way in which Davenport portrays the insanity in female inmates: "It would seem, from a general survey of the inmates, that the demon of insanity prefers the most repelling abode. The 'fair' sex is really represented but three or four times among the five or six hundred women in the Institution [...] If a painter wished to depict the Witch Scene in Macbeth he would here find the finest models" (279). As an example, Davenport cites Ann Barry, whose "grotesque bulk," "huge misshapen body," "deep bass voice," and "arms and hands that would astonish a prize-fighter" stand in sharp contrast to the delicate, feminine inmates Bly describes (279). Davenport singles out another inmate as being a "wrinkled hag" and still another of having "preternatural ugliness" (282).

Of the examples Davenport cites who do display feminine characteristics, their femininity is made grotesque, such as in the case of Norah whose giggles and bashfulness “would be very pretty in a child” but are “supremely ludicrous in the forty-five years Norah numbers,” or the case of “Moonshine” who, dirty, greasy, and gnawing on a bone, attempts repeatedly to kiss the author with a mouth that “expands in a loving leer” (279, 282). Whereas in Bly’s account it is the nurses who curse and make inappropriate sexual remarks, in Davenport’s piece this anti-social behavior is pursued by the inmates. Moonshine and one Fanny L. are rivals for the affection of one of the doctors, and Fanny, formerly “one of the celebrities of the demi-monde” sits outside the doctor’s door “pouring forth melody after melody” and making for him “bouquets of weeds” (283). Other grotesque figures he describes include the “Queen” who wears a crown of flowers and rags and Miss B., an “old maid” who protects her complexion while outdoors with a homemade pasteboard mask (280-81). Miss B. is also known for her “dire revelations of the fiendish corruptions and abuses that exist in the Asylum,” but though her “discourse is coherent, and she is generally judged sane by those who talk to her,” Davenport insists that she is prone to exaggeration and delusions of persecution and should not, in fact, be believed (281).

Davenport criticizes the willingness of the uninitiated to believe such tales and the suspicion of the typical visitor to the asylum that “[r]omance upon romance lies in the past of the unfortunate patients,” and he indicts the prurient impulse to believe so quickly in the injustice of their suffering:

The public ear would listen with credulity, I suspect, to dire tales of cruelty practiced by the officers. I can not honestly oblige it. Abuses to a limited degree unquestionably exist, and ever must, in this Institution and others of like character. While human nature is as it is, provocations of an exasperating

description can not be overlooked at all times without a strength of intellect that is rare. Patients are occasionally struck by the attendants, but the head physician and his educated assistants do their utmost to prevent all such manifestations of impatience. They are gentlemen of heart and mind, and their subordinates, beneath them in cultivation, have the kindness of disposition, the compassionate feelings of the ordinary man. (293-4)

As to the wrongful imprisonment of those who tell such tales, that, too, Davenport suggests is a product of sensational fiction: “The public mind, filled with the fictions of novel writers, indulges the notion that in all insane asylums persons of perfect sanity are unjustly imprisoned against their will [...] They incite pity which to a certain extent can not be shown them” (293).¹⁴³

More than just a difference of opinion, these fundamental differences between Bly’s and Davenport’s pieces point to the feminist rhetoric at the heart of Bly’s sensational stunt report. Bly incorporates rhetoric which pays greater attention to affect, personal experience, and a plurality of voices. At stake is the issue of women’s autonomy and empowerment, and the differences in the two authors’ approaches reflect the conflicting symbolic roles the asylum played in nineteenth century culture. As Benjamin Reiss argues, “institutionalization figured both as the fulfillment of a democratic ideal of universal mental health and as the underside of that ideal, characterized by irrationality, physical constraint, and abuse of power.”¹⁴⁴ This conflict, as a comparison of Bly’s and Davenport’s pieces shows, is particularly apparent when considered in terms of gender—the constraint and powerlessness that characterized the modern asylum is an extreme illustration of the imaginary ideals of the domestic sphere.

¹⁴³ For a selection of texts in which this trope may be found, see Benjamin Reiss, Chapter Six. [*Theatres of Madness: Insane Asylums and Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008)].

¹⁴⁴ Reiss, 19.

Davenport writes off as “romance” the threat of wrongful imprisonment, but the incarceration of sane women and their inability to secure their own release is the common theme—and the greatest horror—running through Bly’s story.

It turns out that Bly’s story is not only about her personal experience among lunatics, but is also a warning about the dangers women face at the hands of doctors, bureaucrats, and husbands. If Bly’s self-positioning as a plucky and pretty young woman whose tastes are too refined for the treatment she receives seems, at times, almost silly in its self-absorption, it is nevertheless a reminder of what makes Bly powerful in a situation of powerlessness. Women, she argues, cannot afford to go “into the madhouse,” or they will never make it out.

“If there is any one who can ferret out a mystery it is a reporter”

Despite Davenport’s claim that the issue of wrongful incarceration was merely a trope of fiction and not typical of the actual asylum population, when Bly wrote her exposé in 1887, husbands in all but four states had the legal right to commit their wives to asylums against the woman’s will and without a public hearing.¹⁴⁵ In this context, Davenport’s estimates regarding the demographics of Blackwell’s Island are particularly interesting: “Of male patients who are single there are more than of those who are married, while with females it is the reverse. The female majority in respect to age lies

¹⁴⁵ Only Illinois legally protected women from committal without a fair trial; laws in Massachusetts, Maine, and Iowa also offered some protection, though these laws contained loopholes reducing their efficacy. [John Chynoweth Burnham, “Packard, Elizabeth Parsons Ware,” in *Notable American Women 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 3, ed. Edward T. James (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 1].

with those between 30 and 40 years” (276). An extensive body of literature also documents cases of husbands committing healthy wives to asylums against their wills.¹⁴⁶

For example, feminist historian Ida Husted Harper relates how, in 1860 (six years before Davenport’s article), Susan B. Anthony unsuccessfully worked to help a woman whose husband had her committed after she confronted him about his infidelity. After spending more than a year in an asylum, the woman attempted to leave her husband and take with her one of their three children. Though she got the testimony of a doctor affirming her sanity, she had no legal rights to the child or to the money from her own writing career, and, despite Anthony’s advocacy, the woman was eventually compelled to give up the child or risk being returned to the asylum.¹⁴⁷

Activist Elizabeth Parsons Ware Packard relates a similar experience in *Modern Persecution, or Insane Asylums Unveiled* (1873), in which she describes the three years she spent in an insane asylum after being committed against her will by her husband for disagreeing with him on religious doctrine. Volume two of the book recounts her legal struggle afterward to re-establish her sanity in the courts (she was successful), reclaim custody of her children, and advocate for the rights of both women and the insane against “the legalized use of an autocratic power” wielded by husbands and asylum administrators.¹⁴⁸ “By aligning ‘the Husband’ with ‘the Superintendent,’” Reiss suggests, “Packard marked the asylum as a bulwark of American patriarchy that was

¹⁴⁶ See note 143 above.

¹⁴⁷ Ida Husted Harper, *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony*, vol. 2 (Indianapolis: The Hollenbeck Press, 1898), 200-205. Nellie Bly would interview Susan B. Anthony in 1896, a candid interview in which Anthony told Bly that although she had been in love “a thousand times” she never married because she never felt she could give up her “life of freedom” [quoted in Kroeger, 285].

¹⁴⁸ Elizabeth Parsons Ware Packard, *Modern Persecution or Insane Asylums Unveiled* (1873; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1973), xxxii.

aligned with the institution of marriage,” and her campaigns for asylum reform served also to promote feminist reforms of laws governing marriage.¹⁴⁹

Fanny Fern also wrote about the issue in a column for *True Flag* (May 8, 1852) and again in her autobiographical novel *Ruth Hall* (1854). Her source material remains unknown, and the accounts may be fictional, but Fern’s exempla tell a story similar to Anthony’s, Packard’s, and Bly’s. Both Mary Lee (in the *True Flag* column) and Mary Leon (in *Ruth Hall*) are at the mercy of husbands who place them in an asylum, ostensibly for their health, and take off for the Continent. In the novel, Ruth learns that the most recent casualty at the local asylum is an old friend of hers whose husband had abandoned her there. Ruth asks to view the body, and on the way down the corridor she passes another woman, who screams, the matron explains, because “her husband ran away from her and carried off her child with him, to spite her [...] She went to law about the child, and the law, you see as it generally is, was on the man’s side.”¹⁵⁰ Ruth, who—like Fern herself (and Packard, and Anthony’s protégée)—must fight for custody of her own children, is affected by the tale to such a degree that the matron mistakes Ruth’s physical, sympathetic response—shaking and an inability to walk any further—for fear. When she is able to continue onward and finally views the body of her dead friend, it turns out that the matron has in her pocket a note scribbled by the patient at the last—a note to Ruth. The note reads, “I am not crazy, Ruth, no no,—but I shall be; the air of

¹⁴⁹ Reiss, 173.

¹⁵⁰ Fanny Fern, *Ruth Hall and Other Writings* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 111.

this place stifles me; I grow weaker—weaker. I cannot die here; for the love of heaven, dear Ruth, come and take me away.”¹⁵¹

Ruth, of course, is too late to save her friend, and the woman screaming for her stolen child, too, is beyond help. At the mercy of cruel husbands, the women are imprisoned until they either actually do lose their minds or, in the case of Mary Leon, their lives. The short episode, centrally located in the novel, criticizes a society whose laws allow husbands complete authority over their wives and default custody of any children, and Ruth will resist that authority by making enough money as a newspaper writer to support her children and to avoid matrimony altogether. The passage features several tropes of sensational fiction: gloomy passageways, coincidence, and the discovery of a revelatory letter, but the fate of Mary Leon is not merely an exciting subplot in the episodic novel. The married woman serves as a foil for Ruth who, despite her relatives’ attempts to control her, maintains her autonomy through financial independence achieved through her career as a writer. In Fern’s fiction as well as in her newspaper column, the risk of wrongful incarceration in an asylum illustrates the need to maintain one’s autonomy, and the trope takes on a similar function in Bly’s madhouse exposé.

When Bly reports the cases of so many supposedly sane women in her madhouse series, she tells a frightening, but familiar, story. Though Davenport is correct that such tales make for good reading, Bly’s warning of abuses that turn normal, if exhausted, wives and mothers into lunatics demonstrates the importance of Bly’s work as a reflection of a society in which women were ill-equipped to defend themselves from legal persecution. Bly’s reluctance to go to the Lodge and the Retreat is necessary for her real

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

safety and the maintenance of her virginal writerly persona, but it also demonstrates a keen awareness of the powerlessness of women adrift in the system—even a woman whose imprisonment is merely part of a stunt. The real threat to women in the asylum is not poor food and drafty rooms but captivity.

Indeed, Bly's madhouse series shares some important similarities with the older genre of the captivity narrative. Reiss points out that "coincident with the rise of the asylum movement in the nineteenth century was the rise of a new genre of captivity narrative: that of the patient wrongfully deemed insane who, upon release from an asylum, bravely exposes the institution that deprived him or her of the rights of an American citizen."¹⁵² He suggests that Bly's book-length account of her Blackwell's Island stay, *Ten Days in a Mad-House* (1887), is one of these "developing seeds of a protest tradition [...] driven by a desire either to reform or to dismantle the power of psychiatric hospitals," but the power structure Bly seeks to reform is further-reaching than the wards at Blackwell's Island. Like Packard's, Bly's target is the domination of women by husbands and bureaucrats, and the narrative of her incarceration allows her a forum in which to expose this larger social problem.¹⁵³

As Christopher Castiglia notes, the captivity narrative gives a recognizable structure to the "culturally unnamable," including "confinement within the home [and] enforced economic dependence," and it allows an audience of enthusiastic readers to "enter a community of fellow 'captives'" through the stories.¹⁵⁴ Bly's madhouse series

¹⁵² Reiss, 169.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁵⁴ Christopher Castiglia, *Bound and Determined: Captivity, Culture-Crossing, and White Womanhood from Mary Rowlandson to Patty Hearst* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 4.

does similar work. Although Bly goes into the asylum of her own volition, the experiences she relates—and the stories she tells of her fellow captives who are there against their will—“speak the experiences of those marginalized by the dominant national language.”¹⁵⁵ As Elaine Showalter and other feminist scholars have long argued, madness itself is gendered feminine, and the ravings of the mad represent “the desperate communication of the powerless.”¹⁵⁶ Bly’s audience shares the vicarious thrill not only of the specific physical sensations and dangers that Bly describes but the larger, unspoken threat that any woman is, essentially, powerless in the American legal system. Bly, who only feigns madness, thus re-writes the power narrative. For that reason, it is important that Bly’s fellow victims should be sane—or at least should appear sane in her stories, and the characters in Bly’s account thus portray an image of victimization that has little in common with the ugly pathology of insanity that Davenport describes.

Bly’s fulfillment of a romanticized image in her own disguise of insanity—which elicited such sympathy from Judge Duffy and others—helps explain why Bly attracted so much attention herself from crowds, from the police court, from reporters and even from the staff and residents of Bellevue and Blackwell’s Island, and why her piece was so successful. By ignoring the uglier realities that marked the bodies of the inmates of the Lodge and the Retreat, Bly is able to generate interest and sympathy from her audience. Bly’s report is already indebted to conventions of women’s writing in its rejection of objectivity and the scientific method in favor of a hyperbolic sentimentality, so it makes

¹⁵⁵ Castiglia, 12.

¹⁵⁶ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 5.

sense that Bly's portrayal of insanity itself would draw from the conventions of fiction and storytelling as well.

Bly claims that her experience with insanity is taken solely from books, and while she "had some faith" in her "ability as an actress" she denies any personal experience with madness: "I had never been near insane persons before in my life and had not the faintest idea of what their actions were like." In order to prepare for the task of outwitting the "learned physicians" Bly turns to depictions of insanity drawn from her reading: "I remembered all I had read of the doings of crazy people, how first of all they must have staring eyes, and so I opened mine as wide as possible and stared unblinkingly at my own reflection." Bly further prepares by reading "snatches of improbable and impossible ghost stories" to put herself "in a fit mood for [her] mission." Though, as I have suggested above, Bly may indeed have been familiar with the professional literature of insanity, to her readers she acknowledges only her debt to fictional portrayals of madness. Bly ostensibly draws her inspiration for looking insane from "the look which maidens wear in pictures entitled 'Dreaming,'" and takes off on her mission conforming to portraits of insanity found in art and fiction rather than those recorded in the medical literature—a necessary step in her strategy not to be too good at playing insane and one that maintains the necessary fictionality of the stunt.

Her ability to tell a good story—to the police, judge, and doctors as well as to her *World* audience—is the key to the success of Bly's experiment. Bly's articles, consisting of her detailed personal narrative and the untold stories of other women, use storytelling (rather than other means of persuasion) as the means of exploring a controversial issue. In Bly's metanarrative, writing proves to be a powerful tool, not only in the end product of

the exposé itself, but as an important element of the story-within-a-story that Bly creates. Bly's creation of the Nellie Brown persona is both a fictional character and an alter ego of her professional self. As part of her act to convince others of her insanity, she scribbles in a notebook that she had brought with her on her adventure "for the purpose of making memoranda" for the article she plans to write and in which to write "utter nonsense for inquisitive scientists."

The staff at Blackwell's Island, who ultimately confiscate the notebook, prove unable to separate the journalist's notes from the incoherent ramblings of a supposedly crazy mind, and indeed, Bly's notes are no threat to her discovery, for as she claims, "the more sanely I talked and acted the crazier I was thought to be." The notebook is an important reminder of Bly's professionalism, and when it is taken from her she is "very anxious to get it to make notes in" and tells the nurse "quite truthfully" that it "helps [her] remember things." She is unable to get the notebook and is "advised to fight against the imaginations of [her] brain" by a bureaucratic system that continuously misreads her. The writer triumphs in the end, and her articles fulfill Judge Duffy's own unconsciously prescient statement that "in a few days [...] she will be able to tell us a story that will be startling." Bly's unique status as journalist gives her an opportunity that the other women in the asylum do not have: to set the record straight.

Not surprisingly, in Bly's account, the only professionals who might not be fooled by her play-acting are her fellow reporters. The reporters, whose craft is based on intuition and storytelling, exhibit a different kind of expert knowledge than the police, judge, and doctors who fall for Bly's ruse. When Bly is first taken to the police court, Judge Duffy, unable to get any information out of Bly declares, "I wish the reporters

were here [...] they would be able to find out something about her.” Bly “got very much frightened at this, for if there is any one who can ferret out a mystery it is a reporter,” and she claims that she “would rather face a mass of expert doctors, policemen and detectives than two bright specimens of [her own] craft.” Even the doctors recognize the reporters’ unique brand of expertise; the doctor at Bellevue allows Bly to be interviewed by reporters because “they would be of assistance in finding some clue as to [Bly’s] identity.” Unlike the doctors, whom Bly will accuse of asking only a set of standard questions that prove ineffective in diagnosing insanity, the reporters rely on feelings and intuition: they “were very kind and nice [...] and very gentle in all their questionings.” The reporters understand the importance of the personal and the pathetic—qualities that Bly portrays herself as exhibiting as she conducts interviews of her own with her fellow inmates.

Ultimately, Bly’s madhouse series is about the importance of having a public voice. Her piece of investigative journalism undermines not only the system that imprisons and silences sane women against their will, but it undermines the conventions that separated journalism and other forms of women’s writing. By using conventions of fiction and storytelling to present an investigative report, she established new generic conventions, creating a brand of reporting that tapped into public demand for the sensational. The result was a synthesis of the investigative report and the rhetoric of feminist discourse into a new journalistic idiom. The stunt report gave a public voice to marginalized groups—not just the women of Blackwell’s Island, but also the woman reporter—and made her story a recognizable and desirable commodity.

End of an Era

The success of Bly's madhouse series guaranteed her a regular spot in the Sunday feature section of the *World*, with her name always appearing in the headline and the stories often accompanied by McDougall's illustrations of the lithe and fashionable writer. Over the next two years Bly pursued many other stunts, including exposés of unsanitary practices at a public medical clinic, corruption at an adoption agency, and the plight of "white slaves" in one of the city's many factories. The humor magazine *Puck* warned: "When a charming young lady comes into your office and smilingly announces she wants to ask you a few questions regarding the possibility of improving New York's moral tone, don't stop to parley. Just say, 'Excuse me, Nellie Bly,' and shin down the fire escape."¹⁵⁷ Bly's ultimate stunt came in the fall of 1889 and early winter of 1890 when she successfully circumnavigated the globe in seventy-two days, beating the record of Jules Verne's fictional Phileas Fogg (and outpacing a rival *Cosmopolitan* reporter). With 280,340 papers sold on the day of her return, she also beat previous circulation records at the *World*, and her name and image appeared on trading cards, advertisements, and even a board game.¹⁵⁸

Despite her popular success, Bly felt unappreciated by Pulitzer, and after her globetrotting stunt she left the *World*. The trip around the world represented not only the possibility of speedy modern travel for a woman on her own but also, as a result, the apex of interest in the daring single woman placing herself in harm's way. If Bly could successfully navigate a course—alone—around the world, "roasted and frozen" on "English boats, on burros, on jinrickshas [*sic*], in bullock carts, in catamarans, sampans,

¹⁵⁷ quoted in Kroeger, 121.

¹⁵⁸ Kroeger, 173.

gherrys [*sic*] and half a dozen other conveyances peculiar to Eastern countries” with little more than a handbag, then the darker corners of New York City were hardly a challenge.¹⁵⁹ Stunt reporting, itself, was on the wane. The *World*, anxious to avoid the expense of star reporters like Bly, began publishing all stunt reports under a single pseudonym, a decision that Lutes suggests “reduced the appeal of stunt reporting itself by imposing a group-think mentality on a genre that depended on idiosyncratic, individualized reportage” (33). These pseudonymous stunt reports of the early 1890s by Bly’s imitators lacked the personality of Bly’s earlier work and audiences were a bit bored with the “long-winded Sunday creatures.”¹⁶⁰ Bly remained a celebrity, embarking on a successful lecture tour, but the first phase of her career was decidedly over, and though she returned to news writing several times over the next two decades, it was for Pulitzer’s biggest rival, William Randolph Hearst and the *New York Evening Journal* that Bly eventually re-invented herself and her career.

When Bly returned to news writing in 1912, it was a new century, and in the age of photography and cynicism the now-forty-something writer had to reinvent the ethos of girlish pluck and sentimentality that had served her so well in previous decades. She had built her success playing the principal role in her own sentimental fictions, but Bly’s increasing age and the decreasing popularity of those old tropes made her previously successful formula obsolete. Nevertheless, Bly’s work for the *Journal* as a political reporter, war correspondent, and, later, as an activist, indicates that stunt reporting was not simply a trend that flared up and flamed out.

¹⁵⁹ Nellie Bly “From Jersey Back to Jersey,” *New York World*, January 26, 1890.

¹⁶⁰ quoted in Kroeger, 241.

The tradition of the woman writer whose expertise was based on sympathy and sensation and who gave voice to the voiceless is visible in Bly's later work as well. In Chapter Three I will explore Bly's re-invention of herself as a war correspondent and how her war journalism owes a debt to the literary forms that shaped her early career. In Bly's dispatches from Austria-Hungary during World War I we can see the continuation of the feminist and feminine discourse that characterized women's writing in the nineteenth-century popular press, and Bly's war correspondence contradicts the standard narrative that claims objectivity and impersonality as the defining characteristics of modern journalism.

CHAPTER THREE:
NELLIE BLY, WAR CORRESPONDENT

In Chapter Two I argued that Bly’s madhouse series used tropes of fiction, particularly sentimental fiction and the captivity narrative, as an alternative to objective reporting—a rhetorical move that made Bly’s reformist agenda palatable to an audience that recognized such tropes as feminine even as the subject matter shifted from the domestic to the public sphere. In this chapter, I examine Bly’s war correspondence to the *New York Evening Journal* from Austria-Hungary and show that her work as a war correspondent shares a common methodology with her work as a stunt reporter. Again Bly relies on rhetorical strategies typically associated with women’s writing to present an alternative portrait of the war that rejects objectivity and the authority of experts in favor of an emotional and personalized response to the suffering of women, children, infantrymen, and the poor. Bly uses her exceptional presence as a woman in male spaces—in the trenches and in the pages of the newspaper itself—to speak for other marginalized groups. In particular, Bly once again relies on storytelling, affect and sentiment to redirect the reader’s gaze away from combat and toward the effects of war on the bodies and families of common people.

