THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Meet the Author:
The Cult of the Individual in Unconventional Journalism

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PhD in English Literature

The University of Edinburgh

2019

Declaration

This is to certify that this thesis has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed: 

Abstract

This thesis considers the forms of journalism that occupy the ambiguous boundary between literature and journalism. Though the distinction between literature and journalism is an increasingly popular subject of literary criticism, few studies have considered the centrality of the literary journalist figure as a vehicle for persona creation and the performance of the self. This study aims to further examine the complexities exhibited in works of literary journalism by considering each writer's contributions in a traceable lineage. By considering the first-person narration in each text, this study seeks to position the form as a response to a particularly American conceptualization of individualism, given its importance as a sustained national mythology. Through the deliberate cultivation of a self-mythologizing persona, each writer utilizes the convergence of performance, commerce, and politics to exemplify an American ideology of individualism through the semi-autobiographical characters they craft. Thus, the immersive style of literary journalism examined in this study can be read as a reflection of the continued prizing of individualism as an ideal that perpetuates partly because of self-reflexive narratives that conflate the narrator and the narrated.

Lay Summary

In four different periods, writers of varied backgrounds used similar techniques to promote versions of themselves through their unconventional journalism. I define "unconventional journalism" as forms of reportage that reject journalistic convention in their use of first-person narration and often in long-form styles that read like works of fiction. By writing themselves into their texts, the authors in this study present personal narratives that all similarly draw attention to the constructed nature of journalistic reports, questioning the unmediated access to events that the objective style of journalism purports to give.

Beginning with Mark Twain, I trace a lineage of the unconventional journalist tradition through the turn of the twentieth century, the Vietnam era, and the turn of the millennium. My study's expansive timescale is intended to demonstrate the similar techniques that each author used to build their personas while also considering the ways in which they responded to the political and social exigencies of their time. In each period, the authors of this study demonstrate the convergence of celebrity, politics, commerce, and performance through their first-person narration. By mythologizing the journalist figure through their highly subjective accounts, each author affirms the prevalence of the cult of the individual regardless of the historical moment because of the centrality of the individual in their reporting. The cult of the individual is defined in this study as the notable value placed on the individual's narrative, prioritizing the individual's autonomy in the face of institutional, including journalistic, authority. Irrespective of the setting, whether a political campaign or an insane asylum, each writer prizes the subjective voice to an extent that their characters always create an additional narrative of the personal drama of encountering the journalistic mission while fulfilling the assignment. In the process, they demonstrate the uniquely American ideology of individualism across varying social and political circumstances.

Acknowledgments

I took a little journey to the unknown
And I come back changed, I can feel it in my bones

-Lord Huron, “Meet Me in the Woods”

So much of this PhD is about the lives of authors off the page and all the various forces that made them successful. It was never just their individual ingenuity. Well, the same goes for this PhD.

So many people and so many different acts of kindness went into the drafting of this document. This all started with a chance encounter at the Dublin Book Festival, and that’s what the past four years have been – one chance encounter after another. Some truly amazing people have populated the story of this project. Even when this all sucked, they got me through. So, this is for you.

Thanks firstly to my family. If I weren’t a Holzapfel, I don’t think I’d have the sheer stubbornness to see this through. Damien, Allison, Olivia; Tristen and Nisa; Matt, Kaitlin, Zoe; Frankie and, of course, Humphrey. Here’s proof that I won’t be a student for the rest of my life. I love you all.

Mom and Dad – obviously you get your own line. You gave me a work ethic, a sense of adventure, more support than I can ever give back, and even more love than that. Thanks for all the things for which I’ll never truly be able to thank you.

On this side of the pond, thanks to my supervisor, Ken Millard for being so supremely patient and good-humoured when I needed reassurance (which was very frequently). I’ll need to run 26.2 miles now to see if you were right about a PhD being a marathon.

Also, thank you to the friends who were there in the day-to-day: Anahit, my forever pizza lunch date and gig companion/music soulmate; Gina, the best flatmate and birthday enthusiast I’m likely to ever meet; Valentina, my coffee morning confidant and meme provider. You all helped me through some pretty crappy times, and you didn’t give up on me. I’m so happy to celebrate this with you three incredible women.

From afar, the Jackson family: you always give me a sense of home, no matter where I end up; Ciara Wallace, Michael Fenn, and Seán Cooke: you have each given me such enthusiasm, no matter the length of time between visits, emails, texts…thank you for keeping up with me and for cheering me on.

Finally, to all the people who got me through this final year, thank you. Whether you drove me to the furthest corners of Scotland, through the Lake District, or around County Kerry, you gave me the energy and welcome distractions I needed to get through the final months. Whether in Dublin, Durham, or Dunblane (and other places not starting with “Du”), thanks for taking me in and giving me so many adventures.

This PhD is dedicated to my two brothers, Matt and Tristen. Both of you have shown me such tremendous support, particularly in the past four years. I'm continually inspired by your generosity, your work ethic, and your good hearts that have always made room for your little sister. Thank you for supporting me in innumerable ways.

To end with a cliché that seems pretty fitting: Edinburgh, you had the worst weather and the most beautiful rainbows. Thanks for both.

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Introduction

In May of 2018, the news of Tom Wolfe's death inspired a number of tributes that highlight Wolfe's memorable persona as a "man in the white suit" (Bowles) and "one of the leading lights of the New Journalism" (Epstein). In the process of honoring Wolfe's legacy, some writers expressed their views on the difference between journalism and literature; for instance, one obituary's title claims, "Tom Wolfe elevated journalism into enduring literature" (McKeen). The obituary's title references the controversial nature of Wolfe's journalistic oeuvre, which complicated notions of journalism and literature as discrete forms. Further, the title insinuates that literature supersedes journalism in a hierarchy of writing, thus contributing to the contentious debate that influenced Wolfe's writing on the distinct natures of literary and journalistic texts.

As a "leading light," Wolfe wrote the introduction to the 1973 New Journalism anthology, which boldly declares nonfiction's dominance over the novel, claiming: "the novelists are all out there right now . . . sweating it out, wondering where they stand" (15). His statements reinforce the opposition between literature and journalism that the writers of tributes after Wolfe's death maintain. In championing mimetic accounts, Wolfe combined the techniques of fiction with factual information to produce a style that writers in his obituaries lauded as "a new style of reportage that could be read for pleasure" (Nevins and Cain). The "new style" received a range of negative responses from skepticism to disdain; Wolfe referenced the "common cultural attitude" in *The New Journalism*'s introduction, claiming the New Journalists were met with contempt, "boundless . . . even breathtaking" (50, ellipsis in original). The oft-cited article "Parajournalism, Or Tom Wolfe and His Magic Writing Machine" by Dwight Macdonald exemplifies Wolfe's claim, as Macdonald, "the dean of Wolfe's critics" (Wakefield 43) called New Journalism "a bastard form, having it both ways, exploiting the factual authority of

journalism and the atmospheric license of fiction" (223). The language of Macdonald's criticism positions journalism and fiction as a dichotomy, implying a common attitude regarding the opposing natures of journalism and literature.

This thesis considers the forms of journalism that writers such as Wolfe published because they occupy the ambiguous boundary between literature and journalism. As this introduction will examine, the distinction between literature and journalism is an increasingly popular subject of literary criticism, but few studies have considered the centrality of the literary journalist figure as a vehicle for persona creation and the performance of the self. Through the deliberate cultivation of a self-mythologizing persona, each writer in this study utilizes the convergence of performance, commerce, and politics to exemplify a particularly American ideology of individualism through the semi-autobiographical characters they craft. Because of the numerous areas of critical inquiry upon which my study draws, the introduction first outlines arguments regarding the distinction between literature and journalism before considering scholarship on the literary celebrity and the return of the author, and the mythology of American individualism, especially through the lens of autobiography. In examining each conceptual area, I aim to elucidate their interconnectedness before tracing the lineage of literary journalist figures whose self-mythologies and persona creation share numerous similarities across different historical and sociopolitical contexts.

Literature and Journalism

At the beginning of the twentieth century, two articles presented differing approaches to the emerging profession of journalism and the opposition between journalists and writers of literature. In a 1906 edition of *The Critic*, Julian Hawthorne, son of Nathaniel Hawthorne, represented one view that separated works of journalism from texts he classified as literature. His article, "Journalism the

Destroyer of Literature," argues: "what lives in literature, dies in journalism" (169). As Hawthorne's title suggests, his comments on the function of journalism position it opposite literature, which he defines as the "characteristic utterance of the spiritual plane" (166). Offering such assertions, Hawthorne establishes rigid distinctions between the expansive categories of literature and journalism based on their function and their stylistic qualities. Hawthorne's hostility to journalism elides the possibility of hybrid forms, which an anonymous writer examined a year after Hawthorne's article. Though the article reflects some of Hawthorne's sentiments, presenting its interest in hybrid forms as a "confession," it is valuable for its prescience. The literary review *The Bookman* published "The Confessions of a 'Literary Journalist" in 1907, thus publishing an early use of the phrase "literary journalist." Written anonymously, the article dramatizes the differences one reporter identifies between literature and journalism. The reporter claims, "In the producer of 'literary journalism' two tendencies are constantly at war," before depicting a journalist's "always objective" view against a "subjective imagination" ("Confessions" 375–76). The rest of the writer's account details his frustration resulting from writing at a daily newspaper while holding aspirations of writing fiction. Expected to produce unembellished reports, the reporter fights a "purely literary faculty" (372) from entering into his writing. He admits, "I had the discouragement of seeing my stories come out, if they came at all, stripped of my adjectives and my felicitous expressions" (371). With the restraints of journalism hindering his creative freedom, the literary journalist leaves newspaper writing to begin writing for magazines in New York.

The articles by Hawthorne and the literary journalist are valuable to revisit, given their engagement with distinctions that later critics and historians of literary journalism would continue to question. Both Hawthorne and the literary journalist maintain the distinct natures of literature and journalism, but neither consider their

use of such broad categories as “literature” and “journalism.” Scholars would later attempt to remedy the two writers’ oversight and, though the expansive designations of literature and journalism continue to shape critical discussions in the latter half of the twentieth century, recent discussions engage more critically with the ways in which the two categories can intersect. In the past thirty years, scholarship on the intersection of works considered literature and those classed as journalism has proliferated with such influential studies as Shelley Fisher Fishkin’s *From Fact to Fiction: Journalism & Imaginative Writing in America* (1985), John C. Hartsock’s *A History of American Literary Journalism* (2000), and Mark Canada’s *Literature and Journalism: Inspirations, Intersections, and Inventions from Ben Franklin to Stephen Colbert* (2013). As the titles suggest, the studies often take a historical approach to literary journalism.[1] Historicizing the form does indeed provide greater insights, particularly by exemplifying the persistent opposition between literature and journalism and problematizing the rigid distinctions that writers like Hawthorne and the literary journalist used.

