

Literacy as Independence: The Writings of Hattie Reynolds, 1870–1927

Sarah Ashlock

University of Missouri, Kansas City

By examining the writings of Hattie Reynolds, this analysis seeks to demonstrate the rhetorical strategies she used to situate herself outside of the nineteenth-century private sphere. Such strategies allowed Reynolds to take unusual paths for a woman and prove that her writing and life offer significant contributions to women's rhetoric.

First: We the above-named, being at the ages of eighteen, and nineteen, capable to act for ourselves, after due deliberation, and consideration on the subject, do solemnly promise, and declare the one to the other that we have concluded to be . . . what the world calls "Old Maids."

So writes Harriet (Hattie) Reynolds at the age of eighteen in 1870, in a document she and her friend Emily Yellott composed titled "Old Maids Contract." Reynolds rejected the expectations of her relatively affluent Maryland upbringing and defied the tradition of marriage and family, instead choosing to focus on a career. Reynolds used "legal" writing and rhetoric in the form of a contract to announce her independence and denounce a life of convention, foreshadowing a fulfilling career in a male-dominated field. Reynolds saw two irreconcilable paths to choose from in her future: marriage and children or education and career. With strong fervor and formality, Hattie Reynolds chose the latter.

The "Old Maids Contract" is two pages long and divided into three parts—an explanation of who the girls are, why they decided to declare their intentions not to marry, and what consequences there would be if they strayed from their vow. Reynolds and Yellott both signed the document, and it was signed by a witness as well. There is no information regarding Yellott's later life, but Reynolds went on to become Maryland's first female game warden and continued to write publicly, submitting texts regarding her work to a Baltimore, Maryland newspaper, the *Sun*.

Reynolds's "Old Maids Contract," biographical information, and her written texts are held in the Weems-Reynolds Family Papers at the University of Maryland. The collection is not available online, although is described in detail there. It includes archival documents from both the Weems and Reynolds families, spanning the years 1713 to 1940. With the help of Elizabeth A. Novara, the curator of historical manuscripts at the University of Maryland's Hornbake Library, I was able to obtain photocopies of the contract and Reynolds's diary, written at age eighteen and younger. With the support of a research grant, I analyzed Reynolds's writing in accordance with the methodologies articulated in *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*, edited by Gesa E. Kirsch and Liz Rohan, and *Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition*, edited by Alexis E. Ramsey, Wendy B. Sharer, Barbara L'Eplattenier, and Lisa S. Mastrangelo.

For the purposes of this essay, I will most focus on Reynolds's "Old Maids Contract." I will draw on Reynolds's other writings, though, as a way to substantiate the significance of the contract. These supplemental texts will include her diary, written around the same time as the contract, personal letters, published letters to the editor, and published articles, all written after the contract. In addition, texts written about Reynolds will be used to provide a more thorough perspective on Reynolds's choice to remain single and pursue a male-dominated career. These archival and secondary materials support my overall claim that Hattie Reynolds used writing rhetorically to facilitate a life of independence apart from typical nineteenth-century culture. The "Old Maids Contract" specifically afforded Reynolds an opportunity to articulate her way outside of the private sphere. By writing herself into public independence, Reynolds not only adds to but also expands what is traditionally accepted as nineteenth-century women's rhetoric.

Opening the Parlor Doors: Contracts and Gendered Rhetoric

Reynolds's contract can be seen as a momentous text that *says* and *does* something. On a closer assessment of each word she chooses, it becomes apparent that Reynolds develops specific rhetorical strategies to make her case. The "Old Maids Contract" is creative and inventive yet uses ceremonial language. After reviewing Reynolds's vocational choice, the document increases in its significance as a declaration by her use of formal speech. This text contrasts greatly with "parlor rhetoric"—particular rhetorical strategies acceptable for women to use during this time period—because its purpose was not to further femininity. Nan Johnson describes parlor rhetoric as conflicting and limiting:

The obvious good achieved by the successful promotion of rhetorical training to the general public in the postbellum period and the late decades of the century is complicated by a tension in parlor pedagogies between egalitarian education and ideological conservatism that plays a dominant role generally in nineteenth-century discourses about gender and rhetorical performance. Although parlor rhetorics ostensibly promised each and every American the opportunity to speak and write more impressively, that promise was ideologically inseparable from an accompanying agenda about gender that limited how rhetorical opportunities were defined and reiterated the normative view that women had no use for training in the more culturally powerful forms of rhetorical performance. (21)