“Nellie Bly on the Battlefield: Hides in Trenches as Russ Shells Rain About Her”

A new environment of realism, objectivity, and succinctness awaited Bly when she returned to journalism at the *New York Evening Journal* in 1912 after a 17-year hiatus.¹⁶¹ William Randolph Hearst had purchased the struggling *New York Morning*

¹⁶¹ Bly left the *World* in 1890 following her round-the-world stunt. She returned to the paper in 1893, not as a stunt girl but as a political reporter who specialized in hard-to-get personal interviews. In 1895 she married and again quit journalism. I am once again

Journal in 1895 and quickly turned it into the *World*'s biggest competitor by imitating Pulitzer's successful New Journalism formula, even leasing office space in the *World*'s own headquarters.¹⁶² In addition to the sensational appeal of sex and violence already characteristic of the New Journalism, the so-called "yellow journalism" of the Pulitzer-Hearst circulation wars used dubious techniques such as "scare-heads"—large, blaring headlines that lent false sense of urgency to mundane news—and other, even shadier practices, such as faked photos and phony interviews. Yellow journalism, if unethical, was certainly successful, and during the buildup to the Spanish-American war—when the papers implored readers to "Remember the Maine!"—circulation at the *Journal* and the *World* passed the one-million mark—720,000 more readers than had followed Bly's trip around the world.¹⁶³

But a backlash to such practices soon followed, and though newspapers would always compete for circulation, the top papers began turning away from the jingoism and fear-mongering that had previously guided their editorial policy. The evolution of newspapers from "personal organ" to "industrial institution" contributed to the change, and "[t]he roar of double-octuple presses drowned out the voice, often shrill and always insistent, of the old-time editor."¹⁶⁴ Gone were the days of one editor controlling the trajectory of the paper. The previous slogan of the *Journal*, "While Others Talk, the

indebted to Brooke Kroeger's meticulous research from which all biographical information is gleaned *passim* unless otherwise noted.

¹⁶² Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years 1690 to 1940* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), 521-5. For a definition of New Journalism see note 36 above. Hearst also hired away Pulitzer's entire Sunday staff, including comics artist Richard Outcault, whose "Yellow Kid" character inspired the moniker "yellow journalism," the term that came to stand for the brand of journalism that drove the Hearst-Pulitzer circulation wars.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 537.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 547.

Journal Acts,”—touting its various “crusades” (a practice also known pejoratively as “muckraking”)—had been scrapped, and the ostensible mission of the newspapers had changed. They no longer purported to serve as the city’s conscience but as an impartial (in theory if not always in practice) record of events.

Coinciding with advances in technology and the rise of the wire services, the reach of the newspapers had also become more global, and papers increasingly stationed correspondents abroad to report on foreign wars.¹⁶⁵ Photographs began to replace illustrations, and a new brand of prose—featuring short sentences and simple language—came into fashion.¹⁶⁶ Another significant change was the increased number of female reporters. No longer an anomalous presence in the paper, women were frequently assigned to cover such decidedly un-feminine beats as murder trials, prize fights, even foreign wars.¹⁶⁷ It was this new environment of realism, objectivity, and succinctness that awaited Bly when she returned to journalism.

Bly set out for Vienna in August, 1914, the same month that Austria invaded Serbia. Her original intention was not to report on the war but to seek foreign investors for her troubled steel company and to place an ocean between herself and her legal problems.¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the move placed her where she best liked to be—in the midst of interesting happenings. If personal business had brought her to Europe, it was the chance to take her affinity for dangerous field reporting to the next level that kept her there. Bly contacted well-connected friends, and, as usual, her charm and stubbornness secured the special favors necessary to make her the first woman correspondent to go to

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 580.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 581.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 599.

¹⁶⁸ Kroeger, 385; 392.

the Austrian front.¹⁶⁹ When the small party of journalists set out for the Russian and Serbian firing lines in October, Bly was one of only four foreign correspondents authorized to cover the war.¹⁷⁰ Bly's dispatches, though they ran months behind thanks to slow mails in Europe and delays with the censors, were an exclusive scoop for the *Journal* and the Hearst-owned INS newswire. The first installment ran on the front page of the paper on December 4, 1914, and was accompanied by a large, embellished photograph of Bly.

Initially only one other American correspondent was at work in Austria, and only Bly offered the personal narratives and the star power behind her still-famous name.¹⁷¹ By this time Bly's photo made it perfectly clear that she was no longer a "girl," though she is still attractive and fashionably dressed, and the *Journal* billed her as a "Famous Woman Writer."¹⁷² In the prominent headlines given to her pieces, the focus is on her unique perspective, and headlines typically direct the reader to Bly's gaze, billing the stories as some instantiation of "Nellie Bly Sees": "Nellie Bly Sees Maimed," "Nellie Bly at Front: Sees Horrors of War," "Nellie Bly Witnesses Shooting of Many Spies," "Nellie Bly At Front: Sees Surgeons Work," "Nellie Bly at Front: Sees Serbs Hidden in Trenches: Inspects Rifle Caves," "Nellie Bly at Front: Finds Captives Shocking Sight: Sees Serbians Held Prisoners," and "Nellie Bly at Front: Sees Dying Soldiers," among others. Though Bly was prone to exaggeration, the danger Bly faced on the Russian and Serbian firing lines, and in her travels between them, was real enough. Five of Bly's

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 393-4.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 397.

¹⁷¹ The other American was William G. Shepherd for United Press. Kroeger, 396.

¹⁷² See, for example, "5 of Bly Party Die in Battle," *The New York Evening Journal*, December 9, 1914.

colleagues were killed near the garrison at Przemyśl where Bly and the rest of her party “were on ground plainly visible to the Russians, who fire as soon as they see anything move.”¹⁷³ As she moved from trench to trench she was, at any moment, “expecting a Russian bullet.”¹⁷⁴

Her predecessors during the Spanish-American war and other conflicts, men who were driven to fierce competition by the circulation wars and new technologies like the telegraph, which allowed for the almost instant transmission of a scoop, sought to make foreign wars into adventure stories—the bloodier the better. In one scholar’s estimation these writers “showed little humanity and no historical perspective.”¹⁷⁵ Bly’s work skewed in the opposite direction—compassionate at the expense of its newsworthiness. Bly’s biographer, Brooke Kroeger, deems Bly’s war correspondence “banal” and “oblivious to the significant overview” even as it is “sensitive [...] reflective, compassionate.”¹⁷⁶ Indeed Bly’s first report, which describes the beginning of her journey, is banal in much of its detail: the light in her hotel room is burned out, the stairs are dirty, and at the coffee house where she breakfasts the waitress uses a dirty rag to clean the table. Throughout her career as a war correspondent Bly would continue to include reviews of her meals and hotel stays even in stories about the worst atrocities.

¹⁷³ “5 of Bly Party”; Nellie Bly, “Nellie Bly on the Battlefield: Hides in Trenches as Russ Shells Rain About Her: Soldiers Five Days Without Food,” *The New York Evening Journal*, December 8, 1914.

¹⁷⁴ Nellie Bly, “Hides in Trenches.”

¹⁷⁵ Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 46. Knightley notes one exception: Moncure D. Conway of the *World*, “who was so sickened by what he saw [during the Franco-Prussian War] that he gave up being a war correspondent altogether” [46].

¹⁷⁶ Kroeger, 398.

Bly's attention to detail reflects a general tendency in women's war writing that Claire M. Tylee identifies as "much wider and more subtle in scope than battle-tales, since [women] are interested in the social context of belligerence and its connection with personal relations and the quality of ordinary life."¹⁷⁷ Tylee suggests that it is this quality—a focus on the everyday and not on the "excitements of battle," from which they were excluded—that has caused women's war writing to go overlooked in studies of war.¹⁷⁸ Bly found significance in these mundane details, and saw the food shortages and worsening hygiene as indicative of problems not just on the home front but within the military infrastructure as well: "one thing, perhaps the first, this war will teach [the Austrians is] the importance of sanitary cleanliness."¹⁷⁹ She is not entirely wrong, as already the muddy roads and scarce provisions were taking a toll on the soldiers and their horses. "In times like this," Bly writes, after seeing horses with broken legs continue to work as pack animals, "one does not lose one's pity, but one realizes one's helplessness. Perhaps that is the most terrible part of the war."

Bly's keen sense of pathos characterizes her dispatches. Though Bly was an alumna of the Pulitzer machine during the heyday of yellow journalism, she took a different approach to her work than her male colleagues who had garnered support for the Spanish-American war and "pandered to the bloodthirsty tastes of the age."¹⁸⁰ In the 24 stories from Austria-Hungary published in the *Journal*, she provides little in the way of hard news, and her narratives are of people, not of events, bringing to American readers a

¹⁷⁷ Claire M. Tylee, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood 1914-64* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990), 13.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁷⁹ Nellie Bly, "Nellie Bly Sends First War Article from Firing Line," *New York Evening Journal*, December 4, 1914.

¹⁸⁰ Knightley, 46.

gritty slice-of-life portrait of war. As she had vowed to do in her first article for the *New York World* nearly thirty years earlier, Bly insists in the first of her Austrian dispatches that she will simply write “the truth,” and that she does so “for the sake of humanity.”¹⁸¹ Her old stunt work had sought to expose the mistreatment and appalling conditions faced by the women and the poor of New York City, and Bly saw a similar exigency in her war correspondence; she meant to show Americans what conditions in Europe were really like for the everyday soldier or peasant, and to do so she needed to experience those conditions first hand.

Though the gimmicky nature of stunt reporting would seem to preclude Bly’s suitability for hard journalism, Bly’s transition to war correspondent is a logical evolution in her career. War correspondence and stunt reporting are not such disparate forms. Bly’s stunt reporting, with its physical risks and the necessity for secrecy and disguise, had already broken the taboos that would prevent women from reporting from the battlefield, and it thus enabled Bly to make the seemingly incongruous switch from one genre to the other. Her presence in the field—like her presence in the paper at all a few decades earlier—was unusual enough to attract the attention of an audience of readers eager to experience unfamiliar dangers vicariously from the perspective of a woman in harm’s way.¹⁸² From the barracks and battlefields of Europe, Bly continued the narrative she

¹⁸¹ Nellie Bly, “Sends First War Article.”

¹⁸² A few other women besides Bly had worked as foreign correspondents. Margaret Fuller is generally regarded as the first American woman war correspondent. In 1918 Peggy Hull would be the first woman war correspondent officially accredited by the U.S. War Department. Though women were working as war reporters before 1918, accreditation allowed them access to military transport, housing, and food. It also allowed the reporter “the privileges of a commissioned officer”—including salute [Wilda M. Smith and Eleanor A. Bogart, *The Wars of Peggy Hull: The Life and Times of a War Correspondent* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1991), 135-7]. By the end of World War

had begun in the public asylums, prisons, and ghettos of New York City: using her celebrity and the tropes of feminine storytelling in order to give voice to those whose stories would otherwise go untold.

“Nellie Bly at Front: Sees Horrors of War”

In her descriptions of trench warfare Bly highlights the “unspeakable” suffering of soldiers—not from enemy fire but from cholera, dysentery, and insanity—as well as the suffering of private citizens, and she once again relies on the stories of individuals to appeal to the sympathy of her audience. In her tour of the firing lines Bly encounters a female soldier with a broken arm, marching in retreat: “Her right arm was bound with a ragged shawl tight to her breast. In a fortnight she will be a mother.”¹⁸³ In the trenches she learns of a man “whose shoulder blade was torn out by shrapnel, leaving a gaping wound bigger than two fists” and another “whose jaws were broken in thirty-two pieces by a shrapnel.”¹⁸⁴ Both men were left alone in trenches for six days before receiving aid. The scenes of suffering leave Bly “saddened and heartsick,” and she admits that she has to avert her gaze: “I turned my eyes away.” But this reluctance to see does not last long, and Bly’s soon reclaims her duty as a journalist to report the scene when a shell hits nearby.¹⁸⁵ The officer tells everyone to get into the trenches, but “like the famous lady who turned to salt,” Bly “turned to look!”

II, there were more than 127 accredited women war correspondents and 467 women were accredited to cover the Vietnam War. [Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner, and Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 214, 206].

¹⁸³ Nellie Bly, “Woman a Soldier at Prezmysl; Nellie Bly Sees Maimed,” *New York Evening Journal*, December 5, 1914.

¹⁸⁴ Nellie Bly, “Hides in Trenches.”

¹⁸⁵ In my discussion of the “female gaze,” I borrow Jean Gallagher’s understanding of the gaze as not only the “physical act of looking” but also “refusing to look,” as well as “the visual or verbal representation of that act for a reading or viewing audience” [*The World*

Here Bly disobeys authority, and aligns herself with Lot's wife—an Old Testament figure infamous for disobeying an angelic command not to look back as her family fled the burning cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.¹⁸⁶ Lot's wife has long served as a warning, especially to women, against caring too much for earthly belongings and against disobeying patriarchal authority (God's and Lot's). The story may also be a warning against participating too closely in events as they are happening; as Martin Harries suggests, “the desire to see the spectacle of destruction as it is happening [literally] petrifies” Lot's wife, and though Abraham safely observes the destruction of the cities from a distance, “Lot's wife is a participant, and participation destroys her.”¹⁸⁷ Bly, on the other hand “was not afraid,” “would not run,” and she insists on her participation in the scene. Unlike Lot's wife, however, Bly is not punished for looking; instead she brings her womanly perspective to her audience and they look along with her.

When Bly invokes Lot's wife, she claims the importance of the female gaze—“Nellie Bly Sees” makes for a compelling headline again and again because Bly turns her eyes to violent spaces previously off-limits to women, though she often is compelled to turn away from the awfulness of the scene. Bly watches a priest violently administering last rites to dying men: “He kicked again and again. The huddled bit of humanity pulled itself to its knees. The priest spoke to him and as he spoke kept kicking the next one to arouse him to life. [...] I turned my back. My heart swelled and cried within me. The

Wars Through the Female Gaze (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1998), 7].

¹⁸⁶ In the Old Testament book of Genesis, Lot and his family are the only ones who escape the destruction of the corrupt cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. As they flee, Lot's wife disobeys the angels' warning not to look back, and is turned into “a pillar of salt” [Gen. 19:26 Noah Webster 1833].

¹⁸⁷ Martin Harries, “Forgetting Lot's Wife: Artaud, Spectatorship and Catastrophe,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 11.1 (1998): 222.

man to pity is not he who is killed by a shot!”¹⁸⁸ Later she sees men dying of cholera and again she cannot look—“I staggered out in to the muddy road. I would rather look on guns and hear the cutting of the air by the shot that bought kinder death.” Bly’s gaze sees another side to war, and it is worse than combat.

As Carol Acton, Jean Gallagher, Margaret Higonnet and others have noted, “vision” during war is “a gendered activity,”; indeed war itself “must be understood as a gendering activity.”¹⁸⁹ As the euphemism suggests, men “see battle,” and this implies that the male perspective of war is more authentic or valid.¹⁹⁰ Paradoxically, it is to those in the more observational roles played by women, such as nurses (as Acton argues) or, in Bly’s case, as a war correspondent, that the effects of war are most visible. But because they do not see combat (in either its literal or figurative sense), the female gaze is toward a different aspect of war—its effect on people, in particular the effects of war on bodies: the corporeal body and the family body. Acton notes that the hospital, in particular, is one site in which men and women experience a “shared but unspoken trauma” because there the woman (as nurse) is both participant and observer.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, “the woman writing from the dual positions of observer and participant must mediate that experience for her reader through the complex interplay of what is present and absent, seen and

¹⁸⁸ Nellie Bly, “Poland War At Close Range: In the Air, on the Field, in the Trenches, and in the Hospitals: Is Described By Nellie Bly,” *New York Evening Journal*, December 7, 1914.

¹⁸⁹ Carol Acton, “Diverting the Gaze: The Unseen Text in Women’s War Writing,” *College Literature* 31.2 (2004): 54; Margaret Higonnet, introduction to *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 4. See also Jean Gallagher, *The World Wars Through the Female Gaze*.

¹⁹⁰ Gallagher, 3.

¹⁹¹ Acton, 57.

unseen.”¹⁹² Even the eyewitness journalist has difficulty really seeing because, as Acton notes, “what is represented as happening outside the range of the [...] reader may also be taking place outside or partially outside the visual range or comprehension of the writer.”¹⁹³

Bly is aware of the discrepancy between her perspective and that of the soldiers. Watching the command given to begin shelling Bly observes, “men kill without emotion. They do not witness the result, and so the killing is less hard.”¹⁹⁴ Though soldiers “see” war, their gaze, too, can be obstructed. As scholars have noted, certain developments during World War I—such as trench warfare, technologies of artificial vision, and long-range weapons—altered the way men saw battle as well.¹⁹⁵ In this new kind of war, men could kill their enemies without looking. The female gaze, which does not see combat but sees its effect (and its affect) suffers the emotion that is deferred by the soldiers who do the killing without looking. Nevertheless the soldiers have seen horrors too: “their eyes are sunken and haunted by the vision of the most frightful hell living man has ever witnessed. Their lips have forgotten how to smile.”¹⁹⁶ Because the men are rendered emotionless, Bly must feel for them and must tell their story to her readers. Still, Bly questions the efficacy of her ability to write about what she sees; she realizes she cannot reproduce it for her readers: “Can the horror be pictured?” she asks.¹⁹⁷ As Higonnet

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁹⁴ Nellie Bly, “Poland War.”

¹⁹⁵ See Leed and Virilio, quoted in Gallagher, 4-5.

¹⁹⁶ Nellie Bly, “Nellie Bly in Galicia: Visits the Firing Line and Describes War Scenes,” *New York Evening Journal*, January 13, 1915.

¹⁹⁷ Nellie Bly, “Nellie [sic] Bly’s Story of the War: Perils of the Cholera,” *New York Evening Journal*, December 10, 1914.

notes, “[t]he insistence in trauma literature that experience lies beyond language depends, ironically, on language.”¹⁹⁸

While in Budapest Bly was summoned to the American Red Cross hospital because the doctor there wanted her to witness “the most frightful case [he] ever saw.” A male colleague from the Associated Press “had enough misery for one day” and tried to persuade Bly not to look, but she insisted. “On the floor was blood. Filling pails and in piles were bloody bandages. I tried not to see. I began to wish I had not come. [...] Dr. MacDonald pointed to two bandaged stumps. I could see one foot was gone at the ankle, the other apparently half way to the knee.” The Russian soldier had been shot and left unattended in a trench for eight days. The doctor speculated that his frozen feet had dropped off in transit: “the last blood the poor fellow had was pouring from his open veins. We carried him here and bandaged him up but he cannot live many minutes longer. He has no pulse now. Come, look at him,” he tells Bly. Bly accepts the doctor’s invitation and extends it to the reader:

Come, look, reader, with me! My whole soul shrank from the sight. The doctor took me by the hand. I kept my eyes away from the face I was afraid to look upon. “Look at this body,” said the doctor. I looked—I shuddered. The clay-pallor of death. The ribs cutting the skin. Bones, bones, no flesh anywhere. The head turned. Great, hollow black eyes looked into mine. Transfixed I stood, heartsick, soul-sad. Those great hollow eyes searched mine. They tried to question me. They spoke soul language to soul.¹⁹⁹

The man spoke to Bly, and one of the attendants translated for her—he was asking for his children. Unable to stand any more, Bly leaves the room and tells the doctor ““Could

¹⁹⁸ Margaret Higgonet, “Authenticity and Art in Trauma Narratives of World War I,” *Modernism/Modernity* 9.1 (2002): 99.

¹⁹⁹ Nellie Bly, “Nellie Bly at Front: Visits Wounded in Budapest: Sees Horrors of War,” *New York Evening Journal*, January 19, 1915.

Emperors and Czars and Kings look on this torturing slaughter and ever sleep again?”

“‘They do not look,’ he said gently.

Bly’s task at the Red Cross hospital is not only to describe to her audience the body of the man she sees but to remind her readers that what he represents is beyond the scope of her seeing: “This is only one case. Travel the roads from the scene of battle; search the trains; wounded, frozen, starved thousands are dying by agonizing torture.” Once again Bly uses one person’s story to speak for a larger group of sufferers. In this case, however, Bly’s deferral has as much to do with the insufficiency of language to describe accurately what is happening as the desire to evoke pathos in her readers. Even her own experience—typically the focus of her pieces—proves insufficient here as Bly creates a double deferral, quoting the doctor who himself disavows the possibility of anyone’s ability to understand what he sees: “‘Only by witnessing such horrors can one realize them’” he tells Bly, who tells the reader who, it is implied, cannot fully understand. Bly did not see the soldier get shot, nor was she with him on the freight train that transported him from the front. She accepts the doctor’s explanation of the man’s injuries though the doctor, too, can only speculate about what happened. The doctor says confidently that it is “doubtless” that the man lost his feet “in the car, for we never saw them,” but it is precisely in this absent presence that the horror of war is located. The “two bandaged stumps” signify the missing feet and require the doctor, Bly, and the reader to imagine their loss.

Bly’s experiences are too thoroughly mediated—through her own deferrals, through the censors, and through the small print on a black and white broadsheet—to have the same effect on the reader as they have on Bly. Bly, like all war correspondents,

must rely largely in the ability of the reader's imagination to fill in the gaps of her experience on their own. Additionally, as Acton notes, Bly has the added difficulty particular to women writers: that their "'seeing' is complicated by their ongoing struggle to establish the legitimacy of their noncombatant perspective"—not only does Bly describe something she has not fully seen, as a woman in a masculine space, her legitimacy is already called into question.²⁰⁰ And, as a woman writer, there is the added expectation that not only must Bly show her readers what she sees, she must "feel" for them as well, making sense of the foreign space through visceral and psychic reactions. "Come, look, reader, with me!" she implores, but Bly alone feels: "I looked—I shuddered." The sensations of psychic suffering prove more difficult to Bly here than in any other piece she wrote. Bly had endured a great deal of physical pain at the hands of doctors and nurses in her career as a stunt reporter. Without flinching she had accepted the cold baths, doses of medicine, and unsanitized surgical instruments, but she "could not endure" another moment in the room as witness to the casualties of trench warfare, and she begged a doctor: "'Let me go!'" Bly's overpowering empathy, "heartsick, soul-sad" tells as much of the story as her description of the wastebaskets full of bloody bandages.

In another dispatch from the Red Cross hospital in Budapest, Bly reports on the sentiment aroused when two peasants arrive at their son's deathbed. Bly intervenes on their behalf, imploring the doctor to give them permission to visit their son at once. Drawing upon one of the most powerful tropes of sentimental literature—the importance of the family to a functioning society—Bly presents the intense emotional response of all

²⁰⁰ Acton, 57.

the bystanders, including herself and the doctor, to the painful goodbye between parents and son:

With a low sound of agonized tenderness [the boy's mother] fell to her knees, pressing her mother-tender lips to his parched ones. [...] The mother murmured tenderly as if comforting an only babe. The two bright brown eyes feasted lovingly upon her face, but the parched lips could utter no sound. Every patient was crying. Bearded men, smooth-faced boys, all were crying. The Vienna professor in the third bed, whose pallid face is whiter than his pillow, closed his eyes, but the tears rushed over his bloodless cheeks. I sank on a bench crying also. Von Leiderfirst with his face screwed up like a grieved baby, sobbed audibly as he dashed out the door. Doctor MacDonald turned his back to me.²⁰¹

The soldier's death moves everyone watching to tears, even those who should retain an objective, emotional distance—the doctor and also Bly herself. In this tearful depiction of mother love, Bly draws upon the sentimental belief in “the special properties of childhood and the sanctity of the home.”²⁰² If, as Jane Tompkins has argued, “the child” in the sentimental tradition serves as “a spiritual force that binds the family together so that it becomes the type and cornerstone of national unity,” then the death of this innocent “babe” represents not only the wreckage of one human body but of the Austro-Hungarian kingdom itself, a people whom Bly idealized as “the most cultured, refined, and modest people of the world, from Emperor Francis Joseph down to the simple folks.”²⁰³

“Nellie Bly at Front: Held as British Spy”

Though she is an outsider, Bly suffers alongside the patient, his parents, the doctors and nurses, and other observers, declaring that she “could never smile again” and that her “heart must always be noticeable like a heavy weight.” And yet Bly recovered

²⁰¹ Nellie Bly, “Nellie Bly at Front: Wounded Battle with Wolves: Sees Dying Soldiers,” *New York Evening Journal*, February 19, 1915.

