

# SINCERELY, HER: ANALYSIS OF AUTHORSHIP AND GENRE IN WOMEN'S DIARIES

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Diaries have been used for centuries by women as a place to engage in writing their daily activities and emotions. The genre differs from other circulated genres as the authors are writing without a large, identified audience or publication in mind. This difference changes how diary authors engage with the genre. While diaries have been commonly researched and studied for their connections to daily accounts of historical or personal moments, this paper attempts to connect the diary genre with larger rhetorical conversations of what makes an author. Using an autoethnographic approach to diaries, I centered my research through my own experience of having my diary read and my curiosity as to why there was a disconnect between diary writing and other genres of writing. Through defining the diary genre, examining rhetorical literature concerning authorship, and analyzing four diaries spanning from 1851-2022, this research concluded with a new way to define authorship for unpublished authors. This research aims to emphasize and legitimize the role female diary authors have within writing and rhetoric studies.

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## INTRODUCTION

Resting on my nightstand is a small diary filled with daily observations, spanning a decade.\* At the end of the day, the diary is ready for my reflections. Through this private space, diary writing becomes a ritual for authors, such as myself, to practice as often as they would like. The diary has been a common genre for women to write about their private lives for centuries. Despite that, diaries are often overlooked

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when studying writing in favor of more widespread genres.

Scholars do not commonly study the genre or recognize writers of diaries as authors who deserve as much acknowledgement and attention as writers of more public genres despite the widespread use of diaries. Not acknowledging diary writers as authors is due in part because of the lack of audience and limited circulation of diaries. However, the acknowledgement of the diary as a legitimate genre gives these writers, primarily women, their appropriate status as authors.

I intend to highlight the importance of the diary as it provides women with a unique form

of authorship that bypasses their historic marginalization in writing and publishing. I aim to redefine diary writing as a valid form of authorship for women through examining the diary as a genre, defining functions of authorship based on the author-function and genre function frameworks, and analyzing four diaries that span from 1851–2022. In my research, I compare these four diaries to see how they utilize genre conventions and ultimately form authorship. These four diaries span from the mid-nineteenth century up to the present day, with my own diary included as a modern example. The ages of the diary writers vary from 13 to 71 years old, but they often function and discuss topics in similar ways. All four of these diary writers are women based near Chicago, and the three historical diaries were sourced from Chicago’s Newberry Library archives.

## WHAT IS A DIARY AND WHO WRITES IT?

Diaries are a genre of writing that is presented in a physical form, oftentimes written in blank journals that are produced with the intention of being filled with daily entries. Diaries are written in separate, ideally daily, entries where the author examines their day with details they find relevant to write down. These details may be short descriptions of tasks or descriptions of complex emotions; whatever the content may be, diaries provide writers with a space to discuss what they want to examine about their day. For the purposes of this analysis, I will focus on diaries as a means to study how the genre has evolved since the nineteenth century.

While the terms “diary” and “journal” sometimes are used interchangeably, I will refer to a “journal” as the empty physical book and a “diary” as a filled journal. I am using this distinction as some scholars use the word “journal” to “imply a more sophisticated, mature type of personal record than that of a diary” (Beattie 83). Through using the term “diary,” I intend to highlight the accessible and informal nature of diary authors without the “sophistication” that comes with using the term journal to describe the entries.

In multiple languages, the word “diary” derives from the root word “day,” coming from the daily routine of writing about one’s day (Paperno 562). The purpose of the diary originally started as a place to write a daily summary of finances, private religious confessions and self-examinations, and emotional reflections (Paperno 563). Over time, the more financial and religious reasons for writing diaries have faded, with diary authors favoring a more personal and informal account of their day.

Although the structure of a diary is written in separate installments, a diary is holistic, as each self-contained entry has the opportunity to expand on thoughts previously mentioned. These entries are written in a first-person narrative without an identified audience (Paperno 562). The content presented in this routine structure can differ between authors, but most follow similar structures. Because diaries are written as reflections on the specific individual’s day, a diary author may choose to write about major events through their perspective, or they may choose to ignore these events

altogether to instead focus on their own personal affairs.

Diaries capture the author's life in separate entries, often written gradually and immediately following the days' events. These works are a culmination of an individual's life, like autobiographies. However, unlike diaries, autobiographies are written after the author has experienced all the events that make up the book. Additionally, autobiographies are written with an identified audience in mind. Whether it is a public and widespread audience or a niche audience, an autobiography has "rhetorical ends dependent on its reception by an audience. The private diary, in contrast, is, initially at least, destined to be read only by its author" (Raoul 60). It is important to distinguish that the primary difference between autobiographies and diaries is that the former is dependent on writing for the benefit of the audience's understanding, whereas diaries are not burdened by audience expectations.