Parlor rhetoric, then, can be seen as positive in that it did provide some rhetorical training to women, who had traditionally been left out of the history of rhetoric, however minimal that training may have been. Additionally, Johnson notes evidence of the intended use of gendered rhetoric:

The assumption that rhetorical training for women should support the development of femininity reveals itself rather obviously in the prefaces to antebellum rhetoric manuals designed for use in female academies and colleges in which authors frequently emphasize the fact that only certain material is suited for the refined delicacy of the tender sex. (24)

Reynolds's rhetorical intentions in the "Old Maids Contract" are neither delicate nor feminine. Her objective was to place herself away from the intended gendered bubble and write for purpose rather than girlish entertainment.

Texts in the mid-nineteenth century suggest the very different roles each gender should take within the realms of writing. For instance, an anonymous 1847 guide to letter writing, *American Lady's and Gentleman's Modern Letter Writer: Relative to Business, Duty, Love, and Marriage*, specifies clear differences between the genders, most notably concerning public/private spheres. Men's public documents included serious topics about "finance and debt," whereas the most public a female could get is with "employing servants or dealing with tradespeople" (67). Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen also study the subject matter typical to female letter writing in their book *Imagining Rhetoric: Composing Women of the Early United States*. They note that the typical topics suggested by manuals were "calculated for a variety of likely occasions and 'concerns of life'" (56). Such occasions and concerns of life could be explained by the concept of parlor rhetoric—this idea that "women's issues" were important in the realm of a parlor—that is, a domestic and private atmosphere. Reynolds diverges from typical parlor rhetoric and gendered writing by creating the contract, and her method can be addressed in three ways: language, revision, and observing witness.

Of first importance in her method is the writing itself. Although there is no record of Reynolds writing any other contracts, it is apparent she had read contracts and understood the necessity of formal language to get one's message across. The formality unquestionably contrasts with the type of language a nineteenth-century woman centered in her home would need to employ. Through the use of such formality, the tone of the writing takes on increased seriousness. Her formality is demonstrated with the use of transitional words such as "secondly" and "thirdly." The contract also includes the date, written out in exact form: "The 9th day of the month September of the year eighteen hundred and seventy. 9th September 1870." This formality contrasts distinctly with her diary, where she simply writes the month and the day: "March 13." Following the date, Reynolds immediately presents the contract as a significant proclamation: "To all whom it may concern! Be it known that Harriet Reynolds, and Emily Yellott of the county of Maryland, being in sound state of mind & memory . . ." The language is distinctly legal and declarative; she maintains her formal style of writing by authenticating the subjects' location and verifying their mental fitness, thus establishing credibility.

The most formal contract language starts with the second section's beginning, "We the above-named Harriet and Emily do solemnly promise and vow . . ." The third section begins almost identically to the second, whereas the first section, as noted earlier, extends the formality, "We the above-named, being at the ages of eighteen, and nineteen, capable to act for ourselves, after due deliberation, and consideration on the subject, do solemnly promise, and declare the one to the other that we have concluded to be . . . what the world calls 'Old Maids.'" Reynolds deliberately includes words like "vow," "promise," and "declare." By doing so, she creates a more concrete and sincere message. The language also becomes reminiscent of matrimony, especially with the word "vow." Whether she was playing with this concept is unknown, but certainly her desire was to create a legal document equally if not more contractually important than a wedding license or marriage ceremony. She also utilizes the effective rhetorical tactic of anaphora by repeating an identical phrasing as an introduction in each divided section, adding emphasis by using words as a declarative chant.

The second piece of evidence that backs the significance of this text to a study of women's rhetoric in the nineteenth century is revision, or the time spent on developing the written words on paper. Included with the formal "Old Maids Contract" in perfect penmanship is a rough draft

version. The rough draft is sloppy and almost impossible to read. The words are large and vary in ink consistency. We can assume Reynolds and her friend Yellott thought the text was incredibly important because they chose to rewrite it in delicate and clear penmanship. The ink and pen demonstrated on the second draft is even more precise, calculated, and clear than the way Reynolds writes in her diary. Judging by Reynolds's careful touch in the final draft, it can be presumed this document was intended to be more public than the first draft and even more open than her semi-public diary.