²⁰² Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 13.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*; Bly quoted in Kroeger, 422.

well enough to be able to write the piece itself, which opens cheerfully with a description of her “homecoming” to Budapest, the special treatment she receives at the Astoria, and “the hottest water” in her “marble bath.” Despite all the “horrors of war” that Bly sees, a certain aspect of her irrepressible personality—with its strange mix of egotism and naïveté—makes it into every piece.²⁰⁴ Like her stunt reports, Bly’s war correspondence is framed by her own experience, and her accounts seem, at times, frivolous in the degree to which Bly reports on personal detail. Audacious, oblivious, or perhaps a bit of both, Bly continues in her war correspondence to make the pieces about herself, her own celebrity and her challenges to authority—even military authority. Although Bly is obligated to follow protocol—“a war correspondent must obey just like a soldier,” she notes (“Sees Dying Soldiers”)—Bly often goes her own way even when the danger the reporter faces is real and not staged.

Bly reacts to being arrested in real life in much the same way that she did when she got herself arrested as part of a stunt; in both “Prisoner” pieces (“Nelly Bly a Prisoner” *New York World*, February 24, 1889 and “Nelly Bly at Front: Taken Prisoner in Hungary: Held as British Spy” *New York Evening Journal*, January 16, 1915) she remains confident that her status as a celebrity, though temporarily hidden, will protect her—and it does. For her 1889 *World* stunt, Bly purported to find out “how women—particularly innocent women—who fall into the hands of the police are treated by them.”²⁰⁵ Bly goes before the same Judge who had declared her “somebody’s darling”

²⁰⁴ Nellie By, “Visits Wounded.”

²⁰⁵ Nellie Bly, “Nellie Bly a Prisoner,” *New York World*, February 24, 1889. Bly enlisted the aid of a fellow female journalist (who is not named) to execute the stunt. Playing country girls who had met on the train to New York, Bly and her colleague checked into a boarding house where they dined together. After the meal Bly’s companion noticed

and sent her to Blackwell's Island, and once again Judge Duffy is sympathetic to Bly thanks to her pretty face and intrinsic ladylike qualities: ““Why this lady hasn't the face of a thief,”” he declares and dismisses the charges against Bly, who “repressed an impulse to give him a wink to try his recollection of the time he sent [her] to Blackwell's Island as a crazy girl.”²⁰⁶ “Nellie Bly a Prisoner” shares a common thesis with her first stunt report from Blackwell's Island: that the bigger threat to women who find themselves at the mercy of the bureaucracy is not physical danger—she eats and sleeps just fine in jail—but the dependence of women on either money or a pretty face to secure any assistance.

Twenty-five years later, Bly, en route to Budapest with her fellow war correspondents, is again arrested, this time on suspicion of being a British spy. She spoke no Hungarian and very little German and had left her official papers in her bag at the train station. Two military officers and two policemen escorted Bly to their headquarters where they locked her in a room with bars on the windows. Her arrest was not planned, and there were no colleagues complicit in the stunt who could come to her rescue, yet the report she sends back to the *Journal* about the incident bears much in common with her story of her staged arrest more than two decades earlier. No longer a girl, Bly nevertheless retained some of the ethos of the plucky girl reporter, and she approaches her subject matter in much the same way as the manufactured drama of her stunt report, taking a cavalier attitude toward danger and remaining unfazed by the authorities.

The penalty for spying was often death, and Bly knew it: “these are dangerous days,” she writes in “Nellie Bly Witnesses Shooting of Many Spies’ (January 28, 1915):

that her money was “missing.” Bly was taken into custody, but charges were dropped when her accuser failed to turn up in court the next day.

²⁰⁶ Nellie Bly, “Behind Asylum Bars,” *The New York World*, October 9, 1887.

“It needs but the lying word of an enemy to send a man to his death.” But if Bly was frightened by her own experience of being held as a suspected spy, she does not admit it. She merely “dreaded the anxiety of those in power” if she were to miss her train and feared that they would send her back to Vienna, stripped of her press credentials. Otherwise, Bly “was enjoying the new experience” and the attention she attracted, telling her readers: “I was the only object of interest” for the people in the marketplace. Just as she had done when she appeared in police court at the start of her Blackwell’s Island adventure—attracting reporters and curious onlookers—once again Bly creates a spectacle and does not hesitate to write about it, including details that enhance the drama of the moment and hint that the writer is on the verge of danger: “Crowds began to gather. Two gendarmes, with naked sabres and Spanish feathers in their caps, pushed through to hold back the increasing mob.”

Three things are at work here to protect Bly and to ensure her release, unharmed, in time to catch her train: her sympathetic rapport with other women, her social status, and her fame. Bly, staying true to her reputation for fearlessness and for questioning authority, insists that she “was not in the least fearful of the crowd” and depicts herself reacting coolly to the officers’ questions: “I studied the faces of the mob as the officers and gendarmes endeavored to obtain information from me. They spoke Hungarian. I spoke Americanish. We did not make rapid progress.” Unable to communicate with her captors, she works the crowd: “When I caught the eye of a woman I would smile,” she writes. “An answering and sympathetic smile would be returned. The men smiled less quickly and then in an awkward, embarrassed manner. Between me and loyalty they were a little undecided.”

In very real danger of being taken away as a prisoner of war, Bly relies on the sympathies of a crowd of civilians—particularly the sympathies of women—to help her. Wordlessly she cultivates a relationship with the women in the crowd, and it is a relationship based on mutual understanding. Bly demonstrates that while the men maintain a martial allegiance to authority, she is able to establish a rapport with women through sentiment, and someone rushes to her aid: “A woman darted from the crowd to my side. She laid a sympathizing, gentle hand on my arm. She looked at me with kind black eyes.” The woman asks Bly if she is American, and Bly responds in the affirmative and by “patting her trembling hand reassuringly.” Though Bly is ostensibly the one in danger, she is the one doing the comforting during this mutual exchange of sympathetic touches. “I knew,” the woman said, happy to have identified Bly’s nationality. “They say you are a British spy” she tells Bly, explaining not only why Bly would have been arrested but also making the same implicit argument that Bly had made in her Blackwell’s Island series and other articles: that women’s intuition trumps the knowledge of supposed experts, in this case the military and police.

As she had done when she came before Judge Duffy in New York, Bly also benefits from others’ recognition of intrinsic qualities in her that require she be treated like a lady. When Bly arrives at the headquarters, officers “arose as if to greet” her, though “their answering smiles faded away” when the arresting officers spoke. Though she is suspected of being a spy, Bly is handled more gently than her “woman friend,” whom they “grabbed [...] roughly and thrust [...] outside.” Ultimately, however, it is Bly’s celebrity that secures her release. Bly’s “captors and their superiors” bring in “a gentleman” to interview her. When Bly tells him “I am Nellie Bly, of New York,”

“[b]oth hands flew up above his head. ‘My god! Nellie Bly!’ he cried, excitedly. The next instant his arms were half around me and he was repeating, like a father to his child ‘Nellie Bly! Nellie Bly! Nellie Bly!’”

The display reverses the power dynamic in the room, rendering the other officials “speechless, dumbfounded.” No longer in charge, “[t]hey listened aghast” as Dr. Friedman explained to them that “every child seven years old in America knows Nellie Bly,” and then one of them rushes to bring back Bly’s “woman friend.” The article concludes with this triumph of womanly sentiment and with Bly’s self-congratulatory enjoyment of her apparently international fame: “She kissed my hand and cried” Bly notes of her friend, and “I patted her cheek and put my arm around her shoulders.” Bly rewards her friend by granting her some celebrity of her own in publishing her name in the *Journal*: “She is Mrs. Therese Newbars, of Mikoheesen.” As for Bly, she assures her former captors that there are no hard feelings, and she concludes the piece by explaining how she “only succeeded in ending their regrets by promising to dine with Dr. Friedman.” Living her life in the papers, Bly remains author of her own experiences, and even in her war correspondence she maintains a firm grip on the Nellie Bly brand.

“Nellie Bly in Austria: Asks U.S. Aid for Suffering”

Bly’s last report from the front was published on February 19, 1915, and covered events from late November 1914. Her reasons for not returning are unclear, though it was likely a combination of chronic pain in her leg (that she attributed to mishandling a poisoned Serbian bullet), a growing weariness with the privations of front line reporting, and a widening gulf in the diplomatic relations between countries of the Central Powers and the U.S.A. Her pro-Austrian pieces in the generally pro-Austrian Hearst paper had

not faced trouble with censors or editors on either side of the ocean: “Fortunately my articles are always printed as I write them,” she told a friend in 1915.²⁰⁷ Nevertheless, authorities were tightening the rules governing correspondents, and Bly was never very interested in following rules. Bly would remain in Austria until 1918, but she would publish only three more pieces from a European dateline, and those pieces nod to the next and final stage of her career: philanthropy.

Bly’s last three pieces from Austria appeal to American readers for money, supplies, and sympathy for widows and orphans. Working with the Royal Austrian Military Widows and Orphans Fund, Bly begs for aid for the “thousands of young children whose baby-eyes are wet daily with lonely cries for a father who is piled with hundreds of other fathers in deep trenches, a rude, rough cross above their heads.”²⁰⁸ Thanks to a “blackout on news” in Austria, and her enjoyment of her own celebrity among the Austrian royalty and upper classes, Bly was “oblivious to the growing public sentiment among her own countrymen against the Central Powers’ cause.”²⁰⁹

Bly tells her American readers: “The Austrian soldier hates no one. He calls no man enemy. And he fights, as I have said before, not for the hatred of some one else, but for love of his country.” Bly tries to drum up interest in the cause by promising her readers that for every quarter they donate she would personally hammer a nail into a wooden soldier, with the idea that as more nails are driven into the wood, the figure will gradually become made of iron. And if that is not enough of an enticement, Bly also promises that each American contributor will have his or her name and address entered

²⁰⁷ quoted in Kroeger, 415.

²⁰⁸ Nellie Bly, “Nellie Bly in Austria: Asks U.S. Aid for Suffering: Tells of Big ‘Iron Man,’” *New York Evening Journal*, May 19, 1915.

²⁰⁹ Kroeger, 416.

into the “Gold Book” in official state archives “to be preserved for all time.” The scheme bears some resemblance to the kind of newspaper contests Pulitzer ran during the heyday of yellow journalism, such as the building fund for the Statue of Liberty’s pedestal or the contest to guess Bly’s arrival time as she completed her trip around the world.²¹⁰

Bly envisioned similar success for the “iron man,” suggesting that her readers organize “nail driving clubs,” and she even imagined an “American nail driving day” captured on film and sent back to America where readers “probably will see us in the cinemas not long hence.”²¹¹ Despite Bly’s enthusiasm and name dropping—she reports that she discussed the iron man project with Prince August Lubkowitz himself and that Archduke Leopold Salvater drove the first nail—there exists little indication that the project was much of a success with Bly’s readership. Her follow-up piece, in which she reports driving the nails into the statue herself, speaks of a solemn ceremony outdoors in cold weather before a dwindling crowd. Bly doesn’t state how many nails she drove, though her short list of donors includes her own mother and a handful of her acquaintances. It seems likely, given Bly’s normal willingness to celebrate her triumphs in excruciatingly specific detail, that the sparse information signals a lack of interest from her American readers. They may have taken offense at Bly’s claim that American donations would make up for the “the guns and ammunition made in America” that “enable the English to continue this war.” Whereas a September 1914 poll had shown

²¹⁰ The *World* was instrumental in raising the hundreds of thousands of dollars needed to finance the pedestal for the Statue of Liberty earlier in the decade, and the paper boasted of more than half a million guesses in the Bly contest [Edward Robb Ellis, *The Epic of New York City: A Narrative History* (1966; reprint, New York: Carroll & Graf, 2005), 389; Kroeger, 169].

²¹¹ Nellie Bly, “Nellie Bly Aids War Victims: U.S. Sends Money for Poor: Many Nails Put in Statue,” *New York Evening Journal*, May 24, 1916.

that about two thirds of newspapers took a neutral stance, by 1916 public opinion (dictated by and reflected in the newspapers) was shifting as war became inevitable.²¹²

In her last piece from Austria-Hungary, published December 7, 1918, less than a month after the armistice, Bly finally changes her approach, stating three times: “America must not allow the people it has freed to perish.”²¹³ The strange final dispatch warns President Wilson in an open letter about the threat of “Bolschwismus” (bolshevism) that can only be alleviated if Americans send food to assist the starving (but grateful) Austrians. It looked as if Bly were losing her relevance. In her final dispatch even the *Journal* seemed to recognize that Bly’s most memorable work had come as the *World’s* stunt girl from years past (at a competing paper), billing her the “world famous newspaper writer, whose trip around the world, beating all records, created a sensation years ago.” As a journalist, Bly would re-invent herself one final time, this time as a philanthropist publicly pleading for the cause of women and children.

The pieces she would write until her death in 1922 indicate that the activism that characterized her earlier work when she went undercover or into the field becomes watered down in post-World-War-I society. Bly lent her famous name to various causes, but she ceased to act as an innovator. In her first stateside article since the war, the *Journal* lays out Bly’s new project, and it is one that draws upon the credibility she built as a stunt reporter and foreign correspondent, but it makes clear that Bly’s new role is as a more passive observer rather than a participant:

Nellie Bly, the famous woman writer, noted the world over for her feats of journalism, has engaged to give the readers of The Evening Journal the benefit of

²¹² Knightley, 127.

²¹³ Nellie Bly, “Writer Who Asks Aid for Austrians,” *New York Evening Journal*, December 7, 1918.

her keen observation and her experience, gained in every country in the world. Miss Bly has recently returned from Europe. During the great war she was literally in the thick of it—sharing with the soldiers of many armies their fortunes in the trenches of the first line. This is the first of a series of articles which Miss Bly will write. Her subjects will be various, and to each she will bring the human sympathy and keen insight for which she is so well known.²¹⁴

In these late-career articles where the focus is philanthropy, Bly no longer needs even to motion toward objective reporting. Instead, she is free to operate straight out of the sentimental tradition from which she sprang, speaking out in support of women, children, the poor, and, now, veterans.

In her first article Bly takes on the very topic that had signaled her entrance into journalism thirty years earlier—the inequity between men and women in the hands of the charity system. Whereas men can seek help with they are down on their luck, she argues, “a woman down is a woman out—forever!” In this piece and those that follow, the aging Bly takes on a motherly persona, giving advice to her readers and weighing in on a variety of social issues, from male pattern baldness to the death penalty.²¹⁵ Eventually Bly assumes the role of nurturing mother figure in a more literal sense, and her column primarily becomes a public platform to organize the adoption of unwanted children.²¹⁶

As the progressive New Woman gradually lost her edge, becoming the mother and grandmother of the flappers who were her inheritors, women’s advancement in journalism came to a standstill. Women’s presence in the papers had once been

²¹⁴ Nellie Bly, “A Man May Be Down, But He’s Never Out,” *New York Evening Journal*, May 24, 1919.

²¹⁵ Nellie Bly, “Nellie Bly Tells How Hamby Was Executed,” *New York World*, February 5, 1920; Nellie Bly, “Nellie Bly Justifies Dyed Hair for Men Eager to Keep Their Grip,” *New York Evening Journal*, May 31, 1919.

²¹⁶ See Nellie Bly, “Nellie Bly Answers Friends’ Letters: Finds Many Interested in the Fate of Little ‘Jack o’ Hearts’—Makes Appeal for Other Love-Hungry Waifs,” *New York Evening Journal*, August 1, 1919.

anomalous, and by 1918 it was ubiquitous, but at what cost? The 1920s would see very few innovations or developments in women's journalism as American society threw its focus on a postwar culture more interested in hemlines than in the cultural politics of the Woman Question. There remained an unresolved tension in the American relationship with the girl reporter, and in the 1930s, as the world again headed toward total war, this tension would reemerge in women's war correspondence from the Spanish Civil War and World War II. The next chapter explores the debt that reporters of the 1930s and 1940s owe to their predecessors, as well as how the new generation of war correspondents navigated these difficult dichotomies: the fraught relationship between objective reporting and storytelling, between modernist impersonality and sentiment, and between professionalism and the sexualized image of the "girl reporter."

CHAPTER FOUR:

MARTHA GELLHORN, *COLLIER'S* GAL CORRESPONDENT

On the night of June 6, 1944, veteran war correspondent Martha Gellhorn stowed away on a Red Cross ship to land on Omaha beach on D-plus-one. Gellhorn had recently lost her accredited status as a front line reporter for *Collier's* magazine, so she was barred from joining the male reporters on the boats for the assault. Not about to miss out on the biggest story of the war, Gellhorn slipped past the military police by telling them she was doing a story on the nurses aboard a hospital ship docked nearby. Following through on her fib, she boarded the boat and hid in a bathroom until it launched on its dangerous channel crossing. When they arrived at Normandy, Gellhorn assisted the doctors and nurses, wading onto the beach to evacuate German prisoners. Gellhorn was the first journalist to land on the beach, and she offered a unique perspective unavailable to her male colleagues who watched the invasion from their boats. Nevertheless, when she returned to London to file her stories she was promptly arrested, and when her story ran in *Collier's*, its publication was delayed and all evidence of the impressive dateline was suppressed.

Gellhorn had been demoted at *Collier's* because the magazine was allowed only one front line reporter, and they had replaced Gellhorn with a more famous writer, Ernest Hemingway, who was also Gellhorn's estranged husband. Increasingly strict rules governing correspondents would have likely prevented a woman from serving as a front line correspondent anyway, but because Hemingway could have worked for any magazine he chose, Gellhorn speculated that he went to *Collier's* in order to punish her

for choosing her work over a more domestic life with him in Cuba.²¹⁷ Gellhorn had been eager to report on the war and begged Hemingway—who busied himself trolling around the Gulf of Mexico in his fishing boat, ostensibly in search of German submarines—to join her in Europe where he could make a real difference.²¹⁸ Hemingway finally relented, but the pair proved unable to rekindle the relationship that had been forged when they worked as correspondents from war-torn Madrid seven years earlier. Instead, by signing on with *Collier's*, Hemingway effectively stripped his wife of her credentials, and *Collier's*, eager to please their top writer, ran Hemingway's D-Day story first, even though he had been among the journalists in the boats and not, as Gellhorn had been, on Omaha beach.

After her arrest, Gellhorn was sent to a nurses training camp to await permission to return to work, and, without passport or credentials, she escaped under a fence to a nearby airfield and convinced a Royal Air Force pilot that she needed to get to Italy to see her fiancé. He took her along, and with “stealth and chicanery” Gellhorn worked her way through Italy “in the company of admirable foreigners who were not fussy about official travel orders and accreditation.”²¹⁹ Losing her accreditation did not hinder Gellhorn's ability to get around; indeed, she found it liberating. Official journalists, especially women, were subject to many rules. Women reporters were often barred from

²¹⁷ Sandra Spanier, “Rivalry, Romance, and War Reporters: Martha Gellhorn's *Love Goes to Press* and the *Collier's* Files,” in *Hemingway and Women: Female Critics and the Female Voice*, ed. Lawrence R. Broer and Gloria Holland (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 256-275. See also Caroline Moorhead, *Gellhorn: A Twentieth-Century Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003), 206, 214.

²¹⁸ Moorhead, 199.

²¹⁹ Martha Gellhorn, *The Face of War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988), 86.

attending press briefings, visiting press camps, and hiring jeeps.²²⁰ As the war progressed, military oversight of all journalists tightened. In order to remain accredited, reporters—in uniform and bearing an honorary rank of captain for their own protection—had to be officially affiliated with a specific branch of service and submit their stories to the censors for approval.²²¹ Gellhorn, annoyed at the militarization of the press, wanted to carry on as she always had: finding stories on her own by going to where the action was, sifting through the rubble for the individual tales of hardship and horror, and telling the truth about what she saw.²²²

Though she would devote most of her life to the profession, Gellhorn nevertheless had a fraught relationship with journalism: she often doubted its efficacy as an instrument of change, and yet she persisted in her work out of a belief that *someone* must record the horrors of poverty, disease, and war—even when people refused to listen. Gellhorn shares this commitment to telling the stories of peasants, soldiers, refugees, women and children with Nellie Bly, whose mission as a stunt reporter infiltrating the public charity system had been “to write a plain and unvarnished narrative” of what she found there and who, as a war correspondent in Austria Hungary, had vowed to write “the truth” “for the sake of humanity.”²²³ In her infiltration of spaces off limits to women—like the Normandy beach—Gellhorn works within an established tradition that allows her access to dangerous scenes and equips her with the idiom with which to write about the injustices she finds there.

²²⁰ Nancy Caldwell Sorel, *The Women Who Wrote the War* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1999), xiv, 242, 272.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 170.

²²² Moorehead, 205-6.

²²³ Nellie Bly, “Nellie Bly Sends First War Article from Firing Line,” *New York Evening Journal*, December 4, 1914.

In her war correspondence, and in fictionalized self-portraits of women war correspondents in her novel *A Stricken Field* (1940) and her play *Love Goes to Press* (co-written with Virginia Cowles, 1945/46), we see a commitment to social justice through storytelling, through sentiment and through the redirection of the gaze away from war itself and toward the effects of war on the lives and bodies of real people—including the body of the war correspondent. Gellhorn and her fictional avatars take advantage of the stylish, sexualized image of the woman war correspondent to gain access to off-limits spaces, but at what cost? Her individuality is effaced in favor of the recognizable image of the girl reporter as beautiful, independent, and always in pursuit of the next big story. Gellhorn's protagonists come to the same realization that she herself must have done when she was forced to choose between her marriage to Hemingway and her marriage to her work: ultimately, the woman war correspondent must detach herself from her own relationships in order to do the important work of giving a voice to people who would otherwise be silenced.

***Collier's* "Gal Correspondent"**

Gellhorn went to Spain in 1937 where, initially, she served as *Collier's* "special correspondent" in name only. In practice she called herself a "tourist of wars," in Spain because it was where her social conscience and natural curiosity told her she should be.²²⁴ Once in Madrid she spent several months living among the working journalists but not writing much herself. Finally, a fellow journalist suggested that "the only way [she] could serve the *Causa*" was to write.²²⁵ In 1937, the magazine was a slightly left-leaning

²²⁴ Gellhorn, *Face*, 16.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

mass market weekly that boasted a circulation of more than nine million readers.²²⁶ The successful mixture of “popular and elite forms” that began in the story papers of the mid-nineteenth century (like the *Ledger*) had carried over into magazines like *Collier’s*.²²⁷

Founded in 1888 and billed as a blend of “Fiction, Fact, Sensation, Wit, Humor, and News,” *Collier’s* was marketed to a middlebrow readership who considered themselves cultured and educated, interested in world affairs, and familiar with prominent literary figures.²²⁸ As the magazine moved into the twentieth century, it began more aggressively to cultivate a reputation for muckraking, occasionally and unconcernedly mixing its interests. The magazine took on “the Beef Trust, the Sugar Trust, the Oil Trust, the Insurance Trust, William Randolph Hearst, liquor, patent medicines, child labor, the haphazard food labelers, and any other handy targets,” and “*Collier’s* became one of the few nationwide voices to share importantly and equally in the credit for both Prohibition and Repeal.”²²⁹ The last page of the magazine was usually dedicated to unsigned editorials weighing in on the big issues, at times contradicting the perspectives offered in its features reporting.