Because autobiographies are written with an audience and clear purpose in mind, the content of an autobiography is retrospective and "carries the subtle implication that she knew where she was going," while a diary reflects the "ongoing struggle to find and name [the author's] path" and is "a record of [their] journey and the journey itself" (Schwiw 236). Diary authors can freely write thoughts that they are not explicitly sharing with others since there is no audience besides the writer themselves. This allows for writing that is not perfect, not structured, and without fear of censorship (Schiw 235).

Historically, diaries have been written by more girls than boys because diary writing was a practice encouraged for young girls to take up while waiting to get married. After marriage, a woman writing about herself (even in an unpublished and private space) was seen as vain and a waste of time better spent on behalf of others. The "non-public, non-literary nature" of the diary was another reason why diaries became a common practice for women, as it was a way for them to engage in authorship without having to face discrimination for writing with the intent to publish (Raoul 58). Diaries became ingrained in society as a common way for women to have the opportunity to write so much that "by the mid-nineteenth century beautifully bound books of blank pages, complete with padlocks, were a popular gift for adolescent girls" (Raoul 58). These types of journals with space for women to write are still produced today and are common. Despite the idea that a woman writing about herself was seen as selfish and vain, these books have been produced to give women the space to engage in this "selfish" writing. While the societal pressures and explicit marginalization of women writers in the nineteenth century no longer influence the need of writing a diary for women, the women have continued to write diaries.

While the goal of a diary varies, there is consistency in how people interact with this form. Instead of a focus on the finished product, the focus is instead on the routine, or practice, of writing the diary. Every entry I write operates within my personal structure of the diary writing genre; I start with the date and give a routine update in chronological order,

typically ending my entries with long reflections or rhetorical questions. Something unique about my diary that I did not see in the other diaries I examined was at the end of every entry I signed off my name with a heart after, as seen in Figure 1. This “sign off” was not taught but has continued for as long as I have written my diary. I have not been consistent with my diary, never writing every day, but I have written about my most important events.

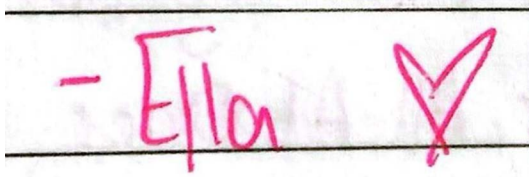


Fig. 1. An example of my sign-off at the end of a diary entry.

## THE DIARY GENRE

Genres are rhetorical strategies that authors use to “recognize, organize, and act in all kinds of situations, literary and nonliterary” (Bawarshi 17). Genres also help readers more easily contextualize information as the framework is set up for a reader’s best interest. This, in turn, serves as a guideline for authors to base how they create their work. Writing with audience needs in mind lends itself to being easily studied and applied in both academic and professional settings. These settings inherently provide an audience, even if they differ in content and form.

For readers, genre is a way to position a work alongside other works within the same genre, as there is a link and connection between them. Because of this, genres “function as sites of action that locate readers in positions of interpretation” (Bawarshi 18). Genres help guide readers through pieces by setting readers up for what the content and structure of the piece will be. However, unlike other genres, diaries do not have an audience. The lack of audience for the diary changes how the author interacts with the text compared to more traditional writing genres.

Even with the lack of formal teaching of the style, the tradition has carried on for centuries with an overlap in structure and themes, making it a genre within the standards of rhetoricians, including Bawarshi and Miller. Miller argues that the “definition of genres must be centered not on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish” (Miller 151). The content of diaries is the entries within the diary that spell out the author’s day-to-day life and the emotional connections that come with that. The action of diary writing is connected to women practicing self-reflection and creativity as women are able to write about what they want to in a way that reflects their frame of mind without imposed standards.

Miller later goes on to explain that there must be “intention and effect, an aspect of social action” for a form of writing to fit within her guidelines of what defines a genre (163). In a diary, the author writes chronologically and without regard to keeping the focus on relevant events. A diary’s complete story is not

realized until it is finished as diaries are written in real-time and without a specific audience in mind to frame the content. Because of this contrast, it may seem that diaries do not share the same idea of intention and effect because of the missing element of an intended audience; however, I argue that diaries do share the same social action that Miller describes because the author of a diary is also the audience. The intention of a diary is to fill its pages with thoughts on daily life, and the writing of a diary impacts the author. By putting their thoughts on a page, diary authors are validating their lived experiences and can connect with their emotions through writing. This also has an impact on the diary's author once pages are reread and authors can reflect on their past experiences with their future knowledge. In this way, when a diary author is choosing to reread passages, they are functioning as both the author and audience of their work.