In tracing the opposition separating literature and journalism through different historical moments, the scholarship on literary journalism implicitly suggests that the meanings connoted by the terms literature and journalism have enduring power, perhaps maintained by the view of journalism as inferior to literature. As a scholar repeatedly engaging with the ambiguous definition of literary journalism, John Hartsock points to the period in which Hawthorne wrote, referencing “an opposition driven critically by the belief in a genteel literature having eternal, transcendent value” (“The Critical Marginalization” 66). He demonstrates how the distinction persisted in the twentieth century, citing “evidence that suggests

[1] *The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism* (1998) is another example of the historical approach that is frequently used to study literary journalism.

why journalism has ceased by the twentieth century to be considered literature" (62), which can include the continued need to signal journalism that is "literary" or "new," as in Wolfe's time. As a form subordinate to works of literature, journalism seemingly requires an explicit association with literature before its merits are considered.

Yet, the discussions regarding literature and journalism rely on the implications produced by their inexact definitions; while questioning the categories of "literature" and "journalism" with greater nuance than Hawthorne and the literary journalist did, scholars like Hartsock reveal the difficulty in defining literature in relation to journalism, and vice versa. In an attempt to define the two, Mark Canada asserts: "we might say that journalism reports timely facts in prescribed formats for mass audiences, while literature explores timeless truths in a variety of artistic ways for select readers" (2). As a result, scholarly discussions can reinforce the conclusion that journalism exists separately from literature by investing importance in generic classifications, as reflected in the language upholding distinctions between factual and fictional texts. The division between writing used to convey fact and writing based in invention manifests itself through many titles, including literature and journalism, the novel and journalism, imaginative writing and narrative nonfiction, among others. Each set of distinctions raises many questions that scholarship examining literary journalism continues to investigate. For instance, can journalism be classed as "unimaginative" writing? Is journalism or nonfiction writing ever free from artificial structures imposed on the narrative? What aims are achieved by using literature and journalism to condense many different genres of writing into two poles? Further, what is achieved by disregarding the two expansive categories? Dismissing the debate that positions journalism against literature and the very use of literature and journalism as referents raises another question: how does one navigate the growing body of scholarship on literary journalism?

Though the connotations of "literature" and "journalism" might continue to situate journalism below literature because of their different aesthetic values, the arguments that distinguish the two indicate the issues of form that merit consideration. For instance, the emergence of "mainstream objectified journalism" as a mode that further separated journalistic and literary works in the post-Civil War period is particularly significant to Hartsock's discussion (64). As Hartsock notes, shifts occurring in conventional newspaper writing helped establish the concept of objectivity as a key factor distinguishing journalism as a discrete form of writing. The seemingly synonymous relationship between objectivity and journalism clarifies the impulse to define literary journalism with phrases such as "subjective," "humanizing," and "personal." Definitions focused on the subjective and personal elements of literary journalism thus locate it as the antithesis of conventional, or objective, journalism.

Using the distinguishing factors of objectivity in journalism[2] versus the subjectivity of literary journalism does not answer all questions regarding the definition of literary journalism. However, it does serve as a useful starting point to consider more defined portions of an expansive debate. Namely, considering the subjectivity of literary journalism allows for more detailed analysis of the figures who disrupt the conventions of objective journalism. The anonymous writer describing himself in "The Confessions of a 'Literary Journalist'" is a valuable example. Inserting himself in the narrative, he exemplifies the pronounced role of the writer's subjectivity, which Hartsock addresses in an attempt at a definition of literary journalism; Hartsock asserts, "Literary journalism is, depending upon the degree of personal participation in the production of the report, an attempt at personal

[2] For historical approaches to objectivity in journalism, see David Mindich's *Just the Facts: How "Objectivity" Came to Define American Journalism* (1998) and Dan Schiller's *Objectivity and the News: The Public and the Rise of Commercial Journalism* (1981).

engagement of one's subjectivity with what too commonly has been objectified" (72).[3] Key in Hartsock's statement is the acknowledgement of "the degree of personal participation," and his explanation challenges the indeterminate nature of a term such as "literary journalism." Though the argument can be made that the subjective "I," whether visible or not, is always present in a work of literary journalism, examples of characters who use self-referential narration, formed and based on the ambiguity between literature and journalism, are rich for examination.

Further considering whether literary journalism is the most effective terminology for describing such a classification can create more circular debates about distinguishing the expansive categories of literature and journalism. However, accepting that "literary journalist" refers to an ambiguous figure who belongs neither fully to fictional or journalistic modes can expand the discussion to consider the stylistic elements that help literary journalists distinguish their writing from that of conventional journalists, such as their use of subjective narrative voices.

Studies that characterize the techniques of subjective journalists are limited, with Doug Underwood's work as an exception. Underwood's work focuses on the value of defining a self-consciously subjective journalist, particularly as he traces a historical lineage; his study *Journalism and the Novel: Truth and Fiction, 1700-2000* (2009) delineates developments from the eighteenth century, highlighting the work of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, Benjamin Franklin and James Boswell through to the writing of the New Journalists in the 1960s and 70s. The parameters Underwood uses to define the journalist-literary figure are broad, given that his definition of a journalist-literary figure includes writers who published both fiction and journalism. As a result, the complexities inherent in the writing of figures caught

[3] In a similar definition in *Literary Journalism Across the Globe* (2011), John S. Bak defines literary journalism as "narrative pieces that recount the factual news of the day in dramatic or emotive ways" (1-2).

between fictional and journalistic modes are erased if the journalist-literary figure is defined as a novelist or short story writer whose publishing history included journalistic writing for newspapers and magazines. Additionally, such criteria include a group of writers too expansive for critical study. The "journalist-literary figure" might thus seem to be a designation without validity, relying on arbitrary distinctions. If viewed as a fictional construction, however, the journalist-literary figure bears greater significance.

The biographical approach in Underwood's study appears unavoidable when discussing individual figures, but it discredits the significance of in-text characterizations of the journalist-literary figures. Instead of merely being the product of a writer occupying multiple professions, the journalist-literary figure asserts its own agency as a character in particular examples that this thesis examines. Viewing the subjective journalist figure as a character then allows for consideration of the performative aspects of the subversive journalist figure's persona. Instead of reinforcing the image of a journalist as a writer responsible for conveying information, these figures destabilize notions of the journalist as an authority figure in their performances. The ways the form allows for the performance of the reporter figure, no longer restricted by the conventions of objective journalism but rather free to invent a persona, is notably absent in scholarship on literary journalism. The omission is particularly noticeable given that many of the studies demonstrate how literary journalism developed during periods that began conversations about the function of the reporter, such as the turn of the twentieth century. During these periods, the performative, self-promoting elements of the narrative voice defied notions of a reporter as a depersonalized contributor to a larger institution.

The formal nature of the reporter's voice has historical antecedents; again demonstrating the importance of historicizing literary journalism, Underwood

highlights the shift in commercial modes in journalism in the period of the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Underwood states, “The image of a journalist as a broadly literate writer editing or writing for a small publication of wit and erudition . . was replaced by the stereotype of the functionary within a large commercial organization that processed news, packaged information within marketing formulas, and sought mass audiences as a result of the transformation of the news business that came with the Industrial Revolution” (*Journalism* 16). The commercialization of the news that Underwood references is the subject of the second chapter of this thesis, as the exaggeratedly capitalistic approaches to the news practiced by figures like Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst evinced the commercial value of commodifying the individual journalist into a recognizable brand.

Commerce and the Literary Celebrity

Underwood’s discussion of the newspaper business and its large commercial organizations indicates the importance of commerce to discussions of the literary journalist’s distinction from traditional journalists. Literary-journalist figures’ engagement with the perceived commercial differences between literary and journalistic works is indeed a significant aspect worth examining, as the characters formed in literary journalism challenge the oversimplified dichotomy between artistic talent and depersonalizing market influences. With journalism viewed as an overtly commercial enterprise that depends on the selling of newspapers, and the “literary” appearing to aspire to a nobler aim than selling books, concerning itself with emotional truths and aesthetic value, writers who engage in the hybrid form of literary journalism confront seemingly paradoxical sets of values: anti-commercial and aesthetically-minded versus commercial and factually-oriented. By blending concerns regarding commerce, aesthetics, and factuality, the literary-journalist

figures in this study attempt disrupting a long-standing approach to generic distinctions.

As a result, the implication that the difference between journalists and authors is a matter of their varying interest in commerce should be challenged. James F. English and John Frow assert, “The figure of the noncommercial author, disinterested and remote from the market, is of course almost entirely a figment of the cultural imagination” (52). The particular version of the author that English and Frow submit—noncommercial, disinterested and remote—has been challenged in studies of literary celebrity, which are valuable for considering the ways in which the literary journalists of this study commodify themselves and are commodified by the literary marketplace. An author’s commodified persona is a subject of immense interest for scholars of literary celebrity such as Joe Moran and Leo Braudy who have extensively examined the complexities of literary celebrity. Braudy’s expansive study *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (1986), Joe Moran’s *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America* (2000), and Loren Glass’ *Authors Inc.: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880-1980* (2004) are seminal texts for the expanding area of celebrity studies, which problematizes views of celebrity as a contemporary debasing of culture or an oversimplified pitting of commercial concerns against artistic or aesthetic value.

To understand the way the writers in this study gain visibility by disrupting journalistic convention with their highly crafted personas, theories on literary celebrity—and by extension, autobiography—can illuminate the different factors that contribute to the success of their personas in their journalistic texts and on public platforms. Before considering the literary journalists in this study as celebrities, it is important to consider the nebulous and inexact nature of “celebrity” as a term; Su Holmes and Sean Redmond described celebrity’s broad definition in the introduction to the first issue of *Celebrity Studies* in 2010 in which they assert: “work outside film

studies has more often used the term 'celebrity' to indicate a broad category which defines the contemporary state of being famous" (4).[4] Redmond and Holmes' definition is useful for this study because of their acknowledgment of its broadness. Though the authors in this study are recognizable figures, their relationships with fame differ greatly based on their individual historical periods and posthumous legacies, thus demonstrating Holmes and Redmond's claim that "celebrity or fame does not reside in the individual: it is constituted discursively" (4). Indeed, studies on literary celebrity demonstrate the complex ways in which authors capitalize on their own recognizable names and public appearances to become public figures while also being subject to the politics of publishing, which challenges notions of authors as self-generated in their fame.

Celebrity literary journalists are especially significant examples of the intersection of numerous aesthetic and commercial concerns that circulate around the individual author who gains fame. As they create narrative personas in newspapers and magazines with varying levels of cultural capital, they exemplify Moran's statement:

> literary celebrities cannot simply be reduced to their exchange value—they are complex cultural signifiers who are repositories for all kinds of meanings, the most significant of which is perhaps the nostalgia for some kind of transcendent, anti-economic, creative element in a secular, debased, commercialized culture. (*Star Authors* 9)

Moran's analysis demonstrates the centrality of commerce to discussions of literary celebrity, which is further complicated in an overtly commercial industry like journalism.[5] The mechanics of literary celebrity are a part of some literary journalists'

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[4] Daniel Boorstin's 1962 book *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* and *Stars*, Richard Dyer's 1979 study of film stars are early studies of celebrity. *The Image* includes Boorstin's often-cited definition of celebrity: "A celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knownness" (57).

