

NELLIE BLY,  
“THE BEST REPORTER IN AMERICA” :  
ONE WOMAN’S RHETORICAL LEGACY

by

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A DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

My project shares the story of Nellie Bly, a true writer who applied her energies to accomplish more in her writing than most women of her time ever dreamed possible. During the Progressive Era (1890-1920), Bly fervently sought to define herself as a writer as she simultaneously negated the socially-constructed parameters that often sought to shield her from certain topics, those issues which were not considered appropriate for a woman's pen to negotiate. What sets Nellie Bly apart from the largely silenced crowd of women attempting to write in her era is that she knew how to present stories as well as, if not better than, any man. Bly should be recognized as a writer in the annals of history and within the rhetorical canon.

Little scholarly work exists on Nellie Bly's contribution to women's writing, or the ways in which women were allowed to express their views during the Progressive Era. Therefore, my dissertation specifically addresses the following aims:

1. To show the need for historical work on texts written by females in the Progressive Era.
2. To propose the texts of Nellie Bly as one locus of this historical work.
3. To provide a theoretical framework and research methodology to investigate feminist contributions to enlarge and enhance the rhetorical tradition of women and their writing.

Building on the methodology of rhetorical sequencing devised by Richard Enos, my dissertation contributes to a greater understanding of the rhetorical canon by arguing to include another contributor. My study describes how Bly voiced her concerns in rhetorical spaces where women were theretofore mostly absent, and thus she disrupted rhetorical modes by which women were largely silenced. My major objective is to add to the history of women's contributions to rhetoric by placing Nellie Bly and her work in that history. By restoring voice to Bly, who wrote when women were largely silenced, I add to discussions surrounding the need to further recognize feminist rhetorical contributions within the field of rhetoric and composition.

## DEDICATION

To my loving husband.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have always marveled at the number of persons whom writers tend to acknowledge on pages such as this one. However, having written a substantial document myself, I now realize that with such an accomplishment comes the desire to thank those that have made the process more enjoyable, more productive, and even more doable. Whether providing a word of encouragement, a recommendation for revision, or an idea for exploration, several people have made this undertaking possible and even pleasurable.

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To my husband, my parents, my in-laws, my grandparents, my Aunt Sarah, and my brother Russell, I thank you for unending encouragement, prayers, and love. When I think of those whom I most cherish, you are the ones that I picture, smiling before me. Without you, I do not know if my dream of becoming a doctor would have become a reality, and I thank you for being so instrumental in helping me to realize this dream.

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## CHAPTER 1 / INTRODUCTION:

### MAPPING HER STORY

I will begin with a humble confession: Although I have intently studied English as a discipline for the past eight years and have written innumerable essays, I have always avoided defining myself as a writer. The avoidance of this descriptor has been whole-hearted. I thought of writers with great reverence, as those capable of easily producing their own texts, for their own purposes. Placing writers on this illusionary pedestal, I considered myself as not fitting into this idealized notion because I differed from what I thought a real writer should be. My initial avoidance of being a writer occurred during the first three years of my undergraduate career, as I sought the path of the M.D. instead of the Ph.D., studying calculus, physics, chemistry, and biology as a belligerent pre-med major. I use the term *belligerent* in describing myself because I find it most applicable to the war-like student I was, waging battle against her *writing self*, which I then associated more with the periodic table and graphing calculators than with journals and pens.

My freshman composition teacher, who later also became my British literature survey professor, publicly denounced my intent of pursuing a biology degree when I introduced myself as a “biology major” on the first day of that survey course. She rather decisively asserted to a class of sophomores, “Her major should be English.” (Earlier, my high school English teacher

had told me as much, but what high schooler actually listens to anyone?) In wearing that suit of a pre-med student's armor, I ignored these teachers spurring me in the direction of the career path that would eventually bring me the most joy and liberation, that of writing and research. Their assertions went unheeded as I continued to balance equations and set reagents on fire in chemistry labs.

In my third year of undergraduate science study, I became increasingly uninterested in learning the amino acids in an advanced biology course, while I grew all the more envious of those English majors who were reading Dickinson and the Brontes instead of science textbooks. My career aspiration as a pre-med student was to enter medical school with the hopes of becoming a dermatologist, but the thoughts of preparing for the MCAT and beginning medical school became unappealing to me. Thus, I changed my major to English during my junior year. By turning from the sciences to the humanities, I stripped myself of the armament of the science/math student and donned the mask of the English/literature scholar, a disguise more comfortable to me but still the visage of an imposter. At that point in my academic career, perhaps because of my idealistic view of real writers, I still failed to embrace the term *writer* in defining myself. In my English undergraduate classes, I primarily wrote about topics that I thought might please my teachers, those ideas that would earn me a top grade, or those theses that mirrored the ever-present politics of those classes. My writing in some sense was not my own, but a reflection of that which I thought the professors desired in their students, in budding scholars, in aspiring but not "true" writers. As I formulated theses, drafted papers, and completed assignments, I thought the essays wrote themselves as I sought to shield my self-deception with that mask of confidence. I became just the bearer of the message, the transcriber of the data, or the mediator between proof and claim. And although every paper was returned to me bearing the

letter A, the often scarlet letter symbolizing the adultery of my own voice, I reasoned that I could share relevant information to persuade my professor to give me the desired grade, but I still did not believe that I was a *writer*.

During my master's degree program, I was confronted with what I perceived to be the truth of my situation: I indeed could not write; I had been found out. I was enrolled in the "boot camp" of the M. A. curriculum, the bibliography and research class. After I had written my thirty-page draft of the required paper, I swapped it with a classmate to engage in my first peer editing session as a graduate student. I proffered the longest essay of my short career in academia to my peer as the primary example of my proficiency as a master's degree student. As a result of my peer editing session, those suspicions of my inability to write were confirmed when my peer editor returned my essay and noted that the paper lacked a thesis, communicated no relevant or convincing points to defend said unknown thesis, and ultimately left him completely befuddled as a reader. Finally, a peer had uncovered my guise; he had taken off the mask I had worn since I changed my major in my junior year. He had exposed my ruse as a so-called English Teaching Assistant to reveal that my attempts were not up to his standards. The writing had indeed been unsatisfactory to my peer reviewer, and thus, graduate school seemed like a wasted first semester to me. In my dismay at having been "found out," I set up a conference with my bibliography and research professor to share the daunting results of my peer review session and to come to terms with my fears that a graduate program was not the place for me.

My professor listened politely to my harrowing but humbling tale, and then in one declarative sentence, he shared the response that I will never forget: "Your peer reviewer is operating from a different theoretical school than you are; no need to worry." Taken aback, I was certain that my professor would have echoed the sentiments of my peer editor, but that was

only a nightmare that I had been conceiving as I wore the mask. My professor thought I could write, and though he had not even read my essay, he bolstered my confidence and set me back on the path to becoming a writer and staying in a graduate program. Although my professor tried to convince me that I was indeed a writer, albeit one operating within a different theoretical school, and accordingly gave me an A on my first essay in graduate school, I still consciously divorced myself from believing I was a writer.

Finishing my master's degree was an experiment in hasty writing: I completed a thesis of nearly one hundred pages following approximately six weeks of intense writing. But in completing this substantial essay, I reasoned that my expedient approach was/is not how true writers operate. I assumed that true writers, whoever they may be, take their time reflecting carefully on every word, every sentence, every salient idea, building those carefully crafted paragraphs that grow into pages, pages that develop into chapters, chapters that end in a convincing thesis that captivates readers. Obviously, I did not take the care and devotion that I thought a true writer would take. My pseudo-magnum opus of a thesis was generated in a month and a half. I was not a writer; I was only a student of English eager to graduate in August and consequently move on to a Ph.D. program.

Entering the hallowed yellow-brick edifice of Morgan Hall at the University of Alabama, I anticipated that I would experience the University of Alabama as my Emerald City during my doctoral degree, a place where I would come ever closer to defining myself as a writer and nearing the realization that indeed "there's no place like home." As a scholar within that Emerald City, I would soon be exposing that Wizard or man behind the curtain, the one who would help me to acknowledge that I alone possess the power to "go home." By "going home," I thought that I would come to understand that I was a writer by embracing the comfort that the

ability to write provides to a person as a teacher, researcher, and rhetorician. Writing would usher me into that home that no other place is like.

As class after class of doctoral degree course work sped by in that yellow-brick building, the papers again miraculously wrote themselves as I sat at an illuminated computer screen; but a writer I was not, even though the words across the screen were my own. And although I taught sixteen sections of freshman composition during my time of graduate study, telling students what makes “good” writing, how they should write, and so forth, teaching writing did not make me a writer.

Surprisingly, after I completed all my course work and was nearing the writing of my dissertation, I finally began to think of myself as a writer. After my marriage, when my identity simultaneously shifted from being defined as a single woman to being defined as a married one, I divorced myself at last from what had been my ever-present denial of being a writer. In marrying, I began to realize that I was also in love with words, language, thoughts, and texts, and this love was something that I had always had. It was not the product of any prescribed course of study, but was something I could have cultivated without the rigors of academia. Realizing that being a writer had always been within my power, I now embraced that neglected mistress of writing that I had kept locked in the attic of my life, the madwoman, if you will. As my groom and I rode on a train through the Canadian Rockies, I realized that I *am* a writer, and the words of Glinda, *The Wizard of Oz*'s Good Witch of the North, suddenly rang true in my ears: “My dear, you don't need to be helped any longer. You've always had the power.” At this moment of self-discovery, I did not want to lose those sentences that I was hearing on that train, those moments of interaction that spawned so much joy and emotion from me. I had indeed been writing all day, having purchased a journal in which to write about our trip. I was a writer, and I wanted to

declare it from the top of the Canadian Rockies, not with my voice, but with my text. I told my husband that he was partly the cause for my revelation.

This acceptance of my destiny as a writer was further confirmed as I wrote in a darkened railway car on the next night of our trip. With only the faint light of the glowing aisle below me, I wrote, not being able to see the pad of paper in my hands, but knowing that I had shaped the letters into words which I could return to, read, and use to craft narratives of our journey. Writing without the aid of much light as the train lapped the miles, I was reminded of the words of my creative writing teacher: “Maybe you could write quickly like Charlotte Bronte’s lines crossing because she wrote with her eyes closed.” I thought that comment had beauty and depth, but at first I found the reference nebulous. However, unable to see what I wrote, I embraced my inner Charlotte Bronte, and I knew that writing was not a choice for me but a necessity. As we enjoyed our tour of the Canadian landscape, I furiously scribbled on my pad of paper, and my husband asserted, with slight chortle to those curious about my tendency to fill paper with words, “Oh, my wife, she’s a writer.” After I heard that statement numerous times, I relished its veracity, knowing its truth.

Beginning my dissertation with this narrative of personal discovery is relevant not only to who I am as a writer, scholar, and woman writing a dissertation, but this analogy is also congruent with the aim of my project. I believe that my inability to define myself as a writer stems largely from my having been reared as a white Southern woman, a genteel lady not necessarily of the upper-class but nonetheless caught in the cogs of a patriarchal system in which men are writers, woman are silent; men are providers, women are recipients; men are doers, women are givers. In defining myself as a writer, I was also ironically liberating myself from the confines of patriarchal domination that can often define a marital existence for many married

women. Realizing that my voice, my text, my writing could possibly provide me with a job, an income, and an audience, I relished the writer within me that provided me with such infinite possibilities.

As a doctoral candidate writing a dissertation, I acknowledge my former inability to define myself as a writer, but I now pair that incapability with my present need to connect with and appreciate what being a writer means. My former disavowal but present embrace of being a writer is similar to the change wrought in Elizabeth Jane Cochran, who would become known during her writing career as Nellie Bly. In attempting to define herself as a writer of newspaper articles in 1887, Nellie Bly encountered more daunting and formidable barriers both within society and within her gender role that I am to face. To be sure, these often-unyielding limitations placed on a woman writing in the Progressive Era (1880-1920) were much worse than any blocking me as a woman writing in 2010. However, when Bly took up her pen, she was holding a device that would determine the power of her rhetorical ethos, not only defining *her* as a writer but as a woman writing.

To be a woman writing posed a much more delicate challenge to Bly than it has to me almost one hundred and twenty-five years later. Entrenched in societal constructs which often rendered her voice paralyzed by patriarchal pre-determinism, Bly posited in one of her most important of all sentences, “Energy rightly applied can accomplish anything” (qtd. in Kroeger 85). Concentrating on this accomplished woman, my dissertation shares the story of a true writer, one who applied her energies to accomplish more in her writing than most women of that time ever dreamed possible. Bly fervently sought to define herself as a writer as she simultaneously negated the socially-constructed parameters that often sought to shield her from certain topics, those issues which were not considered appropriate for a woman’s pen to

negotiate. What sets Nellie Bly apart from the largely silenced crowd of women attempting to write in her era is that she knew how to present stories as well as any man, if not better. Bly was determined, and she should be recognized as a writer in the annals of history and within the rhetorical canon.

To understand Bly's absence from the current rhetorical canon, the reader or the audience of a strictly traditional canon of history and literature must recognize that that map of canonicity and history is not a complete rendering because of who it omits and who did the omitting. In her text *Rhetoric Retold*, Cheryl Glenn uses the metaphor of a map to illustrate the often-barren landscape of a rhetorical history that silences the voices of the numerous "others" while acknowledging the voices of the powerful few. Glenn argues:

Rhetoric always inscribes the relation of language and power at a particular moment (including who may speak, who may listen or who will agree to listen, and what can be said); therefore, canonical rhetorical history has represented the experience of males, powerful males, with no provision or allowance for females. In short, rhetorical history has replicated the power politics of gender, with men in the highest cultural role and social rank. And our view of rhetoric has remained a gendered landscape, with no female rhetoricians (theoreticians) clearly in sight.

(1-2)

Glenn calls for a regendering of this rhetorical landscape. In answering her call, I conceptualize and embrace, as Glenn suggests, a rhetorical topography marked and forged by men and women alike. If men and women can write alongside one another in a rhetorical space defined less like a battleground and more like an equal playing field, then they can occupy a rhetorical landscape of



equality, a place where both genders can generate ideas to achieve validation in order that they can mutually appreciate each others' contributions in turn (Glenn 2).

Although many underrepresented groups and individuals remain unheard, the map changes more frequently now as voices are discovered, reconfiguring the landscape of rhetorical activity. To regender the landscape of rhetoric, those writings that have faded or have otherwise been removed need revisiting. However, the reconfiguration of the map is not done without some negotiation. To be sure, a singular perspective has long unified the rhetorical landscape: that of the white, Anglo-Saxon male, the maker of the map, the creator of the canon. This male has long plotted the points of interest on the map of rhetorical history, theory, and practice, and thus has perpetuated and solidified his supremacy and sovereignty. Either through canonizing or colonizing, his control over society, language, and even conceptualizations of selfhood illustrates the historical and theoretical underpinnings of culture that largely remain uncontested by another race, ethnicity, sex, or nationality. The male enterprise of mapping provides evidence of the ground *only* he has covered. Thus, this mapping of territory illustrates the male propensity toward establishing physical boundaries and also elucidates the scarcity of women's involvement in the process of mapping. The male role of mapmaker serves to justify his control of the rhetorical landscape, but the time has come when the maker of the map should yield his power to others who have made contributions that can similarly shape rhetorical history, theory, and practice. Canonical cartography merits a more comprehensive and descriptive rendering of society and culture if the direction is to be accurate. The urgency is to present a topography of rhetoric or of a canon as rich and diverse as the voices that cry out to be heard.

This study focuses on one such voice, the voice of Nellie Bly, a noteworthy Progressive Era journalist and reformer. The twofold goal of this project is first, to explore Nellie Bly's

legacy as “The Best Reporter in America,” a title conferred upon her posthumously by *The New York Evening Journal* on the occasion of her death in 1922; and second, to share the story of a woman who disrupted the typical contemporary expectations and conventions of womanhood, a disruption she accomplished through her writing by aligning herself with the public rather than the domestic sphere. I will pursue this twofold goal through a critical analysis of Bly’s groundbreaking work as an investigative reporter writing during a time when female voices were overwhelmingly silenced. By challenging current understandings/underpinnings of canonical writing and the power politics/conventional ideologies that shape historical representations, I will argue that Bly’s work is worthy of an audience and that hers is a story fit for the telling, a narrative destined to help regender the map of rhetorical practice, theory, and history.

Current research in the field of rhetoric and composition has extended beyond the study of pedagogy in the writing classroom to include an examination of the rhetorical practices and rhetorical spaces of many others engaged in writing and literacy. My major objective is to add to the history of women’s contributions to rhetoric by placing Nellie Bly and her work in that history. A more thorough and representative account of rhetoric’s history can be achieved only when the voices of the marginalized and silenced also become heard, or when “the subaltern speaks,” to use the clause coined by Gayatri Spivak (24). By restoring voice to Bly, who wrote when women were largely silenced, I will add to discussions surrounding the need to further recognize feminist rhetorical contributions within the field of rhetoric and composition. In the remaining portion of this chapter, I provide the map that will work to illustrate the rhetorical ethos of Nellie Bly as a particular female contributor to the rhetorical tradition and as a figure of interest within the landscape of rhetoric.

Little scholarly work exists on Nellie Bly's contribution to women's writing, or the ways in which women were allowed to express their views during the Progressive Era. Therefore, my dissertation will specifically address the following:

1. To show the need for historical work on texts written by females in the Progressive Era.
2. To propose the texts of Nellie Bly as one locus of this historical work.
3. To provide a theoretical framework and research methodology to investigate feminist contributions to enlarge and enhance the rhetorical tradition of women and their writing.

As one who wishes to contribute to the recent resurgence of rhetorical studies within the field and as one who plans to be a map contributor herself, I acknowledge that rhetorical history does not simply discover new rhetorical activities, but is rather the result of the growing acknowledgement of existing rhetorical activities that have been either forgotten or ignored. This growing recognition is based on a newfound ability among scholars and researchers of rhetoric, both male and female, to exhibit and embrace a willingness to listen to previously untold stories. With recent interest focused on an examination of historical texts, these stories are now being shared within rhetorical scholarship. Scholars such as Cheryl Glenn and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell have begun to examine the political forces that have shaped the rhetorical canon to renegotiate and explore how "canonical writing" is defined. My dissertation will contribute to a greater understanding of the rhetorical canon by arguing to include another contributor. My study will describe how Bly voiced her concerns in rhetorical spaces where women had been mostly absent, and thus how she disrupted rhetorical modes by which women were largely silenced.

## **Nellie Bly as a Locus for Historical Inquiry: Reviving a Feminist Rhetorical Tradition**

Born May 5, 1864, Elizabeth Jane Cochran (she later added an *e* to her last name) would become known as Nellie Bly during her career as a journalist. Building on a journalistic tradition made famous by male reporters such as Stephen Crane, Jacob Riis, and Richard Harding Davis, Bly introduced the role of the “stunt reporter,” a female reporter sharing eyewitness accounts often observed under the guise of “deep cover.” This form of female investigative reporting was usually discouraged by (mostly male) editors and was even considered inappropriate for women writers due to the challenges that those types of stories may have presented for a woman’s reputation. During her career as a journalist in the Progressive Era, Bly faced rejection in this male-dominated realm where women were usually denied discussion of topics such as politics and economics. Although some female journalists (such as Bessie Bramble and Ida Tarbell) were successful and had a readership prior to Bly’s popularity, these journalists focused only on topics of seeming interest to women, as they were hired to write solely for and about women. Considered “women’s interest news,” these topics included fashion, gardening, cooking, sewing, and the arts.

Cast as the appropriate content for the few women who had already established careers in journalism, the women’s interest news story was not appealing to Bly. However, as Bly biographer Brooke Kroeger has noted, “In those days, it was almost unthinkable for a woman on the staff of a mainstream newspaper—half severed appendage in the best of cases—to be covering anything else” but women’s news (48). This seeming rhetorical barrier did not stop Bly from challenging the conventions of her day and pursuing topics outside the realm of “women’s interest news.” As a “stunt reporter,” Bly made contributions to journalism and societal reform that should be noted by scholars in rhetoric and composition.

Bly's journalist career began to flourish when Bly proposed an unconventional idea to one of the leading newspaper editors of her day. John A. Cockerill, editor-in-chief of the *New York World*, refused Bly's initial plan to travel to Europe and return by steerage class to report the firsthand experiences of an immigrant; however, Bly was later able to convince Cockerill that she could handle a local story: investigating an asylum whose harrowing reputation had made it a topic of town gossip. Bly was determined to overcome gender discrimination and wanted to make the most out of this, her first serious assignment from *The New York World*. By feigning insanity, Bly gained entrance into the notorious Blackwell's Island Asylum in order to write an exposé of the dire conditions for women within this mental institution. This story proved to be a success, earning her other similar assignments. Her provocative investigative reporting made Nellie Bly a household name, as her pseudonym was regularly featured below headlines of *The New York World*. The retelling of her experience while in the madhouse inaugurated the performative, investigative slant that would become her trademark reporting style, a style that other female reporters such as Elizabeth Bisland and Anna Laurie began to mimic.

As an investigative reporter, Bly not only increased the sales of newspapers, but her depictions of less than favorable environments also prompted societal reform that illustrates the power of her rhetorical ethos. Her style was unconventional for a woman of her day: she wrote with an unabashed bluntness and a quick instinct for the "scoop." As a woman writing in the Progressive Era and supposedly confined to speak only of what gender scholar Nan Johnson refers to as the "domestic sphere as [woman's] proper rhetorical space," Bly evaded talk of hearth and home by grappling with topics such as factory worker conditions and white slave trading, topics that no woman had formerly discussed (Johnson 6). Thrusting herself into the public arena, Bly regaled her avid readership with provocative interviews, jailhouse

confessionals, and riveting exposés. The strength of her personality evinced her rhetorical ethos as she wrote with boldness free from apology.

Bly employed a rhetorical confidence not formerly projected by women, and her writing helped to create a space for women on journalism's main stage, well beyond the journalistic sideshow of the women's interest story. Thus, her writing offers a rich site of inquiry. Bly employed an authorial ethos which gained her popularity in her day, but unfortunately she has long since been mostly forgotten. Her writing played an important role in the rhetorical tradition by extending her influence to the public interests rather than matters of the home. Bly's writing is a site for exploration of a largely unilluminated rhetorical space for women writers, which makes Bly's work all the more relevant to rhetoric and composition.

### **Answering the Call for Including More Female Representation in the Rhetorical Tradition**

If rhetoric and composition as a field is to offer a more inclusive account of women in the rhetorical tradition, then the previously male-influenced methodological approaches and popular perspectives on historical research need to be renegotiated and improved. To be sure, historical research remains a weighty subject; history tends to be the recollection of the rhetorical practices of those in power, those with voice, and those who stabilize the status quo. Historical documentation often reveals and reaffirms societal expectations and inscriptions of gender, race, and class, rather than disrupting those ideologies that have kept certain histories overlooked and largely absent from historical discussion. When examining historical texts and archival resources, the researcher seeking a more inclusive history must work to destabilize a version of history that accounts only for the stories of the privileged, powerful, and/or patriarchal.

In this regard, the more inclusive researcher of historical traditions must remain mindful of the complexity of negotiating the complicated relationship between what Nan Johnson has

identified as “rhetorical practices and the inscription of cultural power” which have often forged the power politics of historiography (1). As Johnson argues, rhetorical theories and rhetorical practices operate as cultural sites that illustrate “the interdependence of codes of rhetorical performance and the construction of conventional identities, particularly but not exclusively gender identities.” Johnson goes on to say that reading rhetorical theory as a cultural site allows the historian to locate a “nexus where cultural capital and rhetorical performance have become one” and to expose the history of rhetoric “as a revealing narrative about how convention, rhetorical expectations, and the lines of cultural power converge” (Johnson 1). In examining the work of Nellie Bly as a cultural site, I seek to prove how Bly utilized cultural capital through rhetorical performance to disrupt the contemporary conventions of womanhood and divorce herself from the sphere of domesticity.

Rhetoric has typically been cast as a public practice within the public sphere, a discursive tradition aligned with masculine thought and aims. Moreover, Johnson notes that “at the start of the nineteenth century, the arts of rhetoric were the undisputed province of the male professional classes” (3). Thus, rhetoric has largely been conceptualized as a masculine tradition rather than a feminine or even a feminist one. Nan Johnson has argued that women’s rhetoric therefore aligned itself with private, female practices within the domestic sphere. Women were confined to this sphere in order to maintain a space to exercise their proper rhetorical contributions in the forms of letters, recipes, elocution manuals, and guides to etiquette, which all reaffirmed behaviors and mannerisms deemed appropriate for women. These forms of rhetorical activity transcribed behaviors to reinforce a woman’s identity as angel of the house, entrenched in what Barbara Welter defines as “the cult of true womanhood” (1). Moreover, men prescribed that women take on the roles of domestic angels and submissive wives, as men established these

gender conventions to secure their own positions as strong, rational providers. Scholars have examined these conceptualizations of womanhood to describe the male-dominated ideological milieu of the nineteenth century and to elucidate the kinds of barriers that women rhetoricians faced within the cult of domesticity (Welter; Kerber; Donawerth; Wells; Mountford; McClish). More recently, scholars have challenged this distinction that confined women solely to the domestic realm (Campbell; Enos; Glenn; Jarratt). Nellie Bly was challenging these binaries (public/domestic, masculine/feminine, rhetoric/women's interest news) well over a hundred years ago, but no one seems to have remembered.

In order for Nellie Bly's works to be recognized, archival research is necessary. Furthermore, archival inquiry is a rich source of scholarship, one often overlooked in the field. However, some scholars have begun to examine archival resources to offer a more complete rhetorical perspective focusing on female subjects taking part in literate practices. For example, Jane Donawerth examines the archival texts of Lydia Sigourney, Jennie Willing, and Mary Augusta Jordan in her article, "Nineteenth-Century United States Conduct Book Rhetoric by Women." Other scholars pursuing similar research interests include Melissa Fiesta, who discusses the abolitionist rhetoric of Lydia Maria Child; and Susanna Kelly Engbers, who considers the reformatory rhetoric of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Other writers exploring similar scholarly subjects include Karyn L. Hollis, who examines the writing of working women; Susan Kates, who focuses on activist rhetoric in American higher education; Gloria McMillan, who analyzes the rhetorical strategies of Jane Addams; and Paula J. Giddings, who considers the rhetorical ethos of Ida B. Wells during her anti-lynching campaign, among others. Whereas some of these archival scholars such as Kates and Hollis offer implications for improving



pedagogy, others simply offer new ways to theorize feminist contributions to history. These efforts in archival research constitute only a start in such a rich field of inquiry.

Considering the goals of this project, I place myself among the above archival researchers as a scholar seeking to reintroduce a voice that has long been neglected in order to make known an addition to the historical rhetorical tradition shared among women. Moreover, archival inquiry provides a provocative means of investigating, understanding, theorizing, and representing the voices of those women who have formerly not been included, and Nellie Bly is worthy of such inclusion. Nellie Bly's writing helps to provide for a renegotiation and reconsideration of female contributions to rhetoric.

Several scholars argue that investigating women's rhetorical contributions through archival inquiry is a burgeoning area of academic pursuit (Johnson; Bizzell; Enos; Mattingly; Donawerth; Jarratt; Lunsford; Glenn). In order to achieve what Cheryl Glenn refers to as "remapping the history of rhetoric," these researchers agree that the following concerns need to be addressed if women are to receive a proper place within the rhetorical tradition:

1. The catalyst for rhetorical inquiry must surpass mere civic, agonistic discourse to include alternative modes of expression used by women rhetors.
2. Scholarly investigation to discover primary sources and evidence must intensify to increase the availability of a more representative body of texts.
3. This increased corpus of evidence must include non-traditional sources that provide insight to the oral and literate practices of women.
4. Historians of rhetoric must create methods of research and analysis that will provide a more sensitive accounting of primary material than current historical methods were designed to yield (Enos 65).

To further emphasize the urgency and relevance of this scholarship, Carol Mattingly concurs with those who argue for the relevance of women writing within the rhetorical tradition:

My work with nineteenth-century primary texts has convinced me that more time to explore extant texts can alleviate many of the apprehensions associated with this new research. Further time to recover, evaluate, and make meaning from additional information will allow for a more complete picture of women's rhetorical history. In addition, a greater breadth of knowledge will allow us not only to add figures to a more inclusive tradition, but also to redefine what counts as evidence in evaluating rhetoric and rhetoricians. In this way we may create a more complete, honest, and interesting picture of the rhetorical tradition.

(“Telling” 99)

Although Nan Johnson argues that pedagogical materials for rhetorical skills directed American women to the domestic sphere as their proper rhetorical space, Bly is an exception because her investigative reporting dismisses domesticity to embrace realms formerly inaccessible or inappropriate for middle class women to discuss. Thus, Bly’s writing presents space for a rhetorical investigation, and this investigation of a heretofore neglected rhetorical space makes Bly’s work all the more relevant to rhetoric and composition. Bly dismantled the pervasive cultural mindset of what was “acceptable” for women to discuss and negotiated new topics for writing women, sparking a new journalistic movement.