### **“AUTHORS” AND “authors”**

While I have been referring to people who write diaries as “authors,” some scholars do not recognize this form of private writing as legitimate authorship. According to Foucault in his 1969 work “What is an Author?,” an author is not created through merely the act of writing; instead, an author, as we recognize them, is connected to the work they publish and how it circulates in society. This is what Foucault titles the “author-function” (Foucault 125). Authorship within the author-function focuses on the author after publishing. It does not matter who the author was at the time of writ-

ing as we are only able to interact with the author post-publication.

In addition to his thoughts about the author-function, Foucault dismisses the notion that people who write more common or non-published writings are authors within the author-function. In his words, “a private letter may have a signatory, but it does not have an author; a contract can have an underwriter, but not an author; and, similarly, an anonymous poster attached to a wall may have a writer, but he cannot be an author” (Foucault 124). Similar to Miller's concept of genres needing to have a social rhetorical action, Foucault claims that an author's purpose is to interact with the greater discourse community. Without that interaction and public presence, a person cannot be an author, according to Foucault's author-function.

Bawarshi points out the exclusionary nature of this author-function and introduces the “genre function” to even the playing field and hold all authors at the same value (Bawarshi 22). The genre function works by, “constitut[ing] how individuals come to conceptualize and act within different situations” instead of highlighting the specific author in literary settings (Bawarshi 23). Acknowledging that diaries are a genre puts diary writers into this form of genre function, as they are acting on their day-to-day experiences by writing within the genre. This is important for female diary writers as Foucault's definition ignores the validity of non-published writers as authors, which disproportionately affects female writers historically.

To address this nontraditional form of author-function, I propose distinguishing between “Authors” and “authors” in written works. When I capitalize the “A” in “Author,” I am referring to Authorship as Foucault describes it: a person who contributes their work to society and becomes a “character” rather than recognized as a person. When I keep the “a” lowercase in “author” I am referring to non-published authors, like diary writers. This distinction is because they are still authors, but do not function in the proper “Authorship” that is traditionally associated with the practice of publishing writing. These “authors” function in the sense that a work needs to be authored to exist, but instead of the intention focused on their work being circulated, their work stays static, only existing in closed circles—sometimes only in the presence of the author themselves.

By using Bawarshi’s framework of highlighting the importance of genres with the genre-function, examining diary writers as “authors” levels the field of authorship to better include people who, for whatever reason, do not choose to write their work in an uncirculated literary genre. For women, this is a major recognition. As women were often not able to publish writing, diaries became a place for them to engage with authorship. Ignoring the lack of opportunities marginalized communities, such as women, have historically had to publish makes it hard to achieve this status of Authorship. By recognizing people who write uncirculated works as “authors” we can recognize their deserved authority for creating

a piece that functions within a genre, even if that genre does not get published.

## METHODS/AUTOETHNOGRAPHY SECTION

I became interested in this subject because of my own connection to diary writing. As a writing major, I often get asked what type of genres I primarily write. I often disappoint strangers when I tell them about how I enjoy technical or general professional writing. Hearing that someone is a “writer” often evokes the notion that they desire to be a published “Author.” However, in my case that has never been my goal. For me, one of the genres I have written the most is the diary genre. I became fascinated with my diary writing after realizing the reason for their exclusion in my studies. After researching and reflecting, I realized that diaries differ from more traditional forms of genre since they are not taught, due to there being no real way to teach diaries while keeping the author’s content private. The lack of a large intended audience for the diary changes how the author interacts with the text compared to more traditional forms of writing genres. But, as someone whose diary has been read, I realized that this privacy was already broken and wondered how someone reading my diary changed my status as an author according to rhetoric scholars.

I wanted to look at why this historically female written genre was not studied or valued the same as more commonly published genres and use my authorship framework alongside real examples of diary authors. Through my

research I also found that not only have diaries persisted as a method for women to reflect on their days for centuries and that without standardized teaching of diary writing, diary authors often use similar themes and structures for their writing. I found that distinguishing these diary writers as “authors” attributes credit to these writers for the amount of time and care they put into their work, even with it being written for a private audience.