Molly McCarthy points out that nineteenth-century diaries “had a ‘semi-public’ status” and “might lie unprotected on a desk or dresser for anyone to browse through” (277, 282). Since an audience could have read a young girl's diary, readable penmanship was preferred. That the careless writing in the first draft was followed by the deliberate clarity in the second creates the “Old Maids Contract” as a public document, similar to what a young woman's diary was expected to be. Reynolds's decision to follow the first draft, slanted and sloppy, with a second draft boasting perfect penmanship helps signify the document's public purpose.

The last area that proves the document's importance is the very clear signature of the witness, Helen Dunnington. Dunnington eventually married Reynolds's brother Edward. The date of Edward and Helen's marriage is unknown, but Dunnington signed the contract with her maiden name. It is apparent that Dunnington actually signed the document, because her signature varies significantly from Reynolds's and Yellott's. Her witness signature increased the contract's validity a great deal since contracts without a witness signature can be interpreted as forged or false. Incorporating a witness also solidified Reynolds's intention that the “Old Maids Contract” be a public and formal document.

In writing the “Old Maids Contract,” Reynolds expanded her rhetorical performance outside of the designated parlor atmosphere, subverting the accepted tradition of white male public rhetoric. She continued to defy codes of gendered writing beyond the “Old Maids Contract”: her writing in a camel-colored, leather pocket diary between 1870 and 1873 gives a glimpse into her romantically smitten thoughts and her admiration of animals; she composed numerous letters to cousins and friends about intellectual topics such as her political opinions and travel adventures; she published a few poems about nature; and she wrote dozens of letters depicting her professional knowledge of wildlife to the editor of the *Sun*. While young nineteenth-century women were expected to write about their relationships with family and friends or the domestic space they occupied, Reynolds focused on masculine topics such as her career, law, politics, and conservation.

Independence in the Midst of Romantic Inclination

Reynolds's reason for writing such an unusual document as the “Old Maids Contract” can be interpreted in two complementary ways. The first explanation is the most obvious: she did not want to be a wife. In the contract she writes about her disdain for wifehood. She clarifies one of the reasons she and Emily chose the Old Maid lifestyle by “remembering the unhappy consequences of marriage.” The reader can conjecture that she had some kind of close contact with marital unhappiness—perhaps fighting parents or a depressed female relative unable to fulfill her independent dreams. Regardless of her personal experiences, Reynolds clearly made a stance to live her life happily and independently. Although the family archives do not include writings by Reynolds's parents, if we assume that they wished to secure her future through traditional mar-

riage, the contract could signify her formal rebellion not only against the social traditions of her era but against her own parents' plans for her life.

Like Johnson's analysis of parlor rhetoric, Daniel Scott Smith's article "Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America" explores theories of womanhood current in this time period, such as domestic feminism. He states that the theory "was a nineteenth-century creation. . . . domestic feminism viewed woman as a person in the context of relationships with others" (53). These relationships were especially esteemed within the family—particularly the family the woman would create with a husband, and of course relationships with other women in a parlor setting. Although Reynolds created the contract with her friend Emily, she certainly formulated the idea with the goal of ambitious and successful autonomy rather than defining her life through attendant roles and relationships.

Although the contract could indicate that Reynolds was an unromantic girl or one not attracted to males, her diary during this time indicates otherwise. The text offers great insight into how smitten she was with a boy named Gonzola. A few months later she writes about a different boy who wrote her a letter in Greek. Reynolds was a typical blushing teenage girl who had a romantic heart. She described her romantic feelings about a few boys in her diary, and surely she felt similarly about others in the future. Despite her loving feelings, she abided by the "Old Maids Contract" and remained single and ambitious for the rest of her life. The contract was not intended to alienate Reynolds from experiencing love—rather, it was resistance against the institution of marriage.