Scholars such as Richard Enos, Carol Mattingly, Cheryl Glenn, and Nan Johnson agree that the study of the rhetoric of historical women is necessary for our field. Christine Mason Sutherland also posits that future research projects should include the study of the rhetorical theories of historical women (109). Furthermore, selections of Bly’s social-activist rhetorical

texts do not appear in Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg's second edition of *The Rhetorical Tradition*, nor does the work of many other female rhetoricians. But as Patricia Bizzell, among others, has suggested, new methodologies must be derived from the rhetorical practices of marginalized rhetors to expand what constitutes the rhetorical canon (195).

### **Discussion of the Theoretical/Methodological Framework**

Richard Enos provides a succinct and applicable methodology that allows women to achieve authorial ethos and to gain recognition within the field. He calls this methodology "rhetorical sequencing" that operates as a heuristic "to facilitate historical research on women in the rhetorical tradition" (65). According to Enos's sequencing method, which he bases on an archaeological motif, the following steps must be completed in order to recognize a formerly overlooked feminist historical contribution:

1. Discovery: Uncovering or excavating extant/archival materials for study and analysis.
2. Reconstruction: Understanding and reconfiguring the meaning of the text/artifact within its social and historical milieu, i.e. unearthing its "rhetorical situation."
3. Analysis: Examining the actual discourse as it was presented.
4. Display: Sharing and exhibiting the artifact/text through its reconstructed presence and analysis in order to make the text relevant to a present-day audience (74-76).

Nellie Bly's texts have largely not been discovered, reconstructed, analyzed, and displayed. However, some scholars are pursuing an interest in Bly's life. Scholars who are currently studying Bly include Brooke Kroeger and Jean Marie Lutes, but little has been said about Bly's contributions in terms of her relation to the rhetorical traditions in the field of rhetoric and composition. This is the gap that my research seeks to fill. Therefore, the inclusion

of archival work on Bly's texts and her development of a purely feminist rhetorical mode outside of the realm of domesticity should prove beneficial to the field of rhetoric and composition.

As a locus for rhetorical inquiry, the work of Nellie Bly contributes greatly to the rhetorical landscape of the Progressive Era and of women writing during a time when the closed doors of opportunity far outnumbered those opened to them. Men, particularly white men, dominated the rhetorical landscape, and women's attempts to negotiate this shaky ground upon which their feet hesitantly trod left them often jarred by defeat, disgust, and disdain for their attempt at the available means of persuasion. However, Nellie Bly disrupted those shaky grounds by planting her feet firmly in the rhetorical landscape, as she wrote her life boldly upon the pages of newspapers to a loyal audience of men and women alike.

To elucidate the trajectory of the project as a whole and to map Bly's texts as the locus of my work, I share the following chapter descriptions to forecast or direct the passage or map of my text. My second chapter consists of the first step of Richard Enos's approach to rhetorical sequencing by discovering the work of Nellie Bly. I provide the historical background to Nellie Bly's work and writing, including her pursuit of journalism as a career. This section also delineates her achievements by providing evidence of the rich archival source texts of her writings that prefaced the piece that truly made her a household name: "Ten Days in a Mad-house," the story that introduced her stunt reporting approach to journalism and marked her discovery as a woman in journalism.

The third chapter follows the second step of Enos's approach to rhetorical sequencing by reconstructing Bly's contributions. This chapter provides evidence for the rhetorical barriers and prejudices that Bly sought to overcome, as this chapter securely places Bly within her historical context as a woman writing in the Progressive Era. This chapter elucidates the historical

tradition of male journalists, against whom Bly had both to define and distinguish herself. I also consider the journalistic achievements of those women who preceded Bly's work, as well as those women writers who confined their writing tasks solely to the realm of domesticity, as was expected of them. By discussing the women writers of her time, I cast Bly among her contemporaries to examine how she possessed a rhetorical ethos that was different from most of them, thus marking her individual contribution to rhetoric.

The fourth chapter follows the third step of Enos's approach to rhetorical sequencing by analyzing Bly's contributions to the field of rhetoric and composition. This analysis will be done with a consideration of her authorial ethos, her negotiation of self in her writing, and her subsequent rhetorical achievements through her writings that helped prompt Progressive Era reform. This chapter will offer a close reading of Bly's major works, beginning primarily with her investigative exposé of the mad-house, but also including her testimony following her trip around the world in seventy-two days, and ending with her reports from the front lines of World War I.

The concluding fifth chapter follows the final step of Enos's approach to rhetorical sequencing by displaying Bly's contributions to the field of rhetoric and composition. This display will be achieved by answering these questions:

1. Why are women's Progressive Era texts mostly absent from discussions in rhetoric and composition when this period (and the writing/rhetorical modes of the period) spurred such activism as the women's suffrage movement and civic reform?
2. Specifically, why has Nellie Bly not been mentioned alongside those Progressive Era reformers such as Jane Addams and Ida B. Wells in rhetoric and composition scholarship?

3. How can the recovery of Nellie Bly's texts add to the female rhetorical tradition and historical research within rhetoric and composition?

The fifth chapter also makes Bly's work relevant and applicable to a present-day audience by defending her position in the history of rhetorical practices. I also delineate how Bly's contributions to rhetoric encouraged women's empowerment as writers, particularly as journalists. I discuss how her work broke down barriers and opened up opportunities of rhetorical inquiry formerly considered inaccessible to women. I conclude by considering that as a result of Bly's story and legacy as "The Best Reporter in America," more women have found voice and empowerment to negotiate rhetorical practices and rhetorical spaces once denied to them.

CHAPTER TWO:  
DISCOVERING HER STORY

To discover something seems to be sheer happenstance at times, like a nomad traveling along and stumbling upon a hidden treasure by bumping her foot on the riches buried beneath the sand. However, the act of discovery can also be strategic and preconceived, like a determined pirate seeking out a treasure, to which he and only he has the map marked with an X. For my discovery of Nellie Bly, I fall into the first category of the one who stumbled upon her, not initially realizing the hidden worth of the treasure buried beneath the sand.

I was not really stumbling in the desert when I first discovered Nellie Bly; I was perched comfortably on my sofa watching *Jeopardy*, a popular televised trivia game show that requires contestants to show their quick recall of facts in different categories of knowledge. Contestants are given answers for which they must provide acceptable formulations of the questions. Each show ends with a “Final Jeopardy” round in which contestants wager their winnings to that point. The Final Jeopardy category was “Notable Women,” a topic I would have felt overly confident in, had I been a contestant, and I would have wagered a hefty sum. However, I was unable to come up with the right question. The correct question given by the winning contestant was “Who was Nellie Bly?” Although the clues given by the host mentioned the era during which Bly had lived and the fact that she had spent ten days in a mad-house, I unfortunately had never

heard of this woman; or if I had, she had been quickly forgotten, so much so that during that episode of *Jeopardy*, I was ignorant of her name, achievements, and contribution as a notable woman. My ignorance would not remain for long, as I consciously shifted my act of discovery from stumbling nomad to determined pirate. I began to remove the cover from the story of Nellie Bly to learn about this woman whose contributions should be duly noted, but seemingly have not been, except as they were on that episode of *Jeopardy*.

In Richard Enos' methodology of rhetorical sequencing, the act of discovery is the first step in investigating a previously neglected subject. Enos casts the act of discovery as an ability to "realize the social and cultural conditions [of the subject] by identifying the political structure, the social patterns, and the cultural hierarchies of values. All of these will help us understand the mentalities in operation" (75). To discover Bly's texts by placing them within this heuristic of rhetorical sequencing, I believe that an understanding of Bly's personal background must first be achieved to make the discovery of her texts both transparent and multivalent in meaning. Her childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood experiences prior to her fame as a newspaper reporter arguably act as the motivating force for her later writings, and her formative individuation further fuels her impetus to right injustice, the common theme that pervades her work on the national scene. As a young woman determined to make a way for herself in less than optimal circumstances, Bly's maturation and personal choices through her young life illustrate the cultural and social conditions that she was operating against. The oppressive political and power dynamics of her time similarly surface in her writing, as she sought to combat societal problems through the power of her rhetorical ethos. Thus, her background forged her rhetorical ethos. I will rely on Brooke Kroeger's authoritative biography of Bly as I offer a brief view of Bly's life and times.



Bly's story begins in the Pennsylvania town of Cochran's Mills, where on May 5, 1864, Elizabeth Jane Cochran, who would become Nellie Bly, was born as the thirteenth child of Judge Michael Cochran. Bearing the name of the town where they lived, the Cochran family was well respected within their community. In that small Pennsylvania town, Judge Michael Cochran's reputation as a hardworking man of integrity provided his family with a prominent position. However, this position was not so easily gained. When Michael Cochran was only four years old, his father passed away in Apollo, Pennsylvania, the place they had called home long before Michael gained renown in his namesake of Cochran's Mills. The son of early-nineteenth-century Irish settlers, Michael Cochran found his own way after his father's death. After his widowed mother indentured him to the service of a blacksmith and butcher, Cochran learned those trades as an apprentice. At the age of nineteen, he set up his own shop on Main Street in Apollo, taking on his own apprentices in order that they too could learn his trade (Kroeger 3).

Soon after establishing his own shop, Michael Cochran married Catherine Murphy, a woman who bore him ten children before her death in 1857. During the time of his marriage to Catherine, Cochran became active in county politics, winning the election for the justice of the peace in 1840. His fervor for political position was not soon extinguished, as he later campaigned for the Pennsylvania State Assembly, but lost his bid. In 1845, Cochran purchased property eight miles from his hometown of Apollo in a community known as Pitts' Mills. Establishing a general store and assuming proprietorship of a four-story gristmill, Cochran prospered in Pitts' Mills. He further increased his fortune by way of real estate speculation, and only five years after moving from Apollo to Pitts' Mills, Cochran's political influence was further solidified when he won the election to serve in the revered position of associate justice of Armstrong County. In 1855, at the end of his five-year term of office, the town's name changed

to Cochran's Mills to laud Michael Cochran's political achievements. With the changing of the name came the provision of a new name for Cochran himself as well: the title of Judge (Kroeger 3-4).

In 1857, Catherine passed away. Within a year after her death, Cochran married the woman whom Nellie Bly would call mother, Mary Jane Cummings. During the beginning years of his marriage to Mary Jane, the storms of the Civil War were threatening. Cochran, who was fifty when the Civil War began, was too elderly to enlist, but two of his sons by Catherine joined the ranks in 1861; both returned home before Bly's birth and the war's end, having been honorably discharged from service. When Mary Jane married Cochran, six of Catherine's children were placed under her care, including the two returned veterans; however, Cochran's three older daughters and eldest son, all by Catherine, had married to begin families of their own by that time and were not placed within Mary Jane's household (Kroeger 4).

While the battles of the Civil War still ensued, Cochran's Mills remained a placid haven free from war's pillaging. As the war waged in other states, Mary Jane Cummings Cochran had two boys before the birth of Nellie Bly. Overjoyed with the birth of her first daughter in 1864, Mary Jane Cochran had her newborn girl christened Elizabeth Jane by Reverend J. S. Lemon at the local Methodist Episcopal Church. The name, however, never really stuck for Mary Jane's daughter. Whereas most mothers dressed their baby girls in a drab gray calico or brown merino fabrics, Mary Jane did not desire common attire for her daughter. Her daughter would wear a stand-out pink dress coupled with white stockings. In her pink garb, Mary Jane's girl *was* noticed, as the soft feminine color of her dress complemented her flushed apple cheeks, earning this baby a name that did stick: Pink. Brooke Kroeger adds, "From the start, Mary Jane groomed her daughter to know how to attract attention and revel in it. The lessons would never be lost"

(Kroger 4-5). Pink would attract the admiration of a crowd of onlookers and readers, and by being Pink, she would also win their hearts.

Pink's early childhood was one of seeming joy and comfort. Her father had amassed real estate holdings in the amount of \$57,000 by 1870, which was a substantial sum, considering that an acre of land in Cochran's Mills sold for a mere \$30. However, in 1869, the Judge, nearing his sixtieth year, decided to move Mary Jane and her little ones back to Apollo, the place he had first called home. Selling some of his real estate outside of Cochran's Mills, Judge Cochran purchased three acres of land where he would build his new home in Apollo. Pink at the time was five, and she moved into the new house occupied only by those brothers and sisters that her own mother had birthed: by this time, Catherine's children had all entered into marriages, securing families of their own, except for one of her sons who was killed in the Civil War (Kroeger 6-8).

According Brooke Kroeger, Bly's father, the Judge, was described as being "broad-minded and high-principled, a gentleman, cultured and polished" (8). The family also let it be understood that the Judge was a lawyer, even though he had never been educated as such. His position as associate justice of Armstrong County had provided him with opportunities to handle minor court cases, such as appointing township officers, collecting bail, assigning guardianship for orphans, and approving indemnity, but an attorney, he was not. His family also credited him with appreciating education for its advantages, and with providing his children every possible academic opportunity. Kroeger marks these niceties as "at best, a loving embellishment, and at worst, an attempt to fabricate a more sophisticated background for the Cochrans once they determined this was an advantageous thing to do" (Kroeger 8-9).

Although Michael Cochran valued education, not one of his fifteen sons or daughters pursued academics. None of the Cochran children is recorded to have sought out law or medicine as a vocational calling. However, many of them did espouse the entrepreneurial determination of their father, his daughter Pink becoming a prime example. Furthermore, two recorded testaments to the Judge's appreciation of education are evidenced in his personal library of books and his 1848 contribution of \$25 to Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania. This collegial endorsement provided a perpetual scholarship to him as well as his descendants, which included free tuition to Allegheny if room and board were paid. However, no record exists of any of the Cochrans ever attending this college (Kroeger 9).

The house in Apollo came to be a place of abandonment for Pink and her family, as her childhood soon shifted from one of contentment and comfort to one marked by disillusionment and distrust. Within a year of the family's move and just two months after Pink turned six, her beloved father, whom Pink devotedly admired, experienced a debilitating, paralytic illness and quickly died. His death was a crucial turning point for young Pink, as he provided no specific provision of his estate to safeguard the security of his own wife or children. After the passing of her father, Pink gradually took it upon herself to assume responsibility for the stability of her family during her adolescent years. She later believed that she could right the wrong of her situation, and she would consistently handle adversity with this same sense of focus (Kroeger 9).

Adversity fell upon Mary Jane Cochran's children quickly after the passing of their father. Less than seven weeks after Cochran's death, Robert Scott Cochran, his eldest son by Catherine, petitioned the Armstrong County Orphans' Court at Kittanning to initiate an inquest to divide the estate among the Judge's many surviving family members. Since the nature of the property rendered it impossible to divide, his holdings were instead to be appraised for sale at

public action under the provision of the Pennsylvania state intestate law. Among the items up for bid were Mary Jane's new home in Apollo and the many parcels of land that her husband had acquired (Kroeger 10).

Dividing the property of such a wealthy man among children of two different wives presented a precarious situation, and appropriating an equal distribution of assets proved daunting considering a possible rift that might occur between Mary Jane's children and Cochran's children by his first wife. All of Judge Michael Cochran's properties were sold off in less than a year following his death, and the beautiful house that Mary Jane called her own in Apollo went to the town banker, Colonel Samuel Jackson, and his brother James for a mere \$2,650. The selling of all the Judge's real estate properties totaled nearly \$20,000 (Kroeger 10).

Mary Jane received a portion of the estate referred to as "the widow's third," as she was allotted a customary dower. This portion represented a stipend on the receipts from the estate, providing her with the interest on a third of its total value, to be paid to her twice a year until her death. With Mary Jane Cochran receiving this third, given in albeit small increments amounting to \$400 to \$500 annually, the rest of her husband's heirs were allowed to divide up the principal. As he had fourteen surviving children, the other two-thirds of the proceeds of his holdings went first to his nine children by Catherine, who, as adults, were provided their portion outright, a modest sum of \$1,000 each: The funds to be allotted to Mary Jane's five minor children still in her care were placed under the provision of Colonel Samuel Johnson, the banker who was now the owner of their former home in Apollo. Johnson would administer that portion to Mary Jane's children once they became of age (Kroeger 10-11).

The Cochrans, especially Mary Jane and her young children, were at a startling disadvantage economically following the Judge's death. As a means of financial survival, Mary

Jane claimed a yearly allowance from the allotment of funds that had been set aside for her children to receive from Johnson upon reaching the age of accountability. With these funds in addition to her “widow’s third,” Mary Jane had a total income of roughly \$16 a week while her children stayed in her household, but that amount would decrease to a little less than \$10 a week once her children had grown and moved on. This amount equated to a bit more than the wage earned by a well-paid factory worker at the time. Although this income could not be understood as being an indigent situation for the widow Cochran, even by 1870s standards, this dramatic shift from riches to seeming rags marked a pronounced decline for one of Apollo’s formerly most affluent families. Their change in status was also evident when comparing the house that the Judge built in Apollo to the house that Mary Jane purchased for \$200 after the Apollo home was sold; Mary Jane’s move from a 10,000 square foot home to a 1,000 square foot residence unfortunately symbolized how her standard of living shifted dramatically following her husband’s death (Kroeger 11-12).

Leaving her small new house and entering the schoolhouse in Apollo with classrooms serving both primary and high school students, Pink studied only four months out of the year, which was customary during the time. Pink did not excel as a scholar, and she often became noticed more for her riotous outbursts in the classroom and less for her academic achievements. The disruptive nature of her home life and the absence of a father figure could provide reason for Pink to act out in school, but she was later to describe herself from her own recollections of childhood as a studious child, always crafting stories that she wanted to share with her friends (Kroeger 13-14).

In January of 1873, when Pink had reached the age of nine and her father had been dead for two and a half years, she witnessed the marriage of her mother to a third husband, John

Jackson Ford, known as Jack. This marriage placed an indelible mark on Pink's life, as she learned from Ford's deplorable behavior all that a father should not be. Mary Jane was forty-three at the time of this marriage, and considering her dire circumstances as a widowed woman trying to raise five children on a paltry income, having a husband seemed more promising than the circumstance of being alone. The vows were exchanged, and Mary Jane became Mary Jane Cummings Cochran Ford. Marrying a man who had served in the Civil War and had panned for gold in the 1850s, Mary Jane made a disastrous choice in selecting Ford, whose taxable assets were worth only \$400 (Kroeger 15).

Not only was Ford a belligerent man, but he was also an abusive alcoholic. After Mary Jane and Ford had been married for a difficult five years, she attended a church function at the Methodist Episcopal Church against her husband's wishes on New Year's Eve. Bent on punishing her for disrespecting him, Ford arrived at the holiday celebration completely inebriated, pointing a loaded pistol at Mary Jane. Announcing his intent to kill her, Ford was forcefully subdued by Mary Jane's eldest son Albert and two other members of the congregation while Mary Jane fled to safety. Although Mary Jane and Ford reconciled a few weeks later, the couple remained together for only nine more months. By the end of September 1878, Ford dined with the family for the last time. An argument erupted during the dinner, and Ford began hurling furniture and insults at Mary Jane and her children. His atrocious behavior continued into the next day when he returned in a heated rage to point a loaded pistol again at Mary Jane. Pink and her older brother Albert bravely stood between their mother and the loaded gun, blocking Ford's advances while their mother escaped to safety out the front door of their home. The children ran closely behind, longing to escape from the man who for close to six years had been nothing but torment to their lives (Kroeger 18).

After the family's departure to safety, Ford confined himself to the house, nailing all the windows and doors shut, entering and exiting the house solely through an upper story window. After a week following Ford's bellicose antics, Mary Jane was finally able to enter the house to remove some of her remaining belongings, finding that Ford had left her home in total disarray. After collecting her things, Mary Jane rented another house for her family, and Ford left town. On October 14, 1878, Mary Jane bore the brunt of much town gossip in Apollo when she resolved to sue Jack Ford for a divorce in the Armstrong Court of Common Pleas. Mary Jane's case was one of only fifteen divorce cases handled that year in Armstrong, a county with a population of 40,000. And of those fifteen cases, only five involved the plaintiff being the wife. To elucidate the sheer rarity of divorce, a mere eighty-four divorces were granted in that court over the ten-year period of the 1870s, which is, surprisingly, double the number of the previous decade (Kroeger 19).

Mary Jane's divorce hearing featured two of her five children as witnesses placed on the stand to testify to the horror of her marriage: the two providing testimony were Pink and Albert. In addition to her children, eleven friends and neighbors voiced those injustices that Mary Jane had endured as they shared, under oath, descriptions of Ford's malicious and threatening behavior toward his wife. On June 3, 1879, Mary Jane's divorce was finalized, and although divorce would mar Mary Jane with a shameful societal stigma, her resolve to sever her connection to Ford is commendable. Embodying a resolute devotion to her mother, Pink, at age fifteen, assumed the role of her protector and champion following the divorce, and their bond was a profound union which Mary Jane nurtured and cherished. The former situation of domestic turmoil between Mary Jane and Ford taught Pink much about the necessity of self-reliance, proving to her that financial and emotional security are best found through one's own



determination and intuition, not from the stability a man or marriage might provide. Three husbands had not insured Pink's beloved mother with emotional, personal, or financial safety; therefore, as the fifteen-year-old daughter of a woman stigmatized by divorce, Pink determined to support her mother as well as herself by entering into a career she viewed as profitable. Pink thought teaching seemed the fitting and reputable choice for a young girl, and boarding school was the next step to foster this new career path (Kroeger 19-21).

Before leaving Apollo to attend the boarding school only fifteen miles from her home, Pink met with Colonel Samuel Jackson, the executor of the money allocated to her from her father's estate. Tuition, room and board totaled \$75 per term at the State Normal School at Indiana, and Pink knew that her divorced mother would be little help in covering this sum. In meeting with Jackson, Pink wanted assurance from Jackson in knowing that her remaining funds would be sufficient to cover the three-year stint that was required to complete the teaching curriculum. The total cost of her course of study until her graduation would roughly amount to over \$400, but Jackson assured her that the funds would suffice. Signing her registration form as guardian, Jackson urged Pink to attend this school, as he also happened to be an appointee to the school's board of trustees (Kroeger 22-23).

In the fall of 1879, Pink enrolled in the Indiana State Normal School as "Elizabeth J. Cochrane," embracing this new environment with the hopes of redefining herself and her circumstances. She left behind what she viewed as her childish nickname Pink; furthermore, she added an additional vowel to the end of her name in the normal school's ledger. By adding the silent *e*, Elizabeth may have coincidentally created intentional confusion by aligning herself not with the twice-widowed, now-divorced Mary Jane Cochran, but with one of the most affluent families in Apollo, the Cochranes, a family of successful attorneys, bearing no relation to the

former Judge Michael Cochran or his descendants. But on paper with the addition of that letter, Elizabeth Jane Cochrane may have judiciously sought to erase her family's former affiliation with Jack Ford and the stigma of those divorce proceedings that occurred only six months before Elizabeth's admittance into school. Elizabeth's two other brothers, Albert and Charles, followed their sister's lead in similarly changing the spelling of their last name as well, and Mary Jane was to join suit in the years to follow (Kroeger 24-25).

As Elizabeth's first term in school neared its end, she became concerned about the state of her finances. She wrote to Jackson to inquire if he would provide her with some money from her trust in order that she could return home to speak with him about her remaining funds. Jackson had paid her first term schooling debts by removing funds directly from her trust, and he also provided her with a total of three \$10 checks, also from her trust, for spending money. He also sent her the money that she had requested in order to speak with him about the state of her finances. Although Jackson had initially promised Elizabeth that her trust would suffice to cover her schooling until graduation, upon her return, he reported that her funds had run out. Elizabeth was flabbergasted, feeling as if she had been swindled by a man who had assured her that her finances would not pose a problem. As a trustee of the school, as one of the wealthiest men in Apollo, and as her guardian, Jackson could have negotiated a means to allow Elizabeth to return and complete her schooling, but he failed to do so, neither feeling inclined nor willing to assist her in this way (Kroeger 24-25). This difficult experience provided Elizabeth with a strong desire to right an injustice she felt had befallen her as a result of Jackson's misdealing. (Later, Elizabeth Jane Cochrane sued Colonel Samuel Jackson for the misappropriation and mismanagement of her funds. However, she decided to drop the case when she realized how little she could actually gain from it.)

Without the funds to continue her education, Elizabeth resolved not to complete any of her first term final exams, and she withdrew from boarding school. The school record for that semester in 1879 reports no grades for Elizabeth J. Cochrane. Upon her withdrawal from the school, her hopes of becoming a teacher were dashed, as was her experience with formal education. She decided that she would seek employment through other means, and she considered that Jackson's mishandling of her finances was a situation that she felt should best remain untold. Her mother knew the truth of the situation, as she commiserated with her daughter concerning Jackson's misappropriation of the trust, but having to explain the misunderstanding between herself and Jackson, one of the wealthiest and most influential men in Apollo, to her other family members and friends seemed shameful and at best to be avoided.

After Elizabeth Cochrane achieved fame under her pseudonym Nellie Bly over ten years later, a newspaper account of her past schooling shared a much different picture of events from the truth of the matter. The story explained that Miss Cochrane had spent over two years at the Indiana Normal School, and nearing the completing of her teaching curriculum, she fell ill with a heart condition. According to the article, her physician alleged, "One year's study would probably cost the girl her life" (qtd. in Kroeger 29). The article lauds Bly's intentions of desiring to continue her studies but notes that such efforts surely would not be worth her death.

Determining whether the writer of this article received his/her information from Bly herself or from Mary Jane Cochrane is uncertain, but regardless of the source, the truth of her short stint in Indiana boarding school was intentionally withheld from her avid readership once she achieved fame. Casting Bly's removal from formal education as a health matter instead of a financial one added an element of sentimentalism with which readers were more likely to sympathize.

After Elizabeth's return from boarding school, Mary Jane moved her family of five children from Apollo to the town of Allegheny City, Pennsylvania's third largest city, near Pittsburgh. Specific reasons for Elizabeth's inability to find work during her years in Allegheny City cannot be known. Although indications are that she served sometimes as a tutor, nanny, and housekeeper, she was unable to secure steady, gainful employment between the ages of sixteen and twenty while in the Pittsburgh area. Elizabeth's financial prospects were quite limited, and considering the fate that marriage had brought her mother, she professed no desire to marry. However, her less-educated brothers were able to secure positions in white-collar jobs with little difficulty, and Elizabeth realized that her inability to find work was a societal injustice facing her as a woman, an injustice that she felt might await *any* woman looking for work in the male-dominated public sphere of a rapidly-growing Pittsburgh (Kroeger 30-33).

As Elizabeth Cochrane bemoaned the state of the job market for women, the newspaper industry blossomed in the city of 60,000 that she now called home. Pittsburgh's presses featured seven rival daily newspapers that remained in print for fifty years following the end of the Civil War. One of Elizabeth's favorites was *The Pittsburg Dispatch* (which spelled the city's name without the *h* during this time), whose pages held only one featured female columnist, Elizabeth Wilkinson Wade, whose pen name was Bessie Bramble. Bramble wrote woman's interest stories, but was also a strong advocate for women's advancement. Her male counterpart at *The Pittsburg Dispatch* was Erasmus Wilson, the author of prized editorials and one of the city's most renowned newspaper columnists. His "Quiet Observations" column illustrated his humble, honest intellect and sympathetic slant, but his reputation among women began to wane when Wilson wrote sardonically concerning women's increasing presence outside of the home (Kroeger 34-35).

Erasmus Wilson's articles addressing the "Woman Question" in *The Pittsburg Dispatch* caused Elizabeth Cochrane to enter the field of newspaper journalism. Writing specifically on the role of women in society in a crotchety diatribe, Wilson goaded every woman to "let up on this sphere business" and think of "her home [as] a little paradise, . . . playing the part of angel" (qtd. in Kroeger 35). Relegating women solely to the home as their proper sphere, Wilson wrote to assuage the plight of an "Anxious Father" desiring advice to help him manage five unmarried daughters between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six, all still living in his household. In addressing the "Anxious Father," Wilson failed to provide a concrete answer to rectify the concern this worried parent expressed. He rather argued that a society should fear the instability of conditions in which parents fail to rear men who are honorable and industrious enough to assume the role of provider (thus fit to take a wife). Likewise, society should also lament a situation when parents similarly fall short in training women to be domestic, motherly types who can take on the role of submissive nurturer (thus fit for a husband) (Kroeger 36).

Wilson posited that a woman who opted to live outside of her proper sphere was none other than a "monstrosity" and "abnormity." His conceptualization of the "fairer sex" begrudged a woman in breeches as representing not only a threat of emasculation but also an additional danger to gender roles, as she sought to usurp certain duties that Wilson argued were "bequeathed solely to him [or all men in general] by heaven" (qtd. in Kroeger 39). Wilson further discounted women's humanity by asserting as a tongue-in-cheek example of their expendability that female infants in China are killed or sold into slavery by their fathers "because they can make no good use of them. Who knows but this country may have to resort to this sometime" (qtd. in Kroeger 36). This testament roused much anger from female readers itching

to prove that Wilson's views were not only wrong and unfair but also offensively so (Kroeger 36-38).