Another reason for the importance of this research is that diary writing is historically connected to women. This is not to say that diary writing is exclusive to women; it is a genre of writing that does not exclude authors based on gender. However, women interact with diary writing more often and historically allowed women to express their feelings without fear of censorship—something seen in other genres where publication would be the end goal. Because diaries do not have an identified audience and often times are private to the point of no one besides the author having access to the writing, the diary provides authors with a place to “encourage self-awareness and exploration of one’s private and public selves, thereby expanding one’s sense of identity; allow for cathartic expression without fear of censorship” (Schiwy 235). Men traditionally create boundaries between themselves and others in their diaries and the emotional connection aspect that women have is not found as often (Huff 11). Women also feel a strong connection to diary writing due to the genre’s “lack of imposed form and rules” (Raoul 58). While I argue that a diary is a genre and thus has a specific set of structures followed by diary writers,

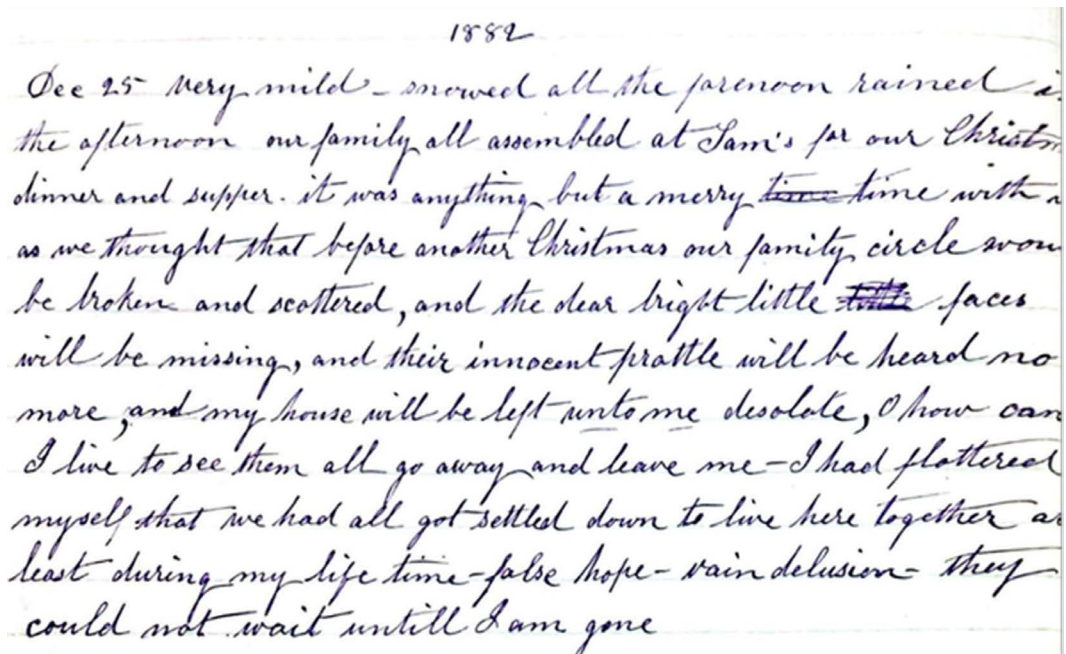
the lack of outside forces imposing or managing these rules, it allows women the space to put thoughts down within the genre without having to maintain an imposed standard within the genre.

I wanted to examine female written diaries in addition to my personal diary to connect them with conversations of authorship. I sourced three archival diaries written by women from the Newberry Library in Chicago spanning from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century. All rooted in Chicago and in our authorship within the diary genre, Jane, Elvira, Ruth, and I share a collective story through our diaries. The diaries tend to follow these rules: they are chronological with the dates beginning each entry, lacking any technical citations, and presumably expected to be private with only the author able to access the writing. When I looked at these diaries, I found that they affirmed Raoul’s argument that “the central conflict expressed by the female diarist is that between Love (the family, self-abnegation, reproduction) and Work (the outside world, self-affirmation, production)” (Raoul 61). Our story describes how the diary genre has continued to function for centuries as a way for women to explore their daily routines, emotions, and the world around them. Even though all four women, myself included, never met, never discussed diary writing, we all tell similar stories of emotions, love, and the world around us through our shared authorship. These diaries, spanning the ages of 13 to 71-years-old, all are able to tell similar stories throughout the span of centuries because of the diary genre.

## EXAMINATION AND ANALYSIS

My decision to study the three archival diaries started by searching a database of primary sources located in Chicago. Through this city-wide search, I selected these diaries from the Newberry Library because of the range of years they were written. The earliest diary I examined was the diary of Jane Rowley, which started in 1851. While this diary is from the earliest period, she is the oldest diary author I examined as she was 36 years-old when she started writing in 1851 and 71 in 1887 when her diary entries ended shortly before her death. Her diary is not just a place for her to examine her

daily thoughts; it is a place for her to examine the grief she feels of getting older without her family nearby. Her diaries include descriptions of her adult children visiting her, dealing with grief from her husband dying, descriptions of the weather, and her complicated emotions surrounding holidays. As she grows older, her entries become more reflective of her mental state, as she becomes lonely when her children grow up and move away. With every birthday or holiday, she describes her grief about the distance between herself and her family and her feelings that her children do not want to visit her, as seen in Figure 2. The use of entries about grief stem “from the fear of watch-