Collier’s was seemingly pro-business, even pro-monopoly, but it was also pro-Union, and the magazine ran several stories on the plight of Southern textile workers. Likewise, it mediated a clearly isolationist stance with an early first-hand account from a concentration-camp survivor and Gellhorn’s pieces from Spain, England, and

²²⁶ Internal advertisement, *Collier’s*, October 30, 1937, 73.

²²⁷ Susan Belasco Smith and Kenneth M. Price, introduction to *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 5.

²²⁸ quoted in Kenneth McArdle, introduction to *A Cavalcade of Collier’s* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1959), xi.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, xi.

Czechoslovakia that begged for international involvement. Politically savvy pieces by future Prime Minister Winston Churchill ran alongside sports articles by Quentin Reynolds, serial fiction by Agatha Christie, short fiction by Collette, Kathleen Norris, and William Saroyan and numerous other, now forgotten, names. Though many of its cartoons played for cheap laughs using racial or gender stereotypes, others nodded to the magazine's self-consciously cosmopolitan readership, such as one 1937 cartoon featuring a newsboy shouting "Extra! Extra! Czechoslovakian aide de camp issues pronunciamento to Reichsfuehrer's charge d'affaires!"²³⁰ The magazine also featured articles about home decorating, fashion, health, and science as well as ads that again drew upon familiar racial and gender stereotypes to market thermometers, liniment, and pancake mix to white, middle-class readers.

Collier's, which viewed itself as a ground-breaking publication, was eager to advertise that it kept a woman war correspondent on the staff. Gellhorn appeared in "The Week's Work," an occasional column that promoted what *Collier's* contributors were doing behind the scenes—and when Gellhorn appeared she was accompanied by a photograph. *Collier's* frequently included her name on the cover or under the "Next Week" heading on the title page. In a 1938 promotional ad, *Collier's* includes three of Gellhorn's articles in its list of "international scoops."²³¹ Her prominent byline was also often accompanied by teasers, not written by the author herself, advertising her ability to get into the middle of the action. For example, the teaser for "Obituary of a Democracy," placed underneath Gellhorn's byline in the December 10, 1938, issue, asks readers:

²³⁰ Abner Dean, cartoon, *Collier's*, November 27, 1937, 40.

²³¹ Internal advertisement, *Collier's*, December, 1938.

“What’s it like to have your country traded out from under your feet? Collier’s sent Martha Gellhorn to talk to the homeless border people, Czechs and Sudetens, whose unspectacular lives got in the ruthless path of international politics.”²³²

The article describes the aftermath of the disastrous Munich Agreement and subsequent Nazi annexation of the Sudetenland, which left the unchallenged Czech army dejected and brought refugees streaming into Czechoslovakia. But the exigency advertised in the teaser recalls that of the stunt reports—the female reporter dispatched to walk among the poor and report back to a curious readership who want to know, first hand, “What’s it like.” *Collier’s* praised her for standing out “among gal correspondents not only for her writing but for her good looks. Blond, tall, dashing—she comes pretty close to living up to Hollywood’s idea of what a big-league woman reporter should be.”²³³ The *Collier’s* editors knew that, in Gellhorn, they had their own real-life Torchy Blane, the adventurous and fast-talking blonde reporter who solved crimes one step ahead of the police in a series of B-movies during the late thirties.²³⁴

Collier’s was not alone in taking advantage of Gellhorn’s good looks. The writer herself admittedly used her looks to gain access to transportation, people, and places otherwise off limits to reporters. From the earliest days of her journalism career—when,

²³² Martha Gellhorn, “Obituary of Democracy,” *Collier’s*, December 10, 1938, 12. All subsequent references are to this issue, and page numbers are cited parenthetically in the text.

²³³ quoted in Moorehead, 212.

²³⁴ Interestingly, Torchy Blane connects tangentially and coincidentally with other people and places I explore in this project: Glenda Farrell played Torchy Blane in seven of the nine pictures, and Farrell’s first role had been that of Little Eva, the most iconic heroine of the sentimental tradition, in a stage production of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Additionally, Torchy Blane was the inspiration for Superman’s love interest, Lois Lane, whose name was inspired by actress Lola Lane, who played Torchy Blane in *Torchy Blane in Panama*. Lola Lane’s mother had worked as a reporter, and her sister, actress Rosemary Lane, starred in *Blackwell’s Island* (1939), a film about a (male) reporter who investigates corruption at the infamous prison. For a discussion of pop cultural instantiations of the woman war correspondent, see Chapter Five.

as a cub reporter for the *Albany Times Union*, she was nicknamed the “blonde peril”—Gellhorn’s identity as a journalist was tied to her blonde hair, long legs, stylish clothing, and breezy, confident manner.²³⁵ Fellow female war correspondent Josephine Herbst remembers how Gellhorn “sailed in and out [of the Florida hotel in war-torn Madrid] in beautiful Saks Fifth Avenue pants with a green chiffon scarf wound around her head.”²³⁶ The attention paid to Gellhorn’s looks—by *Collier’s*, by other writers, and by Gellhorn herself in fictionalizations of her experiences—is not merely a marketing ploy or literary device. The physical presence of the war correspondent is a defining aspect of her identity.

Despite the attention paid to her looks, Gellhorn’s work for the magazine was taken seriously. When she began writing for the magazine, she was known primarily for *The Trouble I’ve Seen* (1936), a quasi-fictional ethnography of the Great Depression in the American South, and from Spain she continued to write about tragedy at the local level, telling the stories of the powerless victims of the bureaucrats and war-mongers. Her first piece in *Collier’s*, “Only the Shells Whine” (July 17, 1937), describes daily life in war-torn Madrid, and it sets the tone for much of her work that would follow. The story describes how the citizens of Madrid—children, a janitor, ladies buying shoes, old women, a soldier on leave, café patrons—go about their daily lives during the regular shelling, and she juxtaposes mundane scenes—“women are standing in line [...] with market baskets on their arms”—with brutal details—“you had passed crisscrossing trails of human blood on the pavement.”²³⁷ Though she had no intention of confining her work

²³⁵ quoted in Moorehead, 26.

²³⁶ Josephine Herbst, “The Starched Blue Sky of Spain,” *Noble Savage* 1 (1960): 83.

²³⁷ Martha Gellhorn, “Only the Shells Whine,” *Collier’s*, July 17, 1937, 13.

to “the rear areas or the woman’s angle,” Gellhorn did not try to write like her male colleagues either, nor did she try to compete with them.²³⁸ Her stories for *Collier’s* focus on the effect of war on ordinary people, a niche in war reporting often filled by women reporters who lacked the credentials to get to the front, but which came naturally to Gellhorn with her previous experience as an ethnographer. Over and over again in her career she would go to the front or to areas where other reporters could not or would not go and report on what she found there.

This first piece also gives some indication of the way Gellhorn would be presented to the *Collier’s* audience in the years to come: its title, punning on the “whine” of the incoming shells and the lack of whining by the beleaguered Madrid citizenry, provides a seemingly glib reference to womanly sentiment. The headline suggests that the *Collier’s* editorial team recognized in Gellhorn’s work a connection to the sentimental, and the headline evokes, even as it purports to reject, the female complaint—brought to the readers of *Collier’s* by a new female correspondent whose name is already featured on the cover. The genre of the complaint, as Lauren Berlant defines it in her work on Fanny Fern, “is an international mode of public discourse that demonstrates women’s contested value in the patriarchal public sphere by providing commentary from a generically ‘feminine’ point of view [...] deployed [...] for example, in women’s antiwar activity.”²³⁹ This presentation of anti-war sentiment through the stories of the powerless is precisely what Gellhorn’s war reporting over the next eight years would do. Nevertheless, *Collier’s* invocation of the female complaint in the article title bothered

²³⁸ Gellhorn, *Face*, 86.

²³⁹ Lauren Berlant, “The Female Woman: Fanny Fern and the Form of Sentiment,” *American Literary History* 3.3 (1991): 433.

her. Though Gellhorn insisted that she gave little thought to the fate of her dispatches once they were filed, she notes that she “disliked” this title, and changed it to “High Explosive for Everyone” when she reprinted it in *The Face of War* (1959).²⁴⁰

Gellhorn was sensitive to attempts to label her as a sentimental writer, yet in her writing she struggled to find the “magic” in the story, because “without magic who will weep and who will protest.”²⁴¹ Her concern—that the reader should weep *and* protest—indicates that Gellhorn is, whether she owns it or not, working within the sentimental idiom, in which the author’s goal is to elicit an emotional response and, with it, to effect social change. It is this exigency, and not a set of “formal criteria” that defines the sentimental tradition; instead the sentimental is “a political enterprise, halfway between sermon and social theory.”²⁴² Meanwhile Gellhorn exhibited a typically modernist anxiety about the importance of journalism relative to fiction writing. For Gellhorn, who felt that “books matter, but magazines are for people on trains,” journalism was a necessary accommodation.²⁴³

As Patrick Collier has noted, this fraught relationship with journalism was not uncommon for modernist writers. The mass media had for some time been equated with “the feminization of its content,” a critique “based on an implied valuation of mind over body and reason over emotion.”²⁴⁴ As Suzanne Clark has argued, this critique was thus

²⁴⁰ “When the titles had not been my choice and I disliked them, I have changed them” [Martha Gellhorn, *Face*, ix].

²⁴¹ quoted in Moorehead, 159. See also Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), xviii.

²⁴² Tompkins, 126.

²⁴³ quoted in Moorehead, 106.

²⁴⁴ Patrick Collier, *Modernism on Fleet Street* (Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 12, 20.

implicitly a “scapegoating of women’s writing” that “makes the sentimental [...] obscene”—but the changing public sphere nevertheless opened opportunities for women writers.²⁴⁵ Partly an accommodation and partly an innovation, Gellhorn’s brand of war reporting flouts the idea of the feminine voice in the media as endangering culture (the logic being, as Collier notes, that “female advances in the profession” caused “anxiety over the authority of the journalistic word”).²⁴⁶ Gellhorn’s kind of “personal journalism,”—in which stories of individual suffering served metonymically as political commentary against the governments that allowed such suffering to occur—did not “trivialize public discourse” as detractors of women’s writing and of the commodification of (mass) culture feared. The sentimental, when invoked by the woman war correspondent, is not “tinged” by its “discursive otherness” because the reporter embodies modern womanhood in her independence and sex appeal.²⁴⁷ Her image mediates the “knee-jerk” “modernist response” to the writer’s emotional appeal.²⁴⁸

Gellhorn’s fears about the ineffectiveness of journalism thus had less to do with worry over its middlebrow mass-market readership than with the failure of that readership to act. In a private letter written by an exhausted Gellhorn and published without her permission in *Collier’s*, Gellhorn writes to her editor: “I always thought that if I could make anyone imagine the suffering, they would insist on a world which refused to allow that suffering. Now I feel as if I had thrown a million pebbles into a bottomless

²⁴⁵ Suzanne Clark, *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 6-7.

²⁴⁶ Collier, 25-26.

²⁴⁷ Clark, 11.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

well.”²⁴⁹ As an objective reporter or as an involved participant, the journalist is also prone to moments of self-doubt, wondering if her work makes any difference, or if, as a war tourist or camp follower, she just makes things worse. Though she would often decry the insignificance of journalism in actually shaping history, she nevertheless demonstrates a commitment to the fundamental necessity of giving a voice to the voiceless. In the despairing letter Gellhorn finally concludes: “I feel finally that the only thing I can do with my writing is to give honor where honor is due, as if one carved a small, shabby and completely perishable monument for people who will get no other monument and will be, in any case, forgotten.”²⁵⁰

Gellhorn’s contract with *Collier’s* was to write articles on France, Czechoslovakia and England, and Gellhorn, who assured her editor she “always tried to be as non-political and pictorial as possible,” was to report on people and places and not on breaking news.²⁵¹ Gellhorn obliged, bringing *Collier’s* and its readership the Czechoslovakia story they wanted: a first-hand account of the refugees. She described the article-in-progress to editor Charles Colebaugh as “a picture of a destroyed state, practically calling the last sugar beet fields and coal mines and railroads by name, practically naming the refugees who are homeless and in desperate danger.”²⁵²

As she had done in “Only the Shells Whine,” in “Obituary of a Democracy” Gellhorn addresses the reader directly through frequent use of the second-person “you” and focuses the reader’s gaze: “people” or “you” “see,” “watch,” or “pick out” six times

²⁴⁹ Martha Gellhorn, quoted in A[my].P[orter]., “This Week’s Work,” *Collier’s*, February 3, 1945, 73.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ Martha Gellhorn, *Selected Letters of Martha Gellhorn*, ed. Caroline Moorehead (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 68.

²⁵² Martha Gellhorn, *Selected Letters*, 68.

in the first two paragraphs.²⁵³ Later in the article she again challenges the reader to look but insists on the incredibility of what she sees: “I got a look at the frontier [...] You couldn’t believe it.”²⁵⁴ The German soldier on the other side of the fence “was very embarrassed by all these eyes”—the gaze of Gellhorn, the Czechs, and, now, nine million *Collier’s* readers.²⁵⁵ Gellhorn’s focus is on the specific rather than the general, finding the story in the individual experiences of the people she meets: the one awkward German frontier guard, one Czech soldier hitchhiking, individual refugees. Eventually, Gellhorn refuses to hear any more stories and takes over the narrative completely, countering one woman’s tale of various suicides with a litany of her own:

“Listen,” I said, “I’ve heard enough, so don’t tell me any more. I can tell you names of Jewish doctors and Social Democrat lawyers who have suicided in the Sudeten territory. I can tell you stories about beatings and brandings and executions with names and addresses attached to them. I know of simple people who had neither the money nor the information to use poison, so they just threw themselves under the trains that were supposed to take them back to Sudetenland. I’ve seen an old man with his front teeth knocked out and his ribs almost showing through a mess of red meat on his side and his arms black and swollen from the beating, and I can’t bear to hear any more, see?—not for a while anyhow.”²⁵⁶

Full of stories of her own, and playing the role of the weary reporter unable to hear or write any more, Gellhorn asks her audience merely to look: “So I stood at the frontier with the woman and we looked over into that new country across the barbed wire.”²⁵⁷

Gellhorn’s deferral serves a dual purpose—in naming the stories she refuses to tell, she does, in fact, tell them, but she does so in a way that does not violate their expectations of

²⁵³ Martha Gellhorn, “Obituary,” 12.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 32

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.* Gellhorn revisits this scene in her novel *A Stricken Field* [(New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1940), 112-113], and again the focus is on the gaze of the Czechs and the embarrassment of the German sentry.

²⁵⁶ Martha Gellhorn, “Obituary,” 32.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

what sort of content is to be found in *Collier's*. The violence is safely contained in the story-within-the-story. Gellhorn's subject is the woman at the frontier and herself and not the unprintable horrors to which she can only allude, a deferral that demonstrates the limits of journalism.

A Stricken Field

In the novel *A Stricken Field* (1940), her fictional account of the aftermath in Czechoslovakia of the Munich Agreement, Gellhorn suggests that only a portion of the horrors can be reported, and that portion is milder than what is left unwritten: "you will see things that will alarm and surprise you [...] You will also hear things that are worse, but you can't check them, so you have to throw them out."²⁵⁸ The novel has two protagonists, and though they meet in earlier chapters, much of the action of the book shifts back and forth between their concurrent but very different experiences. The first, Mary Douglas, is an American journalist in Czechoslovakia on assignment. The other is Rita Salus, German by birth but living in Prague and working for the *Solidaritat*, a Communist organization that seeks to aid the refugees pouring into the country. Without the proper paperwork herself, and living with her boyfriend Peter, who works for a Communist newspaper, Rita is in constant danger of arrest and deportation to one of the German concentration camps already springing up around the countryside. Mary, whose pursuit of a story has taken her to various refugee camps and to the new barbed-wire frontier, uses her status as an American journalist (and as a woman) to gain an audience with various foreign ministers and prominent public servants. She tries unsuccessfully to

²⁵⁸ Martha Gellhorn, *A Stricken Field*, (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1940), 23-4. All subsequent references are to this edition, and page numbers are cited parenthetically in the text.

lobby for an extension on the deportation order for refugees and, failing that, hopes she can at least help Rita and Peter.

Gellhorn's fictional avatar allows her to explore more fully the role of the journalist emotionally invested in her subject, and many of Mary's actions mirror Gellhorn's real-life attempts at swaying Czech, British, and French officials—attempts that go unmentioned in her journalism. In the novel Gellhorn does what she struggled to do in real life, splitting her desired persona of journalist/activist into two (Mary/Rita) in order to be both at once. Rita is a pathetic ideal against which Mary will measure the importance of her own work. That work is telling stories, but, significantly, the ending of Rita's story will be unknown to Mary. Rita and Peter, realizing that time is up for Communists in Prague, part ways, each working to take his or her organization underground. Peter is apprehended almost immediately, and Rita, taking advantage of a series of coincidences, breaks into the secret Nazi headquarters where they are holding him, and hears him being tortured to death. Crawling out of the house via a coal scuttle, Rita goes to a nearby park where she, too, is arrested.

Mary, not knowing that her friends have already been captured, leaves word for Rita to contact the American Embassy for help getting money and a passport, and she catches a plane out of Czechoslovakia to Paris. Mary has proven unable to help Rita, Peter, or the refugees, but she has smuggled into her carry-on luggage hundreds of pages of personal accounts of Nazi atrocities. She knows the material is unusable in her own journalism, but she plans to hand the pages over to the underground movement in Paris for publication. The smuggling of these stories, Mary realizes, is “no girlish prank” (290). This, her real work, is not about the popular press—it is the work of what Nancy

Fraser calls a “subaltern counterpublic.”²⁵⁹ The ending of the novel thus assesses the importance of journalism with some ambivalence: it reinforces the need to tell stories for those who cannot speak for themselves, but it doubts whether the mainstream media is the forum in which these stories can be told. Gellhorn’s novel, in re-writing her journalism, also re-writes the ideology of the public sphere, which, in its exclusion of women, “rests on a gender-biased notion of publicity.”²⁶⁰ Gellhorn’s novel concludes with the assertion that it is the forgotten people—like Rita—and the underground press that will matter, and not her own writing.

The necessity of checking facts and of keeping the worst of the violence out of the general interest publication is not the only difficulty Gellhorn/Mary must negotiate. Language itself gets in the way of the story, and Gellhorn presents the difficulty as a characteristic of the speech of the Czech people, though it is actually a problem endemic to the language of journalism as well: “There were only two ways that people spoke in Czechoslovakia,” either “with terrible and violent control” that “snapped” and turned to “fury and helplessness” or they spoke “coldly, stating facts” (33). This duality between fact and emotion is the tension undergirding Gellhorn’s own journalism. In “Obituary,” though she includes statistics—given in “a gray, matter-of-fact voice [...] like a professor”—“40 per cent of the metallurgical industry lost, 60 per cent of the soft coal lost, 63 per cent of the textile industry lost” (the list goes on), Gellhorn tells her readers “you saw it, not as statistics, not as railroads lost and mines and factories gone, but in

²⁵⁹ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Postmodernism and the Re-Reading of Modernity*, ed. Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (Manchester: The Essex Symposia: Literature/Politics/Theory, 1992), 67. See also Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* [(Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1989)].

²⁶⁰ Fraser, 61.

terms of human life” (36). In a similar passage in the novel, Mary wishes to interview a knowledgeable Czech novelist sitting with the journalists in the hotel bar: “There were flat basic facts that you had to assemble: how many coal mines had the Nazis taken; how much of the textile industry, the glass, the porcelain, the sugar was lost” (the list, like the list in “Obituary,” goes on) (21).

But Mary is kept from digging out her pencil and paper to take down the information by two factors. First there is her own style of writing, which draws its power from emotional truths rather than statistics: “Statistics were only black marks on paper to her, and if she learned that an unpronounceable Czech manufacturing town had become German it meant nothing until she thought of the people who worked in the factories, and where they would go now” (21). The second obstacle to her interview, and one undoubtedly related to the first, is that “she saw that her colleagues were bored” and “counting on her wordlessly to change the conversation, she being a woman, and therefore by right inconsequent or frankly ignorant” (21). Indeed, in Gellhorn’s article, though she does include the statistics, she devotes more space to the stories of the displaced workers, who, formerly Czechs, now “lived in Germany and had to get a printed permission from the German military authorities to cross into Pilsen to work.” (36). Gellhorn tells of two of these workers who ride their bicycles back into Germany at the end of the work day: “When they started to pedal up the hill they were stopped by two German soldiers in steel helmets, who asked for their papers. Just suddenly, there on the road, their country ended” (36). The two workers tell Gellhorn not only their stories of trying unsuccessfully to bring their families into Czechoslovakia but other stories as well, “of an old peasant named Janisek” whose sons had fled—and been arrested, and it

is in their voice that Gellhorn makes overt political and economic arguments: ““The country is cut up to ruin it”” (36). When she reiterates this argument in *A Stricken Field*, again she does not make the statement herself. It is the Czech novelist—the one who knew the quantitative facts—who says that the effect of the new border is that “the economy of the country is ruined” (21).

These examples are just a few of the instances in *A Stricken Field* where Gellhorn borrows heavily from “Obituary of a Democracy.” In the novel, begun in early 1939, completed by August, and published in March 1940, she restates information—often verbatim—from the 1938 article in more than twenty-five passages.²⁶¹ The excerpts serve mainly as exposition, occurring in the first third of the novel. The plot of the novel picks up where the journalism leaves off—moving away from the story of the country told by the reporter to the story of the reporter herself, giving us a self-portrait that is both idealized (in its portrayal of the noble intentions of the protagonist) and highly critical (of the ability of a journalists to do any good). This fictional self-portrait, the intertextuality between article and novel, and Gellhorn’s novelistic style of reporting, in which she creates herself as a character, blur the line between fact and fiction.

The similarities between Gellhorn’s journalism and her fiction did not go unnoticed by contemporary critics. Wieland Herzfelde, who reviewed *A Stricken Field* in May 1940 for *Direction*, writes that though “the cover of the book describes it as a novel” “it is more nearly an eye-witness account.”²⁶² Mary Douglas, he observed, “is a modest self-portrait of the author,” and other characters are “not figures of fiction, but people

²⁶¹ For the publication history of *A Stricken Field* see Moorhead, 158-166.

²⁶² Wieland Herzfelde, “Two Books,” review of *A Stricken Field*, by Martha Gellhorn, *Direction*, May, 1940, 20. All citations of this review refer to this page number.

whom [Gellhorn] knew or heard about in Prague.” The reviewer finds no fault in this borrowing from real life. “The charm of this book,” he writes, “lies in the fact that the author has not tried to be matter-of-fact when she writes about people and human situations.” His critique of the work is, however, related to Gellhorn’s focus on the humanity of the Czechs and Sudetens at the expense of detailing the “moral and political awakening” of the Czech political situation.