Wilson's almost laughable and caustic dialogue with "Anxious Father" generated many heated replies that were mailed to the *Dispatch* from his offended female readership. Among these was a letter addressed to Wilson signed by one who had no such father to worry about the state of her affairs, a young woman whose plight Wilson had dismissed altogether. "Lonely Orphan Girl" had dashed off a hastily written rebuttal to contradict what she saw as Wilson's myopic views on womanhood. This letter was Elizabeth Cochrane's first piece of text to cross the desk of a newspaper editor. George Madden, newly hired to the position of managing editor of *The Pittsburg Dispatch*, felt the letter expressed a sincerity of tone and a genuineness of spirit that impressed him, and he surmised that this writer would be able to learn the craft of newspaper writing quickly with a bit of proper training. Madden shared this document with Wilson, and the two men agreed that this "Lonely Orphan Girl" with her candor and unique slant might prove advantageous to the Sunday edition of their publication. On Saturday, January 17, 1885, an announcement appeared in the *Dispatch's* letters to the editor column asking the "Lonely Orphan Girl" to come forward. The very next day, an excited Elizabeth Cochrane, winded from climbing four flights of stairs to reach the newsroom, entered *The Dispatch* to embark on a career that would render her a legend (Kroeger 38-39).

Only a short week after Cochrane entered the *Dispatch* newsroom to declare her identity as the "Lonely Orphan Girl," her first piece was published on page 11 of the Sunday paper. Madden had decided not to print Cochrane's letter to Wilson that initially had sparked his intrigue; furthermore, he reasoned that having Cochrane draft her own article to continue Wilson's ignited discussion of "the woman's sphere" would prove better suited for their

readership. Cochrane entitled her first contribution “The Girl Puzzle,” which seemed a fitting title, having been written by a woman viewing herself as an orphan girl. Ushered into this position considered outside of the woman’s sphere by sheer chance or providence, Cochrane found herself having to negotiate a complex girl puzzle in her writing: complex because she knew that her response to the woman question could either secure her employment or erase her name from the newspaper’s bylines (Kroeger 41).

In her thoughtful article, Cochrane’s text harkens back to the primary question posed by “Anxious Father” concerning what he should do to secure provision for his many unmarried daughters. Cochrane addresses the question through her situated, personal circumstances. She coaxes her readers not to consider the “Anxious Father’s” situation in light of those privileged women who have security in affluent families or through wealthy husbands, but to reflect instead on those “underprivileged” women without financial means, personal attractiveness, or relevant workplace skills. Those are the women who would most fit the pieces of what Cochrane was exploring as the girl puzzle. Those are the women without the possibility of work, without the hope of marriage, and without the means to do anything personally to rectify their dire situations. Those are the women for whom Cochrane wrote and would continue to write throughout her career, viewing herself as also being one of them, the orphaned, abandoned, and distraught (Kroeger 41).

In addressing those disenfranchised women, “The Girl Puzzle” provides a rhetorical space for Cochrane to illustrate the scarcity of work for young women and to share what had been her own dismay for the four years she sought employment in Allegheny City. She describes schools, factories, and stores as being overrun with those women scavenging for any form of employment and often finding every position already filled by males. She discusses

those idled girls whose ailing and aging parents depend upon them to help with familial expenses but find their daughters without any available means to provide. Arguing that young women should be provided with the same opportunities as young men, Cochrane explains that young women could serve as messengers and “office boys” equally as well, and she even questions why women were not already serving as conductors on Pullman cars. She further chastises the rich for ignoring the quandary of the female destitute while the wealthy spend more on their pets in a day than a struggling female worker may manage to make in a week. Cochrane paints a bleak picture to answer the “Anxious Father’s” question, but she does so as the voice of experience, as one who has stood in the lines being turned away from every opportunity (Kroeger 41-42). This experiential form of writing would soon become her trademark style, but it would take further shape under the guise of stunt reporting, as she would later undergo great risks to experience what would become the news.

Madden personally edited Cochrane’s first article, which she signed “Orphan Girl”; he gave her money for her work and asked that she write another piece for him. Her second piece focused on a topic with which Cochrane also had some unfortunate familiarity: divorce. Cochrane’s viewpoints on divorce were as equally spirited as her thoughts on the workplace doldrums and economic dead ends women faced. Cochrane reasons in her article entitled “Mad Marriages” that marriage and divorce laws should be amended; Cochrane was all too familiar with the circumstances that her mother faced in securing her divorce from Jack Ford, and she wrote with an impassioned fervor to establish safeguards to prevent what happened to her mother from happening to other women (Kroger 42-43).

In speaking on this highly stigmatized topic of divorce, Cochrane calls for those couples engaged to be married to disclose all relevant information that may make them unsuitable to be



wed to their betrothed before their matrimony. For example, she encourages grooms to admit it if they are addicted to alcohol or other vices, prone to violent tendencies, or unable to secure dependable work; likewise for women, Cochrane urges that the women express it if they are not adept at household tasks or not angelic in demeanor. Although these assertions disclose Bly's naïveté, her belief that engaged couples might actually reveal these vices beforehand, the article urges couples to fully disclose their weaknesses or shortcomings publicly before the marriage. This disclosure would either discourage the couples from marrying in the first place (because of the revelation of their true inadequacies) or encourage the couples to later file for divorce when their vices were revealed (because they could accuse each other of being dishonest). Cochrane also contends that it should be made a crime for those betrothed to share false information about their personal history. Furthermore, Cochrane reasons that if an engaged couple discloses every possible vice and personal flaw before they are married, then after the marriage, neither of them would be prevented from pleading that they were ignorant of their spouse's true inadequacies, thus facilitating a divorce. In sharing the worst of their natures before the actual wedding, a husband and wife would then know what to anticipate "until death do they part" (Kroeger 42).

Scaffolding her argument with prevailing gender stereotypes in this second article, Cochrane cast man as the provider and woman as the domestic angel. Cochrane positioned men and women in these traditional roles to reflect how men and women were defined in her cultural milieu, but "Mad Marriage" poses a paradox to today's reader when compared with her first piece, "The Girl Puzzle." When positioning the two articles in dialogue, I believe that Cochrane was completely opposed to marriage as an institution at this point in her life. In unrealistically challenging men and women to provide all evidences of personal deficit before marriage, she wishes to dissuade them from becoming involved in a union in the first place. If men want

women to be angels and women need men to be providers, then Cochrane seems to reason that when these roles are not defined as such in a marriage, then divorce is more likely. However, in her first article, she encourages young girls to take on the roles of young men, to be industrious in finding work by usurping those positions formerly held by men. If women are taking these positions in the workforce, as Cochrane suggests in her first article to help the “Anxious Father” with his daughters, then these workingwomen will not be mastering the skills of a homemaker and thus will be unable to find a husband, especially if the service of homemaking is the primary necessity that a man is desirous of in a wife at that historical moment.

Cochrane’s article on divorce sparked controversy, which Madden relished, but more importantly, her second piece landed her a permanent position on the staff of *The Pittsburg Dispatch*. Her starting salary was five dollars a week, which was a bit more than the factory girls of the time were making. Before “Mad Marriages” rolled off the presses, Madden figured that “Orphan Girl” needed a more fitting byline as the greenest member of his staff. Elizabeth Cochrane would not do, as it was custom of the time that women writing on newspaper staffs were to keep their true identities private by using a pseudonym instead. After editing Cochrane’s piece on divorce, Madden asked for suggestions for Cochrane’s new name by yelling his request out to the newsroom floor. Other writers and staff provided many possibilities, “Nellie Bly” being among those offered. Madden made his decision, and Nellie Bly was chosen as the name by which Elizabeth Jane “Pink” Cochrane would be known in print. The spelling differed from the “Nelly Bly” of the song that Stephen Collins Foster, one of Pittsburgh’s own, had made famous thirty-five years earlier. Both Nelly Bly, the song, and Nellie Bly, the writer, originated from Pittsburgh inspirations; other than their dual “birthplace,” the two bear no other connection (Kroeger 43-44).

Before moving forward in detailing Bly's career, I would like to return to the seeming disparity between Bly's negotiation and representation of conventional gender roles in her first two articles. I think the disparity was deliberate, and can be explained by her being newly appointed to the staff of *The Dispatch* following the publication of her first piece and by her recognizing that securing employment would prove more important to her future than voicing her true convictions. Arguing to defend the plight of workingwomen, Bly, in her first article, offers a more progressive agenda, spurring young women to assume the roles of men in the workforce, an article she signed with an epithet of anonymity as "Orphan Girl." This revision of gender roles for women in her first piece may be consistent with the understanding of an orphaned young lady seeking employment, but when figuring out how to represent herself not as "Orphan Girl" but as "Nellie Bly," her views of marriages and divorces are more consistent with the prevailing and normalized gender roles of her day. Thus, in her second piece, Bly's paradoxical representation of women's roles assumes a slant that she thought she needed to impress her editors, secure her position, and maintain the status quo.

As part of George Madden's staff, Elizabeth Cochrane, now assuming her newspaper pseudonym, returned in her third article to the topic that she had raised in her first: the position of underprivileged, destitute working women. In this third piece, entitled "Perilous Paths," however, she negotiated the topic from a different angle, an angle more fitting for Nellie Bly to elucidate rather than "Orphan Girl." Rather than describing the toil or ins and outs of these women's monotonous work, Bly decided to write about how they would spend their time when their work was done. Focusing on life "after-hours," Bly explains how these poor workingwomen engage in a practice known as "catching a mash." This "mashing" involved a workingwoman who would casually meet a man, maybe even a stranger, on the streetcar or busy

Pittsburgh street. After meeting, they go to a bar together, both becoming completely inebriated. In their drunken stupor, the two would sometimes, to use the euphemism or sexual idiom of the day, “fall” (Kroeger 45). To be sure, this practice disrupted the conventions of ideal womanhood and the possibilities for these women to find husbands. The hazards of this practice are evident in the testimony of a young woman whom Bly interviewed for her article “Perilous Paths,” as the woman’s story illustrates that she views her life as inconsequential because her reputation is tainted.

With a knack for asking just the right question, Bly elicited a response from a young woman for her article that would truly elucidate the life that workingwomen faced as they sought to escape from the doldrums of work by becoming “man-mashers.” Bly asks, “Why do you risk your reputation in such a way?” In Bly’s account, the young woman replies:

“Risk my reputation! . . . I don’t think I ever had one to risk. I work hard all day, week after week, for a mere pittance. I go home at night tired of labor and longing for something new, anything good or bad to break the monotony of my existence. I have no pleasure, no books to read. I cannot go to places of amusement for want of clothes and money, and no one cares what becomes of me.” (qtd. in Kroeger 45)

This woman’s statement illustrates Bly’s ability to articulate a resourceful question without compunction, then use the answer to craft a provocative story that drew a reader’s interest. The candor of this testimony also speaks to Bly’s ability to elicit a sincere, if uncanny or indecent, response from those she interviewed. Her ability to spark genuine dialogue stems from Bly’s desire to converse with her sources, not from a place of judgment or condemnation, but from a position of empathy and understanding. Even from the beginning of her career, Bly’s writing

drew in readers, and her ability to captivate an audience worked in her favor to mask her inadequacies in reasoning or diction (Kroeger 44-45).

Now that Bly had written on the hapless fate of the “men-mashers,” she decided to assume the role of a factory working girl herself. She asked Madden if she could investigate the working conditions by seeking employment in the factories for her next story; Madden approved, even allowing his newest female reporter to bring an illustrator along with her to caricature her experiences. In this series of articles entitled “Our Workshop Girls,” Bly joined the ranks of the factory girls, writing a total of eight articles to share the minutia of the workday as part of the city’s growing female workforce. Although many of the juvenile biographies featuring Bly’s stint as a factory worker cast this series as her attempt to unveil the squalid environments of the factories, her factory worker stories held no such report. Bly’s eight articles lauded the factories for cleanliness, efficiency, congenial supervisors, and reasonably enjoyable duties (Kroeger 46). The appeal of these articles was not to reproach factory owners for providing poor working conditions, but to cast factories as places where women were safe, where they found gainful employment, and where they enjoyed going to work.

These articles mirrored the drive of newspaper reporters at the time to follow their editors’ mandates and report faithfully only that which they had experienced firsthand. However, Bly had not yet honed that skeptical, critical mindset that would mature her voice as a writer. To be sure, newspapers at this moment in history had not yet become bent on investigation and exposé, as would be their favored approaches in a few years to come. But through her stint in the factories, Bly came to realize that a “man-masher” might share juicy snippets at the boarding house where she resided with little fear of identification, but when she was asked questions in front of her factory manager on record for *The Pittsburg Dispatch*, a tight

lip would be the only response. For Bly to become known as “The Best Reporter in America,” she needed to craft a different journalistic slant to uncover the most riveting accounts (Kroeger 48).

Once Bly’s two-month factory worker series had ended, Madden decided to redirect her columns to address the female readership more specifically; she was assigned the women’s interest news story, which included topics such as fashion, society, gardening, and the arts. In these columns, Bly discussed numerous issues that Madden suggested she follow, but she detested writing on these subjects. Occasionally, she could convince Madden to let her write something of more general interest, for example, an interview with a veteran concerning his service in the Civil War; or with a doctor concerning the new malady of hay fever, but Madden was prone to give Bly stories that stifled her spunk and left her using boilerplate to assuage her disgust. At the end of January in 1886, Bly had had as much as she could take of the women’s interest story. Leaving Pittsburgh with her mother, the two departed on a journey that would allow Bly to write for *The Dispatch* on location. She had decided to shift her approach and write from her experiences as a freelance journalist. Madden reluctantly agreed to her idea to write abroad because Bly was resolute in her determination and refused to accept “no” as an answer. On February 21, 1886, a new headline appeared on the pages on *The Pittsburg Dispatch*: “Nellie In Mexico” (Kroeger 56)

Bly’s tour of Mexico lasted six months, and during that time she presented herself in her column as an American woman in an un-American place. Her writing, however, sought to dispel the stereotypes that she thought unjustly characterized the Mexican culture and people. She represented the country in a factual manner, sharing narratives about the people’s habits, values, customs, and politics. Bly’s tour of Mexico proved advantageous to her understanding of self-

ensorship, as she learned to emphasize the positive aspects of a culture while still writing with candor, remaining mindful to avoid sharing anything that might result in her being jailed or her being expelled from the country because of her text (Kroeger 62-63).

At the behest of George Madden, her colleague and mentor, Bly returned to *The Dispatch* after her stay in Mexico to become their theater and arts reporter. This assignment was not the type of story that Bly believed she deserved after her stint on foreign soil, but she accepted the task nonetheless. As the reluctant lead culture writer, she did not find satisfaction in writing that bore such similarities to the women's interest stories that had motivated her to depart from Madden's newsroom in the first place. Her return, however, was not to be a long one. Less than three months following her return from Mexico, Bly, bored by her assignments, wrote her last selection for *The Pittsburg Dispatch*, published on March 20, 1887. Bly resolutely decided not to come in for work anymore. She left a note addressed to the man who had in some respects inspired her writing and who also had coincidentally prompted her journalist career. The letter was addressed to the "Quiet Observer," Erasmus Wilson, and simply stated: "I am off for New York. Look out for me. -Bly" (qtd. in Kroeger 75).

New York City was the place where Bly truly found her niche. This place of great opportunity provided her with the means of becoming "The Best Reporter in America." With her first story for *The New York World*, Bly gained the fame she had been longing for; she was discovered for the genuine talent that she was. And there her story as a journalist and as a "stunt reporter" truly began. Thus, New York marks the place where the next step of rhetorical sequencing should occur: reconstruction. Now that Bly's past has been excavated and discovered, the reconstruction of *kairos*, or the defining of the nuances of her rhetorical situation as a writer coming into her own, can be re-conceptualized within her specific cultural milieu.

### CHAPTER THREE: RECONSTRUCTING HER STORY

As time progresses, things that are neglected, lost, or simply forgotten fall into disrepair. Though once prized, these items may lose their value through years of abandonment. If a building lay in ruin, then the edifice would need either to be razed or reconstructed to provide space for a future site that could serve as a dwelling or business. Razing the construction would render it completely unrecognizable, a heap of rubble bearing no similarity to its former image. However, reconstructing would require rebuilding what had already been in existence, aiming to return the structure to its original worth or aesthetic. Reconstruction would need to occur if the building project were to re-establish the integrity of the structure as it was intended to exist, but razing would only destroy the construction with no intent of returning the structure to its former state.

Reconstruction acknowledges that what currently exists, be it a building or even a history, is no longer structurally sound. The entrance may be marred with graffiti; the foundation may be shifting, or the dilapidated edifice may need extensive remodeling. In order for reconstruction to occur, the builder must investigate the existing structures, whether they are political, physical, or psychological, that may have caused the building or history to depreciate or decline. Reconstruction involves understanding how these political, physical, and psychological



underpinnings function as remnants that elucidate the presence of former forces that may have contributed to its depreciation. For reconstruction to occur, the builder must be willing to understand and negotiate what forces have been present, so that rebuilding is possible. Razing would promote only the complete loss and total destruction of the building or history, thus removing its memory from the landscape.

If Nellie Bly's writing is akin to the aforementioned building or history that has fallen into disrepair, then the apparent deterioration has resulted not from her writing having depreciated in value, but rather from the product of her work having been forgotten and neglected. The apparent need for reconstruction of Bly's writing is the product of this neglect, compounded by a history in which women's rhetoric was more often razed than reconstructed, making Bly's work worthy of the sort of remapping and regendering of the history of rhetoric called for by Cheryl Glenn (Glenn 2). To regender rhetorical history with attention to Bly's contribution, reconstruction of her writing and her impetus to write should occur.

As I have earlier explained, the act of reconstruction is the second step in Richard Enos's methodology of rhetorical sequencing. To achieve this step, Enos argues, "Our task should be to re-co-create the meaning of what is uttered or written as well as the epistemology that is generating such discourse" (70). By rearticulating the meaning at the point of utterance, the researcher can produce what Enos casts as the act of reconstruction, achieving the following:

We must model or recreate what Lloyd Bitzer calls the "rhetorical situation" or what James Kinneavy terms "*kairos*." That is, we must reconstruct the conditions that induce and explain why rhetoric and composition were brought into existence. By isolating the exigencies, audience and constraints (in Bitzer's

terms), we will be able to reconstruct the context within the social dynamics of culture. (75)

Reconstructing Bly's historical context requires excavating the cultural milieu that defined her exigency as a woman writer. Enos posits that "to engage in rhetorical archeology, we must reconstruct not only the discourse and the cultural context but also the mentalities that are indigenous to the period" (70). By investigating the rhetorical situation or *kairos*, that surrounded Bly, I hope to reconstruct her contribution as a writer and stunt reporter. To reconstruct Bly's legacy as a rhetorician, I will examine those existing political, physical, and psychological structures within her society that provide evidence of the rhetorical barriers and prejudices that Bly sought to overcome through her writing. This reconstructing of the societal opposition surrounding Bly securely places her within the historical context as a woman writing in the Progressive Era.

To describe the historical tradition of male journalists, against whom Bly had both to define and distinguish herself, I will examine the conventions of the male-defined field of journalism during the Progressive Era by considering the popular work of Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and Richard Harding Davis. I will explore the contributions of these three male journalists because their work is highly representative of the period and is congruent to the type of journalistic story that Bly also sought to write. To regender the role of the journalist, I will also consider the journalistic achievements of those women journalists who preceded Bly's work as well as those women writers who confined their writing tasks solely to the realm of domesticity, as was expected of them. By discussing the leading women writers of her time, I will cast Bly among her contemporaries to examine how she possessed a different rhetorical ethos from those leading women writers and popular male journalists, thus marking her

individual contribution to rhetoric. I will rely on Elizabeth Burt's authoritative history of the Progressive Era as I offer a brief view of those cultural occurrences marking Bly's life and times.

### **Exploring Bly's Cultural Milieu: Social Dynamics of Progressive Era Culture**

The Progressive Era marked a period in our nation's history fueled by a spirit of optimism. Shared among some politicians, intellectuals, and artists, this sanguine spirit sparked reform among those considered "progressives," a group that historians tend to align with a common social demographic comprised primarily of well-educated, white, middle-class, native-born Anglo-Saxon Protestants. The reform efforts of the progressives benefited segments of the United States socially, politically, and economically, as the Progressive Era was a social climate conducive to reform initiatives. During the years between 1890 and 1920, the nation's population, industries, technologies, and transportation increased at an exponential rate. As industrial landscapes increasingly replaced agrarian ones, the standard of living rose for some but declined for others. During this time, immigrants experienced increased exploitation alongside the poor as well as ethnic and racial minorities; however, the misfortunate plights of these groups often ignited the concern of those progressives who fought to improve the welfare of the destitute and downtrodden (Burt 1-2).

As the Progressive Era bolstered a national sense of fortitude, following such significant post-Civil War developments as increased industrialization, completion of coast-to-coast expansion, subduing of Native American resistance, and victorious participation in the Spanish-American War and World War I, the atmosphere of optimism was often coupled with a consciousness of anxiety and doubt among those without the means to initiate change. Despite the strong penchant among progressives to engage in reform, the societal tensions deriving from economic panic, labor unrest, and immigration problems proved that the optimism of the time

was not without its distresses. However, those with the means to initiate reform were united in their belief that they possessed the wherewithal to transform society, which was sharply contrasted to the earlier nineteenth-century passive viewpoint that progress was automatic and independent of direct human agency (Burt 1-2).

Nellie Bly was among those progressives who believed that reform initiatives had transformative power within society, and many of her newspaper articles illustrated her desire to improve the situations of others through reform. Bly paid attention to the various issues that infused the atmosphere defining the Progressive Era. She often depicted the struggles of others in her writing, and her awareness of and sympathy for many Progressive Era concerns helped forge her rhetorical ethos. Several pervasive economic and social issues, many of which were strongly linked to the nation's growth and urbanization, characterized the cultural climate that led to the Progressive Era and captured Bly's attention as a writer. Bly was particularly attuned to the struggle that many encountered when seeking employment, and she wrote a series of articles depicting the toils of poor working women in factories, and she also investigated the treatment of women, whom she referred to as "while slaves," working in paper box manufacturing.

In addition to the troubles women experienced in attempting to find work, the immigrant population encountered a similar difficulty. Although Bly did not write specifically about the immigrant experience, she was curious about the situations they faced. In Bly's initial interview with John Cockerill, as she sought employment at *The New York World*, she inquired if she could sail to England, then write a story based on her return to America, posing as an immigrant aboard a ship from England. She wanted to share the journey of one coming to America to chronicle the difficulties and challenges an immigrant had to overcome. Unfortunately, Cockerill refused to let her cover what he considered to be a story too dangerous for a young woman (Kroeger 85).

Bly's interest in this story, however, shows her knowledge of the growing immigrant population in America and her desire to understand their plight.

Immigrants settling in industrializing Eastern cities hoped to secure employment in this nation of possibility, but because of their lack of skills (most were illiterate peasants from Eastern and Southern Europe), those who came to the Atlantic coastal regions often remained unemployed. Unfortunately, they entered a pool of laborers alongside other unemployed men and women where the number of unskilled workers far exceeded the number of available positions. Unable to find work, those immigrants often faced dire circumstances in a country that had seemingly promised them opportunities for a better life (Burt 3).

This dearth of work for many created societal troubles such as vagrancy, poverty, disease, and crime; and these issues were most often associated with those who had to live in the city's slums and who were unable to find work. Bly reported on these issues with a desire for reform. In August of 1894, she wrote about the gambling houses of Saratoga, New York, a village she considered to be "the most wicked in the country" (Kroeger 243). She described the horse betting and gaming rooms, arguing, "crime is holding a convention there . . . and vice is enjoying a festival such as it never dared approach before" (qtd. in Kroeger 243). Her article proved instrumental in initiating reform for that community. The follow-up report that appeared after her Saratoga story said, "Bly's exposure of the evils of Saratoga ha[s] fortified its decent citizens with a hope for reform" (Kroeger 243). Bly sparked her readers' desire for reform, as she determined to expose criminal activity and thereby decrease its influence.

As a result of societal problems such as crime, poverty, disease, and vagrancy, the more established of the national citizenry reacted by supporting governmental restrictions on immigration. For example, white workingmen along the Western seaboard united to form the

Workingman's Party of California as a result of their fear that the Chinese would monopolize the job market, thus leaving the white workers facing unemployment. In 1877, the Workingman's Party lobbied Congress to enact legislation prohibiting Chinese immigration. Responding to the pressure of this group as well as the concerns of those fearing the problems of vagrancy, crime, and disease that were rampant among places with a growing immigrant population, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which was the first immigration law to limit one nationality from entering the country: the Chinese (Burt 3, 42). Such anti-immigration laws came to be seen by many as being inconsistent with American ideals and consequently unfair. To be sure, some viewed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 as impeding progressivism, but this attempt at population control illustrates how multiple issues of that era were not strictly aligned with progressive ideologies.

In documenting her 1890 travel stunt for her book *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days*, Bly espoused a similar view of the Chinese that matched the prevailing American attitudes of the time. When passing through China, Bly described the Chinese people as filthy, morose, and generally unpleasant. Staying in China for a short time on her hurried journey, Bly slants her view with a negative depiction of the Chinese to match the prevailing prejudices held by her American readers at the time. Bly remained a conscious observer and supporter of her readers' views, relating to both the sympathies and intolerances held by her audience. As an effective writer, she often tapped into and bolstered her audience's prejudicial views for the sake of a good read.

Issues of the Progressive Era were often presented from seemingly disparate sides, and Brooke Kroeger does not report on the extent to which Bly supported or opposed various of these issues. Progressives were often prone to disagreeing among themselves on social concerns of the

day. For example, some rallied in favor of prohibition as a means of improving the morality and lifestyles of the lower and middle classes, but others viewed prohibition as a restriction of individual rights, arguing that if the manufacturing, selling, and purchasing of alcohol were allowed, then each person should be able to exercise his or her own discretion in its consumption (Burt 2). Bly's view of prohibition, although not stated outright, is discernible in her report based on her visit to a homeless women's shelter. In describing the women's hopeless fate with sympathy-inducing pathos, Bly quotes one homeless woman: "There's no use lying about it . . . Whiskey is our curse. It robs us of everything . . . then we drink to forget our misery" (qtd. in Kroger 286). Bly includes this quote to illustrate the dangers of a life controlled by the reckless abuse of alcohol, and with it, she suggests to her readers that the excessive use of alcohol proves detrimental to those in society without the control to exercise discretion.

In addition to the controversies concerning prohibition and immigration, Westward expansion created social concerns, as the Oklahoma Indian Territory, known then as the "last frontier," drew white settlers during the land rush of 1889. Many whites found hope settling these territories, but many Native Americans found only desolation. During this period of national growth, the plight of the Native American population illustrated the grim consequence of a nation bent on expanding its borders with little regard for those standing in its way. American military forces decimated Native American groups. Military insurgence, harsh living conditions, and food shortages sped the eradication of Native American tribes. In 1886, Apache Chief Geronimo surrendered to American forces, ending his fifteen years of rebellion, and Sioux Chief Sitting Bull was killed shortly prior to the Massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890. The remaining Native American populations soon found themselves sequestered to reservations where the federal government determined the fate of their daily existence (Burt 3).

With the American territories spanning as far as the Pacific Ocean, imperialism and expansionism remained part of the national agenda. Although the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 had limited European colonization within the Western Hemisphere, the 1840s U. S. policy of Manifest Destiny encouraged the further widening of America's borders with a renewed fervor. The Hawaiian Islands came under the control of the United States in 1898, after the Hawaiian ruler was deposed and the American government gained sovereignty over the islands. Puerto Rico and the Philippines were also annexed by the United States following its victory in the Spanish-American War (Burt 3).

The American trend toward accumulating territories led to brief American military interventions in the following nations: Samoa, Panama, Nicaragua, Haiti, Santo Domingo, and Mexico. Such expansionism was met with much opposition among progressives. Organizations were formed such as the Anti-Imperialist League, which was established in 1899. Believing that expansionism violated both moral and practical concerns, the League considered the practice of colonization to be antithetical to democracy. As the government assumed economic and political control over lands, the League feared that this colonization would result in serious financial liability for the country. However, proponents of expansionism justified the practice by arguing that gaining additional territories would create alliances for American business ventures, improving the living conditions of the natives and liberating them from oppressive or unjust governmental control (Burt 3-4).

As the nation expanded, new technological advances improved the living conditions of Progressive Era Americans. Electricity created lighting for city streets and buildings, allowing employees to work nights, thus extending the workday for many. Workers commuted to their jobs on the elevated railways, which increased the growth of suburbs outside of industrial areas.



Advances in communication, such as the invention of the telephone, made conversations across distances possible through instant interaction. Automobiles replaced horse-drawn carriages and much pedestrian activity, as the motorcar increased in popularity and efficiency (Burt 4).