1882  
Dec 25 Very mild - snowed all the forenoon rained in the afternoon our family all assembled at Sam's for our Christmas dinner and supper. it was anything but a merry ~~time~~ time with us as we thought that before another Christmas our family circle would be broken and scattered, and the dear bright little ~~little~~ faces will be missing, and their innocent prattle will be heard no more, and my house will be left unto me desolate, Oh how can I live to see them all go away and leave me - I had flattered myself that we had all got settled down to live here together at least during my life time - false hope - vain delusion - they could not wait untill I am gone

Fig. 2. Christmas 1882. Jane begins with a description of the weather and the events that took place, describing that Christmas day as “anything but a merry time.” She explores these unhappy feelings of seeing her family leave with “Oh how can I live to see them all go away and leave me... they could not wait until I am gone.” At the time of this entry, Jane was 66.

Sept 13 Went to Austin to see Mrs Borden  
14 Ada and I went to Chicago <sup>she</sup> bought ~~the~~ black Alpaca  
for herself and Ett dresses 16<sup>th</sup> had auction sale of cows  
Oct 5 Arba Tanner came to finish Martha's barn Mrs  
Garley came with <sup>him</sup> brought the news of Martha's <sup>death</sup>  
6<sup>th</sup> Ett and I went home to dig our potatoes  
Sept 29 took a trip out to Elgin had a very good visit  
to Mr John Knott's land found my old friend  
Mary Crogan Pratt stayed three days in Elgin

Fig. 4. Multiple entries on the same page from September 1868. Jane self-edits here through inserting words above the line and using a carrot symbol to add the word “she” in the sentence “Ada and I went to Chicago she bought...”

ing life grow shorter with each passing day” (Paperno 563).

One of the things I became most interested in with Jane’s diary is the physical form of the diary itself. There is one passage where she includes a small doodle (Figure 3), and there are multiple passages where she realizes spelling or grammar mistakes and she goes back to fix the mistakes. Figure 3’s doodle appears in the middle of a sentence, seemingly representing a hidden word. This is common as diaries are sometimes written in code for even more security than what the genre typically provides (Raoul 58). In this way, even though Jane was most likely writing without a large intended audience, she possibly wanted to keep this specific word or phrase a secret and put in the doodle as code.

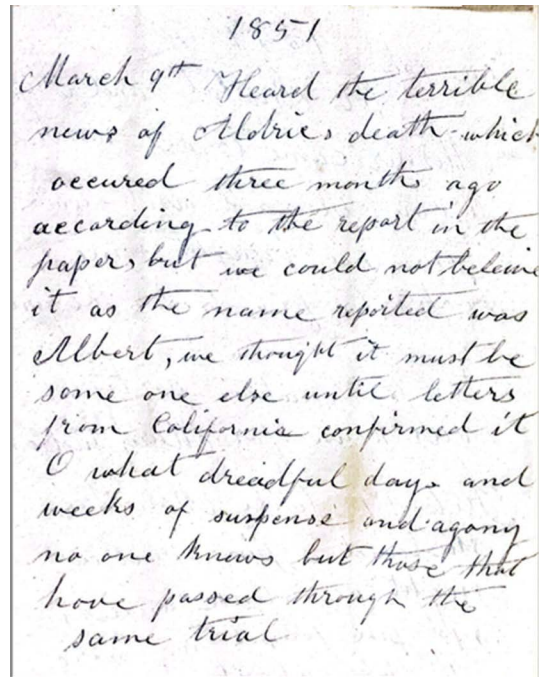
Ada sent her [doodle] to Arson

Fig. 3. From June 29th, 1861, a doodle acting as a word: “Ada sent her [doodle] to [unidentifiable word].” The doodle appears to be of a woman.

In Figure 2, there are a few words crossed off because they were spelled wrong or repeated. In other pages, as seen in Figure 4, Jane adds words she meant to include in-between the lines or by inserting a caret symbol to designate where the additional word should be placed. I also engage in a similar form of self-editing in my diary, specifically calling myself out when I make spelling mistakes. If diaries were just writing without an audience, then simple mistakes, like the mistakes both she and I make in our diaries, would not matter or require editing. In this way, even though

diaries are private forms of writing, they still are genres that value using correct forms of grammar and spelling. As diary authors, both Jane and I edited entries while writing possibly because of prior education instilling an importance on maintaining correct grammar. Even if the author is not writing for a large audience, their use of correct grammar and spelling will help them as they could become the future audience to their entries.