[5] Moran's study examines the value of cultural capital involved with different literary celebrities at greater length than this study will; his discussion of Bordieu's work is especially valuable for his arguments regarding cultural capital. He writes: "the complicated relationship

persona creation by creating tensions between the individual writer and the forces that produce celebrities, including publishers and advertisers; as they combine the fame of their publications and their own individual fame, the writers in this study demonstrate the layers of literary celebrity that challenge the view of authorship as purely entrepreneurial.[6] For instance, David Foster Wallace incorporated *Rolling Stone*'s reputation into his journalistic essays that he had been commissioned to write because of his fame, which I examine in a later chapter. Though discussions of Wallace often identify him as a *sui generis* author, his career is subject to numerous commercial concerns, and his success is the result of many more factors than purely his individual talent.

Given the ways in which the dynamics of literary celebrity oppose views of authors like Wallace as self-generated successes, famous authors demonstrate Leo Braudy's description of celebrities as he identifies "a character (perhaps a personality would be a better phrase) divided between the self that is sold and the self that sells it" (1074). Braudy's language of transaction, considering the figure as both product and producer, echoes Moran's assertion that "authors actively negotiate their own celebrity rather than having it simply imposed on them" (10). As a magazine or newspaper capitalizes on the author's recognizable persona, the author's celebrity value increases but is also enhanced by the author's efforts to self-mythologize, as the subsequent chapters will demonstrate. Braudy's description of the divided self has particular resonance when considering the version of the self

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between cultural elites and the marketplace means that literary celebrity is different in significant ways from the celebrity produced by commercial mass media" (3).

[6] English and Frow describe the networks that influence the author's position and undermine impressions of the famous author as a self-made person, citing "the growth of what we might term the literary-value industry, that is, the whole set of individuals and groups and institutions involved . . . in producing the reputations and status positions of contemporary works and authors, situating them on various scales of worth" (45).

that literary journalistic texts promote, which complicates distinctions between commercial and literary, performed persona and authentic, unknowable individual.

As theorists of celebrity demonstrate, the interaction between the individual and the public creates an illusion of a knowable person in public life, which thrives on the blurring of the private and public life of notable individuals. As Joseph A. Boone and Nancy J. Vickers assert: “what one ‘is’ is often indistinguishable from what one ‘does’ when it comes to famous people and celebrity-mediated events” (902). The conflation of the person and the author resonates differently in a literary journalistic context in which the voice of the literary celebrity obfuscates boundaries between the personal and public because of the personal voice in the text. Differing from mass media celebrities, the authors in this study particularly complicate notions of literary celebrity as they gain fame from journalistic texts that include subjective narrative persona, further blurring the distinctions between their public persona and narrative voice in their work. As Norman Sims states, “Voice distinguishes literary journalism from the standard forms of journalism, at least the kind of voice that permits the writer to express a personality and to advance the story by taking a role on the page” (*True Stories* 19). Becoming involved in the narrative, the author’s work gestures towards the identity of the author, seemingly negating the separation between the author’s narrative voice and their public persona. As the literary journalist engages in mediated events, the splintering of their identities has the potential to occur within and outside their work and further confuses the separation between their spoken and written voices.

The indistinguishable nature of the author’s different identities is particularly exaggerated in a context of publicity and advertisement in which the identity of the author is marketed as a conflation of narrative voice, public personality, and accessible individual, manipulating the layers of constructed identities that P. David Marshall identifies in *Celebrity and Power: Fame and Contemporary Culture* (1997)

as the triangulation of "media construction, audience construction, and the real, living and breathing human being" (6). As the three blend, the authors' public personality emerges as a significant commodity alongside the personality expressed in their referential works. Moran suggests:

> The increasing importance of book publicity in promoting authors as 'personalities' is therefore a symptom of the continuing integration of literary production into the entertainment industry, making authors and books part of the cultural pervasiveness of celebrity as a market mechanism of monopoly capitalism. (*Star Authors* 41)

Moran's comment, addressing commercial concerns and the pervasiveness of celebrity, also highlights the importance of the personality to literary celebrity, which is a central concern of this dissertation. The influence of a marketable personality in promoting a writer's work is a subject of other discussions of fame, as Braudy noted in the definition above. Daniel Boorstin similarly asserts: "the star system has reached far beyond the movies. Wherever it reaches it confuses traditional forms of achievement. It focuses on the personality rather than on the work" (qtd. in *Star Authors* 2).[7] Boorstin's discussion of the star system encourages the displacement of the authors' work with their personalities, a simplified and recognizable version of themselves, which also utilizes the authors' literal image that audiences receive in different forms of publicity and marketing.

Boone and Vickers present a succinct explanation of the exchange between the celebrity image and the audience receiving it; they suggest, "Celebrity demands a gaze . . . The face of celebrity depends on being seen" (907). The dynamic nature of the celebrity's image exemplifies the performative aspect of celebrity, which includes an element of self-promotion. While celebrity "demands a gaze," it also

[7] Moran echoes Boorstin in his assertion: "Once popular heroes are celebrated more for their embodiment of a particular lifestyle than for their 'achievements,' they become figures to identify with rather than distant heroes, encouraging both a less deferential attitude towards them and a belief that their private life is of public concern" ("Brand Name" 356-57).

requires a willing subject to proliferate the media depictions that lend themselves to mythologizing. In many instances, asserting the character's agency as a subversive, subjective journalist figure includes creating a mythology of the self, which involves crafting a recognizable image and further compounding the author's different selves. Discussing the nineteenth-century lecture circuit, Amanda Adams notes: "public performances didn't just complicate the relationship of the work to the embodied author: they enabled the author to *become* the text" (79). By making their performances a vital component of their recognizable persona, celebrity literary journalists often acted as the subjects of their texts in literary and non-literary contexts. Rather than merely submit themselves to market forces, famed authors both experience and cultivate the fictionalizing of their personas.

Again, the New Journalists can be considered for their mythic statuses as figures crafting their personas in and outside of their work. Writing in 1966, Dan Wakefield noted: "in the past year nonfiction works by Tom Wolfe and Truman Capote have catapulted the reportorial kind of writing to a level of social interest suitable for cocktail party conversation . . . As Wolfe might put it, nonfiction has suddenly become . . . *fashionable*" (39, italics and second ellipsis in original). He recognizes the "star status of the new journalist" (52), writing, "The attention the new journalism has received in magazine interviews and picture spreads, on television talk shows, and in literary gossip columns has transformed some journalists into celebrities" ("Hemingway's Permanent Records" 49). Wakefield notes the importance of the visual images of the author that enhance their fame through intertextual representations. Underwood identifies Norman Mailer as one example of a New Journalist who utilized multiple forms of media, describing him as "the benchmark for a new kind of manic celebrity figure in a media age where no self-aggrandizing stunt goes unrewarded" ("Fame" 181). He credits Mailer with displaying "a flagrant egotism" and "raising narcissism to a public art." Though

Underwood privileges *Mailer's* belief "in the idea of the writer as an outsized personality," his commentary can apply to many writers before Mailer whose "self-aggrandizing stunts" established their enduring literary personas.

Norman Mailer's example remains pertinent because his work connected many of the threads that have been presented thus far. It brings distinctions between literature and journalism into question, establishing Mailer as an invented character that exploits ambiguous generic designations. The literary-journalist figure characterized in his work was further crafted through his numerous public appearances and, as a result of his engagement with various forms of media, Mailer's work will be further examined in a later chapter. His example can be traced further back to the precedent set by Mark Twain, who particularly manipulated the multi-dimensional versions a writer performing as a journalist figure could present to audiences. Twain demonstrated the profitable "intertextuality of celebrity—the way in which different media can mutually reinforce a person's fame" (*Star Authors* 19). The fame brought by different media also helped Twain create a character that was partly autobiographical and partly fictionalized, and ultimately a significant symbol as a commercially valuable character.

Like Twain, the literary-journalists who become literary celebrities enter into a complex arena, which obscures the lines between writer, public persona, and commodifiable and recognizable figure because of the added dimension of factuality as represented in journalistic forms. Despite the intricate relationship between the writer, fame, and journalistic convention, studies of literary journalism elide the importance of celebrity in the performance of the journalist in certain works of literary journalism. Underwood's contribution to Canada's collection, "Fame and the Fate of Celebrity: The Trauma of the Lionized Journalist-Literary Figure," is one attempt to combine studies written about celebrity authors, writers of literary journalism, and the history of literature and journalism's intersections. However,

Underwood's essay focuses on the effect of "celebrity building" on the personal lives of the authors included in his study (179). The result is an incomplete examination of the ways famed literary-journalist figures have commodified their personas, given the complex negotiation with fame that occurs in their careers.

Considering the numerous approaches available for navigating theories of literary celebrity, Gaston Franssen and Rick Honings ultimately provide the most succinct definition of literary celebrity for this study by considering three important elements that each literary journalist in subsequent chapters demonstrates. They suggest:

> It is the combination of these three developments—mediatization, personalization and commodification—that we also believe to be crucial to the rise of literary celebrity culture. From the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century, these forces begin to get a grip on the literary domain: they manifest themselves in the form of the magazine revolution and the rise of mass media (mediatization), the establishment of a 'regime of singularity', where the artist ranks as a unique personality (personalization), and the professionalization of the book trade (commercialization). It is at that moment that literary celebrity culture develops. (7)

Because the works of literary journalism in this study distinguish themselves from traditional journalists through the authors' narrative voices, they demonstrate the importance of personalization, which, in turn, enters them into a marketplace that values the personal voice.[8] Commodifying their personal image through different forms of media, the writers in this study exemplify the convergence of the factors that Franssen and Honings elucidate, which includes numerous marketing tactics that draw on extratextual elements to enhance the writer's mythos and thereby perpetuate the active negotiation of the author's fame.

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[8] For example, in a 2018 article for *Forbes,* Adam Rowe writes, "In the publishing industry, adult non-fiction revenues are soaring about fiction revenues and have been widening the gap for the past five years. Adult non-fiction revenue totalled $6.18 billion across the publishing industry in 2017, while adult fiction revenues reached $4.3 billion, according to Penguin Random House, using data from Association of American Publishers (AAP), the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, and Bookscan" ("Traditional Publishers").

For instance, in an interesting examination of literary fame, Moran examines the significance of *Time* magazine's cover stories, which highlights one way that extratextual elements contribute to the author's literal and metaphorical image. Moran uses a cover featuring Hemingway to discuss the construction of a persona that thrives on aspects of the "non-literary" because "*Time* also attempted to demystify its authors by showing them to combine prosaic qualities with exceptional ones" ("The Author" 353). In Hemingway's example, as he cultivated the persona of a hypermasculine individual, depictions of him hunting showcased characteristics of Hemingway the individual rather than Hemingway the author.[9] The view of the literary figure as both "prosaic" and "exceptional" creates a partly accessible figure that readers can romanticize and mythologize, but whose qualities are heavily curated by their producers. As Moran's article is entitled "The Author as a Brand Name," he elucidates the relationship between commerce and literary celebrity that construes the author as a commodity.[10] The illusion that a famous individual can be knowable is perpetuated by the various media across which they appear and the

[9] Though this study does not include Hemingway's literary journalism, he also enters into the discussion regarding literary fame and journalistic assignments, as Ronald Weber's chapter in *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century* examines. Weber asserts, "Nonfiction writing—principally the book-length efforts, the heart of his achievement—occupied a considerable part of Hemingway's career" (26).