As a result of the growth in the automobile industry, the construction of roads and bridges produced national economic concerns, and public initiatives to provide adequate roadways created substantial governmental construction projects. Gas and oil production increased, as consumers needed those resources to run the growing number of automobiles on the newly paved roads. Entrepreneurs and businessmen started companies to allocate these resources to a demanding public. Intercontinental travel improved; a growing number of steamships provided transport for immigrants or recreational travelers at lower fares, thus making intercontinental transport more frequent. Despite the great benefits of these advances, they also created innumerable hazards that cost the lives of many. Following imprecise navigation, captains inadvertently drove steamships into icebergs. Automobiles collided with each other, sometimes resulting in the deaths of one or more passengers. Electricity illuminated a darkened street or business, but it could also electrocute those who did not understand the danger it posed (Burt 4).

The economic climate of the Progressive Era continued to widen the gap between the rich and the poor. In 1890, just one percent of the population owned over half of the nation's wealth, and the problem only escalated as the nation's capital continued to be controlled by a select few. By 1900, ten percent of the population owned more than ninety percent of the nation's capital (Burt 5). During this time, the nation's wealth was concentrated among the few industrial elite, and their control of capital and resources left many others poverty-stricken, including African Americans, Native Americans, and recent immigrants. Despite the seeming futility of their

situations, those living in abject poverty sought to demand higher wages and the improvement of their working conditions (Burt 5).

Efforts to organize workers unions, strikes, and walk-outs encouraged a spirit of determination among those struggling to make ends meet, but when protests broke out among workers, factory owners were quick to involve outside authorities such as the Pinkertons (a private detective agency), the National Guard, or the United States Army. The involvement of these outside forces brought the conflicts quickly to an end, an end that often resulted in the union leader's arrest and the strikers' defeat (Burt 5). Bly became heavily involved in one such strike: The 1894 Pullman Strike among railroad workers. The Pullman strike grew out of the atmosphere of a severe economic recession that caused George M. Pullman to lay off half of his workforce, while decreasing the hourly wages of his remaining employees. In response to the lay offs, the union ultimately determined that no union member would work on any Pullman car on any railroad line. With a possible paralysis of rail transport looming, President Cleveland sent thousands of federal troops to intervene. Bly reported on the circumstances of the strike in Chicago, recounting the embittered situation "to produce what would later be remembered as some of the best reporting of her career" (Kroeger 229-31).

Whereas underpaid factory workers sought justice by organizing unions or strikes, others engaged in political activism to present their agendas on a national platform. For example, two political parties, the People's Party (or Populists), founded in 1890, and the Socialist Party, founded in 1901, brought issues of relevance for their parties to the forefront during national conventions and Presidential debates. However, neither party succeeded in gaining enough support that might have allowed them to disrupt the already well-established Republican and Democrat two-party system (Burt 5). Bly often filed newspaper reports focusing on both

political conventions and presidential elections; early in her career, she covered the election of 1888; and later on in her career, she attended both the Democratic and Republican conventions of 1912. Following the 1912 convention season, she also covered the inauguration of Woodrow Wilson, who won the Democratic nomination and the election (Kroeger 368).

Reformers held the two-party system and political activity, in general, under scrutiny. For example, some reformers proposed that elections on the municipal level be made nonpartisan to decrease party interests. Others supported electing professional managers and administrators in citywide elections to replace mayors and aldermen, who were elected by district vote. As progressives sought to reform the political process, reformers advocated major changes to provide voters with a greater say in electoral outcomes. Through initiatives and referendums, voters could voice their views by voting on specific concerns. Through recalls, voters could take unsatisfactory or corrupt officials out of office. The secret ballot was adopted in 1888, and it decreased intimidation at the polls; by 1910, all states had opted to use this improved voting method. The Progressive Era marked a time when political trends were revamped in the hopes of promoting improvements in the electoral process (Burt 5-6).

Although trends to reform the political process promoted increased voter representation, the hard truth of the matter was that voter participation plummeted during the Progressive Era. Many white men who had the power to cast their votes lacked the motivation to become involved in the electoral process. Restrictions placed on African Americans, Native Americans, and women left these large portions of the population unable to cast their ballots at all (Burt 6). Although women could not vote until the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, Bly was involved in reporting women's suffragist efforts long before they received the right to vote. In 1896, Bly covered the National Woman Suffrage Convention in Washington, interviewing

Susan B. Anthony and depicting the proceedings in such vivid details that her readers felt as if they were delegates attending the convention themselves (Kroger 282-84). The Progressive Era was a time of activism for women's suffrage, and women ultimately won the vote, overcoming entrenched obstacles once hindering them from obtaining this right (Burt 6).

With the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, African American men had won the right to vote, but they were largely deprived of exercising this right. Political injustice resulting from required literacy tests, poll taxes, and harsh intimidation from whites, particularly in the South, kept these men from exercising their right to vote. The Progressive Era was a time marked by unjust discrimination and pervasive racism for the African American community in the South as well as the North. African Americans who remained in the South often found themselves living as impoverished sharecroppers or tenant farmers. Those who decided to flee to the North faced intense competition on the job market, vying against a growing immigrant population also seeking employment. Jim Crow laws fostered a climate of inequality, as schools, buildings, and modes of transportation were designated as either being for white or colored persons. Furthermore, in 1896, the Plessy versus Ferguson Supreme Court case legitimized and promoted the segregation of the races as long as accommodations were considered "separate but equal." This segregation fueled a spirit of divisionism between the races that was to last for decades to follow (Burt 6).

Dangers such as lynching and brutalization characterized the difficulty of the African American experience during this time. Some white reformers such as writer Mark Twain and settlement-house founder Lillian Wald attempted to improve the bleak situation for African Americans, but the most fervent of advocates were the blacks themselves. They worked to promote equality even at the risk of their own lives. Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois,

and Ida B. Wells-Barnett were among those Progressive Era African American reformers who, although sharply divided on how to implement reform, endorsed the advancement and equality of their people. Despite the attempts of these reformers, the Progressive Era brought little improvement in terms of race relations, but the instances of racial strife did provide much evidence that a race problem existed that would need to be remedied (Burt 6-7).

In addition to the race question, another societal concern during the Progressive Era was what came to be called “the woman question.” In her text, *Feminist Ferment: “The Woman Question” in the USA and England, 1870-1940*, Christine Bolt discusses the woman question as being analogous to the “root cause of feminism” defined by the societal belief that “women and men are physically and mentally different, and that their innate and divinely sanctioned differences warrant the enforcement of separate spheres for the sexes” (8). Woman and men both reacted to this woman question with hopes of understanding and dealing with those women who sought to disrupt conventional gender roles.

This issue of “the woman question” persisted during the first half of the twentieth century as industrialization further marked the disparate realms of the home and workplace. However, women, usually of the lower classes, began seeking employment, and this engagement in the male domain of the public sphere prompted an increase in sermons and advice manuals given and written by men that cast women as being fit solely for the domestic sphere. These homilies and didactic tracts argued that a woman’s proper place was in the home, where she would be positioned to ensure that her children would attain Christian values, personal health, and familial comfort, in spite of the tumultuous challenges of modern life. As women kept the home, men were to rule over all intellectual and economic enterprises, as they negotiated the public sphere of politics, industry, and opportunity (Bolt 8-9).

Despite the societal trend of confining women solely to the domestic sphere, some women of the Progressive Era did much to proclaim their answer to this woman question in hopes of escaping their subordination. They argued that the separate public and private spheres were simply man-made conceptualizations, not natural divisions, and thus should be open to renegotiation and redefinition. While revering the responsibilities of motherhood and the tasks of domesticity, women simultaneously discounted the idea that their single purpose in life was the result of their biological function. Instead they argued that women were intellectual persons, capable of independent agency, who should be provided with the same unalienable rights and prospects for self-discovery and self-promotion as men. Women also were apt to point out the correlation between their plight and the former institution of slavery, stating that they, like slaves, had been denied personal autonomy, and if married, no longer possessed a legal identity: as a result of her nuptials, a married woman relinquished to her husband control of all of the property that she may have brought into the marriage or accrued after it, and she held no power to take part in legal transactions (Bolt 9-11).

The married woman's renunciation of her identity was consistent with her disavowal of rhetorical power as well, and the woman question had as much to do with a woman's negotiation of rhetorical space as with her acceptance of conventional gender roles. After the Civil War, regulation of women's rhetorical behaviors increased rather than lessened as women sought to advance their educations, gain the right to vote, increase their property rights, and assert greater visibility in public life. By the 1880s, women had gained some representation on the national scene, voicing their concerns on issues such as abolition, temperance, and their own rights as women. Among these reformist voices were Susan B. Anthony, Frances Willard, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. However, Nan Johnson argues, "The rhetorical

space these women occupied in the shaping of political and cultural life was viewed as the exception rather than the rule” (49). Although a few women gained access to the realm of public discourse, the issue of women’s lives becoming public attracted much scrutiny, and Johnson posits, “In this historical moment of uneasiness, the icon of the quiet woman, . . . seemed to erase the complexity of the woman question and return the American woman to the home where she belonged” (49). Thus, the woman question achieved an answer in the Progressive Era: the answer being a silenced woman whose rhetorical practices were safely circulated only to her family and held within her home.

### **The Power of the Presses: The Growth of the Progressive Era Newspaper Industry**

During the Progressive Era, the newspaper industry grew rapidly as the number of American daily papers written in English increased from 850 in 1880 (with daily circulation totaling 3.1 million copies) to over 2,200 newspapers in 1910 (with daily circulation at 22.4 million) (Burt 7). Business flourished as newspapers were circulated nationally, made possible by more efficient printing presses, increased advertising revenue, and advances in modern transportation. Not only were dailies increasing in numbers, but the weeklies, bi-weeklies, and semiweekly newspapers also became profitable businesses themselves. Their numbers grew to about 14,000 in 1910, most of them written in English, but with some written in foreign languages such as German, Polish, Russian, Italian, and Yiddish. As the publication of foreign-language papers increased, the growing immigrant population found a literate means to express their views in their own languages (Burt 7).

Newspaper owners sought to interest the widest range of readers possible. To achieve this goal, newspapers often followed the prevailing trend of segmenting the news into various types. To engage the masses, editors assigned reporters to write specialty pages, featuring

sections focused on sports, economy, women, entertainment, and society. The newspapers' publications of Sunday editions also became more prevalent as the industry tried to increase sales. Increased sales resulted from the newspapers' ability to target a growing audience of middle class consumers as well as working class readers who had more leisure time as a result of technological advances. In 1890, only 250 of the dailies had a Sunday edition, but this number would increase to over 500 in only a decade (Burt 7).

As the number of dailies and weeklies continued to rise during the Progressive Era, so did the prevalence of newspapers, often referred to as "alternative presses," that were solely focused on specific interests. Some of these newspapers targeted specific ethnic groups such as African Americans, German Americans, or many additional specific immigrant populations. Others communicated platforms or interests of the political parties, like the Socialist or Populist Parties. A number of other causes rallied supporters by publishing newspapers that endorsed movements such as woman's suffrage, anti-suffrage, and prohibition. Many of these newspapers ceased publication after their group's mission was accomplished; for example, the Anti-Saloon League's *American Issue* and the National American Woman Suffrage Association's *Woman's Journal* both ended their publication once their reform agenda had been realized. However, other "alternative presses" that began in the Progressive Era continued to be published, and some still exist in print today, such as the NAACP's *Crisis* and the Catholic Church's *Boston Pilot* (Burt 9).

Newspapers grew tremendously during the Progressive Era as a result of the revenues that advertising generated. By 1890, advertising was the primary way to promote a brand-name product on the national level. To generate consumer interests, department stores purchased entire pages of the newspaper to advertise certain items or to encourage general sales. First



established in the late 1860s, advertising agencies became more productive in their approach by not only buying and re-selling bulk newspaper space for ads, but also designing the ads themselves to attract the interests of specific consumers. By the 1880s, advertising replaced sales and subscription revenue as the top earner for the newspaper industry. By 1914, 66 percent of the newspaper industry's revenue was generated by ads, and that newspaper feature seemed a permanent addition despite the interests of critics who wished to curb advertising's influence on journalism (Burt 9).

Not only did sales of advertisements promote unprecedented growth for the newspaper industry, but developments in printing technologies also facilitated advancements in production. Since the early nineteenth century, printing presses had continued to improve in their function and efficiency. By 1890, a steam-powered press could create 72,000 eight-page papers in an hour (the average size for daily newspapers during that time was eight pages). Color presses soon made their way into mainstream printing, and newspaper owners reasoned that the inclusion of color for comic strips and supplementary materials would attract the interests of the poor as well as the immigrant populations. Half-tone photographs were also introduced in the 1890s, presenting a more realistic visual portrayal of events that the news was covering. The use of linotype also increased the efficiency of arranging lines of text to be printed. While sitting at a typewriter-like device, the linotype operator could set lines of type, a job that had formerly required five people to accomplish in the same amount of time. These advances promoted improved efficiency and allowed the newspaper industry to grow rapidly during the Progressive Era (Burt 9-10).

The newspaper industry also grew as a result of advances in communication technologies and transportation. In 1885, the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T)

constructed telephone lines to connect New York City to other states and cities, allowing telecommunications to span the United States. The advances in telecommunications began to affect the ways reporters gathered their facts and drafted their articles. With telephones in hand and deadlines looming, reporters completed their stories on location, using the telephone to call in and share their scoop with an amanuensis, referred to as “a deskman,” who wrote their copy and prepared it for print. As telephone lines went up across the country, so did elevated rails, changing the way reporters gathered their information from various locales. In addition to elevated rails, underground subway stations in metropolitan areas, such as New York and Boston, alleviated some street congestion, allowing reporters to travel more easily and quickly within a metropolis. Reporters in rural areas, though, depended on automobiles, and as the motorcar, first introduced in the 1890s, increased in production, the speed at which reporters covered ground via automobile increased. As a growing number of gasoline-powered trucks made newspaper distributions throughout cities and suburbs, deliveries and sales increased as more readers received the news (Burt 10).

During the Progressive Era, businesses often engaged in consolidation practices. Business leaders of the day created monopolies and chains of companies, and the newspaper industry was not immune from the influence of these big business dealings. Acquiring multiple newspapers, publishers such as E. W. Scripps and William Randolph Hearst worked to control the market and consolidate their own wealth, and their successes were often met with the failures of those less powerful newspaper owners, who found themselves without the means to sustain their presses or to escape bankruptcy (Burt 11).

The fierce competition that newspapers faced only compounded the economic hardships of smaller newspaper outfits. Chicago and Boston each had eight dailies in 1900, and New York

had nine, and the sheer number of newspapers in each major city prompted circulation wars. Each paper vied to gain a greater readership and more advertising. Newspaper publishers opted to lower their prices, but that method of bolstering sales proved unsatisfactory because the competitors would simply lower their prices as well. Since dropping prices did little to influence overall sales in the long run, newspapers instead focused on encouraging their correspondents to write stories that would gain interest. Many of these stories were crusades or investigations that allowed newspapers to take up causes of interest to their audiences (Burt 11-12).

Although some of these investigative reports were thoroughly researched and accurate, other stories gained popularity only as a result of the entertainment value of their unproven claims, lurid details, and hyperbolic assertions. Promotional tactics for sensationalizing the news made newspapers and their writers more susceptible to rebuke, and many critics argued that the news industry should be required to present all events with credibility and validity. The newspaper industry replied to these rebukes and challenges by initiating a number of changes. For example, in 1901, Joseph Pulitzer created an internal Bureau of Accuracy for *New York World*, known as the leader in investigative reporting. Established to verify claims and publish corrections of any inaccurate information, the Bureau offered an example of how the industry sought to make improvements within the system. Other press associations bolstered the efforts of those intent on reforming newspapers, encouraging their reporters to correct any misstatements and to provide readers with a space to voice complaints through the inclusion of editorial pages (Burt 12).

To be sure, the Progressive Era marked the heyday of the American newspaper industry. With circulations on the rise and competition at its peak, newspapers became an important national symbol, illustrative of the power of literacy as it interfaced with technological

advancements and national interests. Newspapers shaped Americans' perceptions of the world, providing a means for immigrants to assimilate into a culture formerly unknown to them, but seemingly made known to them through newspaper pages. Newspaper articles reinforced middle class lifestyles and values, and advertisements allowed businesses to promote their products, instigating a climate of consumerism unparalleled in the nation's history. Politicians used the power of the presses to voice their campaign goals and increase voter support. Controversial issues found their way onto the front pages of newspapers, as this popular print venue took on the function of both moderator and participant in debate (Burt 13). It was within this heady newspaper atmosphere that Nellie Bly came to find her own Progressive Era voice.

### **Casting Bly Among Her Male Contemporaries: Riis, Crane, and Davis**

When Bly left the comforts of Pittsburgh to negotiate the bustling city of New York, she initially thought that the newspaper office would be a welcoming haven, a place of prospect for what she believed to be her promising career in the field of journalism. However, the doors that she imagined would be opened to her were closed. The newspaper industry of New York was a male domain. To understand the competition Bly faced, it is useful to examine the contributions of the three best-known journalists of the era: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and Richard Harding Davis.

Jacob Riis's work for the newspaper industry focused primarily on exposing the dire living conditions of immigrants and the destitute who were housed in the slums of New York City. With striking verisimilitude, his stories shared the problems of the immigrant existence in the slums; and coupled with his photographs, his depictions of the squalid living conditions provided striking evidence of the plight of the poor. While working for the *New York Tribune* and then *The New York Sun* in the 1870s and 1880s, Riis gained fame for his ability to shed light

on the situation of the impoverished, drawing the attention of reformers and politicians whom he thought had the influence to help improve the living conditions of poor people. Riis used his writing as a platform to incite change, and he fought for sanitation improvements, tenement regulations, and support for orphans and widows. In 1887, he secured an appointment to the Tenement House Commission. Between 1888 and 1890, he wrote *How the Other Half Lives*; his best-selling book exposed the devastating images and harrowing experiences of what it was like to live in the city's tenements (Burt 17).

Riis's start in the newspaper industry was not an easy one. As a Danish immigrant, Riis's reception in the United States was marked by poverty. He did not find employment as a newspaper reporter until 1873, when he began working for the New York News Association (he had already been in America for three years). Working seven days a week from ten in the morning until midnight, Riis made a small income of \$10 a week as a newspaper reporter. In May of 1874, he resigned from the New York News Association and went to work for *South Brooklyn News*. In this position, he wrote all four pages of the paper and was soon promoted to editor, making a substantial \$25 a week. Proud of his accomplishment, Riis wrote in his journal: "I think that I must have a flair for journalism, at least I'm successful at everything I do. I have my own office and, all in all, life is great" (qtd. in Buk-Swienty 103). Riis's success continued as his reports ignited reform movements and improved the living conditions of poverty-stricken immigrants and working class citizens housed in the New York City's tenements (Buk-Swienty 100-03).

Nellie Bly was sympathetic with Riis's arguments and his work in the city tenements; she thought that she could cover such stories just as well as he did. In 1898, only four years after the publication of Riis's text *How the Other Half Lives*, Bly went into the tenements herself to write

a story similar to the one Riis had shared, but from her own experience and perspective. The *World* rented her an apartment for a two-day stay in New York City's largest double-decker tenement on 222 Second Street. According to Bly's count, the tenement housed one hundred and seventeen occupants; they crowded into just sixteen three-room flats. In her article, she described the persistent noises, the repulsive odors from the street below, and the funeral of a tenement-dweller who was survived by his wife and eleven children with no available means of financial support. Bly's decision to write about the tenements displays that she had confidence in her own ability to cover the story as well as any man (Kroeger 242).

Stephen Crane was another male contemporary of Bly's who sought to correct the injustices that he perceived among the working class and the poor, but he did so by sharing their stories without casting blame or prompting his reader to draw particular conclusions. Although Crane is best known for his novel *The Red Badge of Courage*, his career as a writer began when he took up newspaper reporting at the age of seventeen. Working for his brother at the New Jersey Coast News Bureau, Crane focused his journalistic interests on the slums of New York. Another of Crane's novels, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, illustrates the bleak situations of those then living in the city's slums. His fictionalized account resonated with his audience as he produced a realistic portrayal of the conditions of the slums, an effect that he achieved similarly in many of his newspaper pieces. Adrian Hunter, a Crane scholar and literary critic, argues that Crane's "newspaper pieces are the distilled essence of Crane's genius and demonstrate all the virtues" of his writing (22). Crane's career as a journalist was instrumental in providing him with numerous opportunities to discuss a wide range of topics, but what set Crane apart was his ability to present innumerable issues without providing any evaluative commentary to reveal his

personal subjectivity (Hunter 11, 21-22). Crane proved very successful as a writer of fiction, but he continued to work for newspapers during his writing career.

In April 1894, Crane wrote what became his best-known newspaper sketch, an article entitled “An Experiment in Misery,” for *The New York Press*. For this report, Crane dressed up like as a homeless man to experience the fate of destitution and homelessness firsthand. It seems plausible to credit Crane’s approach for this article to Nellie Bly, the woman who had made this type of experimental, investigative reporting part of mainstream newspaper writing since the publication of her muckraking asylum exposé in 1887. She had inaugurated this technique, and Crane had her to thank for paving the way for him (Robertson 95).

Richard Harding Davis, the son of writers L. Clarke Davis and Rebecca Harding Davis, had a privileged upbringing in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Although his family was of the upper middle class, the Davises were not considered “Old Philadelphians,” and Richard resented some of this more elite group in Philadelphia for not allowing him into their innermost circle (Osborn and Phillips 19). Davis’s career in print began in 1886 when he was hired as cub reporter for the *Record* in Philadelphia, but after failing to meet his deadlines, he soon lost that position after only three months of employment. His astonishment at having been fired caused Davis to take his responsibilities more seriously, and he secured a position at the *Philadelphia Press*, where he worked for three years to improve his skills as a reporter. In 1887, Davis’s reputation as a promising journalist in Philadelphia was solidified when, donning a costume appropriate only for one who might frequent disreputable haunts, he managed to infiltrate a group of lawbreakers who ran criminal operations out of a Philadelphia salon. Following his success with that report, Davis moved to New York in 1889 to pursue a more ambitious career in journalism. He found employment at the *New York Evening Sun*, reporting on crime and trial cases. In a manner

much like Stephen Crane, Davis turned to writing fiction while also writing for the newspapers. Davis felt that newspaper reportage served as a practical training ground for an aspiring novelist. By the end of 1890, Davis had left his position at the *Evening Sun* to secure employment as the managing editor of *Harper's Weekly*. During the next five years, in addition to his work at *Harper's*, Davis wrote nine books, mostly travelogues. Davis continued to write prolifically until his death in April of 1916. His fame as a writer and journalist did not endure long after his death. Most of his works appeared inconsequential after his death when compared to that of his contemporaries like Stephen Crane and Jack London (Harrison 15-20).

Although these three men by no means represent all of the male reporters who defined the field of journalism during the Progressive Era, they do illustrate that men engaged in the news took up a similar bent toward righting injustice, as was common among the progressives. Both Riis and Crane had their rhetorical ethos formulated in the kind of trying economic and social conditions that Bly had similarly faced; however, they had one major advantage that Bly did not have: they were men. Men experienced a greater upward mobility in their work, such as Davis's gaining the position of managing editor; women did not have the same opportunities for advancement and were often not afforded the space to negotiate public venues of discourse with the same ease and acceptance as men. Nellie Bly sought to engage in public discourse to advance her position and career as a journalist, and she succeeded in balancing her persona in print, her subject matter, and her audience's perceptions in a way that set her rhetorical achievements apart from most women. Bly is linked with Riis, Crane, and Davis because she shared their sympathy for reform, and she too was capable of writing articles to incite change. She differed from them because of her gender and only her gender.



## **Casting Bly Among her Female Contemporaries: Rhetorical Practices of the Home**

As I have already mentioned, women in the newspaper industry at the time were a minority. Although they were considered a necessary part of a newspaper's staff, a paper generally hired only one woman whose role was predetermined: she wrote news solely for and about women's interests. During the Progressive Era, newspaper owners understood the importance of casting their appeal to the widest range of consumers and readers, and the female audience was one that they hoped to gain with reports focused on gardening, fashion, the home, child-rearing, and society life. Whereas a select few women were featured as newspaper reporters, most women writers wrote fiction and poetry during the Progressive Era.

The rhetorical practices of women engaged in writing and literacy often focused their discourses on issues relevant to the sphere of domesticity. Women were the guardians of the home, and within that dominion, they took part in literate practices that were not often thought of as being rhetorical in nature. Rhetoric was cast solely as a male enterprise, and it provided its wielder with "the surest route to political, economic, and cultural status," a route inaccessible to women (Johnson 2). Nan Johnson argues that if feminist historians are to reconstruct rhetoric as a female enterprise, then they must gain a more thorough understanding of how convention operates to define rhetorical power:

By rereading the history of rhetoric as a drama about how convention is inscribed and redefined within rhetorical space, we better prepare ourselves to identify where and how circles of rhetorical power are constructed in our own times and to better understand who is drawing those circles, who stands within them, and who remains outside. (2)

If women were outside of the circles of rhetorical power, their positioning or distancing from those circles was the result of their historical and cultural placement within the household and outside of the public sphere.

During the Progressive Era, many popular publications further reflected the idea held publicly that “the powerful speakers and writers who shaped the fabric of American life ought to be distinguished, white men” (Johnson 14). The idea that white men wielded all rhetorical power was similarly advanced through the parlor-rhetoric movement, a movement whose texts, such as elocution manuals and rhetoric speakers (books featuring pieces to be performed, read, or acted out by women in the home), positioned women as wives and mothers, as those needing rhetorical skills only to fulfill their purposes within the home. According to Nan Johnson, this movement “was an institutional agent that defined relatively separate and distinctively unequal rhetorical spheres for men and women” (15). The woman’s proper sphere was the home, and her rhetorical activities limited her almost exclusively to that domain, while the man’s sphere was as wide as the world itself.

### **Negotiating a Male Domain: Bly’s Initiation into New York’s Newspaper Industry**

When Nellie Bly left Pittsburgh in May of 1887 to advance her journalistic career in New York, her reputation as a plucky young reporter for *The Pittsburg Dispatch* failed to open those doors of opportunity that Bly thought awaited her. As in Pittsburgh, the newspaper room was the domain of men, and in New York she had to confront that grim reality again. As one month stretched into three, Bly continued to find herself without stable employment in New York. To gain some income, Bly began writing again for *The Pittsburg Dispatch* as a New York correspondent. Under the direction of her editor, Bly focused her pieces on the fashion of New

York's social elite. Regretfully, Bly found herself writing on those topics that she had left Pittsburgh to avoid (Kroeger 81).

By August, Bly had developed a new lead for her *Dispatch* articles. She told her readership that a young woman had sent her a letter to inquire if New York City was a good place for a woman hoping to start a career as a newspaper journalist. Instead of answering this question outright based on her first four failed months in New York as a struggling reporter, Bly opted to address the concern by interviewing those men whom she thought might provide a better answer than her own. Thus, Bly addressed the question to all of New York's most influential journalistic personalities, the men whom she referred to as "the newspaper gods of Gotham" (qtd. in Kroeger 82). She interviewed six of the most prominent men in New York's newspaper industry, as she visited *The Sun*, *The Herald*, *The World*, *The Mail and Express*, *The Telegram*, and *The Times*. Whether Bly's lead prompting these interviews was an actual letter or a fictional pretext that Bly used to set up her own investigation, it remains unknown; however, Brooke Kroeger argues, "Whatever the circumstances that led to Bly's story, her requesting the interviews on behalf of her old Pittsburgh paper was a slick and enterprising maneuver through the phalanx of bodyguards and bouncers who had blocked her entrance on Newspaper Row all spring and summer" (83).

When Bly spoke with Charles A. Dana of *The Sun*, he denied that he personally possessed any prejudice against women journalists. Although he prided himself on not being prejudicial in his views, Dana was obliged to tell Bly that women writers were "not regarded with editorial favor in New York" (qtd. in Kroeger 82). He further described women as tending to be less reliable in handling matters accurately, and to Dana, a journalist's main asset should be his or her accuracy. Thus, in her interview, Bly was able to expose Dana's own prejudicial view

of women: his belief being that a woman was not able to depict a story with the same accuracy as a man (Kroeger 82). This interview prompted Bly to realize that in order for her to succeed as a writer in New York, she would need to be above reproach concerning the accuracy of her depictions.

Rather than approaching Dr. George H. Hepworth of *The Sun* as a correspondent for *The Dispatch* (as she had done with Dana), Bly decided to enter his office under the guise of a job applicant, a technique soon to become synonymous with Bly's approach to stunt reporting. When Hepworth asked Bly what she could do, her answer was "anything," shared with her usual confident candor. Although Hepworth noted that he was not opposed to women being newspaper correspondents, he failed to believe that this applicant before him, being a woman, could do the type of reporting that was in vogue at the time. Hepworth argued that he would not dream of having a woman report from the criminal trials, as he figured that court officials would provide her with no testimony, or would offer her "as little information as they could to get rid of her" (qtd. in Kroeger 82). Considering the societal penchant for sensationalized scandal stories, Hepworth further placed women outside the realm of news reporting, stating, "a gentleman could not in delicacy ask a woman to have anything to do with that class of news" (qtd. in Kroeger 82). From this interview, Bly ascertained that if she were going to succeed among men, then she would have to prove that a woman could handle hard-hitting news just as informatively and accurately as a man.