In addition to Jane's writings about aging during the holidays seen in Figure 2, Figure 5 is a passage early in her diary where she reflects on the loss of her husband and the grief and shock she feels hearing the news. In this entry Jane is connecting with the common theme of women using diaries to "emphasize the ties they feel with another, whether that other is a dead relative, a cherished friend, a place yearned for, or an aspect of themselves remembered but seemingly lost" (Huff 10). This grief is written out in emotional language, connecting Jane with female diary authors who also use the genre to write about emotional topics. Being able to view Jane's diary physically gave me the opportunity to "experience its material aspects" (Schiwy 238). In her diary, the material aspects examined, besides being able to read her work in her handwriting, were her self-editing and doodling. In another nineteenth century diary written by Elvira Sheridan Badger, the physical form was a reminder of how diaries were a daily practice.



1851  
March 9<sup>th</sup> Heard the terrible news of Albert's death which occurred three months ago according to the report in the papers but we could not believe it as the name reported was Albert, we thought it must be some one else until letters from California confirmed it O what dreadful days and weeks of suspense and agony no one knows but those that have passed through the same trial

Fig. 5. March 9, 1851, Jane writes about her grief about her deceased husband. "O what dreadful days and weeks of suspense and agony"

Elvira's diary had the dates already written on the top of the journal in print for her to write about her day in the space below, as seen in Figure 6. This diary was small, almost small enough to fit in a pocket, but was filled with entries from nearly every day in 1859. In this diary, Elvira started every entry with a short sentence about the weather. After this she follows with information about her young children and any visits made by friends or family. In this way, Elvira connects with the diary genre through her use of a consistent structure and need to write about her surroundings.

Elvira and Jane both start their entries with descriptions of the weather before weaving together simple observations with personal relationships, sometimes in surprising ways. For example, Elvira's diary contained a lock of hair tucked away within the back cover (Figure 7). It is unknown whether the lock of hair is Elvira's or another individual's, but it is likely that keeping this lock in the diary could connect the author to memories of whoever's hair it was and remind them of the physical connection they had (Huff 12). Even though I was reading these diaries from an outside perspective and interacting with them in a similar way to the author-function that Foucault describes, seeing the lock of hair took me out of that mindset. The physical reminder that Elvira Sheridan Badger was a real person, not just through seeing her handwriting, but by seeing a physical representation of her, made me see her writing through her "authorship" and not as a part of the author-function, even though she was not writing with my viewing in mind.

The diary I spent the most time examining was the twentieth century diary of Ruth Marion (Daube) Gridley. This diary was transcribed and archived by her daughter, Marion. She donated multiple transcribed documents written by or about her mother in addition to extended documentation of her family's genealogy and private letters. These documents were in large books with Ruth's originally handwritten diary entries typed out alongside Marion's notes, which provided context and commentary. While the other two diaries I viewed were the actual journal that the women had written in, not being able to access the physical diary

for Ruth did make me forget that I was reading a diary written by someone over 100 years ago.

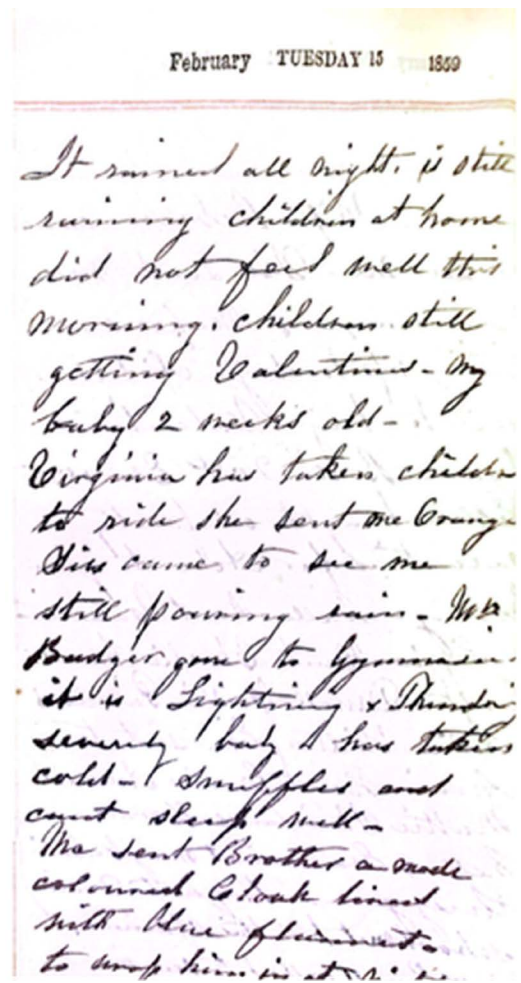


Fig. 6. Elvira's diary entry from February 15th, 1859. Note the date printed at the top as a part of the physical journal. She starts the entry with "It rained all night, is still raining children at home did not feel well this morning. Children still getting Valentines"



Fig. 7. Lock of hair found in the back of Elvira's diary.