Gellhorn writes in *A Stricken Field*, “The reasons didn’t matter. If you are always and naturally on the side of the oppressed you would always naturally have reasons for danger,” but Herzfelde disagrees: “As little as the heart may want to agree, the reasons *do* matter.” Though Herzfelde ultimately deems the book “courageous,” he wishes it were more political. Herzfelde’s critique of Gellhorn’s focus on people rather than action and politics is reminiscent of criticisms levied upon sentimental fiction, criticisms which, as Jane Tompkins and, more recently, Berlant have shown, overlook the powerful political forces encoded in the “womanly” language “whose stated purpose is to influence the course of history.”²⁶³

The contradictions in the review—that the book derives its “charm” from the author’s refusal to be “matter-of-fact,” but that the lack of political and historical “reason” makes it “over-simplified”—illustrate the contradictions inherent in the reading public’s expectations and reception of women war correspondents. Audiences expected the tropes of sentimental fiction: stories within a story, overwrought emotion, attention to families especially in the form of mothers and daughters—but, at the same time, audiences and critics alike dismissed women’s writing as insubstantial because it

²⁶³ Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 123; 125.

embodied these very qualities. Meanwhile the review also, unconsciously, picks up on the fact that Gellhorn's novel *is* contradictory in its presentation of the woman war correspondent, who is simultaneously glamorous and tough, one of the boys and out of place, idealistic and dejected, activist and camp follower. As her treatment of Mary shows, Gellhorn was conscious of these contradictions, and, in her fictionalization of the woman war correspondent, Gellhorn expresses both a frustration with the shallowness of the career and an idealistic hope for its potential to make a difference.

The remarkable similarity between the *Collier's* piece and the novel—the self-portrait as Mary Douglas and the poaching of her own work—allows us to read Gellhorn's work with a critical eye to what the author, unmediated by the *Collier's* editorial machine, found important in her war correspondence. Gellhorn is best remembered for her wartime journalism, and her novels and stories garnered mixed reviews and usually tepid sales, but she repeatedly insisted that the journalism enabled the more important work of her novels, both financially and in terms of subject matter. Though it has proven to be her nonfiction—collections of her journalism and her travelogue *Travels With Myself and Another*—that have remained in print with steady sales, Gellhorn saw periodicals as ephemeral while books—literature—would last: “The books I do are what I earn my living [through journalism] for” she wrote to her publisher, Charles Scribner: “I am a writer of very serious books.”²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ Martha Gellhorn, *Selected Letters*, 97. Gellhorn had a clear sense of what counted as literature and what did not. Gellhorn, who could agonize for years over a novel or even a single story, was able to turn out what she called “bilgers”—vapid short stories about Italian contessas—in a matter of days, and she sold them to women's magazines or to the *Saturday Evening Post* to bolster her income. She never considered these stories important enough to include in any of her short story collections [Moorehead, 265-7].

Mary, too, will come to doubt the importance of her work. At the end of the novel, when she leaves Czechoslovakia with the smuggled manuscript in her bag, she uses her good looks and her American passport to get through customs: “[i]t’s my new lipstick, she thought” (298). Earlier in the novel, Rita, too, had worn a new lipstick, but it was the wrong shade and she wore it awkwardly. Because it is Mary and not Rita who makes it out of Prague with the smuggled documents, Mary’s looks do count for something, and Gellhorn’s novel insists, to the very end, not only on the mere fact of the woman war correspondent’s ambivalent relationship to her body and to her job but on the importance of that ambivalence.

Love Goes to Press

Love Goes to Press, Gellhorn’s only play, self-deprecatingly satirizes the figure of the woman war correspondent, but it also raises some of the same questions as *A Stricken Field*: How effective is journalism? Is it, as the play seems to suggest, just another form of false cosmopolitanism—Americans traveling all over the world, having adventures and affairs? The play also raises questions about the legitimacy of the woman reporter. A primary theme of the play—and one that *A Stricken Field* touches on only tangentially—is the impossibility of reconciling love and career. Thus war becomes an appropriate setting as the characters do battle.

Gellhorn co-wrote the play in 1945 with Virginia Cowles, who, like Gellhorn, was an experienced American war correspondent. Also like Gellhorn, Cowles was known for getting her stories without compromising her sense of style. Josephine Herbst remembers that Cowles wore “heavy gold bracelets” and “tiny black shoes with

incredibly high heels” even among the rubble of Madrid.²⁶⁵ According to Gellhorn, they wrote the play in only ten days, both characters admittedly “caricatures” of the two authors.²⁶⁶ Set in a press camp in Italy in 1944, the play follows two glamorous women war correspondents, Annabelle Jones and Jane Mason, over a three day period. Annabelle is reunited with her ex-husband, a fellow journalist with a habit for stealing her stories under the guise of protecting her from harm. Jane narrowly escapes falling for a British press officer who plans to send her off to England to await the end of the war on his family farm. Mistaken identities and unlikely coincidences keep the two women from getting their stories: Annabelle is duped yet again by her ex Joe Rogers, who takes off on a trip to Poland she had arranged, while Jane’s ride to the front—and thus her scoop—ends up going to Rogers’ new fiancé, Daphne, a would-be Hollywood starlet. In the end, both women, disillusioned, abandon their beaux and take off for a new story in Burma where, the audience learns after their final exit, the men will soon join them.

This battle between the sexes is the source of the play’s jokes, but beneath the comedy is a grim thesis. The woman war correspondent must trade on her feminine attractiveness to men to gain access to their territory, but she must also refrain from growing too close to any of the men she meets. She must remain impersonal; if she gives in to romantic impulses, she loses the identity that is tied up in her job. That identity, the play hints, is more than just a glamorous woman gathering scoops; she is also a serious activist telling the stories that otherwise will go unheard.

²⁶⁵ Herbst, 110.

²⁶⁶ Martha Gellhorn, introduction to *Love Goes to Press*, by Martha Gellhorn and Virginia Cowles, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), ix.

Annabelle and Jane may wear mink, but they get their stories by commandeering ambulances, closed staff cars, and even airplanes along the way while male journalists get a jeep if they are lucky. Most of the ribbing between the male and female reporters is good natured. Two minor characters, Hank and Tex, admire the women for their ability to sniff out good stories. Hank warns, “Don’t be deceived by Miss Mason. She and her pal Miss Jones sail around looking like *Vogue* illustrations and they get the stories before you’ve even heard of them. Some of our colleagues have a low opinion of those girls just because of that little trait.”²⁶⁷

Gellhorn and Cowles also poke fun at the brand of investigative reporting in which the reporter is the hero of his own story. Tex imitates heroic leads by “silly bastards”: ““I rode in on the lead tank; I spearheaded the infantry; I caught the mortar shells in my teeth; I dug up the mines with my pocket knife”” (8). Here Gellhorn may be poking fun at Hemingway’s work in the D-Day story that scooped hers, in which he helped navigate his boat across the channel without maps, or his article “How We Came to Paris,” in which the author plays more than a reporter’s role in the liberation of the city.²⁶⁸ Hemingway, who had somewhat unflatteringly portrayed Gellhorn as the “Vassar bitch” Dorothy Bridges, in his own play about war correspondents, *The Fifth Column* (1938), was certainly fair game.²⁶⁹ Though the two plays—one a farce, one propaganda—are vastly different, *The Fifth Column* also explores the theme of war,

²⁶⁷ Gellhorn and Cowles, 12. All subsequent references are to this edition, and page numbers are cited parenthetically in the text.

²⁶⁸ Ernest Hemingway, “Voyage to Victory,” *Collier’s*, July 22, 1944, 11+; Ernest Hemingway, “How We Came to Paris,” *Collier’s*, October 7, 1944, 14+.

²⁶⁹ Ernest Hemingway, *The Fifth Column* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1938), 5. All subsequent references are to this edition, and page numbers are cited parenthetically in the text.

reporters, and relationships. Gellhorn and Hemingway draw very similar conclusions. Hemingway writes in the Preface to his play that “If [the play] has a moral it is that people who work for certain organizations have very little time for home life,” a point illustrated by the journalists who scatter to their next assignment at the end of Gellhorn’s play (vi).

If Hemingway’s Dorothy falls a little flat, as critics have argued, it is because Hemingway’s position on the outside, as a competitor *against* the girl reporter for her scoop and a competitor *for* her affection, clouds his perspective. Hemingway’s thesis is similar to Gellhorn’s—journalism and relationships do not mix. For Hemingway’s Dorothy, the only problem seems to be losing the love of the male protagonist Philip Rawlings—her own career is unimportant. But Gellhorn and Cowles give us a glimpse of the girl reporter from that reporter’s own perspective, and though their protagonists are just as silly as Dorothy, if not more so, Jane and Annabelle’s disappointment is much keener. Even Daphne, a seemingly prissy, frightened ENSA starlet, is not as dumb—or as dependent on men—as she seems. (And, if *Collier’s* praise of Gellhorn’s Hollywood good looks is any indication, the link between starlets and journalists is not as tenuous as it would seem either). Engaged to the correspondent Joe Rogers, she plans to “stay with his mother until the war is over” because “a career isn’t everything” (14). This statement turns out to be a sly irony when one of the other correspondents reveals that Joe’s mother lives in Hollywood. Daphne, like Annabelle and Jane, is determined to spend the war exactly where she will see the most action. When Daphne is accidentally transported down a heavily shelled road to the front lines, she makes the most of the experience—

charming the soldiers and selling the movie rights to the story before she even leaves camp. (And, with the rights sold, she breaks her engagement to Joe Rogers).

When Jane contemplates leaving the profession, Annabelle, the reporter modeled most closely on Gellhorn, tells her: “we have to write [...] The people who fight can’t. It’s our job. (*hesitating*) Our duty, really” (19). Jane replies “So you’re still out to save the world, are you? [...] I’ll never forget when you turned up in Spain to battle for the under-dog in that black Schiaparelli number” (19). And, in reality, Gellhorn *had* worn Schiaparelli—a daring Italian couturier—to diplomatic parties in London and, incongruously, while traveling around the South collecting information for *The Trouble I’ve Seen*.²⁷⁰ Gellhorn had received the clothes free from the Italian designer who hoped the tall, blonde Gellhorn would publicize the collection.²⁷¹ The idea of the socially conscious author as a living advertisement for haute couture among European refugees and Depression-era Southerners is another interesting contradiction that Gellhorn negotiates, and her inclusion of the designer in the play points to a certain self-consciousness of the inappropriateness of the clothing and, simultaneously, a self-awareness of the figure she cut in it. These contradictions—visible in Gellhorn’s life and in the lives of her protagonists—call into question the importance of the reporter’s work. Despite the many setbacks—real and fictional—Gellhorn and her war correspondents go on.

Jane, echoing the complaint in *A Stricken Field* and in Gellhorn’s weary letter to her editor, argues, “I don’t believe we do much good. Either you can’t write anything the way it really is, or else no one will believe you,” to which Annabelle replies “You have to

²⁷⁰ Moorehead, 59; 77.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

go on trying” (19). Despite the setbacks, and despite the contradictions in her public image, the woman war correspondent serves a specific purpose in the writing of history, and it is not merely, as Annabelle demurs (to throw the male reporters off track), “Oh the usual. Local colour” (23). Nor is it adventure for adventure’s sake. Though she may play the part of the woman reporter after the women-and-children’s angle, or the war tourist in search of the next fashionable front, Annabelle, like Gellhorn in real life, is after something larger. When Joe steals Annabelle’s flight to Poland, his theft is more than just another scooping. Jane explains to her soon-to-be-ex-fiancé Philip:

all you and Joe can think about is what a jam he’s in with Daphne, and whether Annabelle is going to get a better story than he ever got, just because she’s a woman. That’s all you care about the war. It doesn’t occur to you that Annabelle is going on this trip because she can do a good job. She knows about the Poles. They haven’t any Press of their own to tell their story in. She’ll do something wonderful for them. But you couldn’t be expected to care about that. You only care about credentials and permission and whether everyone’s got travel orders. You seem to think she’s gone on this trip just to cause you trouble. (50)

In a play full of quips, quick jokes, and lighthearted banter, Jane’s speech stands out for its length and its serious tone. It defines the problems women war correspondents faced—problems of access, of accreditation, and of being taken seriously. In the end, Jane and Annabelle carry on, using their connections to gain transport to Burma, but we know that the same troubles that followed them to Italy will follow them there, too. Indeed, Gellhorn would continue to declare herself disillusioned and disappointed by journalism, especially after witnessing the horrors of the Dachau concentration camp when it was liberated in April 1945. That experience changed her, and, as she told a friend years later, “I know I have never again felt that lovely, easy, lively hope in life

which I knew before, not in life, not in our species, not in our future on earth.”²⁷² And yet, for four more decades, she would go on writing because, as a soldier quoted in her Dachau piece insists, ““We got to talk about it. We got to talk about it, if anyone believes us or not.””²⁷³

Conclusion

In his defense of journalism as an important and understudied genre of modernism, Patrick Collier notes that critics have wrongly believed that the exclusion of journalism from discussions of modernism was a product of modernism itself: “the narrative of anxiety about journalism has long been a part of our understanding of modernism, which was seen for years as a rejection of mass culture in all its forms.”²⁷⁴ Kevin Dettmar and Stephen Watt persuasively argued for the importance of journalism as a “means of self-promotion and self-fashioning” for modernist writers, and Collier takes their argument further to note that journalism itself served as a productive literary subject: journalism is a way in which modernists “could work out their questions and anxieties about the democracy, and the arts, and the individual writer’s or artist’s potential influence [...] a readily available way of talking about the social function, if any, of literature in modern society.”²⁷⁵ For Gellhorn, journalism and her fictional work about journalism serve this function. *Collier’s* provided her with a forum in which to develop her literary voice, but, more importantly than mere self-promotion, Gellhorn’s journalism was also an acceptable forum for her message of protest, which would

²⁷² Gellhorn quoted in Moorehead, 240.

²⁷³ Gellhorn, *Face*, 179.

²⁷⁴ Collier, 2.

²⁷⁵ Dettmar and Watt quoted in Collier, 6; Collier, 6.

constitute the heart of her fictional work as well. In that fictional work she struggles with the tensions between journalism and activism.

She critiques the press—making fun of it in *Love Goes to Press* and decrying its inability to effect change in *A Stricken Field*. In the 1959 preface to *The Face of War*, a collection of her war correspondence, it would seem Gellhorn had given up on journalism. Previously believing journalism to be a “guiding light,” and the journalist herself “eyes” for the public’s “conscience,” a disillusioned Gellhorn declared that “the guiding light of journalism was no stronger than a glow-worm.”²⁷⁶ And yet Gellhorn would continue her work as a journalist and war correspondent for another quarter century. As Margaret Fuller had done more than a century before, Gellhorn maintained that “journalism at its best and most effective is education.”²⁷⁷ Gellhorn never gave up on writing as a moral imperative. Even if the “articles [...] might have been written in invisible ink, printed on leaves, and loosed to the wind” she continued to write.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁶ Gellhorn, *Face*, 1-2.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 3; See also note 27 above.

²⁷⁸ Gellhorn, *Face*, 2.

CHAPTER FIVE:

HIS GIRL FRIDAY AND BRENDA STARR, REPORTER

At the end of *Love Goes to Press*, Jane Mason of the *New York Bulletin* suffers a moment of doubt as she prepares to leave on assignment to Burma rather than marry the stuffy English gentleman, Public Relations Officer Major Philip Brooke-Jervaux. Jane knows full well that a future in which she would “get up at five in the morning, and plough, and help with the harvest, and take care of the stock” is not for her, and yet, when she commands Corporal Cramp to bring her bags down to the waiting car she hesitates:

Tell Major Philip I’m no good at writing letters, tell him I really wouldn’t be of any use in the country, he’ll know what I mean, and please to excuse me and thank him for everything, and—and—oh, Cramp, if I don’t go at once I’ll never go, and it wouldn’t work.”²⁷⁹

Moments after Jane “exits hurriedly,” the jilted Major comes in and takes a call from a superior ordering him to report the next day—to Burma.

The play ends with a renewal of the conflict with which it began: the two women war correspondents, Jane and *San Francisco World* reporter Annabelle Jones, head off to an exotic outpost to try to get their stories, only to find that love gets in the way. Jane faces the prospect of falling again for Philip, who would make her into a proper English country wife, and Annabelle will have to confront the irresistible chemistry between herself and her ex-husband Joe Rogers, a reporter for a rival paper. She had divorced him because he stole her stories, and, in *Love Goes to Press*, she takes him back only to find he does it again, sneaking off on a flight meant for her under the pretense that the mission

²⁷⁹ Martha Gellhorn and Virginia Cowles, *Love Goes to Press* (1945/46 ; with an Introduction by Martha Gellhorn, edited and with an Afterword by Sandra Spanier, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 76. All subsequent references are to this edition, and page numbers are cited parenthetically in the text.

is “too dangerous” for a woman (73). With Joe and Philip and Annabelle and Jane all heading off to Burma, the audience is left knowing that the trouble between the couples has not been resolved at all—the women will continue to battle their love interests for the right to write and battle their own better judgment for a chance at love.

Gellhorn knew firsthand the difficulty of trying to mix love and work. Although her relationship with Ernest Hemingway had been forged when the two were war correspondents in Spain, once he married her, Hemingway expected Gellhorn to give up the very thing that had brought them together.²⁸⁰ “Are you a war correspondent or wife in my bed?” he asked her, via telegram, while she was out reporting on World War II.²⁸¹ It is no coincidence that the thesis of *Love Goes to Press* resembles the “moral” of Ernest Hemingway’s *The Fifth Column*, that “people who work for certain organizations have very little time for home life.”²⁸² The fictional couples in *Love Goes to Press* and *The Fifth Column*, like the real-life Gellhorn and Hemingway, have a hard time separating career and romance. It is this muddling of the professional with the personal that confused contemporary reviewers and makes Gellhorn’s play resistant to feminist readings.

In her Afterword to the published play (1995), Sandra Spanier notes the disappointment that the “love” in *Love Goes to Press* caused its American reviewers

²⁸⁰ I would like to thank Sandra Spanier for sharing with me two unpublished pieces, which helped to shape my thinking about Martha Gellhorn’s relationship with Ernest Hemingway and to resolve some of the seeming contradictions between Gellhorn’s personal life and her political conscience.

²⁸¹ quoted in Moorehead, 212. See also Sandra Spanier, “Rivalry, Romance, and War Reporters: Martha Gellhorn’s *Love Goes to Press* and the *Collier’s* Files,” in *Hemingway and Women: Female Critics and the Female Voice*, ed. Lawrence R. Broer and Gloria Holland (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 256-275.

²⁸² Ernest Hemingway, preface to *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1938), vi.

when it opened in New York City in 1947. One critic wondered how, “with so much material at their disposal,” Gellhorn and Cowles “decided to focus on love”; another found the “love affairs” of the plot to be “dull and profitless” and not befitting “typewriter soldiers.”²⁸³ Indeed, even if we follow Gellhorn’s advice to take the play as “a joke” and to remember that the two correspondents “bea[r] no resemblance whatever, of any kind at all to war and war correspondents,” Jane and Annabelle are problematic figures.²⁸⁴ Is marriage really the only viable happy ending for even the most modern woman?

In the popular imagination, the answer to that question is a qualified yes. For the girl reporter to stay economically viable—as a marketable commodity in the entertainment industry and as a “girl Friday” or “bombshell” in the fictional world she occupies—she must maintain a careful balance between being sexually available and being an independent career girl. The reporters themselves are aware of the risk. Even before Joe steals Annabelle’s transport to the Polish front, Annabelle displays ambivalence at the prospect of marriage. When Jane asks Annabelle whether she plans to marry Joe, Annabelle demurs, “No, it’s too dangerous. You risk ruining everything with marriage” (69). Meanwhile, it is as important that the girl reporter *could* marry as that she does not. Neither a married woman nor a spinster can be a girl reporter (not in Hollywood anyway), so the fictional girl reporter must navigate the constant promise, threat, and deferral of marriage in order to maintain her career.

²⁸³ *The New Yorker* (unsigned) and Brooks Atkinson of *The New York Times* quoted in Spanier, 81-82.

²⁸⁴ Gellhorn, Introduction, *Love*, viii.

In this chapter I examine the contingency between romance and career in popular instantiations of the girl reporter in order to complicate the conclusions of the previous chapters. In earlier chapters I read women journalists as transgressive in their challenges of gender paradigms and politically active in their insistence on giving voice to women, children, the poor, and the insane, and I located the rhetorical heritage of the girl reporter in the sentimental traditions and feminist rhetoric of nineteenth-century “scribbling women.” In close readings of the 1940 Howard Hawks film *His Girl Friday* and the comic strip *Brenda Starr, Reporter* (1940-present), I look to the limitations of that heritage to argue that the body of the modern girl reporter is a contested site in the American public sphere. To assume that the professional journalist does not maintain an interest in the domestic is to overlook the rhetorical tradition from which she evolved. For this reason, the girl reporter remains a contradictory and fraught figure not completely at home in the narrative of modernism, which, like journalism itself, self-consciously privileges impersonality and objectivity over sentiment. Performing the role of the independent career woman while trading upon the affective subjectivity of the female experience, the modern girl reporter simultaneously relies upon and is limited by the heteronormative precepts she purports to transcend.

“I’m no suburban bridge player. I’m a newspaperman”

I have noted that the girl reporter as a historical reality emerged during the “golden age” of periodicals; unsurprisingly the girl reporter served as a popular character in films during the “golden age” of cinema as well.²⁸⁵ This so-called golden age, which

²⁸⁵ The *New-York Mirror* 1840 quoted in Susan Belasco Smith and Kenneth M. Price, introduction to *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Charlottesville and

began with the advent of the “talkies” and lasted through the decline of the studio system in the 1950s, splashed hundreds of girl reporters upon the silver screen, and, as film historian Howard Good points out, in numbers disproportionate to the actual number of women working in real-life newsrooms.²⁸⁶ Some of the explanations for the popularity of the girl reporter focus on practical reasons: Hollywood was full of ex-journalists for one, and, for another, when the Hays censorship code was enforced starting in 1934, women needed something to do onscreen besides lounge around in nightgowns.²⁸⁷ The girl reporter—who challenged the experts, exposed corruption, advocated for women, children, and the poor and did so with every hair in place—offered limitless possibilities for celluloid adventures.

One example is Torchy Blane, heroine of a series of nine Warner Brother films during the 1930s, who, like real-life Nellie Bly, set out “to prove how useless cops are.”²⁸⁸ But as Good notes, even Torchy Blane “submitted to male authority” eventually—in the form of her police lieutenant boyfriend.²⁸⁹ Undercover sleuthing and a hard-won scoop are not enough of a happy ending in Hollywood; the mass-mediated girl reporter’s ultimate success is measured by the same single criterion by which all women are judged: marital status. Good writes that, with her “frenetic energy, rapid-fire

London: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 5 and Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History, 1690-1960* 3d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 341.

²⁸⁶ Nearly 500 films in the 1930s and 1940s featured female journalists. For a comprehensive list see the database maintained by the University of Southern California Annenberg School of Communication: “Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist in Popular Culture” <http://ijpc.org/sobsmaster.htm> updated April 2008. Accessed November 5, 2009.

²⁸⁷ Howard Good, *Girl Reporter: Gender, Journalism and the Movies* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 5-6.

²⁸⁸ 1937 *Variety* review of Torchy Blane, quoted in Good, 7.

²⁸⁹ Good, 7

repartee, and man-tailored suits” Torchy Blane “didn’t challenge the old notion of woman as the weaker sex; she just reproduced it in a more contemporary—and insidious—form.”²⁹⁰ Torchy Blane may not fulfill Good’s expectations for a modern career woman, but it would be hasty to call her version of womanhood “insidious.”