Victorian America is not remembered as a time period where everyone married for love. Sondra R. Herman explains that written texts about marriage and courtship all typically had the same message: "Writers of the marriage manuals frequently asserted that indissoluble matrimony was the foundation of the whole social order. . . . The two sexes, more different from one another than alike, needed to enter a human trinity—man, woman, child, so that each could become more truly a self" (236). This idea binds a woman to a male and at least one child in order to truly come into her own. By composing the contract, Reynolds rejected this idea, understanding that she had the ability and ambition to become individually herself and avoid the bondage of a marriage contract. Her decision was incredibly rare. Out of American women born during the same time frame as Reynolds, 1850–54, only 7.7% never married (Smith 42). This statistic, compiled from the census, emphasizes the virtually unprecedented stakes Reynolds was raising by composing the "Old Maids Contract."

Significant issues of economic status during this time period further highlight the radicalism of Reynolds's commitment to individualism. By choosing not to marry, she was choosing a life of financial independence. It is unknown whether her family supported her after she became an adult, although the archived family papers suggest she started off wealthy, which is reaffirmed by the *Sun*'s description of the Reynolds family home. Money could, of course, be obtained by a career. A woman able to support herself threatened traditions in Victorian America: "Woman's economic independence would not threaten marriage itself, but would end the male-dominated marriage market. Marriage would no longer be a 'sexuo-economic' relationship" (Herman 248). Since Reynolds's accomplishments of being a game warden and publishing her writing helped accrue some kind of financial stability, it can be assumed she understood she was subverting the norm of a wife being financially supported by her husband.

Born a “Witless, Wild Country Girl,” Becoming an “Old Maid”

The Reynolds family is related by marriage to the Weems family, originally from Scotland and one of Maryland’s oldest families. The most prominent Weems family member was Parson Mason Locke Weems, a literary figure who wrote the first biography of President George Washington, which included the famous cherry tree story. Rachel Thomason Weems married Dr. Thomas Reynolds. They had two children: Hattie, born in 1852, probably in June,¹ and Edward, born in 1853. Edward eventually married Helen Dunnington and had three children; Hattie remained unmarried all her life. She died fifty-seven years after writing the “Old Maids Contract.”

No photographs can be found of Hattie, but in a letter written to a young man (she often rewrote letters she sent to friends and family so she could “remember her girlhood”) she declares, “What a bonnetless, witless, wild country girl I was, seated on an immense old house, with yellow hair flying behind me looking like a wild Indian Squaw.” Her obituary in the *Sun* (expressed as a letter to the editor) is dated 7 June 1927, making her approximately seventy-five years old. Her obituary poignantly illustrates her:

After a long illness, which she bore with true Christian fortitude, Miss Harriet Reynolds, of Sherwood Forest, near Upper Falls, Baltimore county, has gone to her reward and has left a gap in the little rural community where her whole life was passed that will be difficult, if not impossible, to fill.

Endowed with the all too rare gift of appreciation of the true, the beautiful and the good, she was a real lover of nature, and her knowledge of wood lore, of flowers and the wild life that inhabited the deep forests by which her home was surrounded was unsurpassed. (“Miss Harriet Reynolds”)

The wealth of her family is unambiguous. In 1922, the *Sun* published an article describing the Reynolds’s family home, the sketch in the paper virtually identical to the house drawn by Hattie Reynolds on the last page of her diary. The article describes the home as being 225 years old and having six halls, twenty rooms, a fireplace over seven feet long and almost five feet tall, and multiple rare plants (McClennahan). The family estate had many animals, as Hattie stated in her diary. In a letter written to her brother Edward, she hopes the turkeys and peacocks are not driving their mother crazy. According to the published description of the family estate and other clues written by and to Reynolds, she unquestionably grew up in the comfort of wealth and prestige.

Reynolds’s educational background remains mysterious, although there are hints that education was valued in her family. Her family’s social circle seems to be highly educated. In her diary, Reynolds calls her cousin Frank “professor,” stating he attended college for five years and is the “smart cousin.” Her diary mentions a croquet game with Professor Dunnington, presumably a relation of Edward’s wife, who is noted to have been an adjunct and eventually full professor of analytical and agricultural chemistry at the University of Virginia (Barringer 177). Her family’s affluence and her father’s occupation as a doctor suggest she did obtain some formal education—whether by tutors or at an educational institution. Both she and her brother exhibit excellent penmanship and grammar. Additionally, her diary entries from the ages of nineteen to twenty-one include her use of Latin words, what is presumably a draft of an assigned composition called the “Language of Stones,” and a humorous made-up letter to “Pre-Adamite remains,” implying that she was forced to learn about a subject she was less than excited about.