[10] Alison Hearn's research elucidates the interconnectedness of commerce and the building of a persona, examining popular management literature of the late 1990s to discuss the superficiality of a successful public persona; she writes, "In this literature, success is dependent not upon specific skills or motivation but on the glossy packaging of the 'self' and the unrelenting pursuit of attention" (498). Hearn's use of "packaging" to describe the marketing of the self is notable in its allusion to the exteriority of the commodified self, investing significance in the public presentation instead of the substance of the person's skill. Hearn's argument is also important for its attention to the constructed nature of the individual; she writes, "As personal branding literature celebrates the freedom and radical individual empowerment involved in creating the personal brand, its numerous edicts, strictures and rules seriously delimit the field of possibilities within which any imagined 'authentic self' might be performed . . . What is actually being sold in this literature, then, is expertise in crafting a potent synthetic image of autonomous subjectivity" (498).

lauding of their lifestyles, as Moran's example of Hemingway's hypermasculine image demonstrates.

The Role of the Author and Persona Studies

In considering the ways that authors' lives are examined and commercialized, theorists of literary celebrity introduce broader questions regarding the role of the author in their work, which should be considered because of the celebrity literary journalists' places in their texts through their subjective narrative voices. Franssen and Honings discuss the relationship between authorship and celebrity in terms of subjectivity, writing, "Authorship and celebrity are two different ways in which subjectivity can take form in modern, western culture" (9–10). Their focus on subjectivity highlights the nature of authorship and celebrity as vehicles for interest in the individual, which draws on "two telescoping discursive constructs: the author function and the 'celebrity function'" (Franssen and Honings 10).[11] Reiterating Foucault's view of authorship and celebrity in terms of functions, Franssen and Honings maintain the symbolic nature of the author and the celebrity, which both constitute versions of the self that are heavily crafted. As public figures, celebrity authors bear fragmented identities, fractured by each public appearance, but they support the illusion of a knowable author by entering their private selves into public forums.

The difficulty of conceptualizing a unified view of the author, made more complicated by a variety of public appearances, is addressed in seminal texts on the role of the author, which remain pertinent though areas of literary criticism as literary celebrity studies have greatly developed Barthes' and Foucault's queries regarding

[11] Franssen and Honings connect Foucault's thinking with celebrity studies more concretely by asserting, "This view on the 'author function' ties in with Dyer's and Marshall's take on celebrity as an intertextual, discursive construct: the writing (or idolized) subject is no longer the producer of texts or statements, but the product of various (legal, economic, or literary) discourses" (10).

authorship. They raise important questions concerning the conflation of authors' various identities that have continued relevance for this study; for instance, in "What is an Author?" (1969), Foucault asks, "Assuming that we are dealing with an author, is everything he wrote and said, everything he left behind, to be included in his work?" (118). The question of authors' lives influencing their work remains salient in each chapter of this dissertation in which extratextual materials such as the authors' physical images and public appearances perpetuate their personal mythologies. Rather than engaging in strictly biographical criticism, this study considers the extent to which authors' works and the biographical details of their lives should be examined together because the relationship between the author's public life and published texts is rich for exploration in the context of literary journalism. Instead of suggesting that the true identity of the author is vital for their mythology to remain influential, the subsequent chapters consider how each author's constructed persona intimates the author's authentic, non-mediated identity. Who the "living, breathing human being" is, as Marshall states, has less significance than the illusion of intimacy that the author creates through various public appearances and personal details included in their journalistic texts.

In this regard, seminal texts on the role of the author remain useful in as much as they suggest that authors are constructed figures subject to their historical and social conditions. For instance, Foucault asserts, "A 'philosopher' and a 'poet' are not constructed in the same manner; and the author of an eighteenth-century novel was formed differently from the modern novelist" (127). Foucault's thinking illustrates the author's signification as it differs in various historical periods, which has continued relevance in a contemporary context of marketing and publicity. The historical period in which the author is theorized is essential to recognize as a result. As contemporary theorists of literary celebrity acknowledge, the different forms of media available to the contemporary author distinguishes their relationship to

identity construction from that of the authors writing at the time of Foucault and Barthes, for instance. Published two years after Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author" (1967), Foucault's essay identifies the role of the author in his own period, characterized by poststructuralist views of the author as a textual construction in which the language of the text rather than the author's personhood determined the text's meaning. His essay is thus an example of the destabilized nature of theoretical considerations of the author, contributing to the difficulty in defining the author as a purely textual construction since the discussion of the author's significance must consider extratextual elements, including historical and social conditions, that define an author's role.

As a result, Foucault's thinking and Barthes' assertions regarding the primacy of language should be acknowledged in discussions of contemporary views of authorship, but their work is less essential to this study than texts in which theorists have expanded the conversation to consider the influence of various forms of media representations that contribute to an evolved view of authorship, as examined in works by theorists of literary celebrity. Indeed, literary theorists' reconsideration of the views of authorship proposed by Barthes and Foucault coincides with scholarly interest in literary celebrity. In "Literary Celebrity Reconsidered," Anders Ohlsson, Torbjörn Forslid and Ann Steiner observe, "The development of celebrity studies in the 1990s paralleled the 'return of the author' (Burke 1992) in literary studies at much the same time" (33). Sean Burke's *The Death and Return of the Author* (1992) is a seminal text in considering the validity of author-centered criticism, particularly because of the ways that Burke's text examines the arguments posited by Barthes and Foucault in a context of deconstruction. Importantly, Burke echoes Foucault and Barthes by identifying the importance of historical conditions to perceptions of the author, citing "the crucial principle that author-text relationships are subject to variations both historical and

structural" (50). His comment challenges a static view of the author-text relationship, which my study reflects. Burke broaches subjects of criticism that have since developed significantly since the publication of his book in 1992, including theories on celebrity and persona creation.

Burke's study briefly alludes to the importance of literary celebrity; citing a few literary celebrities, Burke asserts, "Biographical discourse has taken note of the life-work reversal intermittently, not only in the case of Proust but those of Byron, Wilde and others, describing the processes of persona construction, of how authors come to identify obsessively with their characters . . . how the mask comes to wear the man" (31). Burke's reference to the author's mask relates his study to important work done recently in the field of persona studies, as the "investigation of celebrity has operated as a remarkable precursor for understanding persona" (Marshall and Barbour 9), which emphasizes the importance of the author's performance rather than the true identity of the author. Indeed, the interest in public personas has resulted in the recent formation of persona studies, and the publication of *Persona Studies: An Introduction* (2018) by P. David Marshall, Christopher W. Moore, and Kim Barbour. In 2015, the journal *Persona Studies* released its first issue and Marshall and Barbour introduced the journal by outlining the meaning of personas historically, writing: "personas are ways of being that are not necessarily modelled on truth, but are forms of presentation and performance for certain effects" (2).[12] Examining the relationship between personas and performance, Marshall and Barbour's thinking helps in understanding the success of an author's public personality as the author's performance creates a seemingly knowable version of

[12] Marshall and Barbour's introduction to *Persona Studies* demonstrates the numerous applications of the concept of a persona by including a thorough examination of the word's uses in the context of Greek theatre, its importance in Freudian and Jungian psychology, and its relationship with gender studies. Though examining the numerous implications of the word, they highlight the contemporary broadness of the term, writing, "Throughout the twentieth century, persona moved gradually into much more common usage" (5).

the author, though the author's true identity remains elusive. The focus on performativity in persona studies is thus vital for understanding the efficacy of the public performances involved in contemporary authorship in blurring boundaries between the private and public self.[13]

By discussing public versions of the self, Marshall and Barbour's introduction considers important issues regarding the creative aspect of identity formation that the authors in this study evince. They assert: "persona helps us to understand the construction, constitution, and production of the self through identity play and performance by the individual in social settings" (2). Their statement emphasizes the manufactured nature of the self in public forums, including acts of marketing and publicity. As commodified personalities, celebrity authors particularly exhibit the power of a persona to fragment one's identity, as "a persona is a reinforced form of performativity that can produce a professional identity, a political identity, or an entertaining identity for various individuals to inhabit" (Marshall and Barbour 5). Inhabiting the identities of performer, author, and literary journalist, the writers examined in subsequent chapters craft multi-faceted personas that highlight the inherently performative nature of their personas, malleable in various forms of media.

The importance of presentation and performance in forms of celebrity authorship should be emphasized when considering the ways in which authors in this study perform their roles as journalists, self-reflexively investigating their own relationship with journalistic convention. Additionally, as recognizable figures, they enact another performance as a celebrity author engaging in numerous public appearances. The view of authorship proposed in persona studies thus aligns with the theoretical considerations of this study as it examines the author's multi-faceted

[13] Marshall and Barbour highlight the relevance of Hannah Arendt's work in considering the separation between public and private spheres.

performance that includes public appearances, textual self-characterizations, and commodified extratextual representations in acts of publicity and marketing. Persona studies is especially useful in considering versions of authorship that invite audiences to witness their numerous identities, elucidating the assertions made by Ohlsson, Forslid and Steiner who argue, “The former anti-biographical stance towards the author figure is no longer tenable in today’s media- saturated society. The public persona of an author is undoubtedly an important part of his or her authorship” (42). Ohlsson, Forslid and Steiner identify the significance of the author’s persona in their assertion, which complicates a strictly biographical reading of the author’s work. Rather, their statement implies the performativity of the author’s identity and its separation from the author’s actual self, as examined in studies of personas.

Autobiography and American Individualism

As Ohlsson, Forslid, and Steiner’s statement implies, persona studies and literary celebrity studies are interrelated fields that argue the importance of the author’s identity, though the person of the author is obscured through the constructed nature of the persona. However, as discussed above, the celebrity author enters into a negotiation with readers and audiences that simulates a personal connection with the public figure and, as Franssen and Honings note, perpetuates “our present-day ‘meet the author’ culture” (10). Marshall and Barbour examine the implication of a private self in the author’s performance through the image of the mask, writing, “Persona, by the very word . . . implies that there is something behind the mask—another persona that reveals some connection to dimensions that are usually called private or intimate” (6). The private self that exists as an unknowable aspect of the celebrity author’s “real” identity is especially pertinent in self-referential works, as Marshall and Barbour acknowledge; they note

how persona studies "has also intersected with biographical and autobiographical studies, and the related areas of life writing in their exploration of the presentation of the public figure" (9). Indeed, the field of autobiographical studies is the final significant conceptual area to consider when analyzing the work of celebrity literary journalists who write themselves into their narratives. Crafting personas that are characterized by self-reflexivity, they allude to their private lives in the personal narratives they include in their journalistic reports and, more importantly, celebrity literary journalists demonstrate the prevalence of personal narratives as characteristically American, which introduces a broader discussion regarding the value placed on the individual in American first-person journalistic accounts.