We do not necessarily need to erase the seeming paradox between the feminist desire to transcend traditional gender roles and the girl reporter’s desire for domestic bliss. The “public mode of sentimentality,” Lauren Berlant argues in *The Female Complaint* (2004), is interested in “scenes of ordinary survival, not transgression”: “In a sentimental worldview, people’s ‘interests’ are less in changing the world than in not being defeated by it.”²⁹¹ Despite the silliness of the plot in which the girl reporter often finds herself—*Love Goes to Press* is, after all, a farce; the *Torchy Blane* films are B movies intended for double features; *His Girl Friday* is a “screwball” comedy; and *Brenda Starr, Reporter* is, obviously, a comic—we ought to read the popular incarnations of the girl reporter as “something other than a failure to be politics” (Berlant 25). Berlant coins a term, the “juxtapolitical,” to describe the position of so-called “women’s culture” in the public sphere. “[F]eminist realist-sentimentality” (like the popular image of the girl reporter) “thrives in *proximity* to the political,” she argues (x). The irreconcilable tension between the independent, cosmopolitan, activist reporter on the one hand and, on the other, the glamour girl looking for a man to rescue her from her latest scrape—and,

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint and the Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 24-25, 27. All subsequent references are to this edition, and page numbers are cited parenthetically in the text.

perhaps, rescue her from the career entirely—is a frequent trope in mass market depictions of the girl reporter.

His Girl Friday opens with a prologue warning the viewer that the story to follow is about the “‘Dark Ages’ of the newspaper game—when to a reporter ‘getting that story’ justified anything short of murder.” The prologue insists upon the fictionality of the film, which contains, supposedly, “no resemblance to the men and women of the press of today,” a disclaimer that resembles Gellhorn’s 1995 Introduction to her play. In the tradition of a fairy tale, the story then gets underway with “once upon a time.” By invoking the fairy-tale opening and by joking about its own fictionality, the prologue acknowledges that the characters we are about to encounter are typecast, idealized, and just plain silly. The warning is somewhat tongue-in-cheek since the movie, which makes topical references to Hitler, the European war, and actor Ralph Bellamy (who co-stars in the film), is clearly set in the present day, but there might indeed be some dark statements about the newspaper business in the romantic hijinx of the glamorous girl reporter and the irascible editor who loves her.

The prologue fades into a shot of a busy newsroom as Hildy Johnson (Rosalind Russell) breezes on screen in a striped coat with matching hat and commands the admiration of men and women alike. Newsmen jump to their feet to greet her, and she sails past a spinster “Advice to the Lovelorn” columnist on her way to meet City Editor Walter Burns, Hildy’s ex-husband and soon-to-be ex-boss. Hildy has come to tell Walter in person that she will be remarrying and is therefore quitting her job. Walter, who wants to win back his ex-wife and retain his star reporter, attempts to get her reminiscing about their brief and stormy marriage, without much success:

Walter: Don't you remember the home I promised you?

Hildy: Sure I do. That was the one we were going to have right after the honeymoon. That honeymoon.

Walter: Well, was it my fault? Did I know that that coal mine was going to have another cave in?²⁹²

Like the couples in *Love Goes to Press*, Walter and Hildy seem unable to reconcile domestic bliss with a career in journalism. Hildy criticizes Walter for putting work in front of their home life: "All I know is that instead of two weeks in Atlantic City with my bridegroom I spent two weeks in a coal mine [...] That's not what I got married for." Hildy, it turns out, is just as bad. She has decided to remarry, but to do so she needs to extract herself from the newspaper business, which she ultimately proves unable to do. She tells Walter "I'm getting married and as far away from newspapers as I can get," setting up the dichotomy that a woman can either be married or she can be a reporter, but she cannot be both. Hildy confronts this dichotomy several times, even as her resolve to quit the business and marry her soft-spoken insurance-salesman fiancé, Bruce Baldwin (Ralph Bellamy), begins to wane. She tells Walter, "I'll be a woman, not a news machine. I'll have babies, give them cod liver oil and watch their teeth grow. If I see one of them look at a paper I'll brain 'em."

Working for the paper prevents her not only from having a home life but it prevents her from being a woman at all:

Walter: You're a newspaperman

Hildy: I wanna go where I can be a woman.

Walter: You mean a traitor.

Hildy: A traitor to what?

²⁹² I have attempted to provide faithful transcriptions, but a trademark feature of a Howard Hawks film is overlapping dialogue and ad-libbing, which does not reproduce well on the printed page. Quotations are from my own transcription of the film and checked against the script at http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/h/his-girl-friday-script-transcript.html.

Walter: To journalism.

In fact, *His Girl Friday* was based on a play with two male leads: *The Front Page* (1928) by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. Hawks liked how the dialogue sounded when read by a woman and made minor revisions in order to turn Hildebrand into Hildegard.²⁹³ Instead of merely pitting an editor against his best reporter, the movie tells the story of professional conflict concurrently with a marriage plot. Jeffrey Smith suggests that this success is a happy accident that occurred when Hawks mixed the role of a great newspaperman with Russell's "recognizable, 1940 romantic lead," resulting in the familiar "type" of the "strong-minded career woman."²⁹⁴ But as a girl reporter Hildy is a particular "type" of career woman who, impeccably dressed and exuding sexual confidence, puts herself in physical danger to get a story. This persona is at odds with traditional domestic roles for women, and the general thesis of *The Front Page*—that marriage and the newspaper business do not mix—in *His Girl Friday* moves beyond the boundaries of plot and becomes a question of character.

The tension between Hildy's choice—girl reporter versus wife—is one fraught with sexual tension, emphasized by the un-feminine settings in which the reporter finds herself. With high-heeled shoes and stylish clothes that hug her curves, Hildy clearly plays up her femininity, and the film relies on the contrast between the distinctly un-feminine setting—the newsroom, the jailhouse, the courthouse—to emphasize her womanly difference. Hildy's looks are a key factor in her success—a fact of which both she and Walter are aware. He reminds her:

²⁹³ Good, 42.

²⁹⁴ Jeffrey A. Smith, "'His Girl Friday,' in the Cell: A Case Study of Theatre-to-Film Adaptation," *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 13.2 (1985): 72.

Walter: “Five years ago you were a college girl from a school of journalism. I took a doll-faced hick”

Hildy (interrupting): “You wouldn’t have if I wasn’t doll-faced.”

Walter: “I made you a great reporter.”

What Hildy lacks is not femininity so much as domesticity, and, with it, as she notes, a “halfway normal life.” After Hildy convinces Walter that she really means to leave journalism in pursuit of this normal life, Walter goes to work concocting a scheme to get Hildy to realize she cannot give up journalism—or him.

He gives her an assignment to cover the story of Earl Williams (John Qualen), a man about to be wrongfully hanged for murder. Earl, recently fired from his job and possibly not in his right mind, has shot and killed a black policeman following a Communist demonstration in the park. Williams is due to hang the next morning, and corrupt officials—the mayor and his bumbling sheriff—fear losing the “colored vote” if Earl goes free. Earl’s innocence is an issue not fully explored in the film; indeed, Earl’s guilt or innocence is irrelevant to Hildy as she pursues her story, which ends up being not so much the profile of a doomed man as an exposé of corruption at City Hall when the mayor and sheriff try to conceal the governor’s last-minute order for a reprieve.

Walter tries to appeal to Hildy’s sentimental side to get her to do the story, telling her “it takes a woman’s touch,” but it is her need for excitement rather than the desire to advocate for the wrongfully accused that finally brings Hildy on board. At first she tells Walter, “Don’t get poetic. Get Sweeney. He’s the best man for that sob-sister stuff,” resisting the typically feminine brand of reporting. When she agrees to do the story, she slips right back into her old role, obviously at ease in the courthouse press room where one of the other journalists says, behind her back, “I give the marriage six months [...]

she can't stay away from the paper. Did you see her when that [fire] bell went off [...] She's like us or she wouldn't be waiting for [Williams] to dance."

Hildy recognizes the value of sympathy, though she barely seems to possess any herself. She befriends Williams in jail, feeding him lines that will make for a better article and will work with Walter's plan for the story's layout: Earl's deranged ramblings in one column, juxtaposed with the corrupt state medical examiner's testimony of Williams' sanity on the other. Smith points out that the jail cell scene occurs only in the film and not in the play; this is a telling difference, Smith argues, because it represents the "convergence" of Hildy's "weddedness to newspaper work—and, implicitly, to Walter."²⁹⁵ More importantly, the added scene shows that a male reporter lacks the influence that the girl reporter yields with her physical beauty and sympathetic ear (an idea that also drives the plot of the first *Brenda Starr* storyline, which I explore below). Smith and other critics of the film are content to read Hildy's behavior in this scene as "feminine" "compassion."²⁹⁶ Indeed, Hildy, like the stunt reporters of old, challenges expert authority while giving voice to the working class and insane. Hildy and Walter's goal, however, is less to help Williams than it is to gain a big scoop.

As a woman, Hildy understands sentiment; as a reporter she capitalizes on it—quite literally. Jean Lutes calls Hildy's interview with Williams a "sentimental commodity" because initially she goes ahead with the interview in exchange for Walter's purchase of an insurance policy from Bruce.²⁹⁷ Lutes argues that it is Molly Malloy

²⁹⁵ Smith, 73.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*; See also James Walters, "Making Light of the Dark: Understanding the World of His Girl Friday," *Journal of Film and Video* 60:3-4 (2008): 90-102.

²⁹⁷ Jean Marie Lutes, *Front-Page Girls: Women Journalists in American Culture and Fiction, 1880-1930* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 163.

(Helen Mack) who “embod[ies] the sensational content of women’s journalism” with her tearful plea for Williams’ life.²⁹⁸ While the other reporters at the court house ignore the hooker-with-a-heart-of-gold, Hildy sees the value in Molly’s story. The other journalists sit around playing poker and insulting Molly as she pours out the tale of how she pitied Williams and brought him home with her, but the camera then cuts to Hildy who is taking down every word on her typewriter. Molly laments to Hildy, whom she apparently believes will show her some womanly sympathy, “they ain’t human,” to which Hildy replies “I know. They’re newspapermen.” But Hildy herself has already been described as a “newspaperman,” and her kindness toward Molly and, later, toward Earl is merely a way to maintain exclusive dibs on a valuable source.

Walters points out that such “moral ambiguity” persists throughout the film, which, while funny enough on the surface, contains subplots involving murder, suicide, graft, prostitution, and racism.²⁹⁹ After all, the film’s prologue did try to warn viewers that the world Hildy and Walter inhabit is “dark.” A running gag throughout the film is Walter’s connection with organized crime, a circumstance that Hildy looks upon with only mild annoyance when the antics of Walter’s goons inconveniences her. The line between right and wrong in the film is blurry enough that scholars of film resist categorizing it as a simple “comedy of remarriage.”³⁰⁰ Robin Wood notes the “disturbing complexity of tone” in the film, but the problem is not just Hildy’s lack of sympathy or

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁹ Walters, 91.

³⁰⁰ “*His Girl Friday*, notably among the comedies of remarriage, does not end, even by implication, with a request for forgiveness [...] this is a way of understanding the terrible darkness of this comedy” [Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 182].

the seedy underworld that the film takes as a matter of course.³⁰¹ The darkness of the film also derives from its refusal to grant us the happy ending that is expected of a romantic comedy. Hildy will find happiness neither with Bruce, nor with Walter because, as her colleagues at the courthouse press office know, she is first of all a writer: “anybody who can write like that won’t give it up to sew socks” says one reporter as he looks over Hildy’s write up of Molly’s story.

Hildy is not just a talented writer. She is also physically daring, literally throwing herself at a story when she hikes her skirt and leaps to tackle the corrupt sheriff as he runs away during Earl’s jailbreak. Earl later holds Hildy at gunpoint in the court press office, but to Hildy, she is the one who has captured him: “I’ve captured Earl Williams—the murderer!” she excitedly tells Walter over the phone. Walter and Hildy then work to keep Earl hidden away in a roll top desk, not for his own safety but in order to secure their exclusive scoop for the *Morning Post*. When Molly comes back into the picture, worried that Earl will be re-captured, the distraught woman throws herself out of an open window to distract the reporters away from Earl’s hiding place: “You wouldn’t listen to me before, and now you want me to talk,” she tells them before jumping. In a move that proves puzzling even in a black comedy, the reporters run to the window, look down at her body sprawled on the pavement, speculate that she might be dead or she might still be moving, and then turn their attention back to the room. It is never explained if Molly has survived her fall, and no one, not even Hildy, seems to care. Her sympathies seem to die along with her source.

³⁰¹ Robin Wood, *Howard Hawks* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2006), 70.

Walters reads Hildy's lingering by the window after Molly's death leap as an "act of staying *close* to Molly," of hesitating between Molly, to whom she had earlier shown compassion, and the newspapermen.³⁰² Walters overlooks, however, that Hildy's compassion was not so much "empathy" as the realization that Molly was providing great stuff to write about. After all, in an earlier scene, Hildy was willing to sacrifice the life of her own future mother-in-law in pursuit of the story, sending her away with one of Walter's mobster buddies in order to keep her from revealing Earl's position in the desk. The mobster wrecks the car, and Mrs. Baldwin escapes unharmed, but Hildy is more upset by the inconvenience of Mrs. Baldwin's return than she was when she thought the woman had been killed.

In the scenes with Earl and Molly, Russell plays Hildy as a familiar type—the woman reporter who makes personal connections with her subject—but Hildy's interactions with her fiancé and her future mother-in-law demonstrate that her womanly sympathy is not authentic. As I have argued in the previous four chapters, sympathy and its attendant ability to tell others' stories is a source of incredible power, and this ability makes women good reporters, but it also makes them dangerous. Hildy is the realization of sympathetic power in the hands of an unfeeling individual, and the image she presents is so discordant not because the role was originally written for a man but because there is a lingering fear of what happens when women trade on that power. This fear explains why the girl reporter is always sexualized. Her sexuality may also be a source of power, but it is simultaneously an excuse for qualifying her position as a "*girl* reporter" and thus diffusing her importance.

³⁰² Walters, 98.

In stunt reporting, even though the stunt itself is a fabrication, the sentiment is real; in *His Girl Friday* Hildy's sentiment is an act. Molly is just another casualty of "war," to use Walter's own metaphor for the business, and he warns Hildy "you can't desert me now." She won't desert Walter, not for Bruce, and certainly not for Molly. War, it seems, is also, metaphorically, Hildy's "career" as Walter switches tactics and tells Hildy "[the story will] kick over City Hall. [...] This isn't just a newspaper story—it's a career!" and when Bruce tries to get her to leave with him, she gestures towards her typewriter and says "Can't you see this is the biggest thing in my life?" At that moment Bruce finally realizes what the other newspapermen have already noted, that Hildy is not the marrying type: "You never intended to be decent and live like a human," he tells her. "You're just like [Walter] and all the rest. If you had any sympathy or understanding ..." but his line is interrupted by Walter on the phone to the *Morning Post* discussing the layout for the big story. He tells the paper to bump Hitler to the funny papers and kill the Chinese earthquake story but to "leave the rooster story alone. That's human interest." For Walter, Hildy, and "all the rest," human interest and sympathy are just a commodities to be exploited to sell papers. Hildy admits what everyone has known all along: "I'm no suburban bridge player. I'm a newspaperman." She also suggests to Bruce "If you want me, take me as I am," but that suggestion cannot possibly work. There is no room for domestic bliss in the life of a woman who can sit and reminisce fondly about "stealing old lady Haggerty's stomach from the coroner."

Finally realizing that a woman who steals stomachs has no business marrying an insurance salesman, Hildy breaks things off with Bruce and goes back to Walter. Unfortunately, however, a romantic happy ending is not possible for the girl reporter

even when the suitor is a fellow journalist. No sooner has Walter announced to the press room that “we’re getting married,” and Hildy has extracted a promise that they will go to Niagara Falls on their long overdue honeymoon, than Walter takes a call about a strike in Albany, which also happens to be Bruce’s home town. It seems certain that the Albany honeymoon spells disaster for the romantic union, and as the screen fades to the credits we watch as Walter exits ahead of Hildy, leaving her to carry her own typewriter.

His Girl Friday, like *Love Goes to Press*, ends with the suggestion that the journalist couple will encounter the same discord all over again. The alternative, however, to be the wife of an insurance salesman living in a world that defines its very meaning in terms of the avoidance of risk, is worse. Ultimately, *His Girl Friday* demonstrates that Hildy and Walter will never have their happily ever after, nor will Hildy be Walter’s professional equal. Meanwhile, the newspaper business itself is portrayed as a degraded racket, with authentic womanly sympathy sold out to get a scoop for a paper that will line tomorrow’s bird cage. For Hildy—indeed, for the fictional world served by Hildy and Walter’s *Morning Post*—the situation is lose-lose, and for this reason *His Girl Friday* is pitched in its prologue as a “dark ages” “fairy tale.”

“Brenda always gets her man”

Hildy and Walter’s story ends on an ambiguous note, the happy ending clouded by the implication that their old problems are already recurring. It is essentially the same ending that Gellhorn and Cowles write for Annabelle and Jane. This dark cloud looms over the adventures of the girl reporter—any girl reporter, not just Hildy—no matter which path she chooses. Though she may be young and beautiful, if she remains unmarried, the real-life girl reporter will eventually find herself at a desk job—like Nellie

Bly, who finished her career writing newspaper columns that sought to pair adoptive parents with orphans, or like the Advice to the Lovelorn columnist in the opening shot of *His Girl Friday*, who dresses in a drab suit and tries unsuccessfully to interest Hildy in an anecdote about her cat.

The only solution for the girl reporter is never to marry and never to grow old, and one reporter has managed to remain eternally youthful for nearly seventy years. Comic strip heroine Brenda Starr lives on in the funny pages, no older today than she was in June 1940 when she made her debut in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* Sunday comics supplement. The nature of the continuity strip insists that Brenda embark on one adventure after another, and though her hairstyles and clothes have changed over the years, Brenda remains a girl reporter in her mid-twenties, always pursuing a story and always pursued by handsome men who beg her to marry them.

In 1945, the year *Love Goes To Press* debuted, Marcia Winn, a reporter for the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, jokingly confessed to a professional rivalry between herself and Brenda. Winn, in her profile of Brenda's creator, Dale Messick, suggests that "beauty, spelled c-u-r-v-e-s, is a circulation builder," and she gives Brenda credit for the "tremendous circulations" of the papers that feature her.³⁰³ Winn's praise is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, but a note of truth sounds in the critique of her own career: after a decade in the newspaper business—during which time she focused mainly on stories relating to fashion, tourism, strange court cases, and charity for women and children—Winn writes that she has lost "one year's quota of sleep, 10 sorely needed pounds of weight, [her] youthful charm, and whatever soft radiance there ever was to [her]

³⁰³ Marcia Winn, "A Star Reporter Writes About a Starr Reporter," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 14, 1945.

complexion”; Brenda on the other hand, “is ageless and eternally beautiful.” But even with the advantage of eternal youth, Brenda, like Hildy, is unable to reconcile journalism and a happy ending; after sixty-nine years Brenda still hasn’t found lasting love with reporter/photographer Tom, the mysterious Basil St. John, or any of the numerous other men who have begged her to marry them. Indeed, the impossibility of reconciling love and career fuels the success of the strip.

Messick’s real first name was Dalia, but she adopted the more masculine-sounding Dale as a defense against the editors and publishers who would not publish the work of a female cartoonist. Trained at the Art Institute of Chicago, she found early inspiration from the drawings by Nell Brinkley that were popular in newspapers when she was a girl.³⁰⁴ The strip debuted in June 1940, six months after *His Girl Friday* appeared in movie houses, and ran weekly in the Sunday funnies until 1945 when it became a daily feature. One of the longest-running comics of all time, the strip continues today.³⁰⁵ The original Brenda bears some resemblance to Rosalind Russell’s Hildy Johnson, wearing fashionable clothes that hug her curves, chasing down sources in high heels, and, when upset, throwing things at the heads of the men who make her angry. Like Hildy, real-life girl reporter Gellhorn, and Gellhorn’s fictional avatars Annabelle and Jane, Brenda Starr uses all of her assets to get her stories.

³⁰⁴ Biographical information on Messick, except when noted, is from Winn; as I noted in Chapter One, Brinkley illustrated Nellie Bly for the *New York Evening Journal*.

³⁰⁵ Messick retired in 1980 [Jackie Leger, “Dale Messick: A Comic Strip Life, *Animation World Magazine* 5.04 (July 2000), <http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.04/5.04pages/legermessick.php3> (Accessed November 1, 2009)].

Brenda Starr, rare among continuity strips for its career-girl female protagonist quickly built a diverse fan following.³⁰⁶ Messick received fan mail from would-be girl reporters, fashion students, and, not surprisingly, male fans, one of whom asked Messick for a “daring” picture of Brenda. Messick, deliberately misinterpreting what version of “daring” the man wanted to see, sent him a drawing of Brenda going over Niagara Falls in a barrel. Messick’s joke puts the eager young man in his place, but it also makes a statement about the relationship between sexuality and risk. The modern girl reporter, as I have argued, evolved from the “stunt” reporters of the previous century, and a great deal of her appeal derives from the suggestiveness of the female body at risk. In a way the ardent fan got exactly what he wished.

In the first installment of *Brenda Starr*, Brenda’s prototype—a little less curvy and a little more demure in her choice of clothing than the vamp who would soon take over the newsroom and the funny papers—sits at a typewriter bored with the same old “birth and death notices.” Driven to action by the jeers of her male colleagues who ask “how’s our little globe-trotter today?” she declares “I’ve had just about enough of your wise-cracks! I’m fed up on this sissy stuff—” and marches into the editor’s office to demand a better beat.³⁰⁷ The editor tells her she should go down to the jail and get Silky Fowler’s story by midnight or she’s out of a job. The problem, of course, is that “no reporter in town’s had any luck with that guy,” but Brenda gives it a try.

³⁰⁶ Other female characters were typically villains (see, for example, *Dragon Lady in Terry and the Pirates*) or “sweethearts” (see, for example, *Boots And Her Buddies*) [Tom Mason, “No Girls Allowed: An Introduction to Brenda Starr and Dale Messick,” *The Red-Headed Bombshell* (Newbury Park, CA: Malibu Graphics, Inc., 1989), [i]].

³⁰⁷ Dale Messick, “Brenda Starr: Reporter,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 30, 1940.

As she heads out, the newsroom is abuzz with speculation about whether “that red-headed bombshell” will be able to make Silky talk. A man who looks a great deal like Cary Grant—and who in later strips the audience will come to know as Brenda’s perennial suitor Tom—begs her: “call it off and for the millionth time will ya marry me?” Brenda leaves the office saying, “My mind’s made up—Brenda always gets her man.” The assignment is Brenda’s first, so Brenda has no precedent on which to base her story, unless she, like her readers, conflates her love life with her professional success. It seems as if, for Brenda herself, her ability to get a man socially translates directly to her ability as a reporter to get her source and as an amateur sleuth to catch the bad guy. The skills set required is, presumably, the same. In a series of panels that resemble movie stills from the jailhouse scene in *His Girl Friday*, Brenda uses her femininity to get Silky’s story. It only takes her four installments to get it, along with the threat/promise of a “date” when Silky gets “out’a dis jug.”³⁰⁸

Unfortunately, Brenda falls victim to the same problem that will plague Gellhorn’s Annabelle in *Love Goes to Press*: Brenda’s beau, Tom, steals her Silky Fowler scoop. Casually lighting a cigar, Tom tells her “It was too big a story for you to muff.”³⁰⁹ When she declares “I’ll never date you again Tom Taylor,—let alone marry you,” Tom tries to excuse his actions: “Gee Brenda, I did it to protect you. Silky Fowler’s a dangerous criminal. No telling what he might do.”³¹⁰ Tom uses exactly the same excuse that Joe Rogers fed to Annabelle, and, like Joe, Tom lets the girl reporter do all the legwork and then reaps the rewards under the guise that reporting is a dangerous

³⁰⁸ Dale Messick, “Brenda Starr: Reporter,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 7, 1940.