Ruth's diary entries themselves do not provide a lot of context to the people involved in her life; rather, the transcription written by her daughter gives more depth and character to the diary. This allows the audience to fully understand the context behind Ruth's entries. This is not common in diaries. Because of the lack of an audience, diary authors do not need to fill in their audience with specific details about the "characters" in their lives. Instead of giving a paragraph of context on who a name refers to, a diary writer instead just names the person and only offers the context important for that specific entry. By adding this context

to her mother's diary, Marion gave the readers of her mother's diary the opportunity to read this diary as more of an autobiography with footnotes instead of a traditional diary reading experience. However, by only examining the writing itself, Ruth's diary still functions in the same ways as the other diaries because she only wrote the important details she wanted to remember from the day. The only difference comes from how I accessed the diary.

Ruth started writing her diary when she was 19, stating with her first entry that "I am opening this book today, February 9, 1919, with a sincere desire to keep a record of daily events in my life. Taking notes, I have made at a previous date, I am adding them to this diary." In this passage she is aware of the genre situation of the diary; she does not mention any identified audience, so it could be implied that she is not writing it for anyone else. She is just writing to take a sincere record of her daily life. On the same page, she writes a list of twelve important facts to remember and a list of her 13 boyfriends that is added throughout the five years she wrote in this specific diary.

Something I wanted to examine in diary writing was how women wove together the outside world with their personal lives. Ruth's diary is no exception. In fact, her use of weaving together seemingly unrelated ideas happens with major world events. Her February 15, 1919, entry reads "Don back from France. Telegram from Don- he is in New York. Hurrah. Had my hair marcelled and a manicure. Came on the "L" with Lela. Mae, Marg and I went down to Sailors, Soldiers Club Dance. Had a pretty good time, not as good as last

Sat.” Don, her brother, was stationed in France for World War 1, a fact expanded on through Marion’s context. Instead of focusing on her emotions with this big development in the context of not only her life but a big world event, she goes on to quickly explain what she did during the day. While her day most likely revolved around that big news, as she is seemingly preparing to celebrate this important event, she does not talk about the implications or the wider celebration of the war ending like other genres would. Instead, she focuses her writing on the diary genre structure: making observations and keeping the writing centered about her own lived experiences.

Much like Ruth’s weaving together of events, my diary has passages from major events in my lifetime. In 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic locked me into my childhood bedroom, I wrote in my diary more frequently. Having a diary in that time of world crisis allowed both me and Ruth to interact with a form of diary writing described below:

“Writing in a diary allowed women to preserve a record of events for the future, come to terms with their self-perception and changing identity in strange and wild surroundings, fight feelings of loneliness and isolation by expressing their thoughts and feelings, and preserve their mental equilibrium by imposing a sense of order and control over their situation” (Beattie 88).

Instead of talking about what was happening in the world during that troubling time, both Ruth and I spent most of our time writing about our own personal experiences and re-

lationships with friends and family. This is a common thread for female diary writers as “instead of magnifying the so-called great events of life... the diarist... focus[es] on the everyday” (Huff 9).

Ruth is the youngest diary author I examined (besides my own diary entries), and with that comes a lot of discussions about potential relationships. At the beginning of her first diary, she has a running list of all the men she was involved in for the five years she wrote in that journal. I took a special interest in two specific relationships she wrote about consistently in 1920. The men involved in these relationships were named Russell and Jim, and Ruth continued to write about Jim for two years. On August 10, 1920, she wrote “Saw Russell Hughes and talked to him a few minutes. I do like him but does he like me???” The casual, yet pressing, nature of this entry is fun to examine as it reads as something a modern teenager would write in a diary, but this entry is from over a century ago. In fact, I have a very similar entry in my diary, but instead of a more rhetorical question, I ask the question as a “poll” allowing future me to answer the question--a strange interaction with the diary genre where I was both the author and the intended audience that was meant to interact with the entry. Both Ruth and I use the unique fact that we are both the writer and audience for our diaries as we are able to answer any questions when we reread the entry in the future. For Ruth, she used the next entries to answer that question of whether he liked her with an affirmative yes. Only a few weeks later, though, Ruth wrote on September 19, 1920: “Date with Russell and went to the movies and Tea Shop. Compared

with Jim there is nothing to Russell. I think of nothing but JIM- JIM- JIM.” This is the start of most entries including Jim until 1922.