Hattie Reynolds never married, staying faithful to the contract she wrote at eighteen. Her focus was on independence and activism, mainly in regard to nature and animals but venturing out into other interests. The *Sun* published an article about “a movement on foot, led by Miss Harriet Reynolds” (“Move Starts to Honor Marylander”), who, after conducting archival research of the Rumsey family, lobbied for a memorial to the man who built the first steamboat, James Rumsey. She was successful, and two years before her death a statue was erected in West Virginia.

Reynolds’s deliberate independence facilitated her mobility. She traveled to visit distant family and friends as far away as Florida and Kansas. She also wrote in a letter to her brother Edward in 1897 about her stay in Washington, DC and Mount Vernon, and she voyaged to Jamaica on the United Fruit Company’s steamer *Brookline* to tour the island, presumably to investigate plant and animal life (“Marine Personals”).

Pursuit of a Passion-Driven Profession

In addition to avoiding the dependence of marriage in Victorian America, Reynolds also pursued a career, fulfilling the rhetorical strategies utilized in the contract. After announcing at age eighteen her commitment to remain single, Reynolds was appointed Maryland’s first female game warden. It is important to discuss her early interest in such a profession and her eventual success within it. She believed in conservation and the sanctity of wildlife. The diary gives the greatest evidence of interests in a career that protected animals:

May 1: Day calm; See a turtle.

May 19: See another turtle?

May 30: No more turtles. (4)

The importance she placed on turtles can be interpreted as all consuming, because unlike in the other diary entries, which tend to be longer and cover more topics, the turtle occupies the day’s events entirely. Other entries show a clear interest in all kinds of animals:

April: three kittens have come

March 11: One of the Moor boys brought a squirrel here for one to buy. he left his hankerchief over it and would not come to the light to throw it into the cage. (7)

[March] 14: Ma has just given 60 dols for a year old black colt . . . displays a gentle and affectionate disposition already. (8)

March 29: Cousin Sarah tells me a real funny story of a parrot she knew. A large waiter was sitting in the window, covered with seeds. the wind blew it down with a loud bang, where upon the parrot jerked himself around, and said “Oh Lord!” His nerves being shocked, I suppose by the noise! (9)

These remarks in her diary provide evidence of a great curiosity about and fascination with animals. Not only did she refer to animals frequently, she also discussed their demeanor and temperament, as shown in her 14 March entry about the black colt. She also writes several poems about animals and nature, and vividly describes a thunderstorm’s interaction with plants and animals in the last three pages of her diary.

Her interest in animals, particularly birds, certainly culminates in her career decision to become a game warden. The “Old Maids Contract” formally declares her intention to pursue a life without male support, not only emotionally but also financially, thus announcing her chosen

life path, unprecedented for a female of her time.

Lieutenant Gregory L. Bartles, the agency historian of the Maryland Natural Resources Police, gives the history of game wardens in Maryland:

The State didn't hire salaried Game Wardens until 1918. There were no females hired until about 1980. Hattie may have been a non-salaried deputy game warden. These were also referred to as "Fee Deputy Game Wardens". They were appointed by the State Game Warden from 1898 and up to 1968. . . . There were up to 600 fee wardens at any given time across the State.

Reynolds was in fact a deputy game warden and the only game warden in her district. The article describing her family's home mentions her occupation: "Her one other greatest treasure is the gold badge of an 'at large' game warden, presented by State Game Warden Le Compte in recognition of her efforts to conserve game, and the articles she has written on birds; many of which have appeared in *The Sun*" (McClennahan). Being a game warden was a serious career; Lieutenant Bartles also mentions that every game warden must be sworn in at the circuit court. Reynolds was paid for her time as an at-large game warden, although not salaried. She was expected to know the laws about hunting game, protecting/preserving animals, and care of plant life. She was expected to enforce these laws if anyone attempted to disobey them.