³⁰⁹ Dale Messick, “Brenda Starr: Reporter,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 14, 1940.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

business. Later, when Tom is again caught eavesdropping on Brenda, he tells her that “nursing [...] personal grudges” is what makes women “lousy reporters,” though the real problem appears to be the men who necessitate those grudges in the first place.³¹¹

In Brenda’s next adventure, she follows Tom’s advice to “pour yourself into a costume” in order to track down a mysterious villain at a masquerade ball.³¹² Going undercover, much as stunt reporter Nellie Bly had done in her madhouse series, Brenda herself becomes the news story. When she is captured by the evil jewel thief she had been pursuing, the headline of the *Flash* reads “Beautiful Reporter Kidnapped.”³¹³ Then Brenda orchestrates her own rescue by tapping out an S.O.S. message in morse code on the radiator. The plotlines of *Brenda Starr* are preposterous, and self-consciously so. Much as Bly had prepared for her madhouse stunt by reading ghost stories, Brenda gets up her nerve for the stunt by reading a book called *Murder Stories* (and going shopping).³¹⁴ Though she has attracted a great deal of admiration for being one of the only career girls in the funny pages, and Messick has often been commended for making good with a female protagonist in a male-dominated business, Brenda nevertheless conforms heavily to gender norms and the tropes of the pulp fiction that Messick depicts her reading.

³¹¹ Dale Messick, “Brenda Starr: Reporter,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 21, 1940. Brenda’s loyal office boy Pesky clues Brenda to the fact that Tom is behind a newspaper eavesdropping on their conversation, and he refers to Tom as “that lousy fifth columnist.” Pesky may be making a general reference to internal espionage, but the remark is likely an allusion to Hemingway’s *The Fifth Column*, which, adapted by Benjamin Glazer, had recently played on Broadway from March 6 to May 18, 1940. [Dale Messick, *The Red-Headed Bombshell*, 7.]

³¹² Dale Messick, “Brenda Starr: Reporter,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 21, 1940.

³¹³ Dale Messick, “Brenda Starr: Reporter,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 1, 1940.

³¹⁴ Dale Messick, “Brenda Starr: Reporter,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 6, 1940.

Brenda, who in another adventure is shown “home safe in bed with a good mystery book,” apparently does not read romances, and the “happily ever after” trope is notably missing from her life.³¹⁵ She tells Tom, who wants to see Brenda fired because it’s the “only way” he can get her to marry him, “save your breath.....I won’t marry you!”³¹⁶ These continuous marriage proposals themselves become a motif within the *Brenda Starr* series as Tom tries to convince Brenda to quit the business and marry him: “I have a job for you....just being Mrs. Tom Taylor!”³¹⁷ Tom isn’t Brenda’s only would-be husband. Larry Nickels, millionaire editor of the *Sun Valley Cloud* (and an excellent skier), would also make Brenda his wife. As he explains to Brenda after rescuing her from a fall on the ski slopes: “The thing I admire about your boss most.....is his genius for picking so beautiful and clever a girl reporter as you.....so I talked him into sending you here to give my paper new life.”³¹⁸ Larry proposes to her within a few panels of introducing himself, and in an attempt to hold her interest he tells Brenda about a mysterious ski lodge where an evil professor is keeping people prisoner. For Larry, the story is just a way to keep Brenda from going back to New York, “and that’s why you’ll never be a good newspaper man” she informs him.³¹⁹ Unlike Brenda, Larry lets romance interfere with his work for the paper, but he can afford to do so; if he were to marry Brenda, he would still be editor of the *Cloud*. For him, “new life” for his paper and a new life for himself are not mutually exclusive. Brenda, on the other hand, to keep the serial running, can never settle down.

³¹⁵ Dale Messick, “Brenda Starr: Reporter,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 8, 1940.

³¹⁶ Dale Messick, “Brenda Starr: Reporter,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 1, 1940.

³¹⁷ Dale Messick, “Brenda Starr: Reporter,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 8, 1940.

³¹⁸ Dale Messick, “Brenda Starr: Reporter,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 12, 1941.

³¹⁹ Dale Messick, “Brenda Starr: Reporter,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 26, 1941.

Conclusion

Hildy Johnson and Brenda Starr are not like Gellhorn's idealistic Mary in *A Stricken Field*, or like Gellhorn's real-life persona, or like Nellie Bly, all of whom use the rhetoric of sentimentality to appeal to the audience's sense of right versus wrong. The popular image of the girl reporter lacks this sympathy, and her pursuit of a story is part of a larger narrative of her pursuit of a husband—though this conclusion must be continually deferred. She may appear to be a modern career girl, but her modernity is bound up in fashionable clothing choices, sexual tension with her male co-workers, witty repartee, and the ability to chuck medium-sized objects at a man's head with some degree of accuracy. She is no longer, however, an overtly political figure.

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has argued that, by the 1920s, the figure of the New Woman—the mothers and grandmothers of Gellhorn, Hildy et al.—had been “shorn of [...] political power and public influence” and “had become a subject of misunderstanding and ridicule.”³²⁰ Meanwhile, in a reversal of the rhetoric that previously saw the New Woman as a “dangerous, sexual competitor,” the New Woman was placed in opposition to “sexually ‘liberated’” forms of modern womanhood, such as the flapper, or, as I argue, the girl reporter (282). This evolution of modern womanhood “redefined the issue of female autonomy in sexual terms,” and the female journalist, once a political figure, became largely an image—even a commodity (282-283).

³²⁰ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 246. All subsequent references are to this edition, and page numbers are cited parenthetically in the text.

In Hemingway's *The Fifth Column*, Philip tells Dorothy she is "a very handsome commodity."³²¹ The words are harsh, but Philip is more correct than he realizes. The girl reporter is a thing that can be consumed, not just by one suitor but by the American public in general. It is no surprise, then, that we find the girl reporter not only in popular media such as films and comic strips but in advertisements as well. In the growing consumer culture that followed the Great War, advertisements began to focus on selling a lifestyle rather than selling a product, and the lifestyle marketed by the girl reporter was a particularly attractive one, with its promises of adventure and personal (read: sexual) freedom. It is worth noting, too, that the advertising industry was populated with former journalists; in *The Front Page*, the male Hildy is leaving journalism not only to get married but to work as an ad man. The problem, as Thomas Richards argues, however, is that "advertised spectacle was not just a set of conventions governing the representation of things, but a set of procedures regulating the presentation of self in everyday life."³²² Once the girl reporter starts appearing in advertisements, her transformation from transgressive social activist to a *Maßstab* of popular taste is complete.

In a 1944 Camel cigarette ad we see just that: real-life "ace war reporter" Pegge Parker sits at a makeshift desk in an army tent: papers are scattered around her typewriter, her hair is coiffed, and she has a cigarette in one hand and her latest piece of copy in the other. The ad is designed to resemble a magazine article, with a headline and a byline, both featuring Parker's name, and the photo of Parker is placed over a tear sheet from one of her dispatches. The lead of the "article" places Parker in the thick of the action:

³²¹ Ernest Hemingway, *The Fifth Column* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), 99.

³²² Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England 1851-1914* (London: Verso, 1991), 257.

I am writing this on a G.I. soap box after a day in a Tiger Division tank under simulated battle conditions that seemed awfully real to me. I've also been up with the paratroopers, finding out what 1500-foot jumps are like...I've spent a week aboard a Liberty Ship, covering the Merchant Marine...I've flown on stunt maneuvers in a glider...run an obstacle course with tracer bullets practically grazing my head.³²³

The “article” then turns into advertising copy: “It’s all been plenty rugged and, take my word for it, that Camel tastes good when you get a minute out for a smoke. And the G.I.’s I’ve seen certainly seem to agree. Camel’s their favorite—and mine!” It is unclear where Pegge Parker’s words end and the copywriter’s begin; indeed, the entire ad is likely written by an ad man in New York City so closely does it resemble the copy in other ads in the series.³²⁴ The individuality of the reporter—the very thing that makes her a desirable spokesperson for Camel cigarettes—is compromised by her appearance in the ad. Philip is right; the girl reporter is a commodity, albeit, “the most beautiful [he] ever had.”³²⁵

Thanks to the commodification of her image, the figure of the girl reporter as fictionalized in *His Girl Friday* and *Brenda Starr: Reporter* seems to resist making any important feminist political arguments. Hildy and Brenda are fashionable and hot-tempered, and though they do a man’s job, they do it in high-heeled shoes. Their success is often based on their looks or the womanly touch they bring to their stories, and, in the end, their own stories—in the plot of the movie or the ongoing adventures of the comic strip—have as much to do with their love lives as with their careers. These portrayals of the girl reporter are nevertheless politically significant, and should not be written off as

³²³ Camels advertisement, *Collier’s*, October 14, 1944.

³²⁴ See, for example, the April 17, 1945, Camel advertisement in *Collier’s* featuring artist-correspondent Howard Baer, noted for his illustrations of WAVE’s.

³²⁵ Hemingway, *Fifth*, 99.

the failure of New Womanhood. In a way, the heroine's never-ending search for a mate is an important part of her New Womanhood. As Maureen Honey points out in the introduction to her collection of short stories about New Women (some of whom are, unsurprisingly, journalists): "The New Woman figure, though not immune to emotional upset or even self-betrayal [...] either finds a mate compatible with [her life] or recommits herself to a woman's right to have a life apart from marriage."³²⁶ Even if Annabelle, Jane, Hildy, and Brenda seem destined to repeat their mistakes, at least they do not passively accept them.

The girl reporter is a figure whose presence in a wide range of popular media simultaneously represents the fulfillment of the legacy begun with the feminist rhetoric of female public intellectuals like Margaret Fuller and the failure of that rhetoric to change the dominant cultural narrative, which insists that even the girl reporter, deep down, just wants to get married. Alternatives to the dominant narrative "thrive," Berlant reminds us, "*because of the extreme amount of contradiction they absorb about the range of possible, plausible responses to conditions of unfairness*" (xi). Though she often does so in ways that make today's feminists uncomfortable, the girl reporter makes visible the woman working in a man's world and reinforces the importance of women's news writing as an alternative rhetoric. We might wish Annabelle Jones, Jane Mason, Hildy Johnson, and Brenda Starr would tell their respective beaux to mind their own business, but ultimately we understand that the public sphere in which these women are working is not, after all, separate, and therein lies the problem and the promise of the girl reporter.

³²⁶ Maureen Honey, editor, *Breaking the Ties that Bind: Popular Stories of the New Woman 1915-1930* (Norman, OK: U of Oklahoma P, 1992), 8.

EPILOGUE

The platitude that “women writ[e] about refugees and men about tanks” unavoidably infiltrates studies of women war correspondents, including this one.³²⁷ In the preceding chapters, it may seem that in my discussions of a rhetoric particular to women’s journalism I have relied upon that same assumption, and, to some degree, I have. During the late nineteenth century, especially, when women journalists were just beginning to professionalize, it was indeed expected (even required) of them that they should stick to topics of domestic importance, even as they themselves entered the public sphere. Later, as women received accreditation, they were still often limited in where they could go—and turned to the assignments available to them under the restrictions. I hope, however, that I have expanded the conversation considerably, going beyond a thematic discussion of women’s war correspondence and incorporating the theories of cultural studies, feminist theory, and periodical studies into my description of the evolution of the girl reporter in American journalism.

Much has changed in the field of journalism since 1945, but the girl reporter remains a recognizable trope in American culture today. The woman war correspondent, in particular, remains subject to a “heightened sexualization[...] to a far greater degree than women reporting in other arenas.”³²⁸ While that attention may work to her advantage, it also carries with it serious risks that often go unspoken. A 2005 survey by the International News Safety Institute, the first of its kind, found that more than half of the women war correspondents who responded reported some form of sexual harassment

³²⁷ Orla Guerin quoted in Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner, and Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 213.

³²⁸ Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner, and Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 202.

while in the field. Actual numbers are likely much higher, and the problem is endemic to the profession. Judith Matloff, a former foreign correspondent for Reuters and *The Christian Science Monitor* who now teaches in the Columbia University School of Journalism, suggests that journalists' male colleagues are the perpetrators of this abuse more often than local sources, and she blames a "news room culture" that ignores and even condones sexual harassment of female colleagues. She also argues that female reporters often take unnecessary risks "to prove ourselves to be tougher than the guys":

I think enough women have been in Iraq, enough women have been in Chechnya and anywhere else that we shouldn't have to have that kind of pressure. And where do we get that pressure? Because some of the people who hire us or the other men in our news room don't quite treat us as equals [...] A lot of women are doing really dumb, stupid things because they don't want to appear to be scared.³²⁹

Matloff's concern suggests that little has changed since the 1945 opinion piece in *Editor and Publisher* with which I opened this dissertation. In that piece, which asked "Are Women War Reporters a Nuisance?" the anonymous male correspondent acknowledges that "[t]he women are brave enough. The ones I've seen have been perfectly cool under fire" and then goes on to suggest that this bravery is either "because they didn't fully understand their danger" or because "they realize what kind of a play a woman's front-line story would get."³³⁰ For better or for worse, the legacy of the girl stunt reporter continues to influence women's war correspondence in 2010, eight years shy of a century

³²⁹ Rodney Pinder, Judith Matloff, et al., "Women Reporting War Survey," (transcript of International News Safety Institute Debate at the Frontline Club, London, January 20, 2005).
http://www.newssafety.org/index.php?view=article&id=6214%3Awomen-war-reporters-air-safety-concerns&option=com_content&Itemid=100081.

³³⁰ Ella Winter and Anonymous, "Are Women War Reporters a Nuisance," *Editor and Publisher*, February 17, 1945, 8.

since Peggy Hull became the first American woman to attain official accreditation from the war department.

Women war correspondents today “continue to evoke highly gendered attention and curiosity, in part because they are engaging in dangerous forays but also because they disrupt still-lingering stereotypes of women’s conventional roles.”³³¹ Chambers et al. point to several recent examples of women war correspondents who have attracted attention (often negative) both for the way that a journalism career interferes with the woman’s domestic role and for the way that women reporters use their sex appeal to advance their careers. In either situation, the elements that make the woman reporter an attractive commodity—her fearlessness and her looks—are precisely the qualities that subject her to criticism, often by other reporters. So, too, does the image of the hypersexual “girl reporter” continue to (alternately) plague and assist female reporters as they go after a story, as in the case of Lara Logan, the CBS correspondent and former model whom a male colleague praised for her use of “God-given advantages with a skill that Mata Hari might envy.”³³²

Despite the criticism, the image of the woman in harm’s way continues to fascinate readers/viewers, and the increase in visibility of women war correspondents, particularly in broadcast news, reflects a perennial desire to “spice up the drama of war reporting in a market-driven profession.”³³³ Women war correspondents take risks because “they know that what the major networks want is a front-line account from a

³³¹ Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner, and Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 202.

³³² Julian Manyon, quoted in Chambers et al., 197.

³³³ Chambers et al., 197.

(preferably pretty) woman in a flak jacket.”³³⁴ Thus little has changed since Nellie Bly first went “Among the Mad” or Martha Gellhorn reported on the “Night Life in the Sky.” Women journalists still attract attention, both positive and negative, for their mere presence in theaters of war, and they still must negotiate the relationship between their bodies, their personal lives, and their work.

The lasting influence of women writers on journalism in general and war correspondence in particular is greater than just the marketability of the girl reporter image. Bly’s and Gellhorn’s stories about refugees, wounded soldiers, and their own adventures are far more in tune with the sensibilities of today’s readers than the objective reporting of their male colleagues that set the standards for the twentieth-century norm. As journalist Emma Daly notes, “war is the greatest human-interest story there is,” and the portraits that make suffering personal ultimately tell the real story of war.³³⁵ John Simpson, having originally criticized work by his colleague Kate Adie on the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre as “horribly emotional,” later retracted the statement: “my piece was fine [...] it told you what had happened. But Kate went to the hospital and she gave you a real feeling of the awfulness of it.”³³⁶ These kind of human interest stories are where war correspondence is heading. No longer considered “soft” news, stories about the human cost of war are the stories winning Pulitzer prizes.³³⁷

³³⁴ Liesbet van Zoonen quoted in Chambers et al., 211.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ John Simpson, quoted in Chambers et al., 209.

³³⁷ For example, the 2005 Pulitzer Prize in International Reporting was awarded to Dele Olojede “for his fresh, haunting look at Rwanda a decade after rape and genocidal slaughter had ravaged the Tutsi tribe,”; the 2005 finalist, Borzou Daragahi, was recognized for “vivid, deeply reported stories on the impact of the Iraq war on citizens and soldiers alike.” [both The Pulitzer Prizes, “International Reporting,” The Pulitzer Prizes, <http://www.pulitzer.org/bycat/International-Reporting>.]

The American press is currently undergoing a cultural shift not unlike the sea change it experienced in the second half of the nineteenth century. At that time, note Susan Belasco Smith and Kenneth M. Price, “technological developments”—in papermaking, printing, and transportation—and “rising literacy rates” “altered the course of publication and deeply affected readers and writers alike. Periodicals became easier to produce and sustain as consumable commodities for a market of incalculable potential.”³³⁸ Now, too, changes in technology and a democratization of readership—as well as economic concerns—are changing the face of journalism.

Indeed, the *epilogue* to this study of the girl reporter in American journalism might, if I were cynical, be called an *epitaph* because, if you believe the hype, print is dead. Even Brenda Starr is not immune to the troubled newspaper business. Brenda’s good looks may be ageless, but the business of journalism has changed. In the March 28, 2009, strip, Brenda, like many of her real-life cohort in the journalism business, was furloughed. Her editor at the *Flash*, the not-so-subtly named B. Babbitt Bottomline, told her “I can’t afford to pay you,” but Starr, never one to be daunted, embarked on a new career as a reporter in India. When Starr was furloughed, it made headlines in the real world. *Editor and Publisher* asked “What’s next? Beetle Bailey revealing post-traumatic stress disorder?”³³⁹ Starr’s current author, *Chicago Tribune* columnist Mary Schmich, explains that “even fantasies need some grounding in reality, and right now, economic

³³⁸ Susan Belasco Smith and Kenneth M. Price, introduction to *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 3.

³³⁹ “Preview: Brenda Starr Furloughed!” The E[ditor] &P[ublisher] Pub, <http://www.eandppub.com/2009/03/preview-brenda-starr-furloughed.html>.

crisis is the reality that colors everything else at pretty much every newspaper.”³⁴⁰ The crisis is being mourned as the death of print even as news outlets retool their business model to make possible a wider audience and more accessible product.

In the 1830s-1850s, periodicals flourished in the U.S., and, as Meredith L. McGill notes, “circulation [of texts] outstripped authorial and editorial control.”³⁴¹ This relatively new and unregulated industry allowed for the wide dissemination of periodicals made up of reprinted material, blurred the line between [...] low and high culture,” and “troubled the boundaries of the text-as-object.”³⁴² Furthermore, “the periodical [...] was a social text, involving complex relationships among writers, readers, editors, publishers, printers and distributors.” Periodical culture today in the so-called “digital age” includes not only paper-based newspapers and magazines, but these periodicals’ digital editions as well and the online communities built around them. Now more than ever the periodical is a social text. Jack Shafer writes in the online news- and culture magazine *Slate*, “Newspapers deserve bragging rights for having homesteaded the Web long before most government agencies and major corporations knew what a URL was.”³⁴³

The popularity of digital media recalls the burgeoning periodical culture of the mid-nineteenth century in its newness, its popularity, its occasional lawlessness, and, most of all, its potential. Online editions of newspapers and magazines are not merely another instantiation of the paper artifact; the news media today is part of “Web 2.0,” an

³⁴⁰ Colleen Mastony, “Gal Reporter Brenda Starr Faces Downsizing,” *The Chicago Tribune*, <http://archives.chicagotribune.com/2009/mar/26/entertainment/chi-0326-dilbert-starr-sidemar26>.

³⁴¹ Meredith L. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting 1834-1853*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 2.

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ Jack Shafer, “How Newspapers Tried to Invent the Web. But Failed,” *Slate*, <http://www.slate.com/id/2207912/pagenum/all/>.

unofficial designation that describes the “user-generated content” on the internet, such as blogs, wikis, and other interactive media. David Silver, in a literature review of the “history, hype and hope” of Web 2.0, sees “broadcast media—and its silent, obedient audiences” as something that “is rapidly fading”—but rather than bemoaning the death of print journalism, Silver is hopeful:

This is the writeable generation, a generation of young people who think of media as something they read and something they write—often simultaneously. This is a generation of content creators, a generation of young people who with the help of Web 2.0 tools know how to create content, how to share content, and how to converse about content.³⁴⁴

In *Digitizing the News* (2004) Pablo J. Boczkowski notes that “the challenge of transforming an artifact [the newspaper] so deeply ingrained in the everyday culture of contemporary industrialized societies brings to the fore the tensions between change and permanence that are at the heart of these appropriation practices.”³⁴⁵ “[C]ultural and material changes,” he notes, do not happen to an artifact alone, but are instead “influenced by the legacy of processes that preceded them,” and any study of such changes—like the study of the girl reporter in the preceding chapters—must “look at ongoing transformations in the artifact under study, but also at related dynamics that happened before (sometimes long before) such an artifact came into being.”³⁴⁶

It is for this reason that this project, which was originally planned as a study of the modern woman war correspondent, begins not with Martha Gellhorn, nor even with Nellie Bly, but with Fanny Fern and Margaret Fuller. Indeed, I could have productively

³⁴⁴ David Silver, “History, Hype, and Hope: An Afterward,” *First Monday* 13.3 (March 2008),

<http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/viewArticle/2143/1950>.

³⁴⁵ Pablo Boczkowski, *Digitizing the News* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 9.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

delved still further back, to the first American woman journalist, Anne Royall (1769-1854) or even to Judith Sargent Murray (1751-1820), whose work in the *Massachusetts Magazine* under the pseudonym “The Gleaner” (1791-1794) takes on issues of equal rights for women and prefigures the newspaper columns Fanny Fern would write six decades later. Likewise, this study of the evolution of the American “girl reporter” informs current discussions of the newspaper industry today.

As we move forward, trying to figure out what shape twenty-first century journalism will take, it looks as if the forms of writing typically regarded as “the woman’s angle”—human interest, first person, and feature stories—are the forms that will survive the shift. The attendant resistance to these (inevitable) changes and the broad proclamations that journalism is dead only confirm that these modes are understood to be womanly (i.e. not serious) writing. I would argue, however, that journalism is far from dead, and we are actually entering a second “Golden Age of Periodicals,” albeit one that requires a redefinition of the periodical itself.