As stated in the beginning of this introduction, the subsequent chapters will argue that celebrity literary journalists who include themselves in their narratives evince the particularly American value of individualism, and the view of the individual's story as a valuable subject worth examining underlies theoretical fields examined thus far. While the field of literary celebrity studies and the scholarship on authorship more generally are complex areas with numerous entry points, both evince an interest in the individual that unite discussions of the author and the celebrity. For instance, in "The Death of the Author" (1967), Barthes writes of the author in terms of the importance of the individual as a modern concept: "The author is a modern figure, produced no doubt by our society insofar as, at the end of the middle ages, with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, or, to put it more nobly, of the 'human person'" (142). Barthes' assertion is echoed in Moran's consideration of the individual's importance in celebrity studies, as they argue that the celebrity "function[s] at the centre of debates about what constitutes an individual, and

specifically an exceptional individual, in contemporary society" (53).[14] In both Barthes' and Moran's assertions, acknowledging the importance of the individual is a vital precursor to discussions regarding the nature of the author or the celebrity and, given the similar interest in the concept of the individual in both areas of critical inquiry, both sets of theorists exemplify the overlapping nature of critical fields that examine public figures as sites of individuality.

The emphasis on the individual in theoretical considerations of authorship and literary celebrity, whether manifesting in discussions of a personality or a persona, introduces questions regarding the representation of the self that also concern theorists of autobiography. The publicized nature of literary celebrity positions celebrity literary journalists in the conversation about self-representation and autobiography in public life because they use their personas to maintain a relationship with market forces while perpetuating the mythology of the individual genius and ideals of entrepreneurship.[15] Though I will examine some of the issues involved in autobiographical theory, Paul John Eakin's concise definition of autobiography is the most useful consideration of autobiography for understanding the texts included in this study. He asserts: "autobiography is nothing if not a referential art, and the self or subject is its principal referent" (*Touching the World* 3). The importance of referentiality to the texts in subsequent chapters distinguishes them from works of fiction, though the generic distinctions of fiction versus nonfiction are complicated in literary journalism. Because of their fictive act of persona-

[14] Marshall and Barbour's discussion of celebrity also includes the prevalence of individualism. They write, "Our inquiry into the dimensions of the public self and the formation of personality for public consumption and derived from what might be called celebrity culture now sets the scene of the development of wide scale public individualism" (34).

[15] Notions of the author as an individual genius are at least traceable to an 1889 article in *The Critic* entitled "Literary Fame" in which John Burroughs wrote, "Inventors and discoverers and men of science may anticipate each other, but literary genius can never be anticipated" (260).

construction, though referential in nature, the celebrity literary journalists who write themselves into their narratives problematize the "timehonoured autobiographical contract--that the self writing and the self written on should be one and the same self" (Burke 54), especially given the nature of their texts as journalistic.

As discussed above, the authors' gestures towards their personal lives divide the self in more ways than Burke's discussion of the autobiographical tract acknowledges. Given the unknowable private self that is obscured by their public performances, the conflation of writers and their narrative constructions is ultimately disrupted because of the presence of the author's persona, especially in instances that include celebrity literary journalists. Theorists' discussions of literary journalism's relationship with autobiography thus merits further inquiry. For instance, in *The Participatory Journalism of Michael Herr, Norman Mailer, Hunter S. Thompson, and Joan Didion* (2012), Jason Mosser adeptly observes, "In critical discourse about New Journalism, the debate has primarily focused on how the writers negotiate the boundaries between journalism and fiction, specifically the novel, but New Journalism's autobiographical elements have received relatively scant attention" (*The Participatory Journalism of Michael Herr, Norman Mailer, Hunter S. Thompson, and Joan Didion* 8). Mosser's study focuses on writing published in the 1960s and 70s, but his argument encompasses concerns that are applicable to the work of other celebrity literary journalists, as the presence of autobiographical elements in works of literary journalism, besides merely the New Journalism of the 1960s and 70s, has numerous implications.

Autobiographical elements of literary journalism should be examined because literary journalism involves the use of autobiography for a greater rhetorical purpose. The use of the first-person, demanding attention to the author of the text, disrupts journalistic convention and asserts the importance of the individual in literary journalism. Interest in the direct involvement of literary journalists in their

narratives often influences critical discussions of New Journalism specifically. As Mosser argues, “Autobiography allows us to make useful distinctions between the writers whose work falls into the category of New Journalism and to create a sub-category of New Journalism based on the narrator’s direct participation in the narrative” (*Participatory Journalism* 8). In considering a potential category based on direct participation, Mosser’s thinking helps to elucidate the importance of the individual’s self-reflexive position in the work of writers who are predecessors and successors of the New Journalists. Like the New Journalists, their writing engages with the autonomy of the individual in their political writing, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate. Additionally, because autobiography and journalism represent the conflicting sets of values of subjectivity and objectivity, their intersection is noteworthy for its subversive nature, and the act of resistance involved with asserting the first person in journalistic accounts supports the literary journalists’ aim of questioning official accounts, while also positioning them in a tradition that prizes the individual’s experiences.

However, as I have illustrated in my discussion of persona studies, the relationship between autobiography and journalism is complicated in such a way that Mosser’s description of the writer’s relationship with the narrator oversimplifies the role of autobiography in literary journalistic accounts. Mosser asserts: “the unique epistemological status of nonfiction texts, grounded in the actual, historically-verifiable world, virtually negates any distinction between writer and narrator” (*Participatory Journalism* 10). Though Mosser identities the importance of the nonfiction designation, he elides the journalist character’s significance as it blurs boundaries between writer, performer, and narrator, problematizing assertions that the writer and narrator are indistinct. Further, the question of whether the celebrity literary journalist’s self-directed gaze constitutes autobiography must be considered, especially given the ambiguous nature of definitions of autobiography. In his study

of autobiography, Timothy Dow Adams examines the challenges of defining autobiography, asserting, “No matter how complicated or complete our attempt, creating an airtight definition of autobiography is virtually impossible” (2). Tracing scholars’ attempts to define autobiography, beginning in 1960 with Roy Pascal’s *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, Adams notes the difficulty of asserting autobiography’s validity as a genre, asking, “How can we proceed when our best theorists argue that autobiography is not really a genre, not finally distinct from fiction, not even definable—a narrative that pretends to be written by a self-conscious self who is actually only a linguistic construct?” (3). Adams’ description of poststructuralist concerns regarding the crisis of representation is important when conceptualizing autobiography, especially in regards to its precarious separation from fiction, and the concept of a linguistic construct is useful in considering the constructed nature of the author’s persona, which emphasizes questions about autobiography’s ability to represent the writer mimetically.[16]

Despite the numerous complex theoretical questions raised by the study of autobiography, its indefinability does not prevent its popularity as both a theoretical field and a commercial enterprise. In his 2017 article entitled “Does Autobiography Have a Future?”, Paul John Eakin argues: “long-form autobiographical narrative remains an extremely popular genre in the world of print. We do indeed live in an age of memoir, which seems likely to continue for the foreseeable future” (272). As the later chapters of this dissertation examine, Eakin’s statement has particular

[16] The separation between the self and the text that Adams questioned in his 1990 book reflects concerns that Philippe Lejeune also discussed in his influential theory of autobiography, as he began his seminal *On Autobiography* with the concise question, “Is it possible to define autobiography?” (3). *On Autobiography* includes Lejeune’s oft-cited theory of an “autobiographical pact” in which Lejeune emphasizes the reader’s expectation that equates the author and the identity on the page. Since its publication, critics such as Michael Ryan have submitted Lejeune’s work to deconstructionist readings that greatly problematize it. The study of autobiography has greatly progressed from Lejeune’s seminal text to consider questions of technology’s influence on the construction of the self, which will be examined in greater depth in the conclusion of this dissertation.

resonance in a contemporary context, which exaggerates the value placed on individual narratives. However, his reference to the popularity of autobiography remains pertinent historically, given each author's construction of the self since before Mark Twain's era.

Eakin's 2017 article joins his many other texts that examine autobiography's amorphous nature, including *Fictions in Autobiography* (1985), *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography* (1992), and *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative* (2008). In his oeuvre, Eakin has written extensively on autobiography as an act of identity formation. Eakin argues: "talking about ourselves involves a lot more than self-indulgence; when we do it, we perform a work of self-construction" (*Living Autobiographically* 2). The self-construction he references has particular significance in an American context because of the pervasiveness of the self-made individual as a cultural mythology, reflecting the myth of a self-engineered nation. Eakin indeed elucidates the symbolic value of autobiography as more than textual representation, viewing self-narration as "a discourse of identity": "autobiography is not merely something we read in a book; rather, as a discourse of identity, delivered bit by bit in the stories we tell about ourselves day in and day out, autobiography structures our living" (4). Eakin's assertion regarding autobiography's performative, lived implications and the way it "structures our living" helps illuminate the expansion of autobiography to include national narratives. Both individualistic and collective, the view of autobiography as a discourse of identity contributes to the national mythology of the individual story having great significance.

Robert F. Sayre echoes Eakin's views of autobiography as imbuing stories with greater meaning. He suggests, "We don't really understand ideas until they are embodied in persons and the stories of their suffering, hope, strength, sacrifice, courage" (10–11). Though Sayre's opinion might be an exaggerated view of the individual person's importance, he exemplifies the romantic view that valorizes the

potential an individual story has to reflect more far-reaching mythologies. For instance, Sayre submits that autobiographical texts “reassure readers that American individualism is still rugged and rewarded or repentant and resilient” (11). Sayre’s mentioning of American individualism, and particularly its continued status as “rugged and rewarded,” invites more questions regarding the connection between American individualism and autobiography. However, the phrase “American individualism” must be considered further before its relationship to autobiographical narratives and the performance of autobiography has more meaningful resonance.

In discussing individualism, the numerous implications of the word complicate attempts to define it, as Steven Lukes acknowledges in his study of the term, beginning his foreword with the admission that “‘Individualism’ is a word that has come to be used with an unusual lack of precision” (ix). As becomes evident in Lukes’ study, time and place are crucial to defining individualism. With sections on moral individualism and the semantic history of individualism, Lukes’ text includes a brief examination of American individualism, which is particularly helpful for considering how nationalistic values influence conceptions of individualism and its relationship with economic systems. Lukes writes, “It was in the United States that ‘individualism’ primarily came to celebrate capitalism and liberal democracy” (26). The embeddedness of economic liberty in conceptions of American individualism is clear in Lukes’ introduction to American individualism, which contains a brief chronology of the term from the Civil War to the thinking of Ayn Rand. In each period, individualism and capitalism help define each other as systems with particularly American connotations.

The connection Lukes draws between capitalism and the American valuing of individualism is echoed in Yehoshua Arieli’s study *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology (*1964), which reviews numerous discussions of individualism by those championing capitalism, including Senator Chauncey M. Depew declaring

at Vanderbilt University, "'The American Commonwealth is built upon the individual. It recognizes neither classes nor masses . . . We have thus become a nation of self-made men'" (qtd. in Arieli 335). Likewise, in a 1907 address, Henry Clews considered American individualism's interchangeability with free enterprise, asserting, "'Take away the spirit of Individualism from the people, and you at once eliminate the American Spirit—the love of freedom, —of free industry, —free and unfettered opportunity, —you take away freedom itself'" (qtd. in Arieli 336). Clews, whose book *The Wall Street Point of View* indicates his position, thus joined Depew in crafting a mythic association between the American individual and the enthusiasm for free enterprise, and their attitudes further emphasized the dominant narrative of the individual's potential to become "self-made."