Bly's recounting of these interviews in *The Pittsburg Dispatch* illustrated that these "gotham gods" were ignorant concerning the increasing number of newswomen who were successfully negotiating their way into newsrooms, albeit as writers of women's interest news. As a result of the disparity between what these prominent newspapermen had shared and what

was actually happening in newspaper rooms, Bly's article was reprinted in newspapers in New York and Boston. *The Journalist*, a trade magazine, also covered her article, thus allowing her report on the fate of women journalists to reach a large number of the nation's readers. Her piece not only provided her with these invaluable one-on-one experiences with each of New York's most powerful newspapermen, but it also allowed her to determine what skills she would need to hone if she were to find employment as a newspaper writer in New York.

Soon after she interviewed those newspaper giants, Nellie Bly finally found employment in the newspaper rooms of New York City, as she convinced John Cockerill that she could feign insanity to gain entrance into the infamous asylum for women on Blackwell's Island. *The New York World* hired her to write this story, and the first installment of her report was published on October 9, 1887. Her promise as an up-and-coming reporter was realized in her asylum report, and this text is among those that merit close analysis. Now that Nellie Bly's milieu has been reconstructed to account for its physical, psychological, and political currents, it is time to analyze her work itself to provide further evidence of her rhetorical contributions.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYZING HER STORY

Analysis requires attention to detail, looking carefully at the distinct parts that make up the whole. Analysis is a process similar to dissection, a method by which the pieces of an object or text are scrutinized and interpreted, so that an understanding can be achieved concerning their relationship to the object or document from which the pieces were taken. An analysis of Nellie Bly's work requires a close reading of some of her texts to understand not only how the claims work independently of each other but also how they work together to forge her rhetorical ethos.

In Richard Enos' methodology of rhetorical sequencing, the act of analysis is the third step in investigating a previously neglected subject. To achieve this step, Enos argues that it "requires that we examine the actual discourse" (75). Using Cheryl Glenn's work in *Rhetoric Retold* to illustrate this third step, Enos describes how Glenn focuses her inquiry on a woman engaged in rhetorical activity. He posits that Glenn selects this woman as her subject because the woman's text provides some "response to a problematic situation that constitutes a major social or cultural issue" (75). Enos further provides that the analysis of this selected woman's writing considers "rhetorical practices [that] will be different from the prevailing rhetorical practices of the period, often because the activities of the period were performed by males and later studied by historians who concentrated on male-dominated events" (75-76). Enos uses

Glenn's text to illustrate that "the discourse practices of this woman will often be characterized as unconventional by contemporaries and viewed by historians as such an aberration that both subject and topic are dismissed from serious study" (76). These factors contribute to the need for more careful analysis that Enos argues presents "a 'space' [that] is made to consider the discourse practices . . . in a way that is accurate, thorough, and representative" (76). Fostering a more accurate, thorough, and representative analysis is the primary goal of Enos's third step of rhetorical sequencing.

In this chapter, I follow the third step of Enos's approach to rhetorical sequencing by analyzing Bly's contributions to the field of rhetoric and composition. This analysis considers Bly's authorial ethos, her negotiation of self in her writing, and her subsequent rhetorical achievements through her writings that helped to prompt Progressive Era reform. This chapter explores a close reading of Bly's major works, focusing most intently on her investigative exposé of the mad-house but also including her testimony following her trip around the world in seventy-two days and her reports from the front lines of World War I. I have selected these three pieces because they best exemplify Bly's disruption of convention, as she focused on topics outside of the realm of what women as newspaper journalists were typically allowed to discuss or report. An analysis of these texts also describes those works as written by a female and therefore deemed unconventional and viewed as aberrations by historians; these selections follow those recommendations that Enos posits for choosing texts applicable for analysis.

Analysis requires that a methodological theory be applied to texts. To scaffold an analytical approach, Enos argues, "There are several rhetorical theories that provide schemes for analysis, but the most appropriate one will have to be determined by how sensitive it is to the context" (75-76). The analytical lens sensitive to the context of Bly's writing that I wish to use

is one that Charles Bazerman formulates in his text, “Theories of the Middle Range in Historical Studies of Writing Practice.” Bazerman outlines a methodology derived from Robert Merton, a sociologist, who developed theories that he refers to as being of “the middle range.” Merton describes theories of the middle range as providing “empirically researchable phenomena, relations, and mechanisms” (Bazerman 300). These theories support a method of inquiry that extends beyond compiling information to include what Bazerman describes as follows:

a search for order and systematicity—in the historically produced systems of contemporary practice; in the processes by which practices, forms, and texts emerge, evolve, and decline; in the actual responses individuals and groups make within socially organized situations; and in the ways texts mediate actions and social relations. (300)

Bly’s texts are particularly suited for this approach: She wrote socially-situated articles that through their public presence allowed her words to present a different rhetorical ethos for women writers and to mediate social actions for reform. Furthermore, Bazerman explores Merton’s heuristic as being applicable to inquiry into historical writing because Merton “advocated theories of the middle range to identify empirically researchable social phenomena and processes that, as they become confirmed and elaborated, might emerge into theories of somewhat larger sweep, but still well-grounded empirically” (300). A researcher can draw conclusions from an analysis of Bly’s texts to understand how her contemporaries achieved success as well, as they revised their approach to match Bly’s style of investigative reporting. Thus, Bly influenced a wider range of audience members, allowing her texts to generate that larger sweep.

With theories of the middle ground providing a foundation for inquiry, Bazerman outlines a methodology for analysis that provides a focus for this chapter. In describing his



analytical approach, Bazerman presents his methodology as working “to address how the texts represented author, audience, and subject matter—the categories of the communication triangle (that goes back to Aristotle but has had many instantiations since, up through Kenneth Burke and James Kinneavy)” (313). In focusing on the three areas of the rhetorical triangle, I can elucidate Bly’s text from a more systematic approach, similar to the one employed by Bazerman.

### **Looking at Bly: Considering Her Representations of Author, Audience, and Content**

Nellie Bly left Pittsburgh in 1887 to escape the doldrums of writing women’s interest stories, and she embarked on a journey to become the New York City journalist that she longed to be. After many months of unemployment in New York, Bly convinced John Cockerill, the editor of *The New York World*, that she could report on the conditions of those institutionalized women at the asylum on Blackwell’s Island. She developed a strategy to assure that she could not only get herself admitted, but she could also get herself released (Kroeger 84-85).

To secure entrance into the asylum, Bly rehearsed in front of her mirror for hours, contorting her face to achieve what she imagined to be the convincing appearance of a lunatic. Mastering faraway gazes, Bly gained confidence in her ability to feign insanity, and with this confidence, she set her plan into action (Kroeger 89). To secure legal protection for this undertaking, Bly consulted Henry D. Macdona, the Assistant District Attorney of New York City. Before providing her with legal assistance, Macdona initially warned Bly of the dangers of her proposed stunt, but he ultimately “agreed to give her immunity from prosecution for the ruse” (Kroeger 90). In addition to securing legal protection, Bly also needed to ensure her release from the asylum. Cockerill determined that, using the newspaper’s power, Bly’s release from the asylum was to occur a week after she had been hospitalized at Blackwell’s Island. *The*

*World* sent attorney Patrick A. Hendricks to secure her release on Tuesday, October 4 (Kroeger 93).

After her discharge from the asylum, Bly recounted her experiences to her audience in two illustrated newspaper installments that were published in the *World's* Sunday editions. Released on October 9, 1887, her first asylum article was entitled "Behind Asylum Bars," and the second and final installment, published on October 16, was entitled "Inside the Madhouse." The success of her articles caused such an outpouring of reader interest that she compiled her newspaper reports into a book form. Entitled *Ten Days in a Mad-House*, her book was released only two months after her asylum stay. The book's introduction illustrated the demand for her story: "The [newspaper] edition containing my story long since ran out, and I have been prevailed upon to allow it to be published in book form, to satisfy the hundreds who are yet asking for copies" (Bly, *Ten Days* 4). In satisfying these hundreds of readers, Bly also discloses her popularity and presence as a well-known reporter. Bly's book recounts her experiences in greater detail, describing the two days and nights she spent in Bellevue's pavilion for the insane and the eight days and nights she spent on Blackwell's Island. In this text, as in her newspaper articles, she outlines the unfavorable conditions of the women's asylum by describing the inedible food, the unsuitable clothing that patients were forced to wear, and the mistreatment of the patients by both staff and doctors. (For my analysis, I will use her passages from the book-length version of her report).

With the publication of asylum narrative in book form, Bly provided further explication to her story than was provided in the newspaper account. She explained to her readers in her text that she had no prior experience with the insane. She notes, "What a difficult task, I thought, to appear before a crowd of people and convince them that I was insane. I had never been near

insane persons before in my life, and had not the faintest idea of what their actions were like” (Bly, *Ten Days* 8). By noting that she had no former knowledge of the insane, Bly achieved what her readers viewed as an extraordinary feat. By becoming like the insane herself, Bly developed a convincing guise that was all the more engaging for her readers. In inventing her depiction of insanity, Bly employed stereotypical notions of how insane people behaved, notions that her readers probably shared. Bly’s ability to become like the insane even though she had no prior experiences with them highlights Bly’s creativity and ingenuity, characteristics that were hallmarks of her approach as a female stunt reporter.

On September 24, 1887, Bly entered into the insane pavilion after successfully negotiating a series of challenges in which she presented herself as insane to fool the authorities. Bly first masqueraded as one who was insane when she decided to check into Matron Irene Stanard’s Temporary Home for Women on Friday, September 23. Bly determined that this boardinghouse for working-class women was the place for her performance to gain the proper attention of authorities who would surely send her off to Blackwell’s Island. Appearing insane at this boardinghouse, Bly convinced both the assistant matron and the boarders that she was mad.

Following the advice of her editor John Cockerill, Bly used the name Nellie Brown, a name consistent with her initials, when checking into the boardinghouse and from then on, as she revealed her false identity to those questioning her. Bly spent only one night at the boardinghouse, and as she talked with and even harassed other boarders, she influenced them into believing that she posed a danger to both herself as well as others. She achieved this feat by saying that she viewed the women in the house to be crazy. To present herself as insane, Bly continually raved at the boardinghouse, “They [the other boarders] look horrible to me; just like crazy women. I am so afraid of them” (Bly, *Ten Days* 15). Bly made these claims of paranoia

and mistrust to ensure that her guise of insanity appeared genuine. Before bedtime, a fellow boarder stated, "I'm afraid to stay with such a crazy being in the house" (Bly, *Ten Days* 17). Another remarked, "She will murder us all before morning" (Bly, *Ten Days* 17). Both of these comments illustrate Bly's success at convincing others that she could act as if she were mad. Some of these women later corroborated Bly's story to verify her reports.

After spending that one night in the boardinghouse, Bly awoke the next morning to threats from Mrs. Stanard, the assistant matron, who intended to have Bly removed from the premises. This insistence on Bly's removal after only one night shows the convincing nature of Bly's performance as well as the lax ways of the period in judging and certifying what constituted insane behavior. Bly extended her stay at the boardinghouse momentarily, however, by stating that her traveling trunks appeared to be missing. She preoccupied herself with attempts to find them, arguing that she would not leave until she located her belongings. Two police officers arrived thereafter and took Bly (without her missing trunks) to the police station for questioning (Bly, *Ten Days* 22-24).

Although Bly's text is entitled *Ten Days in a Mad-House*, Bly includes her experience in the home for women for specific reasons. What is particularly noteworthy concerning the chronicling of the events of the day prior to her entry into the madhouse is the rhetorical purpose of that chronicling. Bly details those events preceding her stay in the asylum to orient the reader to the obstacles that she faced and to allow the reader to understand how committed she was to her goal. Bly could have easily begun her text by stating that she entered the madhouse on Saturday, September 24, but much of the relationship that she forged with her readers through those precursory events would have been lost. In those scenes, Bly voices her lack of confidence in undertaking this project; but in expressing her lack of confidence, she also espoused a female

sensibility, one in which success is not a given but is something that requires determination and consistency, two characteristics that forged her rhetorical ethos.

After Bly traveled via police escort with Mrs. Stanard from the boardinghouse, she arrived at the police station where Mrs. Stanard convinced Captain McCullagh that Bly needed medical attention for insanity. McCullagh required that the police take Bly to the Essex Market Court, and authorities escorted her to the courtroom of Judge Patrick G. Duffy. As Judge Duffy questioned Bly, he noted a distinct accent and asked if she were Cuban. Bly said that she was indeed of Cuban descent and that her name was Nellie Moreno (changing her last name to the Spanish word for brown). Believing that this poor woman had been drugged, Judge Duffy presumed that Bly was insane as a result of the drug's effects. A doctor examined Bly at the courthouse and determined that she "ha[d] been using belladonna," a poison which caused delirium and hallucinations, symptoms consistent with insanity (Bly, *Ten Days* 32). Judge Duffy suggested that reporters be brought into the courtroom so that public information could be released in the hopes of locating Moreno's family (Kroeger 91).

Bly balked at the idea of summoning reporters. She says, "I got very much frightened at this, for if there is any one who can ferret out a mystery it is a reporter. I felt that I would rather face a mass of expert doctors, policemen, and detectives than two bright specimens of my craft" (Bly, *Ten Days* 28). As Bly describes those of her craft as being able to "ferret out a mystery," she foreshadows her own success at divulging the mystery of Blackwell's Island. Although Bly credits her colleagues—those male reporters—as being keen to extract the truth, she also discredits them for their inability to find her out. Bly did her best to avoid the gaze and questions of reporters for fear that she be found out, but *The Sun* reported the case in an article entitled "Who Is This Insane Girl?" casting the story as the mystery of an unknown young woman. The

article explained the disoriented behavior of the woman, providing a description of her appearance with specific mention of her clothing and accessories (Kroeger 91).

After Bly underwent her initial medical evaluation at the Essex Market Court, Judge Duffy ordered that police accompany her to New York City's Bellevue Hospital Center for a more thorough medical examination. Bellevue is the oldest public hospital in the United States, and during Bly's time, the hospital was well known for the addition of its then state-of-the-art insane pavilion. As Bly rode in an ambulance on her way to Bellevue, she recorded her impressions of what she had accomplished thus far, later to be shared in her account: "I had passed through successfully the ordeals at the home and at Essex Market Police Court, and now felt confident that I should not fail" (Bly, *Ten Days* 33). At this point in her narrative, Bly's confidence is bolstered based on her previous ability to achieve her aims with few deterrents. At the Bellevue pavilion, medical experts detained Bly for examination, and one doctor ruled out belladonna. Dr. William C. Braisted, the head of the insane pavilion at Bellevue, shared Bly's diagnosis with *The New York Herald*: "She never seems to be restless. Her dull apathetic condition, the muscular twitching of her hands and arms and her loss of memory, all indicate hysteria" (qtd. in Kroeger 91). During the weekend of September 24 and 25, Bly spent those two nights at Bellevue as psychiatric doctors continued to question her to determine the severity of her condition. Concluding that she was insane, Bly's doctors determined that she should be hospitalized to receive further treatment on Blackwell's Island.

After her two-day detainment at Bellevue, Bly traveled on small ferryboat to Blackwell's Island. Bly faced a precarious fate, one she refers to as her "delicate mission" in gaining entrance into the asylum (*Ten Days* 5). The delicacy derives not only from the way in which Bly presented her information but also the way in which she presented herself. As a woman writing,

she remained mindful of proffering a presentation of self that would be consistent with sanity even while doctors described her as being “positively demented” (40). Bly claims that her interactions and presentation of self were sane from the moment she entered the asylum on Blackwell’s Island. She argues, “But here let me say one thing: From the moment I entered the insane ward on the Island, I made no attempt to keep up the assumed *role* of insanity. I talked and acted just as I do in ordinary life” (*Ten Days* 8). She assumed the role of insanity only to get into the asylum, not to ensure that she remained there. Her return to sanity within the asylum walls was necessary for the credibility of her writing.

By appearing sane after gaining entry into Blackwell’s asylum, Bly also won the confidence of the other female patients who entrusted her with their stories. Patients viewed Bly as someone in whom they could confide, as they shared the difficulties of their situation with one who understood their plight and empathized with them. To be sure, Bly could not continue to act crazed or hysterical while interacting with the patients for fear their conversations would appear irrational. In acting sane, Bly intentionally undermined the medical establishment with hopes of proving that their treatments were inappropriate. She further explains, “I always made a point of telling the doctors I was sane and asking them to be released, but the more I endeavored to assure them of my sanity the more they doubted it” (*Ten Days* 91). Although she acted sane within the asylum and told the doctors she was quite well, the medical authorities continued to deem her insane.

During her asylum stay, Bly endured situations that she argues would have caused any sane woman to go mad, but she remained composed, a composure necessary for an author who needed to share those seemingly incredible stories of the patients with her readers. In recounting her experiences, Bly knew that the success of her writing depended upon her ability to convince

her audience that she wrote with veracity. Knowing that accuracy was necessary, Bly argues in her first sentence in *Ten Days in a Mad-house*: “On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September I was asked by the *World* if I could have myself committed to one of the asylums for the insane in New York, with the view to writing a plain and unvarnished narrative of the treatment of the patients therein and the methods of management” (5). By describing her text as “plain and unvarnished,” Bly seeks to establish a connection with her audience as a writer whom they can trust. She also claims, “I merely tell in common words, without exaggeration, of my life in a mad-house for ten days” (73). She presents only the facts, but this challenge was a demanding one considering that the women inside the asylum to whom she spoke may have suffered from delusions and mental illnesses. However, in presenting herself as trustworthy to her readership, Bly shared the stories from other asylum patients as being factual, not skewed by madness or hysteria. When Bly reported a woman’s commentary as being sane, her audience was more likely to agree with Bly, rather than the medical experts whom Bly cast as largely incompetent. Bly later corroborated her reports with other witnesses that added to her credibility as well.

Bly took on numerous responsibilities as part of this, her first serious assignment. Bly describes her responsibilities as follows: “I was to chronicle faithfully the experiences I underwent, and when once within the walls of the asylum to find out and describe its inside workings which are always, so effectually hidden by white-capped nurses, as well as by bolts and bars, from the knowledge of the public” (*Ten Days* 5-6). She describes the knowledge that she obtained as something “so effectually hidden” that she seemed to be divulging secrets to her readers. Relying on readers’ desire to know the inside workings of the asylum, Bly sparked their interest by declaring that her story presented information not formerly disclosed. Her approach was novel, and in exposing the “effectually hidden,” Bly reproached the nurses for failing to



report the mistreatment of patients, possibly because Bly found the nurses themselves most responsible for the abuse and neglect of the patients.

To contribute to her desire to make her readers think that she entered the asylum with few preconceived notions, Bly argues, “If I did get into the asylum, which I hardly hoped to do, I had no idea that my experiences would contain aught else than a simple tale of life in an asylum” (*Ten Days* 6). In anticipating “a simple tale of life in an asylum,” Bly posits that she did not consider the asylum to be a place where patients were abused: “That such an institution could be mismanaged, and that cruelties could exist ‘neath its roof, I did not deem possible” (6). Indicating that she anticipated maltreatment to be unlikely, Bly exposes a naïveté, as she leads her reader to question how she did not expect the mistreatment that she witnessed. This naïveté, however, serves a purpose for Bly. She initially discredited the idea that cruelties and mismanagement existed in the asylum to bolster her female rhetorical sensibility. Bly considered that no mistreatment was possible to express her hope in the goodness and charity that she expected of medical professionals. As a female, Bly sought to avoid admitting that she knew that she was entering a situation that could be injurious or threatening to her, as she tells her readers that she did not expect such abuse. As a lady, she initially avoided acknowledging the plausible threat of asylum life to make her desire for reform not her reason for entering the asylum, but her reason for leaving it: So that in leaving, she could share a report that exposed the deplorable conditions that were grossly in need of reform.

Bly’s audience may have known that the doctors and nurses at Blackwell’s Island asylum had reputations for treating patients poorly. Just months earlier in August, *The New York Times* ran a story describing how two nurses on Blackwell’s Island reportedly accused two physicians of patient brutality and neglect. The *Times* claimed that the four involved were suspended from

their duties. However, an editorial in response to the report questioned the veracity of the nurses' accusations: "It would be as much a mistake to assume that there is nothing in these stories as to assume that they are literally true" (qtd. in Kroeger 87). An investigation was necessary to determine the truth of the matter. Bly addressed the reputations of the asylum workers by stating, "The many stories I had read of abuses in such institutions I had regarded as wildly exaggerated or else romances, yet there was a latent desire to know positively" (*Ten Days* 6). Pointing out that she knew of these stories of alleged abuses, Bly questioned the veracity of these stories by sharing her aim "to know positively" what asylum life entailed.

Rather than assuming that these "romances" were factual depictions, Bly sought to uncover the truth for herself as well as for her readers. Bly also illustrates her rhetorical ethos through this desire: By claiming she did not anticipate the issues of mismanagement and cruelty, Bly forged a connection with her readers by telling the story not as she envisioned it based on the rumors of others, but as she experienced it herself based on her own involvement. Setting up a disparity between what she thought might unfold and what actually occurred allowed Bly to increase the credibility of her narrative.

Another way Bly increased her credibility is by her own questioning of her ability to feign insanity. Bly discounts her ability to gain entrance into the asylum, and this builds the readers' feelings of apprehension, as they naturally question if anyone could successfully feign insanity. She posits, "I had little belief in my ability to deceive the insanity experts, and I think my editor had less" (6). However, in the beginning of her text, she confidently says, "I had some faith in my own ability as an actress and thought I could assume insanity long enough to accomplish any mission intrusted [sic] to me. Could I pass a week in the insane ward at Blackwell's Island? I said I could and would. And I did" (5). In first claiming that she believes

in her own ability to feign insanity and then discounting that ability, Bly waffles intentionally to build suspense in her narrative. Since she wrote this text after her release from the asylum, she knew that she had been successful in feigning insanity, yet she wanted her readers to question whether or not her stunt was possible, a question probably not unlike one that Bly had grappled with before engaging in her investigation. Her inclusion of her sense of mistrust in her own abilities makes the actuation of her stunt more convincing and awe-inspiring.

Reflecting upon her ten-day stay in the asylum, Bly chronicles the day-to-day experiences that she faced alongside those other women whom she met on Blackwell's Island. She strives to present an even-handed assessment, presenting both the positive and negative implications of institutionalization. Throughout her narrative, Bly consciously negotiates her presentation of self to appeal to her audience. She works to maintain an idealized portrayal of womanhood consistent with the gender conventions of her day. Although she was entering the public sphere with her writing, Bly was confined to a private sphere with her content, as her writing focuses on the privatized world of the asylum. In order to negotiate the public sphere successfully, while focusing on a private discourse, she needed to present herself as a lady throughout her narrative. To be considered a lady, Bly's sexual purity needed to be discernible because she was a young, unmarried woman.

Bly recognized the necessity of this portrayal of chastity. For example, when a doctor questioned her if she is "a woman of the town" or if she allows "men to provide for [her] and keep [her]," Bly reports: "I felt like slapping him in the face, but I had to maintain my composure, so I simply stated, 'I do not know what you are talking about. I have always lived at home'" (40). Bly mentions her desire to slap the male doctor because of his insult to her character, and this claim is a rhetorical move. She allows the reader to be privy to her thoughts

in this instance, and her disclosure is intentional: Bly uses this instance to construct not only her reputation as a genteel lady, but she also avoids being defined as “a woman about town,” a descriptor that would have offended her readership and tarnished her purity.

In maintaining her composure, Bly also enacted a stereotypical female sensibility by remaining demure and unthreatening. By remarking that she did not know what the doctor was talking about, Bly was not being disingenuous; rather, she wanted her readers to understand that she turned a deaf ear to such unwarranted accusations. In dealing with the nurses, Bly sought to present herself as a lady as well. As if sharing a secret, Bly confides to her readers, “The other nurses made several attempts to talk to me about lovers, and asked me if I would not like to have one. They did not find me very communicative on the—to them—popular subject” (84). By remaining reticent on this point, Bly avoids the precarious situation that she would have faced had she admitted to lovers or engaged in further conversations on this topic likely to defame her reputation and isolate her from her readership.

Throughout her text, Bly depicts the asylum on Blackwell’s Island as a place where many enter but few leave. This depiction is another rhetorical move that positions Bly in the journalistic field as a stunt reporter and builds her ethos. Securing her own removal from the asylum, prearranged by Cockerill and the *World’s* attorney, allowed Bly to accomplish her stunt with a sense of certainty concerning her escape. Once she arrived on the island via boat, a man escorted her to the ambulance that transported her to the asylum for women. Although knowing quite well where she was, Bly asked the man, “What is this place?” To which he replied, “Blackwell’s Island, an insane place, where you’ll never get out of” (*Ten Days* 48). Bly continually refers to this motif in her text—that the asylum is near inescapable for its patients—to spark the readers’ interest and build suspense. She expounds upon this idea: “The insane

asylum on Blackwell's Island is a human rat-trap. It is easy to get in, but once there it is impossible to get out" (*Ten Days* 93). The readers understand that Bly was fortunate to have been able to leave this institution where so many others have been held captive. Bly, as a skillful writer, builds interest by describing harrowing conditions, causing readers to wonder how she managed to escape. By harkening back to the motif that the asylum seems near inescapable, Bly further solidifies her achievement as a stunt reporter.

Another recurring theme in Bly's text that builds her rhetorical ethos is her cognizance of and sympathy for those women confined to the asylum, women who have little hope for release. As Bly nears the asylum after leaving the ambulance, she knows the stories of the women she is with, for these are the same women with whom she had spoken at Bellevue's insane pavilion. While Bly experiences a moment of victory and hope in finally achieving her goal of arriving at the asylum, she is disheartened by the defeat and hopelessness of those women around her. She declares, "As the wagon was rapidly driven through the beautiful lawns up to the asylum my feelings of satisfaction at having attained the object of my work were greatly dampened by the look of distress on the faces of my companions" (*Ten Days* 49). Bly's benevolence marks her rhetorical ethos, as she desires that these seemingly innocent women avoid such anguish. She further remarks, "Poor women, they had no hopes of a speedy delivery. They were being driven to a prison, through no fault of their own, in all probability for life. In comparison, how much easier would it be to walk to the gallows than to this tomb of living horrors!" (*Ten Days* 49). Bly paints a bleak picture of the future of these women.

Bly uses the image of the gallows to represent a quick death that she determines to be seemingly less tortuous than the fate that awaits these women. Bly grieves for the futures of these women who "through no fault of their own" are forced into "the tomb of living horrors,"

where they have little to no hope of freedom. Bly seems to view death as a greater freedom than life in the asylum, and she resolves to share a story that venerates these women. She argues, “I 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” (*Ten Days* 52). Bly’s compassion toward those less fortunate than she is consistent throughout her text and similarly draws the readers’ sympathies for the plight of those patients who were institutionalized for seemingly illegitimate reasons.

Bly draws these sympathies with concrete details by proving that patients are considered insane without proper medical examination or what Bly describes as an “ample trial” (*Ten Days* 52). Bly provides evidence that the doctors within Blackwell’s Island Women’s Lunatic Asylum misdiagnose women as insane as a result of their inadequate review of the women’s testimony. Bly shares the story of Mrs. Louise Schanz, a German woman who, when questioned by the doctor, could neither understand him nor provide him with answers to any of his questions, except in German. Although one of the nurses was from Germany and spoke German, she refused to serve as an interpreter. Viewing the nurse’s refusal as an impudence and the doctor’s dismissal as insolence, Bly asks, “Can such carelessness be excused, I wonder, when it is so easy to get an interpreter?” (*Ten Days* 52). Bly posits that Mrs. Schanz was “given no chance to prove her sanity. Confined most probably for life behind asylum bars, without even being told in her language the why and wherefore” (52). In viewing Schanz as a victim of improper care and provision, Bly makes a poignant analogy: “Compare this with a criminal, who is given every chance to prove his innocence. Who would not rather be a murderer and take the chance for life than be declared insane, without hope of escape?” (*Ten Days* 52-53). Bly argues that at least the criminal has a chance of freedom if he is proven innocent, but the patients at the

Blackwell's Island are deemed guilty of insanity without even being given the chance to defend their own cases.

Bly faced a delicate situation as she sought to question the authority of the medical community whom she casts as largely incompetent. To be sure, male physicians who dominated the medical field at the time often lacked professional training and were not in a position to offer expertise about the female body, an entity about which they possessed little knowledge. While discussing the destructive "rest cure" treatment that Silas Weir Mitchell prescribed to Charlotte Perkins Gilman and that Gilman used as her basis for writing "The Yellow Wall-paper" in 1892, Suzanne Poirier argues, "The combination of [men's] honest medical ignorance coupled with [men's] cultural biases served to give women little latitude in their individual needs and even less voice in assessing the health care they received" (16). Bly similarly attempted to convince her audience that the male doctors' assessments of the patients within the asylum were less astute than her own. Bly tells of women whom she deduced were as sane as she but were imprisoned despite their pleas for release and declarations of sanity: "I left the insane ward with pleasure and regret—pleasure that I was once more able to enjoy the free breath of heaven; regret that I could not have brought with me some of the unfortunate women who lived and suffered with me, and who, I am convinced, are just as sane as I was and am now myself" (8). These women were able to carry on intelligent and rational conversations with Bly, and Bly was able to ascertain that the placement of these women within the asylum was unjust and unwarranted.