Enforcement mainly included fines, which sanction Reynolds defends in the *Sun*. On 17 June 1920, she wrote a text for the *Sun* titled "Did You Know It Is Unlawful to Shoot Eagles?" in which she explains there is a \$10 fine for shooting an eagle, and how anyone with little or no skill could shoot one. The work is forcefully written:

No bird is more inoffensive than an eagle . . . it was not smart to kill this splendid bird, now so scarce; it was not kind to take the life of an innocent creature; it was not patriotic to kill the emblem of our country. I do not know what he could have done it for, only the lust to kill seems to take possession of most men and boys. If the next man who kills an eagle was fined maybe some of these grand birds might be saved.

She signs the piece "H. Reynolds, Deputy Game Warden. Bradshaw, Baltimore county, Maryland."

The main way Reynolds proves her dedication to her career, though, is through the knowledge she voluntarily shares in the *Sun*. On 4 May 1906, Reynolds writes boldly in the "From the People: Letters from Readers of the Sun on Subjects of Interest" section. She responds to a previous text a woman named M. D. Starr wrote: "Woman's Cruelty to Birds." In Reynolds response, titled "One of the Sex Criticises Her Sisters for Their Heartless Subservience to Brutal Fashion," she states:

Ninety per cent. of the tender sex seem to be perfectly heartless on the subject of birds. They will hunt up to the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to rescue a sick cat from a bad boy or a balky mule from an angry driver, but, speak of exterminating birds, and note what answer is received. There would not be one aigrette [head plumes from an egret used as an adornment on women's hats] sold in the city of Baltimore next year if the women refused to buy them. The Legislature should fine milliners for having them. . . . M. D. Starr says: "We women are not deliberately cruel." It is not what you did not want to do, but it is what you do that you are responsible for. Most women lead

beautiful unselfish lives; they toil night and day for their loved ones. . . . This wonderful, untiring mother love—the purest, strongest, truest love on earth—should make them tender-hearted toward the birds. Why? Because when the birds' colors are brightest, when the egret's lovely plumes adorn their graceful bodies, when they are feeding their young, then they are shot by hundreds and thousands for women's hats. . . . [Reynolds then goes on to describe in detail the feathers of various birds used for women's hats.] These birds for thousands of years have been beloved and protected by man until women demanded their feathers.

Both of the above quotes demonstrate Reynolds's awareness of her career, of course, but also reveal her understanding of gender roles during the early twentieth century. Reynolds does not hesitate to express her opinions through writing in a public, educated manner. Almost every single text she wrote for the *Sun* relates to her career as a game warden.

Moreover, her obituary mentions her history-making career as a woman in the nineteenth century: "For many years she was the game warden of her section of Baltimore county, being the first lady to hold such a position, and her contributions to the press on the subject of conservation and the habits of birds and animals showed a wonderful familiarity of the subject, gained at first hand" ("Miss Harriet Reynolds"). Her contributions are evidenced by her published writings on the subject of her expertise. What is particularly interesting is how long it took Maryland to hire a salaried game warden—over sixty years. Also, since there could be about six hundred deputy game wardens at one time, this means Reynolds was the first female deputy game warden amongst 599 men.

According to the 1910 publication *Powers, Duties and Work of Game Wardens: A Handbook of Practical Information for Officers and Others Interested in the Enforcement of Fish and Game Laws*, the position of game warden was taxing, dangerous, and authoritative. The text includes a quote by Carlos Avery, the executive agent of the Minnesota Game Commission when the book was published. Although Minnesota's rules for hunting game were slightly different than Maryland's, the same principles applied throughout the United States during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Avery depicts the extremity of Reynolds's career and also the gender dynamics within the profession:

The degree of physical and moral courage, good judgment and discretion demanded of a game warden is greater than any other branch of the public service. A man who can so perform the varied and exacting duties of this position successfully . . . is a valuable officer, and he who will cheerfully expose himself to the danger, endure the exposure, undergo the hardships and suffer the abuse often heaped upon him for the paltry salaries we are able to pay, is a genuine patriot, and should always have the support and admiration of all good citizens. (Chase 9)

Avery clearly defines the occupation of game warden as dangerous and draining. The occupation of game warden was complex. He (certainly not "she" at this time) utilized knowledge of the law, animals, nature and, most importantly, an ability to react quickly and use discretion. Avery identifies the valiant warden as a male, specifying the male gender via pronoun use. With his use of masculine language he supports the claim that it was rare for a female to hold Reynolds's occupation.