As the literary celebrity participates in the commercialization of public personalities through advertising and marketing to become a commodity, they encompass the ideals of free enterprise that are inherent to discussions of self-made individuals. Consequently, they encourage views of American individualism as a product of economic systems that value entrepreneurial ideals, though their personas depend upon an interplay of numerous factors besides their own ingenuity, as I have demonstrated. While writers can characterize their narrative voices as that of individual artists, they remain subject to economic forces that challenge the sovereignty of their agency. However, the very act of representing the self in autobiographical texts asserts the importance of the individual, which establishes autobiographical works as evidence of a culturally pervasive ideology.

As individualism is considered a characteristically American ideal, autobiography is similarly identified as an American form, reflective of the American tradition of prizing individuals' own narratives. Sayre's mention of "American individualism" alongside personal narratives indeed contributes to the discussion of America's relationship with autobiography present from the beginning of American

autobiographical study. In his theory of autobiographical texts, James Olney recognizes: “there frequently has been a nationalist element present, explicitly or implicitly, in the premises of autobiography study” (376). Olney discusses “the American view—very widespread I should think—that autobiography is, on the face of it and quite undeniably, and whether one speaks historically, politically, psychologically, or literarily, an *American* phenomenon” (376, emphasis in original). Olney’s assertion, though perhaps hyperbolic, points to the relationship between autobiography and selfhood that reflects the notions of autobiography as a method of constituting the self, especially given the historical narrative of a nation written in being.

The relationship between nationhood and individual narratives illuminates the historical basis for persona construction that characterizes the authors’ careers in this study. In Daniel Walker Howe’s *Making the American Self* (1997), he describes the concept of self-construction in an American context, arguing, “The conscious construction of the autonomous self was not merely *compatible* with American institutions, not only *logically required* by them, but was in historical fact *practiced* by Americans . . . as the scope of American democracy widened, so too did the practice of self-construction” (12). Discussing the autonomous self, Howe identifies the ideals of American democracy as vital to understanding the pervasiveness of self-construction, and also gestures towards the act of self-construction as an integral aspect of Americans’ conceptualizations of themselves since the country’s colonial history. By locating the performance of the American self in the country’s colonial history, critics and historians illuminate the embeddedness of the American model of government in perceptions of the American identity,

particularly the liberty to define the self as an autonomous subject.[17] Howe describes the influence of the American ideal of self-governance on early American identities, writing, "When the people discussed in this book spoke of 'self-government,' they meant it in both a political and psychological sense, and they believed that the two senses went together" (9). By discussing self-government as a concept enacted in personal and public contexts, Walker indicates the relationship between the nation and the individual that allows for the myth of individualism to perpetuate.

As a myth, the ideal of individualism purports that all individuals act autonomously in a democratic government and have the liberty to determine the trajectory of their lives. However, individualism remains a myth, as some critics have discussed. For instance, historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. demonstrated the paradoxical nature of individualism as both powerful rhetoric and unattainable ideal. Specifically, he offered a version of individualism that explicitly celebrates heroes, differentiating them from "common" individuals. His 1958 publication "The Decline of Heroes" considered the negative implications of Soviet-era dictatorship before asserting: "our age has gone further than this—it objects not just to hero worship but to heroes. The century of the common man has come into its own" (97). The concept of heroism thrives on mythic idealizations of the individual as one worthy of praise, which texts such as Schlesinger's delineate. He asked, "Where does the great man fit into our homogenized society?" (98). Schlesinger's dichotomy between great individuals and a homogenized society supported a capitalistic economic mode that exemplifies particularly American ideals.

As the authors in this study demonstrate, the negotiation between capitalistic modes of publishing and the autonomy of the individual illuminates the difficulty in

[17] Sacvan Bercovitch's useful study *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* encourages thinking about the role of rhetoric in establishing the American self as a rich symbol established in autobiographical works, for instance.

supporting a purely individualistic view of American self-construction. Schlesinger indicates the discrepancy between American economic modes and the rhetoric of individualism that characterizes public life, as he asserts:

> More and more of us live and work within great organizations . . . The bureaucratization of American life, the decline of the working class, the growth of the white-collar class, the rise of suburbia—all this has meant the increasing homogeneity of American society. Though we continue to speak of ourselves as rugged individualists, our actual life has grown more and more collective and anonymous. (98)

Schlesinger's statement identifies individualism as rhetoric, which exemplifies the constructed nature of individualism and its prevalence as a narrative crafted partly in response to economic models that encourage self-centered views. Writing in 1958, Schlesinger particularly responds to the economic conditions of his time, further evincing the malleability of individualism as an unstable concept that nevertheless remains pertinent, as studies of the celebrity and the author demonstrate.

Lukes' conceptualization of individualism is itself subject to the historical context in which he wrote, as he reconsidered his 1973 text in a new introduction published in 2006. Revisiting the text three decades later, Lukes' approach necessarily differs, problematizing the historical constancy of American individualism. Acknowledging the influence of deconstruction, Lukes reassesses his methodology, writing, "But, as I now see more clearly, these exercises in semantic history and in taxonomy really amounted to a second aim of the book: namely, to decompose, or perhaps better, *deconstruct* (the term was not yet in vogue) a socially constructed concept" (2-3, emphasis in original). In deconstructing the concept of individualism, Lukes importantly asserts, "'Individualism' is presented as a tightly coherent body of ideas" (9), which contributes to its status as a myth, as Colin Bird's text *The Myth of Liberal Individualism* (1999) supports. Particularly salient in Lukes' quotation is the use of "presented" to indicate the discrepancy

between the presentation of individualism and its position as a socially constructed myth.

As a result of the mythic nature of individualism, celebrity literary journalists contribute to its prevailing power through their individualistic accounts of journalism. Their narratives join other narratives of the constructed American self that frequently enter the conversation regarding the historical significance of American selfhood. With the ideal of autonomy reinforced through the dominant version of the story of America's founding, populated by stories of figures such as Benjamin Franklin, the impulse to characterize the individual as self-made finds support in long-established narratives. Reflecting concerns addressed by theorists of persona studies, Howe notes the importance of identity construction in lives of American figures including Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, and Frederick Douglass, and Howe echoes other critics by asserting, "Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) is, of course, one of the most famous exemplars of self-construction who ever lived" (22). Howe's discussion of Franklin's life as an act of self-construction aptly emphasizes the prevalence of construction in an American context, writing, "The opportunity for self-construction, though far from universal, has been more widespread in the United States than elsewhere" (16). Indeed, scrutinizing the self to an audience has influenced the American act of self-representation since before Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, in America's Puritanical roots.[18] In *From Puritanism to Postmodernism* (1993), Malcolm Bradbury and Richard Ruland describe the importance of autobiographical

[18] Scholars have discussed the importance of Puritan accounts delivered at church services in which personal stories entered the public sphere. Margo Culley, for instance, writes of the Puritan conversion narratives in which "the individual autobiographical act was an act of community building" (10). Of the preacher Thomas Shepard's autobiography, Kathleen M. Swaim identifies his use of his own life story to instruct his congregation, an "elevation of individual history into public parable" (52). Bradbury and Ruland likewise describe the importance of accounts like Shepard's autobiography and Jonathan Edwards' *Personal Narrative* as acts of self-scrutiny.

works in American history: “Such works created a legacy of self-scrutiny that was to shape later secular statements of individualism and conscience, like that famous gospel of the American Self, the *Autobiography* of the eighteenth century’s best-known American, Benjamin Franklin” (18). By highlighting individualism’s prevalence in religious and secular works of autobiography, Bradbury and Ruland demonstrate the traceable lineage of self-mythologies through autobiographical works, which emphasizes the recurrence of the self-made person in crucial points of American history, including its Puritanical roots and during the American Revolution. Recognizing the historical precedents for the self-made American individual, critics of autobiography support the claims of this study by establishing a chronology of self-mythologies that has relevance in the works I examine that combine autobiography and journalism. Additionally, by frequently citing Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography in discussions of the self-made American, critics exemplify the convergence of politics and persona creation, which is also relevant in my study.

Benjamin Franklin’s influence on American autobiography characterizes early critical discussions of autobiography, and Olney points to James M. Cox’s work on Franklin in 1962 during autobiographical studies’ beginnings. Olney cites Cox’s 1962 work, *Recovering Literature’s Lost Ground*, and states, “What is truly interesting is that Franklin’s act of conceiving, discovering, or inventing himself almost exactly coincides with the birth of America” (16). As the autobiographies from notable individuals such as Benjamin Franklin and the Puritan church leaders demonstrate, the power to craft a persona through autobiographical texts allows for the beginnings of self-mythologies. Franklin’s autobiography joins other texts such as Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself” (1855) as a particularly famed example of the

mythologized American individual asserting itself as a literary trope that encompassed individual and universal concerns.[19]

Further, the relationship between autobiography and American individualism is addressed in works of literary criticism examining fictional modes of realism that prize individuals' narratives. For instance, in Ian Watt's study *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), he elucidated the techniques used in literary realism that constitute "the production of what purports to be an authentic account of the actual experiences of individuals" (27). While Watt's study could be discussed in relation to the elements of literary realism inherent in the texts in this study, his discussion of individualism's role in literary works provides an important precedent because of the connection in his work between individualism and forms of literature, which this study also asserts in its consideration of individualism in works of literary journalism.

In defining individualism, Watt's discussion of the absence of tradition to conceptualizations of the individual foregrounds the version of the individual characterized in works of literary journalism. Watt describes "an appropriate ideology . . . primarily based, not on the tradition of the past, but on the autonomy of the individual" (*Rise of the Novel* 60). His definition emphasizes the singularity of the individual's experience that works of literary journalism necessitate. Rather than position themselves in relation to others writing in a similar tradition, celebrity literary journalists characterize themselves as unique in their reportage, and they evince

[19] It should be noted that the American individual as a literary trope has particularly masculine implications, especially in the context of literary celebrity. In *Authors, Inc.: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880-1980,* Loren Glass "argues that celebrity authorship in the United States was a resolutely historical phenomenon that began with the rise of mass culture and the first crisis of masculinity in the late nineteenth century" (23). The relationship between masculinity, literary celebrity, and American individualism is rich for exploration but is outside the scope of my study.

Watt's definition of individualism, which echoes the thinking of other critics in his description of societal narratives of the individual's autonomy, as he asserts:

> In all ages, no doubt, and in all societies, some people have been 'individualists' in the sense that they were egocentric, unique or conspicuously independent of current opinions and habits; but the concept of individualism involves much more than this. It posits a whole society mainly governed by the idea of every individual's intrinsic independence both from other individuals and from that multifarious allegiance to past modes of thought and action denoted by the word 'tradition'—a force that is always social, not individual. (60)

By elucidating the relationship between the individualist and the ideology of individualism as a socially constructed concept, Watt describes tensions that also resonate in a literary context, whether in the works of literary realism he discusses or the works in this study.