After she had fooled two medical examiners at the Bellevue pavilion into believing that she was insane, Bly argues, "I began to have a smaller regard for the ability of doctors than I ever had before, and a greater one for myself. I felt sure now that no doctor could tell whether people were insane or not, so long as the case was not violent" (*Ten Days* 40). Bly's confidence

in the medical community greatly plummeted as a result of her involvement with them and her further interaction with the other patients. In her report, Bly questions the ability of the psychiatric medical community in order to bolster her rhetorical ethos and to posit yet another area of necessary reform: that regulations be imposed on the doctors to ensure that their diagnoses are correct and that innocent women are not placed into asylums without good cause.

Whereas Bly depicts many patients who are housed within the asylum without evidence of their insanity, Bly similarly describes those patients within the institution who experience hallucinations, hysteria, and madness, women whom Bly deemed should be institutionalized. With approximately 1,600 female patients confined to Blackwell's Island, one such group, whom Bly refers to as "unfortunates," are those women "from the Lodge," that place that houses the group of women considered most violent. Bly encountered some of these women during one of the patients' supervised walks on the grounds, and she provides a vivid account of their apparent madness: "Some were yelling, some were cursing, others were singing or praying or preaching, as the fancy struck them, and they made up the most miserable collection of humanity I had ever seen" (69). Bly witnessed their incoherent mumblings and chaotic screams, and she thought these sights and sounds were truly unforgettable. She also describes madness as she views its indelible mark on some patients:

What a mysterious thing madness is. I have watched patients whose lips are forever sealed in a perpetual silence. They live, they breathe, eat; the human form is there, but that something, which the body can live without, but which cannot exist without the body, was missing. I have wondered if behind those sealed lips there were dreams we ken not of, or if all was blank? (88)



Even though Bly's representation of madness here is bleak, it does attest to the curiosity that she possesses concerning the connection between the mind and the body. She conjectures that without this *something* that she mentions, be it the mind, the soul, or the spirit, madness results. Bly thought that women who showed symptoms such as these needed to be placed within the asylum walls, but they did not deserve the harsh treatment that they faced at the hands of the nurses and physicians.

Bly argues that the living conditions that patients had to endure at the asylum were conducive to insanity. Bly explains that the patients' daily routines contribute to their insanity, and she indicts the medical community for their mistreatment of the patients. She argues that an unraveling of the patients' psyches was often the result of their institutionalization within the asylum, not a prior condition that brought them there. She finds the motto on the exterior of the asylum to be farcical: It reads, "While I live I hope" (70). Based on her experiences, Bly cast another phrase that she viewed as being more fitting: "He would enters here leaveth hope behind" (70). She presents the following challenge to "the expert physicians" to illustrate how their treatment of the patients only worsens their conditions, leaving them with little hope for recovery:

Take a perfectly sane and healthy woman, shut her up and make her sit from 6 A. M. to 8 P. M. on straight-back benches, do not allow her to talk or move during these hours, give her no reading and let her know nothing of the world or its doings, give her bad food and harsh treatment, and see how long it will take to make her insane. Two months would make her a mental and physical wreck. (*Ten Days* 72)

Bly observed these mental and physical wrecks engaged in monotonous activities that were compounded by the harsh living conditions they faced. Bly casts their plights as being no fault of their own, but the result of their mistreatment and mismanagement within the asylum.

In describing the treatment of the patients at the asylum, Bly faithfully recounts what she experienced when forced to consume the repulsive food provided to the patients. Despite her strong hunger, she was unable to eat the bowl of pinkish-colored liquid (that the patients called tea) and the buttered bread due to the terrible taste of both. Miss Neville, another patient whom Bly befriended, told Bly, ““You must force the food down . . . else you will be sick, and who knows but what, with these surroundings, you may go crazy. To have a good brain the stomach must be cared for”” (*Ten Days* 58-59). Others, who faced the same deplorable conditions, later substantiated these reports. Despite Miss Neville’s advice, Bly could not consume the food, and she shares that she “ate nothing that night,” the first of the eight nights that she stayed in the asylum on Blackwell’s Island (59). With minimal nourishment, the patients, ravaged by hunger, often fought during mealtime, stealing bread from one another. However, Bly describes the meals provided for the staff to create a sharp contrast with what the patients were given. The nurses and doctors were given “melons and grapes and all kinds of fruits, beautiful white bread and nice meat” (72); whereas Bly, finding a spider in her bread, thought it most difficult to consume anything that the hospital kitchen provided to her and the other patients.

In addition to describing the nearly inedible meals, Bly also discusses the humiliation and horror that she experienced during the administering of the weekly baths. Bly fuels her rhetorical ethos with the inclusion of the bath, as she describes how the women are treated with little regard for the personal privacy or personal decency. Bly describes how she was ordered to undress. When she refused, she was forced to remove all of her clothing, while a small gathering

of patients stood within viewing distance. Bly quickly “jumped into the bathtub with more energy than grace” to evade their glances, and she requested that the onlookers be asked to leave to no avail (*Ten Days* 60). Bly describes the dirty bathwater as being “ice-cold” and the rags that were being used by the attendant as being “discolored” (59-60). Bly noted that the water is not changed, as all women are bathed in the same dirty water, and the “same towels are used on all the women, those with eruptions [sores] or those without” (*Ten Days* 84). The bath scene presents a stark reality where Bly verges on insanity herself as a result of the deplorable conditions she faced. She paints a vivid picture of her harrowing experience in the asylum:

My teeth chattered and my limbs were goose-fleshed and blue with cold. Suddenly I got, one after the other, three buckets of water over my head—ice-cold water, too—into my eyes, my ears, my nose and my mouth. I think I experienced some of the sensations of a drowning person as they dragged me, gasping, shivering and quaking, from the tub. For once I did look insane. I caught a glance of the indescribable look on the faces of my companions, who had witnessed my fate and knew theirs was surely following. (60)

Bly depicts the horrors and humiliation of her bath to allow her readers to conceptualize how the staff treated the women within the asylum with little regard or respect. Bly mentions that she “did look insane” as an additional rhetorical move to illustrate that even a sane woman could appear to be insane if her personal autonomy is stripped away and she is treated inhumanely.

On September 26, during Bly’s first night in the asylum, the staff placed her in a locked room. Unable to sleep, Bly contemplated the horrific fate that the patients would face if the building caught fire. Bly illustrates her concern for fire safety:

Every door is locked separately and the windows are heavily barred, so that escape is impossible. In the one building alone, I think Dr. Ingram told me, [are] some three hundred women. They are locked, one to ten to a room. It is impossible to get out unless these doors are unlocked. A fire is not improbable, but one of the most likely occurrences. Should the building burn, the jailers or nurses would never think of releasing their crazy patients. This I can prove to you later when I come to tell of their cruel treatment of the poor things intrusted [sic] to their care. As I say, in case of fire, not a dozen women could escape. All would roast to death. (*Ten Days* 63)

In describing the asylum as a likely inferno, a place where hundreds of lives would be lost if the building caught fire, Bly argues that the “jailers” or nurses would do nothing to save the patients; in saying this, Bly pulls the heartstrings of her audience, and she points out an area of reform that must be realized to ensure patient safety in the future. Bly argues, “Unless there is a change there will some day be a tale of horror never equaled” (*Ten Days* 63). The momentum driving Bly’s rhetorical ethos is her demand for reform, and before her release from the hospital, she spoke with Dr. Ingram, one of the few staff who showed her kindness in the asylum, about the possibility of using locks that could be released by the turn of a crank at the end of the hall. Using technology of this nature (as Bly knew existed in prisons) would allow the staff to unlock numerous doors at once, making the possibility of the patients’ escape during a fire much more likely (*Ten Days* 64). Bly’s concern with patient safety became increasingly realized when she entered the asylum and spoke with numerous patients, and once released, she sought to secure fire safety as a top priority for reform at the institution.

In addition to the issue of fire safety, Bly found the nurses' use of asylum patients as housekeepers appalling and in need of reform. Bly describes how the nurses used the patients to clean the facilities:

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. (67)

Rather than receiving the medical care that they needed, asylum patients toiled in an environment that they should not have been responsible for maintaining. Bly felt that it was an injustice to force the patients to complete these housekeeping tasks; the hospital attendants who are paid for such work should take care of these duties.

In the care of a staff that Bly characterized as abusive, demanding, and inconsiderate, the patients found it futile to defy the nurses, for the patients feared them (*Ten Days* 67). During a routine visit from Superintendent Dent, he asked many of the patients how they were feeling. None of them replied, and Bly found this behavior disconcerting considering that the same patients were more than willing to speak with her concerning their poor plight. Bly thought that if the patients confided in the superintendent, telling him about their inadequate clothing, cold baths, insufficient food, and forced labor that surely improvements would be made. However, the patients argued that “the nurses would beat them if they told” (*Ten Days* 71). Fearful of the nurses, patients faced deplorable circumstances and engaged in housekeeping tasks with little chance of evading such unwarranted responsibilities or undesirable living conditions.

To avoid the sensationalism that often characterizes tales of abuse, Bly honed her rhetorical ethos to elicit honest accounts from those patients whom she interviewed concerning how the nurses treated them. She gained specific details to chronicle the mistreatment and neglect that the patients endured at the hands of the nurses. Bly recounts how Miss Grady, one of the most abusive nurses, beat an insane woman and gave her a black eye, attempting to subdue her by force. Bly describes the nurses as gossips with foul mouths who spoke maliciously about the doctors and other nurses (*Ten Days* 84). Based on specific testimony, Bly further explains how nurses scratched, pinched, choked, and taunted patients, treating them more like animals than human beings (*Ten Days* 80-81). Bly mentions a woman who described how the nurses pulled out her hair, and to provide concrete evidence for her audience, Bly reports how she personally viewed the women's bald patch to confirm that the accusations were true. However, Bly does mention the kindness of one nurse who serves as a foil to the other attendants: "I want to say that the night nurse, Burns, in hall 6, seemed very kind and patient to the poor, afflicted people" (84). Burns, however, seems the rare exception.

The kindness of this nurse serves as a sharp contrast to the multiple descriptions that Bly gives of nurses engaging in deplorable behavior. Bridget McGuinness, one patient who was housed at the Retreat and later at the Lodge, where the most violent of patients are kept, provides Bly with her horrific experience:

The beatings I got [at the Retreat] 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. They would hold patients under the water and threaten to leave them to die there if they did not promise not to tell the doctors. We would all promise, because we knew the doctors would not help us, and we would do anything to escape the punishment. (qtd. in Bly *Ten Days* 86-87)

Although the Lodge and the Retreat by their names sounded like pleasant and restful havens, these were the facilities on the island where the insane women were treated with the most disrespect and abuse. Bly includes testimonies from women who were forced to stay the Retreat and the Lodge to provide examples to illustrate that reform is necessary to improve the inexcusable treatment that patients were forced to endure at these facilities. Bly explores but then retracts her desire to be housed at these facilities for the most violent of inmates: “I had intended to have myself committed to the violent wards, the Lodge and the Retreat, but when I got testimony of two sane women and could give [their testimonies], I decided not to risk my health—and hair—so I did not get violent” (93-94). Showing her benevolence for the patients and communicating her desire to improve their situations, Bly included testimonials such as these, given by the women who stayed in the violent wards, to forge her rhetorical ethos. These testimonies also saved her from having to endure the mistreatment that she would have faced had she gone to the Retreat or the Lodge.

After ten days of experiencing asylum life, Bly was released when Peter A. Hendricks, a lawyer from *The New York World*, came and explained to the medical authorities that Bly should be allowed to leave because her friends wanted to take charge of her. Although his reference to her friends more than likely referred to Bly’s mother and her family, the attorney used this excuse to convince the asylum’s physicians that upon her release, Bly would be in the safe care

of loved ones. In her account, Bly reflects on her experience among the women in the asylum: “For ten days I had been one of them. Foolishly enough, it seemed intensely selfish to leave them to their sufferings. I felt a Quixotic desire to help them by sympathy and presence” (*Ten Days* 94).

After her release, Bly appeared before a grand jury of “twenty-three august presences” to share her story and make suggestions for reform. She argues, “I longed to help those of God’s most unfortunate children whom I had left prisoners behind me. If I could not bring them that boon of all boons, liberty, I hoped to least influence others to make life more bearable for them” (*Ten Days* 95). The all-male jury, yet another example of the unempowered status of women at the time, asked that Bly accompany them to the asylum, and just two weeks following her release, Bly returned to the island with the group of male jurors. Dr. Dent, the superintendent, spoke with the jury once they arrived at Blackwell’s Island, sharing that “he had no means by which to tell positively that the bath was cold and of the number of women put into the same water. He knew the food was not what it should be, but said it was due to lack of funds” (94). The jury continued to question Dent concerning the complaints that Bly had voiced about the institution.

Dent said that he had no way of knowing whether or not the nurses were being cruel, but he did assent to the incompetent nature of the doctors, which resulted from “the lack of means to secure good medical men” (qtd. in Bly 94). Dent thanked Bly for conducting her investigation, and he applauded her for her efforts: “I am glad you did this now, and had I known your purpose, I would have aided you. We have no means of learning the way things are going except to do as you did” (qtd. in Bly 94). Dent lauded Bly’s approach, and his approval of her intentions as a stunt reporter spoke to the efficacy of her investigation and her appeals for reform.



The jurors also asked that Mrs. Anne Neville be brought in for questioning. Neville initially arrived on the island with Bly, and Bly suggested that Neville be questioned to corroborate Bly's report. Neville discloses the following to show the sharp contrast between what happened when she arrived with Nellie Brown and the changes brought about following the publication of Bly's newspaper reports:

When Miss Brown and I were brought here the nurses were cruel and the food was too bad to eat. We did not have enough clothing, and Miss Brown asked for more all the time. I thought she was very kind, for when a doctor promised her some clothing she said she would give it to me. Strange to say, ever since Miss Brown has been taken away everything is different. The nurses are very kind and we are given plenty to wear. The doctors come to see us often and the food is greatly improved. (qtd. in Bly, *Ten Days* 96-97)

The evidence from Miss Neville showed that many changes had occurred within the asylum, and those improvements pleased Bly and the jury members. Many of the patients of whom Bly spoke of in her reports, who might have also been questioned to corroborate her findings, had either been released from the asylum or were moved to other buildings on the island (*Ten Days* 97-98).

Bly concludes her text with mention of how she achieved the reform that she sought: "I hardly expected the grand jury to sustain me, after they saw everything different from what it had been while I was there. Yet they did, and their report to the court advises all the changes made that I had proposed" (*Ten Days* 98). Bly was uncertain if the court believed her case considering that the environment of the asylum upon their investigation differed greatly from the report she gave, but upon Miss Neville's testimony, the jurors realized that word of Bly's report and their

impeding visit to the asylum were adequate reasons for the asylum to place some changes into effect. Bly further argues, “I have one consolation for my work—on the strength of my story the committee of appropriation provides \$1,000,000 more than was ever before given, for the benefit of the insane” (98). Bly ends her *Ten Days in a Mad-house* with this idea, and by doing so, she lends power to her rhetorical ethos, as she seeks to prove that her text accomplished reform and improved the plight of those women within the asylum. Bly realized her goal of helping those women, and by aiding them, she helped herself to gain an audience and a career in journalism. This investigative report landed her the dream job at *The New York World*. In this two-part series of articles based on her stay in the Women’s Lunatic Asylum, Bly projected a presentation of self that clearly marked her rhetorical ethos, setting her apart from her contemporaries, both in journalistic approach and in content.

In a forthcoming book by Michael L. Keene and Katherine H. Adams, entitled *The “Frenzy of the Visible”: Women Depicted, 1880-1920 and Beyond*, Bly’s work is cast as a contributor to this “frenzy of the visible,” a phrase coined by film historian Jean-Louis Comolli. (I will be using excerpts from their to-be-published book based on the partial manuscript that I was provided, following the pagination from that manuscript for parenthetical citations). Keene and Adams use the description to define the period of 1880 to 1920, a period that “witnessed the development of the first national visual culture, appearing as a result of a new level of invention, reproduction, and distribution” of visual images (Keene and Adams 3-4). Keene and Adams argue that the increased circulation of information promoted the “national marketing of a visual culture,” and in this thriving visual culture, “one especially important ingredient was women, especially young and beautiful ones, ubiquitously selling themselves and other commodities” (Keene and Adams 3-4). By tracing “the first national marketing of various ‘types’ or ‘brands’

of women,” Keene and Adams include Bly among those examples, demonstrating how women became a profitable visual representation of American culture (3-4).

Bly exhibited a particular “brand” of women as a stunt reporter. Her daring achievements as a workingwoman created this “type” of fearless female. Keene and Adams posit, “Newspapers at the end of the nineteenth century created nationally known ‘fictional’ characters, called ‘stunt girls,’ who were just as artistically delineated as characters in plays or films. These journalists took on a specific part—as the risk-taker—providing good stories as well as titillation and shock” (6). By becoming nationally “visible,” women like Bly achieved a status that secured their positions not only as writers of the news but also as makers of it as well, as characters in their own provocative stories. Keene and Adams illustrate Bly’s ability to achieve this goal:

Although many women worked on the women's pages at newspapers, only these “stunt girls” secured public attention, with their looks and their choice of placing their bodies in danger constantly featured. Newspapers featured pictures of them, often in scanty clothing, along with their investigative news articles. In this most visible and even shocking work role, women appeared as individuals on the loose in a dangerous world without a support system or colleagues, without any training, assuming risks as they took on corrupt institutions. With assumed names, often from songs or fiction, they became well-known characters in their own papers and through syndication across the nation. (6)

Keene and Adams argue that Bly’s rhetorical ethos was not only forged by her words, but also through the visual representation of her bodily image alongside those words. In her text *Front-Page Girls: Women Journalist in American Culture and Fiction, 1880-1930*, Jean Marie Lutes

posits a similar claim. She argues, “Female reporters offered to ease the uncertainty and alienation of urban life by using their bodies as conduits for the news, projecting themselves into their stories and thus into their readers’ lives” (Lutes 6). The embodied experience of the female stunt reporter made her news story personally relevant as she used her body to engage in and negotiate the news.

Bly’s next big story also involved her “stunt girl” willingness to make her body a “conduit” for the news. Bly determined that she would attempt to beat the fictional “record” set by Phileas Fogg, the main character in Jules Verne’s popular novel *Around the World in Eighty Days*. To beat the “record” set by Verne’s protagonist, Bly knew that her speed of travel was of paramount importance, but she also realized the need to offer enough details about places and customs while on her journey, at least to assure her readers that she did, indeed, visit the places along her itinerary. Bly succeeded in balancing her need for speed and her ability to capture vivid, convincing details by immersing herself into the locales where she landed, even if her stay was relatively short. She lingered in some places long enough to file detailed reports about the people, customs, and places, reports that required some time. (The quotations that I will use from *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days* are taken from the electronic copy of the book, which does not provide pagination. In quoting Bly’s sentences, I will maintain all of her word use, but for the sake of clarity and convenience, I have modernized some of Bly’s punctuation in a few of her quotes.)

When Bly asked Cockerill, her *New York World* editor, if he supported her idea to traverse the globe, he said that a report of that nature was better suited for a male journalist. Cockerill said, “It is impossible for you to do it. . . . In the first place you are a woman and would need a protector, and even if it were possible for you to travel alone you would need to carry so

much baggage that it would detain you in making rapid changes . . . no one but a man can do this” (qtd. in Bly, *Around* n. pag.). With her resolve not to let a man take this story away from her, she quickly retorted, “Start the man, and I’ll start the same day for some other newspaper and beat him” (*Around* n. pag.). Knowing that Bly would accomplish this feat with or without his approval, Cockerill consented to let Bly do the story.

On November 14, 1889, Bly left on her journey, approximately a year after she pitched the idea to Cockerill. While on her trip, Bly sent brief, periodic messages to *The New York World* that were published as she traveled so that her readership could track her whereabouts by reading these episodic reports. These reports, usually nothing more than a quickly dashed-off cable or a delayed letter, left *World* editors scrambling for copy to sustain readers’ interest in the story. To keep the story going for the nearly two and a half months that Bly was gone, editors rarely let a day pass in which the newspaper did not mention something concerning her travels. This in and of itself was a feat, considering that days with no first- or even secondhand reports from Bly far outnumbered the days when news from her or from a foreign correspondents did arrive. To sustain the story’s momentum, *The New York World* quoted excerpts from other out-of-town newspapers lauding Bly’s achievements (Kroeger 150). They printed minitravelogues to highlight points of interest along her itinerary, where she may or may not have traveled. They also included speculation pieces written by travel experts, attempting to gauge her chances of success to achieve her feat in less than eighty days (Kroeger 161-62).

The most productive means of sustaining audience interest in Bly’s journey resulted from the editors’ idea to create a contest for the readers. The contest generated reader involvement by allowing them to try to guess her exact time of travel. The reader who came the closest to guessing Bly’s total travel time would win a free trip to Europe. For the months of December

1889 and January 1890, every issue of *The World* included a ballot on which readers could cast their projection for the “Nellie Bly Guessing Match” (Kroeger 150-51). On December 2, 1889, the day after readers had first received their ballots, an astonishing 100,000 participants sent in their guesses. The *World* no longer remained at a loss for what to print; the ballots from contestants provided fodder to fuel further copy for weeks (Kroeger 150).

As she traveled around the world, Bly documented her personal experiences for her readers so that she could provide a more detailed account of her journey upon her return. When she returned from her tour, *The New York World* printed the first four chapters of her travelogue in the Sunday edition on February 2, 1890. They continued to print the remaining installments in three additional Sunday editions, running on February 9, February 16, and the last one on February 23 (Kroeger 178). She later compiled her newspaper selections with further explication into a book-length manuscript that was published in 1890, the same year that she returned from her journey.

To highlight Bly’s attractive appearance, *The World* provided a photograph image of Bly in her traveling garb next to her articles. Bly opted to carry only one piece of baggage, and she noted that readers often asked her what she packed for such a journey. She describes the contents of her luggage:

One never knows the capacity of an ordinary hand-satchel until dire necessity compels the exercise of all one's ingenuity to reduce every thing to the smallest possible compass. In mine I was able to pack two traveling caps, three veils, a pair of slippers, a complete outfit of toilet articles, ink-stand, pens, pencils, and copy-paper, pins, needles and thread, a dressing gown, a tennis blazer, a small flask and a drinking cup, several complete changes of underwear, a liberal supply of

handkerchiefs and fresh ruchings [a decorative pleat or frill of fabric] and most bulky and uncompromising of all, a jar of cold cream to keep my face from chapping in the varied climates I should encounter. (Bly, *Around* n. pag.)

Bly listed the contents of her luggage to prove that a woman could travel light, even for a journey that might last over two months. She argues, “It will be seen that if one is traveling simply for the sake of traveling and not for the purpose of impressing one's fellow passengers, the problem of baggage becomes a very simple one” (*Around* n. pag.). With this statement, Bly addresses two female stereotypes: the tendency women have to carry too much luggage, and the desire women have to impress others with their clothing and appearance during their travels. Although Bly intentionally traveled light, she may have done so simply to prove that she could; when she pitched the idea of her journey to Cockerill, he posited that he did not think it possible for a woman to travel with few parcels, but Bly managed to travel with only one satchel to prove him wrong. Bly was able to disrupt that stereotype, but she remained conscious of her appearance and had a beautiful, all-weather travel garment made specifically for the purpose of her journey.

Although someone suggested that Bly carry a revolver with her to insure her personal safety during her travels, Bly disagreed with the recommendation: “I had such a strong belief in the world's greeting me as I greeted it, that I refused to arm myself. I knew if my conduct was proper I should always find men ready to protect me, let them be Americans, English, French, German, or anything else” (*Around* n. pag.). Bly's refusal to carry a gun illustrates her belief that the world would receive her as she received it. She believed that if she respected those whom she encountered, they would embrace her with kindness and hospitality as well; therefore, Bly felt a gun was unnecessary. She argues that men of many different nationalities would offer

her protection if she needed it, and in making this argument, Bly places a great confidence in and dependence on others to insure her safety, a confidence that similarly illustrates a naïveté in her blind trust of seeming strangers.

By confessing her reliance upon foreign men to offer her protection, Bly also displays an important aspect of her persona, a “weapon” that proved more valuable to her than any revolver: her beauty. Bly knew that men found her attractive, and with this assumption that men would protect her, she discloses that she thinks her sex appeal made it easier for her to get men to grant what she wanted. Bly’s delicate utilization of her persona required that she present herself as affable and alluring, as a lady who welcomed the protection of a man, not a revolver. Based on her attractiveness and likeability, Bly believed that foreign men would come to her aid if she needed assistance. Much of Bly’s success derived from her ability to persuade men to help her accomplish her goals. Whether she was being protected or promoted, Bly often used men, as she honed a persona that provided her with opportunities for her personal gain, opportunities granted to her by men.

In her account, as Bly departs for her journey, she acknowledges a sense of trepidation concerning her trip around the world and the possible dangers she might encounter: “I am off... and shall I ever get back? Intense heat, bitter cold, terrible storms, shipwrecks, fevers, all such agreeable topics had been drummed into me until I felt much as I imagine one would feel if shut in a cave of midnight darkness and told that all sorts of horrors were waiting to gobble one up” (Bly, *Around* n. pag.). While considering the many possibly threatening situations that others warned her about, she sarcastically describes them as “agreeable,” and gives voice to her fears to increase the feeling of suspense for her readers. She shares her anxieties to illustrate the



innumerable “sorts of horrors” that might await her and to highlight her own courageousness in being willing to face uncertainty as an invincible female.

Although Bly initially shares her fears by questioning her safety, she soon resolves to suppress her self-doubt, as she exhibits a great confidence in her own abilities to succeed on this journey. As she departs on the *Augusta Victoria*, the first ship of her tour, Bly argues, “Silently I marveled at my boldness to attempt such a feat wholly unused, as I was, to sea-voyages. Still I did not entertain one doubt as to the result” (*Around* n. pag.). Bly considered her trek a bold undertaking, but she similarly removes all doubt from her mind concerning the final outcome of her travels. Despite a bout of seasickness—what Bly referred to as “the disease of the wave”—that kept her in the bed from seven p.m. on the first day of her journey to four p.m. on the second day, she remained assured that she would complete her task.

As Bly began her journey by crossing the Atlantic aboard the *Augusta Victoria*, she mentions her curiosity about and interest in the other passengers. As if admitting a secret to her readers, she confides, “I think it is only natural for travelers to take an innocent pleasure in studying the peculiarities of their fellow companions” (*Around* n. pag.). Bly’s strong penchant to “study the peculiarities” is a source of constant amusement for her readers. She tells of a man who “counted his pulse after every meal” and another who “counted the number of steps he took every day” (*Around* n. pag.). Both of these men sparked her curiosity, but her interest was soon diverted to a woman who apparently claimed that she “had not undressed since she left her home in New York” (*Around* n. pag.). This woman reasoned that any minute the ship could sink, and she “determined to go down dressed!” (*Around* n. pag.). Bly describes people with their personal idiosyncrasies, illustrating that she easily found material to write about, even aboard a ship at sea.

When writing for her readers, Bly presents her persona as an interesting and thoughtful writer to shape her audience's perception of her. She wants to appear smart, knowledgeable, observant, reliable, entertaining, and eminently likeable. To achieve this persona, Bly hones her ability to make herself as well as the various other travelers take on roles as dynamic characters. She peppers her stories with humor and tragedy, as she reveals compelling aspects of her persona while unveiling the lives of other pilgrims and pedestrians whom she met along the way. While striving to achieve this great challenge of circling the globe in record time, Bly succeeds at securing the appreciation and trust of her readers, an accomplishment that serves as a tribute to her skill as a rhetorician who just happens to be a woman.

Before Bly reaches her first port of call, she records a conversation about foreigners' knowledge of the United States that she had with Captain Albers and others aboard the *Augusta Victoria*. To her surprise, she notes, "Many were the discussions about the erroneous impression entertained by most foreigners about Americans and America. Some one [sic] remarked that the majority of people in foreign lands were not able to tell where the United States is" (*Around n. pag.*). Captain Albers, whose experiences at sea had provided contact with numerous foreigners, stated, "There are plenty of people who think that the United States is one little island, with a few houses on it" (*Around n. pag.*). Bly provides no personal commentary to explain her viewpoint on this topic, but she includes this exchange to show the supposed ignorance among foreigners concerning their understanding of America as a developed nation. Bly also may not have shared her opinion because she did not know how foreigners viewed her homeland. Her trip, however, provided her with that opportunity.

On November 21, 1889, after Bly had been at sea for a week, someone aboard the ship spotted land. Bly describes the excitement on board, "The way every one . . . rushed on deck

was surely not surpassed by the companions of Columbus when they discovered America. I can not give any good reason for it, but I know that I looked at the first point of bleak land with more interest than I would have bestowed on the most beautiful bit of scenery in the world” (*Around*, n. pag.). Having spent so many days at sea, Bly relished the sight of land, and she also treasured the possibilities that awaited her as she prepared to disembark for London after landing at Southampton.