Reynolds herself was certainly aware of her position as a female game warden surrounded by men. In the many texts she writes for the *Sun*, she signs her name “H. Reynolds.” A reader even sends a letter in response to a piece she had written, citing her as “Mr. Reynolds” and using the pronouns “he” and “him.” Reynolds carefully positioned herself as gender-neutral in a parlor-rhetoric society, so she was able to voice her opinion and expertise without readers doubting or questioning. As quoted in Johnson’s text on parlor rhetoric, Lillian O’Connor gives insight into why Reynolds might choose to refrain from outwardly expressing her gender in texts written for the *Sun*:

So long as woman confined her efforts for reform to attendance at prayer meetings and at sewing circles . . . her activities were not subject to criticism. Such activities were all appropriate to her sphere and, therefore, acceptable. Custom forbade that she make use of public address so widely utilized by her father, brother, and son; “ladies” could not speak before a group of men and women. (22)

Reynolds addresses men singularly in her “eagles” text, women singularly in her “cruelty to birds” text, and both men and women in her many other writings for the *Sun*.

By using her first initial only and thus passing as male, she could write gutsy texts. In one of her pieces she talks about \$2–\$10 fines a boy endures for killing birds and pointedly states, “[H]is parents encourage him in his cruelty. A cruel boy makes a cruel man” (“Boys”). A gender-ambiguous signature allowed Reynolds to dominantly express her knowledge and opinions in a documented public sphere. With our fortunate knowledge of Reynolds’s appointed career, we can examine her writing with greater scrutiny in a feminizing public perspective.

Evidence of Reynolds focusing passionately on her career is overwhelming. She participated in supplementary activities to advance her career, becoming a member of the Baltimore Audubon Society, publishing articles in the *Sun*, the *Nature-Study Review by American Nature Study Society*, and *Birds and Nature Magazine*, and publishing a poem and story in the *Guide to Nature*. Her writing was not only creative but also purposeful and political. In 1917, she petitioned the Committee of Foreign Affairs in support of the House migratory-bird treaty act (“Journal of the House of Representatives”). She also became an elected member of the Maryland State Game and Fish Protective Association with about one hundred others. Reynolds was the only “Miss” listed amongst the “Misters” in the record of new members (Chambliss). It also appears that in 1910, she either initiated or helped with creating a game preserve in her deputy game warden area in Bradshaw, Baltimore County. The success of the preserve stemmed from a \$2,000 a year legislative appropriation, education in schools on the protection of birds, and the “gentlemen sportsmen” (game wardens) who protected the area.

When women were employed in the nineteenth century, they usually filled more feminine occupations. Susan L. Porter describes the average female occupation in the eastern United States in her book *Women of the Commonwealth: Work, Family, and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts*. Basing her findings on 1,032 interviews conducted in 1880, she reveals that “approximately one in five Boston women enumerated in the 1880 census was employed. Of those forty thousand women, about six percent were teachers, artists, musicians, and physicians, together with one lone attorney. . . . Domestic workers . . . made up half of the remainder” (91). The rest of the working females were employed in trade and manufacturing. This example of female employment in an East Coast city ten years after the “Old Maids Contract” was composed

shows the contrast between the average female career and Hattie Reynolds's appointment as a game warden.

Porter also examines the choices women made during late Victorian America:

In [an] attempt to explain how this generation of women coped with these conflicting demands [the "cruel choice" between marriage and career], historians have offered a variety of interpretations. Some note that many women suffered illness and succumbed . . . some creative women channeled their intellectual energies into service, thereby building on the traditional female nurturing role. Other scholars have argued that some educated women seized on science and modeled themselves after men, renouncing the stereotypical road to achievement through social motherhood. (187)

Reynolds knew that she had to choose. Women could not juggle a family and a career. A woman in 1870 must decide, and Reynolds chose her path in very public discourse. Devastatingly evidenced is the dilemma nineteenth-century women were challenged with between marriage and career:

The conflict between the actuality of working women and the myth of True Womanhood roused concern. . . . Half persuaded by the myth they had helped to create, government, employers, and men's trade unions tried to get women out of the workplace and into marriage. They blamed women for men's low wages on the grounds that many women who "didn't need to work" were taking the jobs men deserved and settling for lower wages than men earned.