November 1, 1920, she continues her work of describing her relationship with Jim and weaving in world context with “Pres. Elect Harding- Next Pres. Jim brought me his [Jim’s] picture which is dandy- of him. We went over to Buchanan’s and played poker- lots of fun. Had quite a time dodging Russell. Jim and I fussed all evening.” Compared to her unfolding relationship with Jim, noting the next President is just a passing thought. This is a feature of the diary genre, as it places more importance on the personal than the more standard important facts.

Ruth’s diary focuses a lot on what seems to be the “central conflicts” of *Love and Work* discussed by Raoul. While Jane and Elvira’s diaries spent more time describing the simple facts of everyday life without frequent passages about pursuing emotional connections, Ruth spends a lot of time writing about her unfolding situation with Jim. Ruth uses her diary, similar to how I use mine, as a confidant to talk about how she and Jim both have fallen deeply in love with each other, but because of Jim’s physical ailments, most likely from serving in World War 1, they will not end up together. This doomed fate of their relationship is mentioned in 1920, but they continue seeing each other until the end of 1922 after an unwritten incident occurs leaving Ruth heartbroken. In spring of 1923 Ruth wrote, “I love Will and we are engaged.” Reading this diary from an outside audience perspective, I felt led astray because so much time had been invested in her daily entries about the state of her relationship

with Jim. The quick turnaround from writing about Jim to then being engaged to a man not previously mentioned was shocking— but that is the point. The diary was not for me to read and feel satisfied reading her life’s story, as one might expect in an autobiography. The diary was practice for Ruth as she was unfolding these complicated emotions.

In a way, genre happens naturally for diary writers because they do not have to worry about satisfying a large audience. The oversight necessary to write something that is to be read by another does not appear in diary writing because the practice of writing a diary is for the author’s benefit alone. While all these diaries included their own, but similar, form and style, there was no focus on an audience or a threaded oversight because they were written day-by-day without knowing what may happen past that day’s entry. In Ruth’s case, she didn’t know that over 100 years later someone would be reading her diary entries and forming their own assumptions about her relationship, so why would she feel the need to inform her diary about every change in her life if these changes weren’t important for her to document?

In the time I have been writing diary entries, I have willingly shown a few people specific entries. In middle school I was sent to the principal’s office to retell my perspective of a classmate’s conflict. I told the principal I had written about the events in my diary. She gave me her phone number and told me to text her the diary pages. Even though I mentioned my diary and I willingly took photos of my entries, when she did not respond or acknowledge what I wrote, I felt violated. The entries that were

meant for my own reflection were seen by an authority figure who ignored my vulnerability in her lack of response.

When I left for college, I left my first diary in my childhood home. My then-15-year-old brother let his curiosity get to him and read my diary immediately after finding it. He did not read all of it, but he did not ask for my permission or let me know about him reading it. I only realized he read it when I mentioned something I had only written in my diary and he replied with “oh yeah I know, I read your diary.”

With this, my framework of “Author” vs “author” blurs lines once an “author’s” work begins to circulate, sometimes without the author’s knowledge. When I read diaries authored by strangers that were later donated to an archive, I did not view their work as they authored it. The difference between my interaction with these diaries and my interactions with Authors within the traditional author-function is the form of writing that they created. Because diary writers are authoring their work within the diary genre, they can keep this “author” status because they are inherently connected and being examined as themselves in their work. Even though I knew Ruth’s entire family tree and outside context provided by her daughter at the time of her diary being donated, I still view her as an uncirculated “author” because she, along with the other diary authors I studied, did not intend for their work to be circulated nor are they regarded as “Authors” within the author-function because of their lack of connection to the public.

Beyond viewing in archival spaces, diaries like Anne Frank’s are circulated in a similar way to work that operates within the Author-function. In these scenarios, the “author”

gets treated like an “Author” because culturally we assign them to that function through wide publication even though in the act of writing they were simply an “author” without considering the future wide range of their work. These diary writers morph into “Authorship” in part because of the external circumstances that create a more linear and non-repetitive narrative to their daily writings but also because of how widely these works have been circulated in society (Raoul 62).

## CONCLUSION

Diary writing is a genre that has been used by women since the nineteenth century to gain authorship through writing about their daily lives. This daily practice allows women to write about themes of love and work in a simply structured form that changes from author to author.

Because of the simple and accessible nature of the genre, women have used this genre to engage in authorship at times where they were not allowed to write in other genres. By distinguishing between “Authors” and “authors,” I intend to validate women diary writers as “authors” because the writing they are producing functions within a specific genre, even if it is not circulated to public audiences. Through thinking about the audience function in diaries, this “authorship” still applies, as the author is both the creator and intended audience for the work. When reading diaries, even from different time periods, the genre functions the same and themes overlap, revealing how the genre has helped women process their daily lives for centuries. Because of this importance, I hope to see diaries be considered further in rhetoric and genre studies in the future.

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