As Bly and several other passengers began to disembark, a man offered to serve as Bly’s escort to London. In determining not to carry a revolver, Bly formerly reasoned that men would offer her protection if she needed it, and once an opportunity arose for her to gain that protection, Bly does not neglect to mention in her account how willingly a man sought to assume that responsibility. The gentleman who offered to escort her “thought as it was so late, or rather so early, that the London correspondent, who was to have met [Bly], would not put in an appearance” (*Around* n. pag.). However, the London correspondent arrived to assist Bly, and he convinced her prospective escort that she was in safekeeping. Her fellow traveler said, “He [the correspondent] is all right. If he had not been so, I should have gone to London with you anyway. I can rest satisfied now for he will take care of you” (*Around* n. pag.). Bly reflects on his withdrawn offer: “I went away with a warm feeling in my heart for the kindly man who would have sacrificed his own comfort to insure the safety of an unprotected girl” (*Around* n. pag.). This narrative does more than simply illustrate Bly’s willingness to assume the role of “unprotected girl,” it also shows Bly’s dependence upon her attractiveness and affability to secure the companionship of a man to ease the burden of her journey. She had such confidence in her beauty and self-assurance; she believed men would respond protectively to her, and they did. Additionally, Bly’s willingness to accept this man’s protection perhaps evinces her naïveté, as

she very nearly placed her blind trust in someone who may have been no more than a stranger. Bly possibly became acquainted with this man on her journey, but her travel account does not disclose the development of their relationship.

Bly soon boarded a train; a passenger coach had been attached to a special mail train to expedite the transit of those wanting to head to London without further delay. While riding on the train, she assessed her accommodations as being adequate: "I took a survey of an English railway compartment. The little square in which I sat looked like a hotel omnibus and was about as comfortable. The two red leather seats in it run across the car, one backing the engine, the other backing the rear of the train" (*Around* n. pag.). Bly attempts to show her readers how English rail travel compares to American, and by doing so, she also voices a question concerning her safety. She asks, "How should we get out if the train ran the track?" (*Around* n. pag.). She mentions these concerns because she did not care for "the idea of being locked in a box like an animal in a freight train" (*Around* n. pag.). The answer she received was "trains never run off the track in England" (*Around* n. pag.). To which she playfully responded, "Too slow for that" (*Around* n. pag.). Bly, whose thoughts were usually situated on reform, dropped the conversation about the possibility of train derailment, using the interaction to illustrate her humor.

Upon her arrival in London, Bly needed to obtain her passport from the American Legation office. When Mr. McCormick, the Secretary of Legation, asked Bly her age, he said, "There is one question all women dread to answer, and as very few will give a truthful replay, I will ask you to swear to the rest first and fill in the other question afterward, unless you have no hesitancy in telling me your age" (*Around* n. pag.). Although Bly responds by stating, "I will tell you my age, swear to it, too, and I am not afraid" (*Around* n. pag.), she never discloses her age in

her account to her readers, as she writes about this exchange with McCormick. Evidence of her reported age, however, could be found on her passport that bore May 5, 1867, as her birth date. Although Bly was really twenty-five at this time, her passport indicated that she falsely claimed to be twenty-two. To qualify Bly's shaving "three years off reality for the rest of her years," Kroeger argues, "Victorian women were forever lying about their ages. The practice was a widely accepted nod to vanity, not entirely out of vogue even yet. Bly, for her part, looked even younger than twenty-two and had a great deal invested in being 'that plucky *girl* reporter'" (Kroeger 145). Bly desired that her true age remain unknown, as she wanted to appear as young as her passport record allowed.

Following the receipt of her passport in London, Bly traveled first by train and later via boat to arrive in Boulogne, France. While in Boulogne, she boarded yet another train for Amiens. In this railcar, Bly questioned the use of private compartments, and she discerned that if a young woman were placed alone in the car with a stranger, then these cloistered spaces might create a possibly threatening situation for an unaccompanied lady. Bly considered American women to be at an advantage in that the open American railcars provided them with the protection of other passengers:

Small wonder the American girl is fearless. She has not been used to so-called private compartments in English railway carriages, but to large crowds, and every individual that helps to swell that crowd is her protector. When mothers teach their daughters that there is safety in numbers, and that numbers are the body-guard that shield all woman-kind, then chaperones will be a thing of the past, and women will be nobler and better. (*Around* n. pag.)

Bly illustrates that a woman is safe when she is surrounded by others whom she can call upon to ensure her protection. Understanding the safety in numbers, Bly presents a seeming paradox by sharing her description of private railcars: Had she accepted the protection of the man who was her fellow traveler aboard the *Augusta Victoria*, she may have found herself in a precarious and potentially scandalous situation, placed alone in a private car with him. Having never ridden on the English rails, Bly may not have anticipated the private accommodations. However, in avoiding this situation, Bly circumvented a circumstance where her naïveté and blind trust in her fellow man may have outweighed her usual intelligence.

Upon her arrival in France, *The New York World* arranged for Bly to meet with Jules Verne, the man who inspired her journey. Arriving in Amiens with her escort, a London correspondent for *The World*, Bly spied Jules Verne, his wife, and a Paris journalist, waiting to greet them at the train platform. As she departed from the train, Bly lamented her travel-worn appearance, regretting that she had no opportunity to freshen up before meeting her gracious guests:

When I saw them I felt as any other woman would have done under the same circumstances. I wondered if my face was travel-stained, and if my hair was tossed. I thought regretfully, had I been traveling on an American train, I should have been able to make my toilet *en route*, so that when I stepped off at Amiens and faced the famous novelist and his charming wife, I would have been as trim and tidy as I would had I been receiving them in my own home. (*Around* n. pag.)

Although Bly expressed regret for not being able to appear more kempt, her apprehension subsided once she saw the Vernes: “There was little time for regret. They were advancing

towards us, and in another second I had forgotten my untidiness in the cordial welcome they gave me” (*Around* n. pag.).

After riding by coach to their house, Bly met with Verne and his wife only for a short time, so as not to delay her trip. She asked him what inspired him to write *Around the World in Eighty Days*. He shared that he had read a newspaper article that noted that a trip around the world would be possible in that amount of time, and the possibility prompted him to write his novel. Bly found Verne and his wife to be gracious as host and hostess, and she appreciated their hospitality almost immediately: “There were no stiff formalities to freeze the kindness in all our hearts, but a cordiality expressed with such charming grace that before I had been many minutes in their company, they had won my everlasting respect and devotion” (*Around* n. pag.). Bly recounted that her meeting with the Verne couple was the great highlight of her trip, and she considered that her time with them made her journey worth the while.

After she departed from the Verne home, Bly headed to Calais aboard a train known as the Club train, heralded as “the pride of France.” She was impressed by the dinner she ate on the train, and she enjoyed the coffee they served after the meal: “I thought this manner of serving coffee a very pleasing one, quite an improvement on our system, and quite worthy of adoption” (*Around* n. pag.). Once she arrived in Calais, she waited two hours for the arrival of the mail train, and then she boarded it with “one thousand bags of mail” and a few other passengers, heading to Brindisi (*Around* n. pag.).

In her report of her journey, Bly discusses how women are treated, especially when she felt as though they are being treated unequally. While traveling via rail to Italy, she provides evidence to how women receive different accommodations than men during their meals on the train: “A dining car was attached in the evening, but I was informed by the women that it was not

exactly the thing for us to eat in a public car with men, so we continued to be served in our state rooms” (*Around n. pag.*). Bly does not mention if she viewed this segregation as an inconvenience or an advantage, but her inclusion of this detail illustrates how women travelers were not afforded the same privileges as men.

While sailing on the *Victoria* from Brindisi, Italy, to Port Said, Egypt, Bly spent her cruise analyzing the peculiarities of her fellow passengers. Bly reports, “The passengers formed two striking contrasts. There were some of the most refined and lovely people on board, and there were some of the most ill-bred and uncouth” (*Around n.pag.*). Those whom she viewed as “ill-bred and uncouth” disrupted her evening meal, joining her table without invitation, hurling insults at her, and generally making her feel uncomfortable. Conversely, she describes a refined Englishman “who belongs to the Civil Service in Calcutta” as taking a personal interest in her safety that she welcomed: “Learning that I was traveling alone, he devoted most of his time looking out for my comfort and pleasure” (*Around n. pag.*). This statement seems a recurrent theme of her travelogue: that men were willing to offer their friendship and protection to her along the journey. Bly shares that she easily acquires the favor of men to illustrate her likeability as well as her attractiveness.

Bly remained critical of the accommodations for the passengers aboard the *Victoria*. She informs her readers that the *Victoria* was not as luxurious as she thought it should be:

The *Victoria* is said to be the finest boat on the P. and O. Line, still it could not be more unsuited for the trip. It is very badly planned, being built so that a great number of cabins inside are absolutely cut off from light and air. It is a compliment to call them cabins as they are really nothing more than small, dark, disagreeable, and unventilated boxes. (*Around n. pag.*)



The accommodations displeased Bly, and she allows her readers to envision how the passengers were confined to small sleeping quarters. Discussing the service of the crew aboard the *Victoria*, Bly criticizes them for being intolerable and unacceptable to her. She argues, “The impudence and rudeness of servants in America is a standing joke, but if the servants on the *Victoria* are a sample of English servants, I am thankful to keep those we have, such as they are” (*Around n. pag.*). Despite the contempt she may have felt for the crew, Bly reveals that they did not ruin her experience aboard the *Victoria*: “Notwithstanding all annoying trifles it was a very happy life we spent in those pleasant waters” (*Around n. pag.*).

With over three hundred passengers aboard the *Victoria*, Bly forged many relationships upon this vessel, and she recounted not only her interest in the passengers, but also their interest in her: “Most of the women, whose acquaintances I formed, were very desirous of knowing all about American women, and frequently expressed their admiration for the free American woman, many going so far as to envy me, while admiring my unfettered happiness” (*Around n. pag.*). For her readers, Bly embodies the persona of the “free American woman,” unfettered by constraints that may have entangled other Victorian women. Bly’s depiction as the “free American woman” illustrates a part of her persona integral to her travel documents. She was conscious not only of her presentation of self as a woman, but also as an American. With this consciousness, she delicately sought to maintain some of the American expectations of womanhood, such as apparent chastity, benevolence, and good manners. However, she similarly determined to challenge other expectations of womanhood, by partaking in this travel stunt and seeking to prove that she could accomplish this feat as well as any man.

Bly acknowledges that, by chance, the passengers aboard the *Victoria* initially mistook her identity: “I had not been on the *Victoria* many days until some one who had become friendly

with me, told me it was rumored on board that I was an eccentric American heiress, traveling about with a hair brush and a bank book. I judged that some of the attention I was receiving was due to the story of my wealth” (*Around* n. pag.). This misunderstanding, to be sure, flattered and amused Bly, but she determined to correct the falsehood once a young man, looking “to find a wife who would settle £1,000 a year on him,” set his sights on her (*Around* n. pag.). Bly also includes this misconception to contribute to her persona. Not only did the other passengers view her as an American, but they also considered her to be a wealthy heiress. This conceptualization illustrates that Bly’s physical appearance and presentation of self impressed other passengers. She dressed well; she spoke well. She projected the image of an upper-class American woman, and she embraced this image by including this story in her narrative.

Bly also embraced the image of being an independent woman, one willing to make her own decisions. After departing from the Suez Canal in Egypt, Bly arrived in Aden, Yemen, where those aboard the *Victoria* were “warned by the officers on board not to go ashore to Aden because of the intense heat” (*Around* n. pag.). Despite those admonitions, Bly went ashore. The people of Aden sparked Bly’s curiosity, and she wrote concerning their beautiful teeth. She described their teeth as being “the finest white teeth of any mortals,” and she also detailed how they achieved such pearly whites (*Around* n. pag.). Bly says, “They get tree branches of a soft, fibrous wood which they cut into pieces three and four inches in length. With one end of this stick, scraped free of the bark, they rub and polish their teeth until they are perfect in their whiteness” (*Around* n. pag.). Bly purchased these brushes for her teeth while in Aden: “I bought several sticks and found them the most efficient as well as pleasant tooth brush I had ever tried. I felt a regret that some enterprising firm had not thought of importing this useful bit of timber to

replace the tooth-destroying brush used in America” (*Around* n. pag.). Bly’s interest in oral hygiene was consistent with her focus on her image.

Bly also describes an additional feature on an Aden pier that she felt worthy of adoption in America:

A large board occupied a prominent position on the pier. On it was marked the prices that should be paid drivers, boatmen, and like people. It was, indeed, a praiseworthy thoughtfulness that caused the erection of that board, for it prevented tourists being robbed. I looked at it, and thought that even in that land there was more precaution taken to protect helpless and ignorant strangers than in New York City, where the usual custom of night hack-men is to demand exorbitant prices, and if they are not forthcoming, to pull off their coats and fight for it. (*Around* n. pag.)

By displaying the expected wages for services, the message board on the pier prevented visitors from being swindled out of their money. Bly determined that employing a practice similar to this in New York City would help prevent those dishonest dealings that she understood to be commonplace. With an eye for reform, Bly, even in her travel correspondence, sought to point out those practices in other countries that she felt were worthy of implementation in America.

Although Bly wrote her travel documents for a difference rhetorical purpose (she was not focused on reform as she had been in her mad-house exposé), she, however, included prospects for reform when she noticed cultural practices that she felt would benefit Americans as well.

Returning to the *Victoria*, Bly continued her journey from Aden, Yemen, to Colombo, Ceylon [now Sri Lanka]. Before arriving in Colombo, Bly and several other passengers viewed

a lantern slide show. While being entertained by the display, Bly reflected on the European approval of the monarchy and her own disapproval of American governmental officials:

The loyalty of the English to their Queen on all occasions, and at all times, had won my admiration. Though born and bred a staunch American, with the belief that a man is what he makes of himself, not what he was born, still I could not help admiring the undying respect the English have for their royal family. During the lantern slide exhibition, the Queen's picture was thrown on the white sheet, and evoked warmer applause than anything else that evening. We never had an evening's amusement that did not end by everybody rising to their feet and singing "God Save the Queen." I could not help but think how devoted that woman, for she is only a woman after all, should be to the interests of such faithful subjects. With that thought came to me a shamed feeling that there I was, a free born American girl, the native of the grandest country on earth, forced to be silent because I could not in honesty speak proudly of the rulers of my land, unless I went back to those two kings of manhood, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.

Unable to "speak proudly" of President Benjamin Harrison, America's highest elected official, Bly exposes how she felt isolated from the electoral process as a woman. Women did not receive the right to vote until 1920, thirty years after Bly shared this report. Furthermore, Bly posited that America's leaders failed to incite the same reaction of adoration that the dignitaries of Europe received from their countrymen or, at least, in England.

After a five-day delay in Colombo, Bly took the first opportunity to depart aboard the *Oriental* to China, a ship that she found more accommodating than the *Victoria*, with better food

service and a more pleasant crew. Although Bly tends to write about the people whom she encounters or the picturesque landscapes that she viewed, she also includes stories that are humorous simply because they exhibit Bly's personality. While aboard the *Oriental*, Bly's sleeping quarters were located next to a family. Bly, who greatly appreciated the opportunity to sleep late, grew increasingly annoyed by the loud exchanges that took place every morning in the adjoining cabin. As Bly tried to sleep, the father returned from his breakfast and began loudly asking his young child: "What does baby say to mamma? . . . What does Baby say to papa? . . . What does the moo-moo cow say, my treasure; tell papa what the moo-moo cow says" (*Around* n. pag.). Bly could tolerate this banter only for so long, and on the sixth consecutive morning that she heard this conversation verbatim, Bly responded by shouting from her cabin: "For heaven's sake, baby, tell papa what the moo-moo cow says and let me go to sleep!" (*Around* n. pag.). Bly admits, "The fond parents did not speak to me after that" (*Around* n. pag.). This experience allows Bly to express her exasperation, but the narrative proves comedic. Bly concludes the tale with the dream that haunted her once she returned to sleep that morning. In her dream, a group of babies riding upon a herd of cattle chased her down a hill as they all chanted moo, moo, moo (*Around* n. pag.).

After sailing on the *Oriental*, Bly arrived in Singapore. The presence of the marking system that identified the people of Singapore by caste intrigued Bly:

The people in Singapore have ranks as have people in other lands. There they do not wait for one neighbor to tell another or for the newspapers to inform the public as to their standing, but every man, woman, and child carries his mark in gray powder on the forehead so that all the world may look and read and know his caste. (*Around* n. pag.).

Bly omits whether she feels this marking system is advantageous or detrimental for the people of Singapore, but Bly knew that a marking system such as this one reflected prejudice and rigid social stratification. With her commentary, she indicates that newspapers are used in her country to inform people of others' "standing." The society pages of American newspapers informed a literate American public about social castes that were also rigid, often based on family, fortune, or both. By depicting the American newspaper society pages as an indicator of social standing, Bly may be positing that at least the clearly-marked social castes in Singapore were in some way more direct or honest than the American social class "markers" displayed on newspaper pages in her country. Bly, who improved her social standing and achieved fame through the newspaper pages herself, was not immune to newspaper attacks that could just as easily decrease her social standing.

The *Oriental* brought Bly to China, and she arrived there only thirty-nine days after she had left Hoboken, New Jersey. In China, she went to the Oriental and Occidental Steamship Company to inquire when the next vessel departed for Japan, the next stop on her itinerary. To Bly's surprise, the attendant at the steamship company told her that he believed her competitor might arrive back to New York in less than the seventy-five days that Bly had projected were necessary to complete her itinerary. The other woman whom he referred to was Elizabeth Bisland, a reporter sent by *Cosmopolitan* in a race against Bly heading in the opposite direction, departing from San Francisco, having crossed the Pacific on the first leg of her journey. According to the man with whom Bly spoke, Bisland left from China for Ceylon three days earlier, gaining quite a lead on Bly. Upon hearing the news that she faced a competitor, Bly was taken aback; she was completely unaware that someone else had embarked on the same journey, leaving the same day she began her travels. In her account, she argues, "I am not racing

with anyone. I would not race. If someone else wants to do the trip in less time, that is their concern. If they take it upon themselves to race *against* me, it is their lookout that they succeed. I am not racing. I promised to do the trip in seventy-five days, and I will do it” (*Around* n. pag.). Rather than becoming dismayed, Bly resolved to continue with her journey, racing only against time and not paying any heed to another who might stand in her way. This spirit of tenacity defined Bly’s ethos, as she presented a persona of determination and fervor in her writing that would not be quashed.

Bly’s sponsorship with *The New York World* helped facilitate her travels. While she was in Hong Kong, she describes meeting with both the purser and the captain of the *Oceanic*, the next ship she would board to travel from China to Japan and on to San Francisco. On the day that she landed in Hong Kong, after she departed from the *Oriental*, the purser of the *Oceanic* met with her to say: “We want to take good care of you now that you are in our charge” (*Around* n. pag.). Captain Smith of the *Oceanic*, whom Bly described as a “youthful, good-looking man with the softest blue eyes that seemed to have caught a tinge of the ocean’s blue,” called upon her, and they spent her second day in Hong Kong sightseeing (*Around* n. pag.). Meetings of this type were not afforded to just any passenger; therefore, it seems probable to speculate that *The World* arranged these meetings to expedite Bly’s journey, allowing her to charm the men who would be responsible for her safe passage to San Francisco.

While in Hong Kong and possibly reflecting on time spent with Captain Smith, Bly argues that the East seems the place to find a husband:

At every port I touched I found so many bachelors, men of position, means and good appearance, that I naturally began to wonder why women do not flock that way. It was all very well some years ago to say, “Go West, young man”; but I

would say, "Girls, go East!" There are bachelors enough and to spare! And a most happy time do these bachelors have in the East. They are handsome, jolly and good natured. They have their own fine homes with no one but the servants to look after them. Think of it, and let me whisper, "Girls, go East!"

In jest, Bly beckons young, unmarried girls to come to Hong Kong, where men are available and plentiful, as she lauds Eastern men for their attractiveness and wealth. Based on her brief exposure to their culture, Bly's estimations of these men as likely husbands are meant to be humorous and entertaining for her readers. To be sure, the length of time that Bly spent in Hong Kong was not long enough for her to obtain factual evidence that these men proved more suitable for marriage than American men. By inviting young women to travel abroad to find a suitor, Bly makes a comedic appeal, laughable in its implausibility, but entertaining in its reinforcement of the independent spirit of the America woman. This lighthearted plea for young women to "go East" provides an example of how charming and humorous Bly's persona was for her audience who understood her wit, and who also recognized her allusion to the then-familiar words of Horace Greeley, the editor of *The New York Tribune*.

During her time in Hong Kong, Bly traveled to the nearby city of Canton, China. Bly visited the execution grounds in Canton. In her travel account, she details the methods of punishment used to put criminals to death: "It was an ordinary thing for ten to twenty criminals to be executed at one time. The average number per annum is something like 400. The guide also told us that in one year, 1855, over 50,000 rebels were beheaded in this narrow alley" (*Around n. pag.*). The guide tells Bly that women are "bound to wooden crosses and cut to pieces" and "men are beheaded with one stroke," and Bly recounts the gruesome tales of how criminals are dismembered and tortured. Touring an execution ground seems an unlikely point of interest for a



young woman, but Bly seemed fascinated by the bloody history of the place, sharing the account without the slightest restraint.

Returning from Canton to Hong Kong, Bly boarded the *Oceanic* to sail for Yokohama, Japan. Bly appreciated the accommodations of this ship, speaking most highly of its staff and services:

No expense is spared to make this ship comfortable for the passengers. The catering would be hard to excel by even a first-class hotel. Passengers are accorded every liberty, and the officers do their utmost to make their guests feel at home, so that in the Orient the *Oceanic* is the favorite ship, and people wait for months so as to travel on her. (*Around n. pag.*)

Bly's mention that the *Oceanic* is such a superior vessel that passengers are willing to "wait for months" before securing their passage causes readers to question how Bly was able to board the ship with such short notice. Although Bly's estimations of the ship may simply be hyperbolic, her ability to board with little delay speaks to the influence that Bly had as a reporter for *The World*, seeking to accomplish her stunt in record time. Before she even boarded the *Oceanic*, she had spent a day sightseeing in Hong Kong with Captain Smith, a man who duly impressed upon her the graciousness of the *Oceanic's* staff; thus, it seems that Bly's passage aboard the *Oceanic* was prearranged, as was her meeting with the captain.

In her text, Bly discloses few details concerning what she might have paid to get a berth on the *Oceanic* or what was paid to cover the actual total expense of her trip: "It is not possible to quote my fares and expenses as a criterion for prospective tourists, as I was traveling for a newspaper, and what it costs is their secret" (*Around n. pag.*). In describing the tactics of Elizabeth Bisland, her alleged competitor in the travel stunt, Bly reports that she was informed

that Bisland could “pay any amount to get ships to leave in advance of their time. Her editor offered one or two thousand dollars to the [Oriental and Occidental Steamship Company] if they would have the *Oceanic* leave San Francisco two days ahead of time” (*Around* n.pag.). It is quite plausible that Bly similarly used large sums of money to secure her accommodations, especially considering that she is hesitant to disclose the amount that the newspaper actually paid for her journey.

Bly enjoyed her stay in Japan, and in her travelogue, she compares the beauty and cleanliness of Japanese to what she viewed as the “ugliness and filth” of Chinese people:

The Japanese are the direct opposite to the Chinese. The Japanese are the cleanliest people on earth, the Chinese are the filthiest; the Japanese are always happy and cheerful, the Chinese are always grumpy and morose; the Japanese are the most graceful of people, the Chinese the most awkward; the Japanese have few vices, the Chinese have all the vices in the world; in short, the Japanese are the most delightful of people, the Chinese the most disagreeable. (*Around* n. pag.)

Bly’s disapproval of the Chinese may have been based on her impressions from visiting their country, but it may have also resulted from the xenophobic attitudes of Americans toward the Chinese at that time, attitudes that promoted the adoption of the Chinese Exclusion Act in America in 1882. Bly may have depicted the Chinese in an unfavorable light to mirror the prejudices that she knew her readership held, slanting her story to ensure a good read.

Bly spent five days in Japan before she departed for San Francisco aboard the *Oceanic*. The captain of the *Oceanic* assured her that the journey would be a swift one, but Bly experienced a few scares aboard the ship, such as a smallpox outbreak and the loss of the bill of health, a document needed to enter a port of call, attesting that the passengers aboard the ship

were free of contagious diseases. Bly's fears subsided when the small pox outbreak was determined to be a rumor, and the ship's doctor found the misplaced bill of health (*Around n. pag.*). Bly successfully returned to the United States, landing in San Francisco, in less time than she anticipated; and she boarded a special train to hurry her on her way to New Jersey, the place where she initially departed. Many onlookers came to numerous brief stops along her route to show their support: "They say no man or woman in America ever received ovations like those given me during my flying trip across the continent. The Americans turned out to do honor to an American girl who had been the first to make a record of a flying trip around the world, and I rejoiced with them that it was an American girl who had done it" (*Around n. pag.*). Returning to America, Bly embraced her persona as an American girl, prideful of her heritage and happy to return home.

The *World* capitalized on Bly's image as an American woman returning home. Furthermore, Bly's own response to press interviews from other newspapers bolstered this image, as she placed her confidence, hope, and pride in her American roots: "There is really not much for Americans to see in the foreign lands . . . We've got the best of everything here; we lack in nothing; then when you go over there you must be robbed, you get nothing fit to eat and you see nothing that America cannot improve upon wonderfully. There is a great deal more to see at home than abroad" (qtd. in Kroeger 168-69). As she neared New Jersey, the *World* published an excerpt written by their male staff to celebrate her return and define her as an "American woman":

Her grit has been more than masculine. Her perseverance has been more than rare Ben Jonson ever counselled or Philosopher Ben Franklin ever practiced. She is coming home to dear old America with the scalps of carpers and critics strung on

her slender girdle, and about her head a monster wreath of laurel and forget-me-nots, as a tribute to American pluck, American womanhood, and American perseverance. (qtd. in Kroeger 163)

In describing Bly's "grit" as being "more than masculine," the male reporter writing this piece defines her courage and strength as exceeding that of "masculine" enterprises. This assertion lauds Bly for her achievements and focuses on her femininity, a femininity that makes the daring-nature of her accomplishment all the more noteworthy. To be sure, in traveling around the world as a woman on her own, Bly achieved a greater feat than if a man without a companion had made the same journey. By depicting Bly as bearing "the scalps of carpers and critics strung on her slender girdle," the unnamed writer creates a vivid juxtaposition: the placement of scalps next to Bly's feminine waist. The depiction of scalps illustrates the trophies of war, proving that she succeeded in defeating her naysayers, and the image of her small waist displays a delicate female subjectivity that made her narratives all the more compelling. This startling contrast between the scalps and her waist exemplifies the crux of Bly's rhetorical ethos: that she wrote with a figurative strength to slay her competitors but through a delicate female presence that one would not think her capable of such feats.

Crowned as the victor with her laurel wreath, Bly achieved national fame because she epitomized the "American pluck, American womanhood, and American perseverance," an unlikely combination for a woman in 1890, but a combination that allowed Bly to achieve a place on the front-page as a female newspaper journalist. Bly returned to the New Jersey shore on January 25, 1890, completing her trip in only seventy-two days, six hours, eleven minutes, and fourteen seconds—three days less than she had anticipated—and managing to return before Elizabeth Bisland, who arrived four days later (Kroeger 172). Throughout her journey, Bly

averaged a remarkable speed, excluding stops, of 22.47 miles per hour. *The World* heralded that she “had broken every record for circumnavigation” (Kroeger 172).

By the time Bly wrote the account of her travels, she had already achieved near celebrity status, and her trip further solidified her national visibility. Her rhetorical ethos utilized in her travel writing was based not on a call for reform but on her ability to point out quickly-observed but interesting facets of life in other countries that enthralled her readers. Most of Bly’s commentary during her travels focuses on the peculiar customs of those people whom she encountered. She peppered her text with vivid descriptions of the landscapes, the food, or the interesting personalities with whom she came into contact. Whether she described seeing a play at the Parsee Theater in Colombo, Sri Lanka [then Ceylon], or viewing the execution grounds of Canton, China, Bly shared her surroundings with engrossing detail, allowing the reader to feel as if he or she traveled with Bly to faraway destinations. Keene and Adams argue that in *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days*, “[Bly’s] prose holds the reader close, as one might a trusted traveling companion, someone who is complicit in her slightly scandalous choices, traveling along with her to share her adventures and to learn from her criticisms of foreign and thus of domestic institutions” (15). Bly wrote with an eye for detail, providing a female perspective as an independent, adventurous American woman who accomplished a feat that successfully coupled speed with spectacle.

Bly successfully accomplished her travel stunt for the *New York World*, and Bly’s trip made her “the best known and most widely talked-of woman on earth” (qtd. in Kroeger 181). As “the best known woman,” she had generated increased revenue for both the newspaper and its advertisers, and felt that her editors should provide her with the recompense that she thought that

she deserved; however, Bly viewed her homecoming as “an unjust and galling insult” (Kroeger 185), and she left *The World* for reasons that she did not disclose to her reading public.