Besides, they fretted, working for pay would make women unable to create harmonious families. (Schneider and Schneider 15)

Not only did women during this time period have to make a clear-cut decision between family and career, they also received fuming opposition if they chose the latter.

From Pen and Paper to Hobby and Hope

Although countless sources can be found of girls' writing in the nineteenth century, usually the texts are diaries, letters, notes, or minute books. My research suggests that Hattie Reynolds composed a text specifically intended to establish a life of unmarried womanhood. No manuals were written describing how to formulate on paper your independence, and texts like the one authored by Reynolds are exceedingly rare.

Reynolds formally used literacy to express her feminist ideals. This is quite monumental, not only because of the subject of the writing but also regarding the writing itself. Before the nineteenth century, female literacy was not necessarily promoted or encouraged. Jean Ferguson Carr suggests that a change took place after the eighteenth century: "The nineteenth century was an age of growing access to literacy for U.S. girls" (51). This increased access certainly encouraged Reynolds to write informally in a diary and formally in a multi-drafted contract. We can assume she was encouraged to write, since during this time "[a]dults gave girls letter-writing guides and blank books to serve as journals or diaries" (51). Reynolds's pocket diary, the size of two decks of cards, is leather with cream-colored pages. It can be assumed that Reynolds received the blank-paged diary as a gift. As Cinthia Gannett points out:

[J]ournal or diary keeping has helped women negotiate the relations of language, society, and self by sustaining and nurturing women's otherwise muted

discourse networks and communities. . . . Women have discovered themselves as thinking subjects and inscribed themselves onto a world that has offered fewer opportunities for women than for men to leave their verbal imprint. (116–17)

Reynolds's diary writing evidences the literacy initiative embarked upon by her parents, relatives, or friends to promote self-expression and purpose through writing.

Of course, although there were several etiquette and letter-writing guidebooks available, there certainly were no nineteenth-century guides about how to write oneself into a life of single womanhood, an adult life outside the marriage tradition. Instead, Reynolds concocted this out of her own intelligence and creativity. Without a doubt, literacy was something that Reynolds spent an enormous amount of time on. Besides her drafts of the contract and her lengthy diary, at least ten letters written by her to family members are archived. She enjoyed writing as a hobby, but utilized it as a means of forceful autonomy and self-identity. In her diary, Reynolds mentions on 6 May (year unstated), "I have just written a . . . letter to Ed. I hope that he will receive it and write back again." Not only was writing a concrete statement, it was a continuing conversation within a semi-public sphere that created and maintained relationships outside the context of marriage. Writing for Reynolds was all things: leisure, communication, and self-proclamation.

Her literacy consists of reading as well; her diary suggests a giddiness towards reading conversational letters. On 20 October she writes, "[H]e wrote me a Greek letter, which of course I could not understand. I told him that I need to get it translated as soon as possible." Her reference to a letter she received from a boy in Greek implies her desire for (and perhaps eventual attainment of) further education. Rather than disregarding the letter, she asks her brother Edward, who was close to the same age, to translate it. This evidences the inequality in education girls and boys received, even within her affluent family. It demonstrates Reynolds as a girl with a bright yearning to absorb any and all written knowledge and also explains the educational limitations she might have experienced during this time period—she was unable to read Greek but two males in her life could.

Reynolds's writing, particularly the "Old Maids Contract" is a tangible representation of her principles and goals. During this time period, "[l]iteracy was an exterior demonstration of both individual and collective values" (Greer 52). Her dedicated formal writing is an announcement of her independence and consequently an expression of her beliefs about marriage and a professional career. She embarked upon an unprecedented path in 1870 at only eighteen years old. She chose to secure her independence and remain unmarried, thus advancing into a fulfilling career as Maryland's first female game warden. Most importantly, her practice of literacy in the form of a contract guaranteed her commitment to proclaim and publicize her freedom from the conventions of societal restraints on females.

Note

¹ A letter from one of Reynolds's cousins suggests she was born in June, and the University of Maryland's online database cites her birth year as 1852.

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