Watt's argument thus has bearing on texts besides eighteenth-century novels, as his historicizing of the concept of individualism evinces. Though his history of individualism ends in the nineteenth century, Watt could extend his history into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to examine how narrative personas respond to changes and continuities in social and political implications of individualism. One of Watt's assertions is particularly applicable when considering conceptualizations of individualism, as he states: "the characters of the novel can only be individualised if they are set in a background of particularised time and place" (*Rise of the Novel* 21). The character's narrative therefore does not depend entirely on the strength of the individual's story, but also on the historical and circumstantial conditions that contribute to its telling. As each chapter of my study demonstrates, the historical and social conditions of each celebrity literary journalist's writing influences their conceptualizations of the individual.[20]

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[20] Ian Watt's interest in canonical literary figures' relationship with the rhetoric of individualism characterizes another of his texts, *Myths of Modern Individualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe* (1996). Regarding the characters he discusses—Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe—Watt also argues the importance of historical conditions to the ways in which the individual is conceptualized, arguing: "they

Watt's study discusses individualism exclusively in terms of the British novel, but his thinking parallels arguments inherent to discussions of American literature, as evident in R. W. B Lewis' influential study, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (1955). Lewis examines the mythology of the American individual as a heroic, ahistorical figure, describing "an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources" (5). Lewis' study applies his concept of the self-reliant individual to canonical nineteenth century texts such as Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) and Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855) to consider classic examples of independent, self-characterizing figures who freed themselves from the constraints of history, instead creating conditions in which they were free to invent themselves, whether in free verse or autobiographical prose.[21] As Lewis argued, the narrators of *Walden* and *Leaves of Grass* depicted themselves as characters created in a context "[w]ith the past discarded and largely forgotten, with conventions shed and the molting season concluded" (28). In citing Thoreau and Whitman, Lewis acknowledges the rich tradition of protagonists in American literature whose stories highlight their acts of self-construction.

Lewis' description of classic examples of American literature demonstrates a paradigmatic tradition in American history that manifests in literary and non-literary contexts, as discussed earlier in this introduction in the relationship between the

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reflected their period's new emphasis on the social and political primacy of the individual" (242).

[21] Scholarship on *Walden* and *Leaves of Grass* is expansive, but for more extensive criticism regarding the importance of the self-reliant figure in these two works, see Richard Francis' *Transcendental Utopias: Individual and Community at Brook Farm, Fruitlands, and Walden* (2007), and W.C. Harris' 2000 article "Whitman's 'Leaves of Grass' and the Problem of the One and the Many".

American mode of governance and individuals' conceptualizations of their autonomy. Lewis' view of the individual is particularly useful for my study because of his emphasis on the independence of the individual from tradition. The use of the journalistic form is then a rich act of self-construction because of the present-tense nature of journalism in which the journalist engages with current events, particularly in works of investigative journalism. As many of the authors of this study engage in investigative journalism, they depict themselves as self-reliant and self-propelling, entering a variety of situations but maintaining their autonomy by self-reflexively highlighting their reactions to the demands of their journalistic assignments. Because of their depiction of the individual's autonomy, the authors detail the immediacy of their various situations in journalistic reports to locate themselves in the scenes they describe.

The Cult of the Individual

The preoccupation with the individual that has been examined in this introduction is encapsulated most effectively in the sociological concept of the cult of the individual, which proves useful in expressing the adulatory nature of the individual's rise to celebrity status, as Eric Rothenbuhler demonstrates in a chapter entitled "The Church of the Cult of the Individual." Rothenbuhler's contribution to the collection *Media Anthropology* (2005) provides a significant new lens through which to consider representations of the self, especially as Rothenbuhler examines the view of the individual as a highly prized commodity. He draws on the work of sociologist Emile Durkheim and his theory of the cult of the individual, describing the value of "[a]ssimilating Durkheimian sociology and consumer culture" (93) and highlights how celebrity culture exemplifies the idolization of the individual, which Durkheim's theory describes. Durkheim's theory proposed that the cult of the individual "is the religion of the modern society" (Rothenbuhler 91), which modes of

autobiographical writing and commentary on celebrity lives help to support by reinforcing the interest in and valuing of individuals.

The language of Rothenbuhler's title is especially significant because of the concepts it distils from Durkheim's thinking in its religious imagery; "church" and "cult" imply the status of the individual as an object of worship. The individual as a sacred object is an idea espoused in *The Division of Labour* (1893): "As all the other beliefs and all the other practices take on a character less and less religious, the individual becomes the object of a sort of religion. We erect a cult on behalf of personal dignity" (172). Though Durkheim's statement did not address the idolizing of celebrities, the applicability of religious terminology to celebrated individuals is evident: in *Star Authors,* the phrase "cult" appears a number of times when discussing celebrities; Moran uses phrases such as the "cult of authorship" (15) and the "cult of celebrity" (33) and refers to Adorno and Horkheimer's use of "'cult of leading personalities'" (qtd. in Moran 60) and Philip Collins' description of "'a new cult of literary personality'" (16). Boone and Vickers describe the elevation of celebrities to a god-like status, writing, "To this day, the numinous aura of the godly and the ineffable surrounds both the celebrity 'icons' or 'idols' on whom the mysterious gift of 'It' has been bestowed ('heavenly bodies,' as Dyer aptly calls them) and the participants in celebrity worship, the congregation of the faithful" (903-04). The language of worship—"the godly," "the congregation of the faithful,"—aligns itself with theories of individualism such as Durkheim's that propose the ways the rhetoric of the individual is not only present in social life, but is also valued to the level of religious worship.

Despite its applicability to numerous aspects of public life, Durkheim's theory noticeably omits mention of journalism or literature. Rothenbuhler notes how Durkheim's theory elided mention of the media, asserting, "One of the mysteries of Durkheim's work is his lack of explicit reference to communication and media" (92),

particularly because his work was published between 1893 and 1912. Rothenbuhler highlights technological advancements, such as the telegraph, at the turn of the century that aided in the cult of the individual's expansion. Considering the influence of the numerous platforms used for celebrating the individual, Rothenbuhler amends Durkheim's omission by expanding his theory to include outlets for information and entertainment. He asserts: "Modern life is built on the cult of the individual . . . our communication practices; our cultural choices; our industries of information, entertainment, and consumption; our politics; our educational institutions; and, increasingly, our churches are built around the construction, display, critique, and improvement of selves" (99). Rothenbuhler's assertion in its wide-reaching nature is tremendously significant; the cult of the individual becomes normalized because of its presence in the various areas of social life that support its proliferation. From politics to entertainment, the public's response to the strength of the individual's personality and its ability to earn a collection of followers influences numerous areas of public life.

As further evidence of his view of individualism as a normalized institution, Durkheim suggested in *The Division of Labour* that individualism possesses a timeless quality, stating, "Individualism, free thought, dates neither from our time nor from 1789, nor from the Reformation, nor from scholasticism, nor from the decline of Graeco-Latin polytheism or oriental theocracies. It is a phenomenon which begins in no certain part, but which develops without cessation all through history" (171).[22] Claiming individualism is a timeless, universal ideal contributes to Durkheim's

[22] Critics of Durkheim question the universality of the "individual" to which he referred, particularly feminist theorists. In Marcela Cristi's 2012 article "Durkheim on Moral Individualism, Social Justice, and Rights: A Gendered Construction of Rights," she highlights how the Durkheimian "individual" who should be guaranteed equality and just treatment was male; in Durkheim's structural functionalism, subordination of women maintained a structure of hierarchy that allowed society to function. Wives and child-bearers were thus functions to be included in the structure of society, which, as Cristi argues, undermines the universal humanism that could be interpreted as Durkheim's philosophy.

rejection of "the utilitarian egoism of [Herbert] Spencer and the economists" and the "crass commercialism which reduces society to nothing more than a vast apparatus of production and exchange" (*Morality and Society* 44). Instead, his thinking placed individualism as a higher ideal than capitalism and, perhaps more importantly, established individualism as highly idealistic because the individualism Durkheim envisioned had the possibility of uniting individuals as a universal goal to guarantee the right of the individual.[23]

Though Durkheim's thinking might seem far removed from the context of textual representations of the self, his response to his times with a declaration of the individual's importance parallels the historical impetus inspiring some first-hand accounts, such as New Journalistic responses to their sociopolitical context of the Vietnam era. The consideration that specific conditions allow for the individual's expression undermines the depiction of individualism as a timeless, universal ideal, which is a tension presented by Durkheim's thinking. The implication of timelessness and universality eclipsing historical specificity is an important tension in the continued prevalence of the rhetoric of individualism. As Paul Stob examines in his article, "The Rhetoric of Individualism and the Creation of Community," the tropes of individualist narratives depend on "individualist discourse suggest[ing] that

[23] The boldness of Durkheim's claim can partly be explained by the historical context in which he wrote. Durkheim's philosophy responded to the rapid political and economic changes in nineteenth century France, which inevitably presented questions about the role of the individual in society. Living under France's Third Republic, Durkheim was writing while France was slowly evolving from an agrarian economy into industrialization, continuing to establish its government a century after the French Revolution, and his writing on individualism was influenced by the ideals of *liberté, égalité,* and *fraternité,* which had become an official motto representing a part of French ideology by the time of the Third Republic. The decreasing role of the Catholic Church, as Durkheim viewed it, influenced the sentiment regarding the rights of the individual, having reached new heights during the French Revolution with the publication of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* (1789). ("Durkheim's 'Individualism and the Intellectuals'")

freedom and agency are available to everyone" (26) thus erasing social and cultural factors that distinguish individuals.

The "individualist discourse" that Stob investigates includes the journalism that intersects with autobiography to produce first-person narratives, therefore entering it into a discussion of individualism. Operating on the belief that "individualism is the core value of modern society" (Marske 3), Durkheim's interest in individualism as a "core value" is useful to consider alongside discussions of journalism, which is characterized by a series of values. As Michael Buozis and Brian Creech argue, "Values, such as objectivity, or conventions, such as the inverted pyramid, shape the structure of texts, forming a coherent representational practice that persists in newsrooms" (2). Further, the values expressed in journalistic practice help establish journalism as an austere institution with ideals of objectivity that contribute to its authoritative nature.

In viewing journalism sociologically, the identity of the unconventional journalist becomes more clearly characterized, particularly because of the importance of the collective to the individual journalist. The confrontation between the journalist and the institution of journalism, a conflict in which the individual is triumphant by asserting a subjective perspective, is narrativized in accounts of unconventional journalism. Unconventional journalists reflect Stob's statement: "Institutional confrontation is key to individualist narratives, as the hero must succeed despite daunting obstacles" (26). Traditional journalism thrives on the reputation of the institution of journalism; Barbie Zelizer notes the significance of the journalistic collective as she asserts:

> common to all sociological inquiry into journalism was an emphasis on the systematic actions, practices, and interactions by which journalists maintained themselves as journalists . . . journalists were seen within this view as sociological beings who systematically acted in patterned ways that had bearing on the stature and shape of the journalistic collective at large. (47)

Zelizer's list should also reference the importance of systematic journalistic values, which includes moralistic values such as truth and trustworthiness. As a symbol of shared moral values, traditional journalistic practice does not respond to the ideal of individualism, but rather the sort of collective shared belief system that Durkheim described in his texts on religion.