Her hasty departure caused her readers to question, Where is Nellie Bly? and it also spurred her colleagues to inquire why she had left. Bly answered this question in a confidential letter to Frank G. Carpenter, a friend and colleague, who worked as a travel writer and columnist in Washington. She consented to share with him the reason for her departure, but on the grounds that he strictly refrain from quoting her. Her reason for leaving *The World* was that she never received any acknowledgment of appreciation from her editors for all that she had done, nor did they offer her any salary increases or bonuses following her return. Although Joseph Pulitzer, the owner of *The World*, sent his congratulations for her success, Bly never received the gift from India that he said was also shipped in her honor. Bly no longer desired to work for a publication that offered her less than she figured she rightfully deserved (Kroeger 185-86).

After Bly’s departure from *The World*, she received a lucrative three-year contract to write fiction to be released in weekly installments in the *New York Family Story Paper*. N. L. Munro, her publisher, agreed to pay her a comfortable salary of \$10,000 for the first year and \$15,000 for each of the remaining two years of her contract (Kroeger 186). This income for Bly’s fiction contract was the same amount that Cockerill, Bly’s editor at *The World*, made as one of the top-earning editors in the nation (Kroeger 186). Bly wrote to her former colleague and confidant, Q. O. (Erasmus Wilson) in Pittsburgh, telling him that she swore never to return to journalism and that she wanted only to stay at home and become a novelist. During the three years that Munro contracted Bly to write for him, her presence in the public eye faded, and her hopes of becoming as well known for her fiction as she was for her reporting were ultimately dashed (Kroeger 188). According to Brooke Kroeger, “No copies of Munro’s *New York Family*

*Story Paper* for the period Bly was under contract are known to have survived, nor does any reference to the magazine [exist] during the time” (187). She possessed little ability or acumen as a novelist, and Munro possibly grew to regret his decision to employ Bly to write in a genre that was not her forte (Kroeger 186).

Although Bly had sworn never to return to journalism, her unsuccessful three-year stint as a novelist left her feeling depressed and unfulfilled. She longed for more. In September of 1893, *The New York World* appointed Morrill Goddard as the new editor of the Sunday edition, and Goddard’s first executive decision was to try to employ Bly as part of his staff. No longer under contract with Munro, Bly heartily welcomed this opportunity, but upon her return, she resolved that the negotiations for her employment be settled on her own terms and to her own advantage. Goddard agreed to appoint her as a columnist, the position she wanted, and she received an undisclosed salary that she deemed suitable for her talent (Kroeger 200).

On September 17, 1893, Bly’s provocative interview with alleged anarchist Emma Goldman marked Bly’s return, making its way to the front page with Bly’s name featured prominently in the headline, one that read: “Nellie Bly Again” (Kroeger 205). Even after her three-year hiatus from the newspaper, Bly and her longstanding reputation as a journalist still afforded her a place of prominence on the front page of *The World* (Kroeger 205). She continued writing for *The New York World* steadily for the next two years until her contract was renegotiated in January of 1895. Although the actual terms of this new contract remain unknown, Bly’s involvement with *The New York World* lessened as her articles began to appear with the tag line “Special to *The World*,” a description generally indicating the contribution of a reporter who was not employed as a member of the newspaper’s permanent staff (Kroeger 251).

By February of 1895, James W. Scott, owner of the *Times-Herald* of Chicago, presented Bly with an employment offer that she could not refuse. Other reporters insinuated that Scott had dismissed twelve members of his staff to be able to add Bly to his team. Bly began her brief five-week stint with the *Times-Herald* with an exposé of the Cook County Jail, and she ended her Chicago career soon thereafter with an investigation of Bridewell Prison. Her departure from the *Times-Herald* coincided with an unanticipated merger for Bly. On April 5, 1895, to everyone's surprise, Bly eloped. Staking her claim for a more stable life, she married Robert Livingston Seaman, a businessman from Catskill, New York, who reportedly had an estimated fortune of three million dollars. Seaman amassed his fortune as the owner of the Iron Clad Manufacturing Company, which specialized in the manufacturing of milk containers for rail transport. At the time of their marriage, Bly was a month shy of her thirty-first birthday, and Seaman was seventy (Kroeger 258, 264).

As news of Bly's nuptials spread, some thought that the elopement was yet another of Bly's stunts; however, allegations of a supposed stunt ultimately proved false, as the couple remained together for nine years until Seaman's death (Kroeger 302). During her marriage, Bly assumed operation of Seaman's Iron Clad Business. As its acting president, she took her responsibilities very seriously. In 1899, she overhauled Iron Clad operations, introducing more modern and efficient processes for production and devoting herself to eleven- to twelve-hour workdays at the Brooklyn plant. She prided herself on being able to operate all the machinery in the factory. She also invented several new devices to facilitate and improve productivity; in her lifetime, Bly had twenty-five patents in her name for her industrial inventions. By 1904, she is reported to have quadrupled the company's business, erasing their debt of over \$300,000,



increasing their sales to \$1 million, and producing an annual profit for the company of \$200,000 (Kroeger 306).

With productivity at an all-time high for Iron Clad, Bly lost her husband to heart disease on March 11, 1904 (Kroeger 302). After her husband's death, Bly succeeded for a time at managing Iron Clad, and she also opened another company, the American Steel Barrel Company. The steel barrels were Bly's own invention for which she held the patent, and she seemed to enjoy the responsibilities of being a businesswoman in charge of two then-thriving companies (Kroeger 308). By 1909, Bly's confidence in the financial management of her two companies began to wane, and she questioned Edward R. Gilman, the Iron's Clad general manager, concerning the state of the ledgers. He skirted her questions, reporting that Iron Clad had accrued some debts (Kroeger 319).

Bly had a mind for improving the product, but not for handling the finances. Bly's apparent trust in Gilman proved misguided (Kroeger 323). Bly had been bamboozled; Gilman and two accountants swindled nearly \$1.6 million dollars from Iron Clad (Kroeger 331, 336). She admitted, "I cannot blame myself enough for not having learned banking methods and commercial accounting when I first went into the Iron Clad" (qtd. in Kroeger 329). If Bly had been more knowledgeable and involved in the financial operations of Iron Clad, then maybe the company's bankruptcy could have been avoided.

Although she had lost the Iron Clad Manufacturing Business to bankruptcy, Bly still held onto a hope for the financial viability of the American Steel Barrel Company. Bly left for Vienna in August of 1914 to seek the assistance of Oscar Bondy, her wealthy Austrian friend, and to discuss how he might support her in financing her steel barrel business (Kroeger 385-86). Prior to her departure on July 28, 1914, Austria declared war on Serbia, and Germany invaded

Belgium and Luxembourg. Although her reason for traveling to Vienna was primarily to secure financial assistance, Bly's motivations soon changed, as she was quickly led back to writing. Bly found herself longing to be a war correspondent, as she grew less worried about her affairs with the barrel company and more confident in her ability to gain access to the war front (Kroeger 385, 393).

Bly's resourcefulness as a writer was again evinced in her ability to secure contacts that allowed her to gain access to the war front. While Bly stayed at the Hotel Bristol in Vienna, she used the Hotel Imperial as her permanent address because the Imperial housed "anyone who was anyone" (Kroeger 393). While retrieving her mail from the Hotel Imperial, Bly astutely introduced herself to all those of importance with whom she came in contact in Austria. Moreover, her ability to forge connections with others in power proved instrumental in allowing her to be not only one of the first foreigners to visit the war front, but also one of the first women to do so (Kroeger 393). These influential people whom Bly met included Princess Alexandrine von Windischgrätz and Baron Franz von Schönauich, who both agreed to put in a good word for her with Leopold Graf Berchtold, the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister (Kroeger 393-94).

Bly's fifteen-year acquaintance with Frederic C. Penfield, the U.S. ambassador to Austria, also greatly increased her prospects of becoming a war correspondent. Bly used this connection to her advantage by persuading Penfield to assist her in gaining access to the front. Penfield, who thought highly of Bly, agreed to write a letter on her behalf to Ritter Oskar von Montlong, the head of the press department of the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry. When Bly arrived at Penfield's office to retrieve the letter, he graciously provided her with the following words of encouragement and admonition: "You must promise me personally that you will remain what you have been all along: an advocate of truth, an apostle of justice and, last but

not least, you must never forget that you are an American” (qtd. in Kroeger 394). She appreciated his candor and advice, and in her actions and writing, Bly held her allegiance to America while demonstrating an adoring appreciation for Austrian people and culture.

Bly succeeded in obtaining the necessary authorizations and arrangements to travel to the Kriegspressequartier, the military press headquarters for the Austro-Hungarian army. On October 22, 1914, Bly, along with three other foreign correspondents, gained permission from the Austrian foreign ministry to travel to the war zone. One of the journalists was American William G. Shepherd, and the other two were men working for Italian publications. After leaving the press office, Bly headed to the firing line that divided the Austrian forces from the Russians. She then departed for the Austro-Hungarian front where fighting ensued against Serbia (Kroeger 395-96).

Bly sent her war reports to the *New York Evening Journal*, which published them under the heading “Nellie Bly on the Firing Line.” After spending one month on the front, Bly provided enough copy for the *Journal* to release her accounts in twenty-one installments, printed every three or four days for over two and a half months. Her descriptions of the Eastern Front were unlike anything else in the newspapers, and although the articles were released usually months after she had written the accounts, the newspaper “seemed delighted to be printing almost every word she wrote” (Kroeger 397).

Bly’s persona as a war correspondent illustrated her consistent ability to balance confidence, candor, and consciousness. Her ability to secure permission from the Austrian foreign ministry to report from the war illustrates her resourcefulness, and her war coverage further exemplifies Bly’s drive as a fearless female “willing to endure anything for the sake of the adventure and the chance to tell about it” (Kroeger 398). Bly’s war correspondence did not,

however, provide a holistic view of war coverage; rather her accounts offered intimate glimpses of human stories alongside her personal reactions to those things that she witnessed. In her reports, Bly vividly details the devastation of war, such as when she recounts her observations from the bedside of a dying Russian soldier. After being wounded in battle and spending eight days in an otherwise abandoned trench, he was brought to a Red Cross hospital in Budapest.

Bly illustrates the peril of his situation:

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 search mine. They tried to question me. They spoke soul language to soul. The lips parted, a moan, a groan or more than physical agony. He spoke. I could not understand. His words were a sound my ears shall never forget. The appeal, the longing, the knowledge!

“What does he say?” I cried, unable to stand it. “Can no one understand? Can’t you find some one [sic] to speak to him?”

A nurse smoothed his forehead. An attendant held fast the pale, pale hands.

“The attendant understands,” the doctor said; and to him, “What does he say?”

“He is asking for his children,” was the low reply.

The hollow, black eyes turned again to search mine. I could not endure their question. I had no answer to give.

“Let me go,” I said to the doctor.

The low moan seemed to call me back, but I walked steadfastly toward the door and down the corridor.

“Could Emperors and Czars and Kings look on this torturing slaughter and ever sleep again? I asked the doctor.

“They do not look,” he said gently. (qtd. in Kroeger 406-07)

Although Bly’s allegiance and sympathies were to the Austrians, this Russian man, as he breathed his last, affected Bly in a way that she was not soon to forget. Through his painful groans, the man called for his children, but Bly could no longer face him when she realized that his dying wish to see his family could not be granted. Bly’s ability to capture the fragility of human life in moments like this, the touching episode of a father longing only to be near his children while taking his final breaths, drew her readers with a heart-felt sympathy for the casualties of war. Bly’s war reports illustrated a compassion for humanity that touched her readers as well.

Bly also wrote about the treatment and responsibilities of the Austro-Hungarian women during the war: “Grand duchesses scrub the floors and perform the most menial of services for the injured soldiers . . . . Peasant women, unsolicited, bring their last pillow as well as their only pillow. . . . Women are standing shoulder to shoulder with [men], dry-eyed and brave. There can never again in this land be any question as to the equality of women” (qtd. in Kroeger 408). Bly lauded the women for their exemplary service to the military men, and she also noted that the men “appreciate” all the efforts that the women partake in, treating them with equality and respect. Bly’s commentary provides a picture of Austrian men and women working side-by-side, both carrying the burden of war with equal grace and strength, and she posits that the perils of war have promoted equality in respect to how women are treated.

In November 1914, Bly recounted her experience at the hospitals in Budapest:

I enter a ward where some 40 men with horrible wounds hover between life and death. In the two end beds are two gypsies. There is only one face between them. Each has half a face blown off by shrapnel. They cannot speak. They can only grunt and make signs. Out of the bandages peer their black bulging eyes, half of a disfigured nose and an upper distorted lip. By signs each conveys the information to the nurses that the looks of the other disgusts him. When they grunt too energetically, great chunks of blood gush from their mouths.

And yet when some one brought a fiddle into the ward, the one grabbed it as if it were heaven. He played wild sweet refrains until the one beside him snatched it away to play a wilder, sweeter one. And all faces not hidden by bandages beamed and glowed. For the moment, the voice of the violin had stolen their pain away.

(qtd. in Kroeger 410)

Bly's narrative illustrates a scene that a typical war correspondent would not necessarily have written about: two disfigured and near lifeless men silencing a crowd with their violin playing. However, Bly's ability to choose just the right word, to select the most appropriate phrase, provides this story and these characters with a touching moment of transcendence that overshadows the grotesque and highlights the beauty of the narrative. In giving the violin the voice that they no longer have, these men articulate their own hope in spite of their difficulties. Bly beautifully characterizes the violin as the voice capable of stealing away their pain and illuminating their faces with joy. In the midst of war's intense horrors, Bly captivates her readership with this enthralling story. Just as the violin brings joy to these men in their dire conditions, Bly's text ushers her readers to a place of understanding, as she juxtaposes the welcome sound of the violin to the unwelcome ravages of the war.

The United States officially remained neutral in the war conflict until April 6, 1917. Because Bly did not have access to news from the opposing forces, she was at first ignorant that America supported the Allied Powers (Kroeger 416, 426). When American forces joined in the war effort, Bly was “the American darling of the Austrian regime” (Kroeger 427). Although America’s entry into the war changed Bly’s status in Austria to “enemy alien,” it did not prove to be a source of adversity for her. Her resourcefulness in securing relationships with the most powerful in Austria made her practically immune from potential dangers that being an alien might have caused. She felt safe and expressed no desire to leave Austria to return to America, but as an enemy alien, Bly was most likely forbidden to report on the war. In any case, she no longer filed reports back to New York because she was not allowed to write from behind enemy lines (Kroeger 427).

Bly’s war coverage antedated the war reports of other American female war correspondents such as Peggy Hull, who began writing about the war once America became involved in 1917. Bly’s reports influenced numerous war journalists, as she was the first female to have access to the Austro-Hungarian front. Bly sharpened her ability to describe events with engaging detail and engrossing sympathy. After the United States entered the war, Bly shifted her interests, however, from war coverage to philanthropic duty, as she sought to help Austria ease the human burdens that the war created. Philanthropic duty remained her major focus for the remaining years of her life.

Bly’s madhouse exposé, her travelogue, and her war coverage illustrate her versatility and resourcefulness as a writer. Bly gained access to the asylum by successfully feigning insanity, investigating within its walls to accomplish reform. She traveled to faraway destinations for a newspaper stunt, completing her race against the clock in less time than she

initially thought possible. To report on the front lines of World War I, she convinced Austrian leaders to allow her, as an American woman, to go to their own war front, as she willingly endangered her own life to inform her readers of the realities of war. Bly's passion for the topics that she covered enlivened her prose and motivated her purpose. Although Bly employed a different rhetorical purpose in each of these three texts, Bly's rhetorical ethos consistently presented her as a competent, charismatic, and confident correspondent. Once she determined that she wanted to cover a story, she persuaded those who thought it impossible that she could accomplish anything that she set her mind to do. Her success as a reformer, reporter, and rhetorician is a tribute to her achievement, an achievement that merits display, the final step to Richard Leo Enos' model of rhetorical sequencing.



## CHAPTER FIVE / CONCLUSION:

### DISPLAYING HER STORY

While touring the Greek and Roman Antiquities section of the British Museum, Richard Enos noticed two water jugs or *hydriai* and a small terra cotta statue that similarly depicted Athenian women reading from scrolls. These artifacts perplexed Enos who, as a researcher of Hellenic rhetoric, understood that the women of the fifth-century B.C. were “essentially illiterate” (66). The information contained on these relics presented a seeming paradox between the known history of women’s rhetorical practices and the unquestionable evidence present on these pieces of pottery. Surely the crafters of the fifth-century B.C. vases featured these women reading not as an anomaly, but rather as a focal point to provide a glimpse into typical Athenian culture. This display of information did not agree with history, as Enos knew it; thus, Enos questioned the accuracy, not of the artists’ portrayal of these women on the artifacts, but of the recording of the history of Hellenic rhetoric itself (66).

Upon making this discovery, Enos argues, “These small bits of archaeological evidence . . . unmistakably counter our stereotypes of ancient women and they should be taken as a prompt that signals us that not only is our history of rhetoric constrained . . . but that our mentality toward the history of rhetoric itself is in need of revision” (66).

By following the steps of Enos' rhetorical sequencing in the preceding chapters, I have sought to revise the history of Nellie Bly's contribution to rhetoric by discovering her story, reconstructing her history, and analyzing her contribution. In this chapter, I will conclude the steps of Enos' heuristic by displaying her achievements.

When an object is displayed, numerous people can view it. The object gains an audience, and with this acknowledgement of an audience, the object achieves greater permanence. The display that Enos viewed in the British Museum sheds light on a past that had long been forgotten or largely ignored: Athenian women were engaged in literate practices, but history erased this knowledge, replacing it with the erroneous concept that Athenian women of classical rhetorical traditions were illiterate. Similarly, history has forgotten Nellie Bly, and my purpose now is to display her work so that an audience can gain a greater understanding of a woman who disrupted contemporary gender conventions by placing herself in the public arena with her writing.

As I have already mentioned, in Richard Enos' methodology of rhetorical sequencing, the act of display is the final step in investigating a previously neglected subject. Enos casts the act of display as "present[ing] our research in such a manner that we 'display' our work for all to see and display it in a way that best explains its value and significance to the public" (75). Moreover, Enos defines display as the process by which "results are presented in a manner by which we 'exhibit' our artifact in a reconstructed context that will help readers grasp the utterance at the moment of *kairos*, much as we do at a museum" (75). Bly's work gains value and significance through its display in this chapter, as it would in a museum, through an audience being able to view and appreciate her contributions to rhetoric.

To display Bly's contributions to the field of rhetoric and composition, I have in previous chapters considered the reasons why women's Progressive Era texts are mostly absent from discussions in rhetoric and composition, although this period and the writing/rhetorical modes of the period spurred such activism as the campaigns for women's suffrage and other movements of civic reform. I have addressed why Nellie Bly has not been mentioned alongside Progressive Era reformers such as Jane Addams and Ida B. Wells, and I have discussed how the recovery of Nellie Bly's texts adds to the female rhetorical tradition, and therefore adds to *all* rhetorical tradition.

This chapter completes the rhetorical sequencing task of making Bly's work relevant and applicable to a present-day audience by defending her position in the history of rhetorical practices. Here I delineate how Bly's contributions to rhetoric encouraged women's empowerment as writers and particularly as journalists. I review how her writing broke down barriers and opened up opportunities of rhetorical inquiry formerly considered inaccessible to women. I display Bly's legacy as "The Best Reporter in America," and describe how through Bly's efforts more women have found voice and empowerment to negotiate rhetorical practices and rhetorical spaces once denied to them. I conclude with possibilities for my further research.

Although the Progressive Era was a period rich with writings that spurred such activism as women's suffrage and other movements of civic reform, research of this period does not reach the level of critical inquiry that it deserves. The reason for this neglect is that many of the extant, primary texts have possibly not been—to use Richard Enos's term—discovered, or have not been considered worthy of analysis, especially those texts written by women. My project has sought to recover the work of Nellie Bly, but the works of numerous other female journalists that defined this period with their rhetorical contributions remain to be analyzed.

Rhetorical history is being revised to account for these omissions or deletions, but I would argue that the Progressive Era still remains a vast field of rhetorical inquiry, just waiting to be unearthed. With a burgeoning atmosphere of reform and the unprecedented growth of literate practices of women, the Progressive Era defines a moment in our nation's history that reflects the power of rhetorical momentum. During the Progressive Era, women wrote more than ever before, and their words held greater power and significance. They gained a voice as contributors to the public sphere; and they initiated change, becoming participants in rhetorical activities, rather than just witnesses to them.

The Progressive Era was a time of activism for women. Their engagement in civic reform produced an atmosphere in which women challenged issues relevant to the home and to family life. According to Nancy S. Dye, co-editor of and contributor to the text *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era*, the Progressive Era atmosphere of reform piqued the interests of women seeking to initiate change:

Most of the laws that comprised women's legislative agenda were measures intended to improve the lives of women and children: minimum wage and maximum hour states, mother's pensions, juvenile justice codes, the prohibition of child labor and industrial homework, and compulsory school attendance. (2)

These issues became applicable to the public domain as women sought to enact reform efforts that functioned in the Progressive Era as the foundation for the American welfare system (Dye 2), and these efforts illustrate the atmosphere of reform that Bly negotiated and campaigned for in her writings.

Through the efforts of women's clubs, founded during the late nineteenth century, and other activist groups for women rights, women earned the right to vote in 1920, as the

Progressive Era came to a close. Reformers such as Jane Addams and Ida B. Wells became well known for their personal campaigns. Jane Addams developed settlement houses, and Ida B. Wells engaged in anti-lynching campaigns. Both of these women have similarly gained interest from scholars, an interest that until the present study has not been garnered for Nellie Bly's work.

### **Defending Bly's Work: Displaying Her Contribution**

Bly may have not generated the interest among scholars that Addams and Wells have, but during her career as a newspaper reporter, Bly's work inspired a following of female journalists who wanted to capitalize on her successes by becoming stunt reporters themselves. After Bly's madhouse exposé, *The New York World* encouraged Fannie B. Merrill to engage in the type of investigative, undercover reporting that Bly had inaugurated; Merrill, once a struggling reporter in Boston, began to take on duties similar to those assigned to Bly at the *New York World*. Merrill went to do undercover work at cigarette factories, rolling tobacco, but she recounted her report from a third-person perspective that, unfortunately, lessened the investigative slant that made Bly's first-person reports so engaging. Although Merrill had been on staff at the *World* longer than Bly, the headlines of her story were not accompanied with her name, as were Bly's articles (Kroeger 101-02).

Fannie B. Merrill was not the only female reporter to follow in Bly's footsteps. Another was Viola Roseboro, a writer whose rhetoric seemed largely shaped by Bly's influence. Roseboro's name, however, was placed at the end of her newspaper reports. In her first stunt investigation, Roseboro presented her story in a way similar to Bly's approach: "I went begging. I don't mean I got contributions to buy red flannels for the wild Africans, or sold tickets for a

benefit to be given in aid of the widows and orphans of deceased messenger boys, but that I went begging on the street in rags” (qtd. in Kroeger 102).

Joseph Pulitzer, the owner of *The New York World*, had a reputation for intentionally pitting talent against talent. Based on the popularity of Bly’s reports, Pulitzer determined that having more female investigative journalists on his staff could only further increase his sales. In encouraging women like Merrill and Roseboro to write in a manner similar to Bly’s approach, Pulitzer argued that he was not intentionally creating competition among his staff (which was the obvious result), but that he was rather inciting each journalist to work harder, doing her own best, for the benefit of the newspaper (Kroeger 105). Pulitzer added another woman to his staff shortly thereafter; she was Nell Nelson, who began her reports for *The New York World* by going undercover as a workingwoman, utilizing the approach that “was already the Bly tradition” (Kroeger 120).

Bly’s success as a female investigative reporter created an atmosphere in which newspaper editors viewed women writers as sought-after additions to their staffs, rather than expendable appendages. By the 1880s some newspaperwomen had made names for themselves, like Bessie Bramble in Pittsburgh and Middy Morgan in New York City, who covered livestock trade for *The New York Times*. But by the 1890s, the investigative work of the stunt girl reporter secured the first separate space for women as permanent fixtures of newspaper staffs (Kroeger 127). Brooke Kroeger describes the duties, skills, and exceptionality of the newspaper’s female stunt reporters:

Unlike the duties women had generally been asked to perform on newspapers, stunts did not appear on women’s pages. They also required daring, resourcefulness, a strong news sense, quick turnaround, and cunning—all

qualities of any good reporter. The work was often strong enough, as Bly had proved, to be lifted out of the feature sections and onto the front pages, providing women with their first collective opportunity to show editors they could perform with the brains, dedication, and selfless abandon of the most able men. Stunt girls, with Bly as the genre's leader, formed the human chute down which the next generation of women reporters plunged into journalism's mainstream. There would be issues and discriminations for years to come, but at least the way in had finally been opened. (Kroeger 127)

Bly opened this door to provide a way in, allowing so many other women to find easier entry. By proving that a woman could handle the news just as competently as a man, she successfully negotiated and removed barriers for other female correspondents. Her achievements made newspaper reporting more accessible to female reporters, specifically for those women who wanted to cover more than just the women's interest news. Bly's pluck, determination, attention to detail, resourcefulness, and versatility were all a tribute to her great skill as a reporter and rhetorician. She influenced and entertained her audience and her colleagues with her reform efforts, her stunts, and her war reports, as she paved the way for other female war correspondents such as Peggy Hull. Her words continued to incite reform even in her latter years, and she remained involved in humanitarian efforts, reporting to secure families for orphaned children.

When Nellie Bly died in 1922 at the age of 57, *The New York Evening Journal* described her as "the best reporter in America" in her obituary. What is particularly compelling concerning this description is that it defines Bly not as the best *female* writer or the best investigative reporter, but as the best reporter. The assertion describes Bly's achievement as the best writer of the news, as one who enriched her craft through her writing, her determination, and her life. By

becoming “the best,” Bly negotiated rhetorical spaces that were formerly inaccessible to women, and she fulfilled her maxim: “Energy rightly applied can accomplish anything” (qtd. in Kroeger 85). She had accomplished much in her life, and the newspapers again illustrated her exceptionalism.

### **Thoughts on Further Research**

Writing a dissertation is a project that opens up many additional avenues of research. Focusing my interest on Nellie Bly has been an engaging opportunity for me, and her life and writing bears so much more mention than I was able to cover within the span of these pages. For future study, I would like to develop this manuscript into a book which illustrates a more comprehensive survey of Bly’s writings. In this study, I have considered three of her most representative texts: the madhouse exposé, the travelogue covering her around-the-world journey, and her war correspondence. Bly’s body of writings, however, is much more extensive and expansive. As a reporter, she accomplished many additional investigative, daring stunts; she interviewed numerous celebrities, politicians, and criminals; and she ended her career with philanthropic pieces that communicated her desire to further humanitarian efforts. For a book-length project, I would consider more of her texts to provide a more holistic view of her writing.

In addition to including an analytical consideration of more of Bly’s texts, I would also like to provide more insights into how Bly specifically used her gender and sex appeal as a rhetorical device. I have alluded in this dissertation to how Bly’s attractiveness gained her the attention and approval of men, but I would like to expound upon that topic by paying more particular attention to how Bly positioned herself as a female, honing her rhetorical ethos with her gender and sex appeal in mind. I would like to consider more specifically what advantages her beauty and intelligence might have afforded her, and how Bly may have revealed any such



advantages in her writings. This approach merits an investigation not only of Bly's writing but also, as suggested by Keene and Adams, those images of her that often accompanied her articles that were available to her audience.

For future research, I would also like to explore the connection between Bly's writing and her life. When she wrote she literally put herself on the line, and many of her experiences as a writer intrinsically informed the way she conceptualized her society and the way she lived her life. She absorbed herself so completely into her work that at times it became synonymous with her identity. Arguably, "Pink" Elizabeth Jane Cochran was not the identity that she acted out in the newspaper pages or in the remaining years of her life after she achieved fame. Then she was Nellie Bly, the reformer and humanitarian reporter. I would like to trace how Bly's writing offered her a means to renegotiate her identity in ways that both confirmed and complicated her gender role as a woman writing in the Progressive Era.

I would also like to consider the work of Bly's other female contemporaries by analyzing their writings as well. By looking more specifically at the work of Nell Nelson, Viola Roseboro, Fannie B. Merrill, and Peggy Hull, I would like to trace how their reports may have been shaped by Bly's influence as their predecessor. By comparing and contrasting their pieces, I can further illustrate that Bly's texts motivated and encouraged others to produce a similar rhetorical style.

The present project has only further fueled my interest in Nellie Bly as reporter, reformer, and revolutionary woman. Because she pioneered an approach to journalism that made a way for numerous women, Nellie Bly deserves more attention for the lasting legacy that she left as "The Best Reporter in America." Her rhetorical achievements allowed other women to engage in rhetorical practices once denied them, and her inclusion within the history of rhetoric is merited. Bly herself would expect no less.

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