In the age of instant news, when news aggregators like Fark or The Drudge Report and social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook routinely scoop the networks, the supposedly feminine modes of news reporting are gaining prominence over objective, quantitative reports, not because the reading public no longer demands rigorous reporting but because “hard news” is instantly available. Analysis and the nuanced insider story are what today’s reader expects from journalists. Print journalism simply cannot compete with the internet, so it must find a niche in which it can coexist. News outlets that recognize and adapt to this shift will succeed; those who refuse to adapt, whose “reactive, defensive” strategies merely attempt to “diversif[y] revenue

streams” and thwart competition by replicating the internet in print form, will fail or have perhaps failed already.³⁴⁷ As Shafer rightly speculates:

From the beginning, newspapers sought to invent the Web in their own image by repurposing the copy, values, and temperament found in their ink-and-paper editions. Despite being early arrivals, despite having spent millions on manpower and hardware, despite all the animations, links, videos, databases, and other software tricks found on their sites, every newspaper Web site is instantly identifiable as a newspaper Web site. By succeeding, they failed to invent the Web.³⁴⁸

Newsweek recently acknowledged the impossibility of a print weekly competing against live internet updates and abandoned its old format, killing off “the straightforward news piece.”³⁴⁹ But as journalism historian Michael Schudson notes, “straightforward news” was never an attainable goal in the first place:

Objectivity is a peculiar demand to make of institutions which, as business corporations, are dedicated first of all to economic survival. It is a peculiar demand to make of institutions which often, by tradition or explicit credo, are political organs. It is a peculiar demand to make of editors and reporters who have none of the professional apparatus which, for doctors or lawyers or scientists, is supposed to guarantee objectivity.³⁵⁰

Margaret Fuller, Fanny Fern, Nellie Bly, and Martha Gellhorn resisted—in their public personae and in their work—the empirically measured expertise of doctors, lawyers, scientists, and politicians. They insisted upon the legitimacy of feminine

³⁴⁷ Boczkowski, 20; John Temple, “Temple: Why Denver Can’t Support Two Papers,” *The Rocky Mountain News*, <http://www.rockymountainnews.com/news/2009/feb/27/temple-why-denver-cant-support-two-papers/>. Temple, former editor of the now defunct *Rocky Mountain News*, states in this farewell column that the paper failed primarily because of the difficulties of remaining profitable under the Joint Operating Agreement with its competitor. Ironically, under the heading “More Local News” on the webpage featuring Temple’s apology, the top story is “Rocky used Twitter to report its closure.”

³⁴⁸ Shafer.

³⁴⁹ Jon Meacham, “A New Magazine for a Changing World,” *Newsweek*, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/197888>.

³⁵⁰ Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 3.

sentiment and the social conscience, and they saw their writing as a necessary part of the public's education—not an education of facts but one based on feeling. Gellhorn doubted the importance of the deadline- and dateline-driven business of newsgathering: “[Other journalists] had to get stuff in fast, and it was very important that somebody who was working for the AP should say they took Hill 242 twenty minutes before somebody working for the *Times*,” she recalls.³⁵¹ Meanwhile, her own projects “didn’t have to do with immediate news or any form of competition [...] It had to do with trying to understand, to see and understand, what it meant to the people involved.” It is with this thoughtful, personal response to news that the future of serious journalism lies.

Newsweek now devotes the majority of its space to first person columns and feature articles, precisely the kind of work that Bly and Gellhorn sent home from their respective theaters of war. “We know you know what the news is,” writes Jon Meacham in his introduction to the “reinvented and rethought” magazine. *Newsweek*'s new mission, he explains, “is to bring [the reader] as intellectually satisfying and as visually rich an experience as the great monthlies of old.” Central to that mission is a focus on “the reported narrative [...] grounded in original observation.” It a mission that Fuller, Fern, Bly, and Gellhorn could have easily claimed as their own.

³⁵¹ quoted in Sandra Spanier, Afterword to *Love Goes to Press* by Martha Gellhorn and Virginia Cowles (1946; with an Introduction by Martha Gellhorn, edited and with an Afterword by Sandra Spanier, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 86.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- “5 of Bly Party Die in Battle.” *The New York Evening Journal*, December 9, 1914. 1.
- “All the Doctors Fooled.” *The New York World*, October 15, 1887, 5.
- “Last Rites for Nellie Bly To-Morrow.” *New York Evening Journal*, January 28, 1922.
- Acton, Carol. “Diverting the Gaze: The Unseen Text in Women’s War Writing.”
College Literature 31.2 (2004): 53-79.
- Aucoin, James L. *The Evolution of American Investigative Journalism*. Columbia, MO:
 University of Missouri Press, 2005.
- Barnes, Elizabeth. *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel*.
 New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Baym, Nina. *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum
 America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984.
- . *Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870*.
 Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978.
- Bean, Judith Mattson. “Conversation as Rhetoric in Margaret Fuller’s *Woman in the
 Nineteenth Century*.” In *In Her Own Voice*, edited by Sherry Lee Linkon, 27-40.
 New York and London: Garland, 1997.
- Beecher, Catharine E. *Suggestions Respecting Improvements in Education*. Hartford:
 Packard & Butler, 1829.
- Bennett, Paula Bernat. *Poets in the Public Sphere: The Emancipatory Project of
 American Women’s Poetry, 1800-1900*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton
 University Press, 2003.

Bentel, Dwight. "The Ladies Cover the War Fronts." *Editor and Publisher*, February 17, 1945.

Berlant, Lauren. *The Female Complaint and the Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008.

---. "The Female Woman: Fanny Fern and the Form of Sentiment." *American Literary History* 3.3 (1991): 429-454.

Bly, Nellie. "Behind Asylum Bars." *The New York World*, October 9, 1887, 25+.

---. "From Jersey Back to Jersey." *New York World*, January 26, 1890, 1.

---. "Inside the Madhouse." *The New York World*, October 16, 1887, 25.

---. "A Man May Be Down, But He's Never Out." *New York Evening Journal*, May 24, 1919, editorial page.

---. "Nellie Bly Aids War Victims: U.S. Sends Money for Poor: Many Nails Put in Statue." *New York Evening Journal*, May 24, 1916, 8.

---. "Nellie Bly Answers Friends' Letters: Finds Many Interested in the Fate of Little 'Jack o' Hearts'—Makes Appeal for Other Love-Hungry Waifs." *New York Evening Journal*, August 1, 1919, editorial page.

---. "Nellie Bly in Austria: Asks U.S. Aid for Suffering: Tells of Big 'Iron Man.'" *New York Evening Journal*, May 19, 1915, 6.

---. "Nellie Bly on the Battlefield: Hides in Trenches as Russ Shells Rain About Her: Soldiers Five Days Without Food." *The New York Evening Journal*, December 8, 1914, 3.

---. "Nellie Bly at Front: Visits Wounded in Budapest: Sees Horrors of War." *New York Evening Journal*, January 19, 1915, 3.

- . "Nellie Bly at Front: Wounded Battle with Wolves: Sees Dying Soldiers." *New York Evening Journal*, February 19, 1915, 16.
- . "Nellie Bly in Galicia: Visits the Firing Line and Describes War Scenes." *New York Evening Journal*, January 13, 1915, 3.
- . "Nellie Bly Justifies Dyed Hair for Men Eager to Keep Their Grip." *New York Evening Journal*, May 31, 1919, editorial page.
- . "Nellie Bly a Prisoner." *New York World*, February 24, 1889, 10.
- . "Nellie Bly Sends First War Article from Firing Line." *New York Evening Journal*, December 4, 1914, 1+.
- . "Nellie Bly Tells How Hamby Was Executed." *New York World*, February 5, 1920, 1.
- . "Nellte [*sic*] Bly's Story of the War: Perils of the Cholera." *New York Evening Journal*, December 10, 1914, 10.
- . "Poland War At Close Range: In the Air, on the Field, in the Trenches, and in the Hospitals: Is Described By Nellie Bly." *New York Evening Journal*, December 7, 1914, 2.
- . "Woman a Soldier at Prezmysl; Nellie Bly Sees Maimed." *New York Evening Journal*, December 5, 1914, 3.
- . "Writer Who Asks Aid for Austrians." *New York Evening Journal*, December 7, 1918, 2.
- Boczkowski, Pablo. *Digitizing the News*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004.
- Boynton, Robert S. *The New New Journalism: Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft*. New York: Vintage Books, 2005.

- Brownson, Orestes A. "Miss Fuller and Reformers." Review of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, by Margaret Fuller. In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Larry J. Reynolds, 213-6. New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1998. Originally published in *Brownson's Quarterly Review*, 2 (April 1845): 249-57.
- Burnham, John Chynoweth. "Packard, Elizabeth Parsons Ware." In *Notable American Women 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary*. Vol. 3, edited by Edward T. James, 1. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971.
- Burrows, Edwin G. and Mike Wallace. *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Castiglia, Christopher. *Bound and Determined: Captivity, Culture-Crossing, and White Womanhood from Mary Rowlandson to Patty Hearst*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Cavell, Stanley. *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Chambers, Deborah, Linda Steiner, and Carole Fleming. *Women and Journalism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Chapman, Mary and Glenn Hendler. Introduction to *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Child, Lydia Maria. "Woman in the Nineteenth Century." Review of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, by Margaret Fuller. In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Larry J. Reynolds, 220-21. New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1998. Originally published in *Broadway Journal*, Feb. 15, 1845.

- Clark, Suzanne. *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- Cmiel, Kenneth. *Democratic Eloquence: The Fight Over Popular Speech in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: W. Morrow, 1990.
- Collier, Patrick. *Modernism on Fleet Street*. Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006.
- Davenport, W.H. "Blackwell's Island Lunatic Asylum." *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, February, 1866.
- Davidson, Cathy N. *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America, Expanded Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of Culture*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998.
- Drew's Script-O-Rama. "His Girl Friday Script—Dialogue Transcript."
http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/h/his-girl-friday-script-transcript.html (accessed January 4, 2010).
- Ellis, Edward Robb. *The Epic of New York City: A Narrative History*. 1966. Reprint, New York: Carroll & Graf, 2005.
- Ellison, Julie. *Cato's Tears and the making of Anglo-American Emotion*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- . *Delicate Subjects: Romanticism, Gender, and the Ethics of Understanding*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Nature*. Boston: J. Munroe, 1836.

- Fern, Fanny, "Amiable Creatures." In *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*. American Women Writers Series, edited by Joyce W. Warren, 310-11. New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990. Originally published in *New York Ledger*, March 12, 1859.
- . "Blackwell's Island. Number I." *New York Ledger*, August 14, 1858, 4.
- . "Blackwell's Island. Number Three." *New York Ledger*, August 28, 1858, 4.
- . "Blackwell's Island. Number Two." *New York Ledger*, August 21, 1858, 4.
- . "Male Criticism on Ladies Books." In *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*. American Women Writers Series, edited by Joyce W. Warren, 285-6. New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990. Originally published in *New York Ledger*, May 23, 1857.
- . "Mrs. Adolphus Smith Sporting the 'Blue Stocking,'" In *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*. American Women Writers Series, edited by Joyce W. Warren, 265-66. New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990. Originally published in *Fern Leaves*, 1854.
- . "A Practical Blue Stocking." In *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*. American Women Writers Series, edited by Joyce W. Warren, 232-35. New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990. Originally published in *Olive Branch*, August 2, 1852.
- . *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*. Edited by Joyce W. Warren. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1986.
- . "Tom Pax's Conjugal Soliloquy." In *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*. American Women Writers Series, edited by Joyce W. Warren, 268-69. New Brunswick, NJ

and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990. Originally published in *New York Ledger* February 9, 1856.

Fine, Lisa M. "Women's Movement,." In *The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States*, edited by Cathy N. Davidson and Linda Wagner-Martin, 933-9. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Fuller, Margaret. *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*. Vol. 3, 1842-44, ed. Robert N. Hudspeth. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.

---. *Love-Letters of Margaret Fuller 1845-1846: With an Introduction by Julia Ward Howe to Which are Added the Reminiscences of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Horace Greeley and Charles T. Congdon*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903.

---. "Our City Charities. Visit To Bellevue Alms House, to the Farm School, the Asylum for the Insane, and Penitentiary on Blackwell's Island." In *Margaret Fuller, Critic: Writings from the New-York Tribune, 1844-1846*, edited by Judith Mattson Bean and Joel Myerson, 98-104. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. Originally published in the *New-York Daily Tribune*, March 19, 1845.

---. *Papers on Literature and Art*, Part II. New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846.

---. *These Sad But Glorious Days: Dispatches from Europe 1846-1850*, eds. Larry J. Reynolds & Susan Belasco Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

---. *Things and Thoughts in America and Europe*. Boston: Crosby, Nichols, and Company, 1856.

---. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Edited by Larry J. Reynolds. New York: Norton Critical Editions, 1998.

- . "The Wrongs of American Women. The Duty of American Women." In *Margaret Fuller, Critic: Writings from the New-York Tribune, 1844-1846*, edited by Judith Mattson Bean and Joel Myerson, 233-39. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. Originally published in the *New-York Daily Tribune*, September 30, 1845.
- Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." In *Postmodernism and the Re-Reading of Modernity*, edited by Francis Barker and Margaret Iverson, 197-231. Manchester: The Essex Symposia: Literature/Politics/Theory, 1992.
- Gallagher, Jean. *The World Wars Through the Female Gaze*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1998.
- Gellhorn, Martha. *The Face of War*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988.
- . "Night Life in the Sky." *Collier's*, March 17, 1945.
- . "Obituary of Democracy." *Collier's*, December 10, 1938.
- . "Only the Shells Whine." *Collier's*, July 17, 1937.
- . *Selected Letters of Martha Gellhorn*, edited by Caroline Moorehead. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006.
- . *A Stricken Field*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1940.
- Gellhorn, Martha and Virginia Cowles, *Love Goes to Press* 1946. With an Introduction by Martha Gellhorn, edited and with an Afterword by Sandra Spanier, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.
- Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *Women and Economics*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1998.
- Good, Howard. *Girl Reporter: Gender, Journalism and the Movies*, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998.

- Grob, Gerald N. *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875*. New York: The Free Press, 1973.
- Gubar, Susan. "This Is My Rifle, This Is My Gun: World War II and the Blitz on Women." In *Feminism and American Literary History: Essays*, edited by Margaret R. Higonnet, 227-59. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992.
- Harper, Ida Husted. *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony*. Vol. 2. Indianapolis: The Hollenbeck Press, 1898.
- Harries, Martin. "Forgetting Lot's Wife: Artaud, Spectatorship and Catastrophe." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 11.1 (1998): 221-238.
- Hemingway, Ernest. *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938.
- Herbst, Josephine. "The Starched Blue Sky of Spain." *Noble Savage* 1 (1960): 76-117.
- Herzfelde, Wieland. "Two Books." Review of *A Stricken Field*, by Martha Gellhorn, *Direction*, May, 1940.
- Higonnet, Margaret. "Authenticity and Art in Trauma Narratives of World War I." *Modernism/Modernity* 9.1 (2002): 91-107.
- . Introduction to *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*. Margaret Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel, and Margaret Collins Weitz, eds. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987.
- Honey, Maureen, editor. *Breaking the Ties that Bind: Popular Stories of the New Woman 1915-1930*. Norman, OK: U of Oklahoma P, 1992.

- Knapp, Clark D. *A Treatise on the Laws of the State of New York Relating to the Poor, Insane, Idiots and Habitual Drunkards*. Rochester, N.Y.: Williamson & Higbie, 1887.
- Knightley, Phillip. *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.
- Kolodny, Annette. "Inventing a Feminist Discourse: Rhetoric and Resistance in Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*." In *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, edited by Andrea A. Lunsford, 137-166. Pittsburgh and London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995.
- Kroeger, Brooke. *Nellie Bly: Daredevil, Reporter, Feminist*. New York: Random House, 1994.
- Kurtz, Howard, "The Death of Print," *WashingtonPost.com*, May 11, 2009, (accessed December 6, 2009).
- Laffrado, Laura. "'I Thought From the Way You *Writ*, That You Were a Great Six-Footer of a Woman,': Gender and the Public Voice in Fanny Fern's Newspaper Essays." In *In Her Own Voice: Nineteenth-Century American Women Essayists*, edited by Sherry Lee Linkon, 81-96. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997.
- Latham, Sean and Robert Scholes. "The Rise of Periodical Studies." *PMLA* 121.2 (2006): 517-31.
- Leger, Jackie. "Dale Messick: A Comic Strip Life, *Animation World Magazine* 5.04 (July 2000), <http://www.awn.com/mag/issue5.04/5.04pages/legermessick.php3> (Accessed November 1, 2009).

- Lutes, Jean Marie. *Front-Page Girls: Women Journalists in American Culture and Fiction, 1880-1930*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2006.
- McArdle, Kenneth. Introduction to *A Cavalcade of Collier's*, ix-xiii. New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1959.
- McGill, Meredith L. *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting 1834-1853*. Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.
- Messick, Dale. "Brenda Starr: Reporter." *Chicago Tribune*, June 30, 1940, B11.
- . "Brenda Starr: Reporter." *Chicago Tribune*, July 7, 1940, D19.
- . "Brenda Starr: Reporter." *Chicago Tribune*, July 14, 1940, G20.
- . "Brenda Starr: Reporter." *Chicago Tribune*, July 21, 1940, G23.
- . "Brenda Starr: Reporter." *Chicago Tribune*, September 1, 1940, H8.
- . "Brenda Starr: Reporter." *Chicago Tribune*, October 6, 1940, I21.
- . "Brenda Starr: Reporter." *Chicago Tribune*, December 1, 1940, J21.
- . "Brenda Starr: Reporter." *Chicago Tribune*, December 8, 1940, K19.
- . "Brenda Starr: Reporter." *Chicago Tribune*, January 12, 1941, C12.
- . "Brenda Starr: Reporter." *Chicago Tribune*, January 26, 1941, D12.
- . *The Red-Headed Bombshell*. Compiled and edited by Tom Mason. Newbury Park, CA: Malibu Graphics, Inc., 1989.
- Moorehead, Caroline. *Gellhorn: A Twentieth-Century Life*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003.
- Moses, Carol. "The Domestic Transcendentalism of Fanny Fern." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 50 (Spring 2008): 90-119.

- Mott, Frank Luther. *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years 1690 to 1940*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941.
- Packard, Elizabeth Parsons Ware. *Modern Persecution or Insane Asylums Unveiled*. 1873. Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1973.
- Pattee, Fred Lewis. *The Feminine Fifties*. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1940.
- Pinder, Rodney, Judith Matloff, et al. "Women Reporting War Survey." Transcript of International News Safety Institute Debate at the Frontline Club, London, January 20, 2005.
http://www.newssafety.org/index.php?view=article&id=6214%3Awomen-war-reporters-air-safety-concerns&option=com_content&Itemid=100081 (accessed January 4, 2009).
- Rakow, Lana F. "Feminists, Media, Freed Speech." *Feminist Media Studies* 1.1 (2001): 41-44.
- Ray, Isaac. *A Treatise on the Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity*. 1836. Reprint, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962.
- Reiss, Benjamin. *Theatres of Madness: Insane Asylums and Nineteenth-Century American Culture*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Reynolds, Larry J. Note on the Text of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, by Margaret Fuller, 137-8. New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1998.
- . Preface to *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, by Margaret Fuller, ix-xi. New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1998.

- Richards, Thomas. *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England 1851-1914*. London: Verso, 1991.
- Roggenkamp, Karen. *Narrating the News*. Kent, OH and London: The Kent State University Press, 2005.
- Ross, Ishbel. *Ladies of the Press: The Story of Women in Journalism by an Insider*. New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1936.
- Sánchez-Eppler, Karen. *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Schudson, Michael. *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*. New York: Basic Books, 1978.
- Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.
- Smith Jeffrey A. "'His Girl Friday,' in the Cell: A Case Study of Theatre-to-Film Adaptation." *Literature Film Quarterly* 13.2 (1985): 71-75.
- Smith, Susan Belasco and Kenneth M. Price. Introduction to *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1995.
- Smith, Wilda M. and Eleanor A. Bogart. *The Wars of Peggy Hull: The Life and Times of a War Correspondent*. El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1991.
- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Sorel, Nancy Caldwell. *The Women Who Wrote the War*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1999.

- Spanier, Sandra. "Rivalry, Romance, and War Reporters: Martha Gellhorn's *Love Goes to Press* and the *Collier's* Files." In *Hemingway and Women: Female Critics and the Female Voice*, edited by Lawrence R. Broer and Gloria Holland, 256-275. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002.
- Stern, Julia. *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden: Or, Life in the Woods*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1893.
- Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Tylee, Claire M. *The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood 1914-64*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990.
- Walters, James. "Making Light of the Dark: Understanding the World of His Girl Friday." *Journal of Film and Video* 60:3-4 (2008): 90-102.
- Warren, Joyce W. *Fanny Fern: An Independent Woman*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986.
- Warren, Joyce W. "Uncommon Discourse: Fanny Fern and the *New York Ledger*." In *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, edited by Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith, 51-68. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1995.
- Winn, Marcia. "A Star Reporter Writes About a Starr Reporter." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 14, 1945, C1.

Winter, Ella and Anonymous. "Are Women War Reporters a Nuisance." *Editor and Publisher*, February 17, 1945.

Wood, Robin. *Howard Hawks*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2006.

Wright, Elizabethada A. "'Joking Isn't Safe': Fanny Fern, Irony, and Signifyin(g)." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 31 (Spring 2001): 91-111.

VITA

VERNA KALE

EDUCATION

Ph.D., English, The Pennsylvania State University, May 2010

M.A., English, The Pennsylvania State University, May 2005

Fulbright Scholar, Sociology, The Ludwigs-Maximilians Universität München, 2000-2001

B.A., English and German, highest honors, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999

EMPLOYMENT

Lecturer in English and Rhetoric, Hampden-Sydney College, Hampden-Sydney, Virginia, 2009-2010

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of English, The Pennsylvania State University, 2003-2009

Research Assistant, The Hemingway Letters Project, The Pennsylvania State University, 2004-2007

PUBLICATIONS

Articles

“A Moveable Feast or ‘a miserable time actually’?: Ernest Hemingway, Kay Boyle, and Modernist Memoir.” *Ernest Hemingway and the Geography of Memory*. Eds. Mark Ott and Mark Cirino. Kent, OH: Kent State UP, forthcoming 2010.

“Hemingway’s Poetry and the Paris Apprenticeship.” *The Hemingway Review* 26.2 (2007): 58-73.

Reviews

Review of *The Critical Companion to Ernest Hemingway: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* by Charles M. Oliver. *The Hemingway Review* 28.1 (2008). 149-152.

Review of *The Fifth Column: A Play By Ernest Hemingway*. Dir. Jonathan Bank. *The Hemingway Review* 27.2 (2008). 131-134.

Review of *Front Page Girls* by Jean Lutes. *The Journal of Popular Culture* 40.2 (2007): 388-389.

HONORS AND AWARDS

Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center Dissertation Fellowship, The University of Texas at Austin 2007-2008; Ph.D. Excellence in Teaching Award, The Pennsylvania State University Department of English, 2007; George and Barbara Kelly Fellowship in English and American Literature, The Pennsylvania State University Department of English, 2006-2007; The Philip Young Endowment in American Literature, The Pennsylvania State University Department of English, 2006, 2007, 2008; Jim and Nancy Hinkle Award, The Hemingway Society, 2006, 2008.