As a result, valuing individualism to a level of worship establishes a hospitable environment for subjectivities to enter into domains traditionally known for objectivity. Literary journalism's history includes many figures whose idolizing of the self distinguished their work from conventional journalism, and thus their forms of journalism that prize the individual can be viewed through Durkheim's theory that values the individual to the level of religious worship. Consequently, Durkheim's theory is valuable for understanding the texts in each chapter because of the emphasis not only on the individual but, more importantly, the worship of the individual, as signified by the self-mythologizing tactics present in each work, which were particularly utilized by New Journalists like Hunter S. Thompson and Norman Mailer.

Though many examples in this introduction have pointed to the importance of the 1960s and 70s New Journalism, it is merely one period among many in which unconventional journalists received attention from critics for their participatory, individualistic tactics. To understand more fully the similar and diverging conditions in which unconventional journalists manipulate journalistic convention with their individualist personas, a number of historical moments should be considered. For instance, focusing on the figures who emerged during the period of news commercialization in the beginning of the twentieth century or the period introducing twenty-four-hour news cycles in the 1990s, the impact of changing modes of news dissemination influences the way that seemingly subversive journalistic voices conform to a dominant national narrative of individualism as enduring rhetoric.

Given the number of renowned authors who have written literary journalism and thus generated interest for scholarly enquiry, this study aims to further examine the complexities exhibited by writers of literary journalism across different time periods and seeks to position the form in terms of broader cultural concerns in American writing. Specifically, I attempt to understand the form as a response to a particularly American conceptualization of individualism as a historically and politically powerful value and as a sustained national mythology. In a similar fashion to Ian Watt contextualizing the rise of the novel in response to the economic individualism of the eighteenth century, I view the continued prevalence of American individualism as subject to specific historical and political circumstances, which the authors of the works of literary journalism in this study evince. Thus, literary journalism, and the particularly participatory mode examined in this study, can be read as a reflection of the continued prizing of individualism as an ideal that perpetuates partly because of self-reflexive, congratulatory narratives that result from a set of specific historical and socio-political circumstances.

As I hope to demonstrate, the lineage of unconventional journalists that includes writers from different historical contexts contribute to a discussion on the tensions between a writer's artistic and commercial value when their persona becomes a commodity, thus drawing on conventions of autobiographical writing to present a character that is often intertextual. The different media across which each author appears reinforces the importance of the author's literal image alongside images constructed in textual representations. From the lecture circuit of Mark Twain's post-Civil War era to the contemporary use of television appearances, the author's public performance enhances the complicated relationship between the writer and the writer's work.

This study uses the designation of "unconventional journalism" to highlight the authority invested in journalistic convention. Scholars have noted the importance

of journalistic conventions and “journalism’s implicit authority over the truth” (Buozis and Creech 7). For instance, Buozis and Creech cite “the repeated and common conventions that constitute the power of journalistic representation” (7). By focusing on the conventions that establish journalism as a recognizable form, deeper consideration of abstractions such as truth and power in journalism can be examined. The relationship between truth and journalism is a well-investigated topic, examined from a number of angles. Foucault’s work on the role of power in shaping truth claims is a potential connection, as Mark Andrejevic proposes in his article “Power, Knowledge, and Governance: Foucault’s Relevance to Journalism Studies” (2008). The journalistic convention of truth and the power granted to journalistic organizations underlies each chapter, which all examine different methods in which writers strove to subvert practices that established journalism as a political institution with standardized practices, regulated by a capitalistic organization, whether in the form of a newspaper, magazine, or subsequent collected works that repackaged the journalistic writing. As a result, the concept of journalism as a collection of varied approaches also influences my thinking.

The nature of the study required a selection of historical moments, which has been divided into four periods: the post-Civil War era, the beginning of the twentieth-century, the Vietnam era, and the turn of the millennium. In each period, self-reflexive journalistic texts challenged the depersonalizing nature of standardized journalism, thus forming a tradition in a traceable lineage. Also, a sense of journalistic innovation characterized the four periods, earning titles like New Journalism, but each period was similarly shaped by financial imperatives to commodify the individual. Capitalizing on the commercial viability of marketing individualism in their journalism, each writer invented a persona rooted in the negotiation of journalistic mores. The invented personas, signifying the constructed

nature of reportorial writing, responded to the tension of the individual existing in an organization.

My study begins with Mark Twain to introduce the techniques of intertextual fame-building that the writers in the other chapters will replicate. Because he promoted his persona through newspaper sketches, lectures, and his book-length works, Twain developed his own fame with proto-postmodern self-reflexivity. Beginning with Twain allows this study to introduce the importance of the literary celebrity as a commercially valuable commodity. Additionally, as the entry point to the celebrity literary journalist, Twain highlights the importance of the performative aspects of intertextual personas.

The second chapter examines the commercialization of the newspaper industry at the turn of the century. The significance of yellow journalism, a form of sensationalized reporting, contributes to a wider exploration of the term “New Journalism” as it was used at the beginning of the twentieth century. In contextualizing the New Journalism, I focus on the emergence and popularization of the interview as a site of persona-building and the promotion of the individual. Though a variety of early practitioners could be considered, the chapter focuses on the use of the interview in the stunt reporting of Nellie Bly. To continue historicizing the unconventional journalist figure, Bly’s articles are used to trace concepts presented in Twain’s work, particularly the forming of a commodified brand of reporting.

Given the use of the phrase “New Journalism” to connote commercially appealing writing that subverted expectations for newspaper reports, the third chapter interprets the reappearance of new journalism in the Vietnam era. In the work of Norman Mailer and Hunter S. Thompson, the character of the unconventional journalist is especially lauded through self-mythologizing tactics. Their places in publications such as *Harper’s* and *Rolling Stone* dramatize the

tension between the individual writers and the reputation of their publications, which corresponds to the political context in which they wrote. The movements in the 1960s and 70s that questioned a homogenous authority reflected the push for individualized approaches to governance that each writer champions.

Following the discussion of the New Journalism of the 1960s, I draw parallels between Mailer and Thompson and David Foster Wallace. In considering the performance of the unconventional journalist in overtly political contexts, this chapter aims to interrogate the affective nature of politics, which allows for Wallace's faux journalist character to emerge. I consider Wallace's essay on John McCain's campaign in 2000, "Up, Simba!", which considers the persona-creation that accompanies political campaigns. As an unlikely double for John McCain, the subject of his essay, Wallace responds to the hyper-mediated context in which he wrote, and his self-reflexive performance as a journalist exemplifies the predominance of personal narratives at the turn of the millennium.

The final chapter considers the work of Sarah Vowell, a contributor to the radio program *This American Life.* Given Vowell's relationship with broadcast journalism*,* I read Vowell's work *Assassination Vacation* (2005) as a form of performative journalism in which the persona Vowell cultivated on the radio program investigates historiography self-reflexively. Additionally, I discuss the influence of infotainment on Vowell's work to partly expand the scope of my study by examining unconventional journalism across explicitly theatrical platforms, including *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report.*

The publications vary from newspapers, magazines, and subsequent collected works. In many instances, the choice of works is determined by the writer's conscious relationship with their publications' reputation. For instance, David Foster Wallace's essay on John McCain, examined in depth later in the study, includes many moments of reflection on the importance of him writing a political piece for the

readers of *Rolling Stone* magazine. Similarly, Nellie Bly's relationship with the *World* influenced her work as she presented herself to her interview subjects as a representative of the *World* and thus a writer for a recognizable, well-circulated newspaper. As I will argue, the authors' references to their various publications undermine their self-characterizations as self-made reporters.

In each period, the relationship between news production and entertainment witnessed a number of permutations, whether in the penny papers that preceded Twain's era or the rise of satirical news broadcasts, including the "Weekend Update" segment of *Saturday Night Live* or the eleven-season run of *The Colbert Report.* By satirizing the investment in personalities to deliver the news, the comedic news show reveals the manner in which objective reports become subjective by centering on the fame of one individual. With such importance invested in the individual, the cult of the individual persists across time periods and media. The result is, as has been suggested, a view of the rhetoric of individualism as all-pervasive, including in outlets expected to thrive on depersonalized voices.

Chapter One: The Intertextual Fame of Mark Twain

When considering the lineage of the literary journalist performer tradition, a number of writers are potential points of origin because early examples of the celebrity as a public figure in the United States include a variety of authors who utilized journalistic forms to craft recognizable personas. The popularity of the nineteenth-century lecture circuit allowed for important humorist-journalist figures to capitalize on the public visibility afforded by the lecture circuit, including David Ross Locke's character Petroleum V. Nasby, Henry Wheeler Shaw's Josh Billings, and Charles Farrar Browne's Artemus Ward. Locke, Shaw, and Browne are significant contemporaries of Twain because of the characters they created in newspapers in which they wrote political satire or humorous letters that established their fame before they embarked on lecture tours, sometimes appearing alongside Twain. As contemporaries of Twain, the dynamics of celebrity authorship in their careers are important to examine before I establish Twain's place as a point of origin for this study, given their similar engagement with politics, performance, and persona creation across different media.

Though this study begins in the Civil War-era, the role of the American ideology of individualism in establishing recognizable personalities, particularly in journalistic contexts, is traceable to early periods in the nineteenth century. Before the celebrity was recognized in the Civil War-era, the foundations for the American star's rise exist in the Jacksonian era, as Peter Cherches notes, writing:

> A European-influenced, romantic conception of the hero as someone who transcends the limits that proscribe common mortals, combined with a particularly American cult of the rugged individualist—a combination no doubt responsible for the vitality of the Davy Crockett legend and other frontier myths—helped to foster the rise of the star system in the Jacksonian era. (xv)

Cherches' reference to the cult of individualism as particularly American is important when considering the expansion of celebrity across the United States through the

lecture circuit, which increased the number of opportunities for audiences to celebrate an individual performer by bringing the performer closer to audiences.

Twain's era is especially notable because of writers' frequent conflation of performance and authorship, which combined the fame they earned from their newspaper sketches alongside their public appearances on the lecture circuit. For instance, in the "Biographical Introduction" of *The Complete Works of Josh Billings* (1876), Billings' performance is described as a vital aspect of his persona, especially in an American context with its high value placed on entertainment: "A 'showman,' as well as an author, *Josh Billings* is now regarded in the cities of the Union. In England we would style him a facetious lecturer, but the lecturing business in America is carried out with all the arts, formulæ and appurtenances of showmanship" (xv). The introduction's explicit emphasis on the lecture as a business, noting the publicity associated with Billings' public appearances, attests to the commercially minded tactics that characterize American celebrity authorship in the Civil War-era. As the introduction notes, "There are the large posters, the puff advertisements, the agent in advance, and the lithographs plain or colored, all brought into requisition" (xv). Given the numerous elements such as posters and agents that established it as a business, the lecture circuit multiplied Billings' identities, presenting him to audiences as a humorist, author, and newspaper writer. His public persona established him as a commercially valuable product worth paying to see, which exemplifies the lecture circuit's success in commodifying authors' personalities for public consumption.

Besides describing Billings' fame in terms of the uniquely American approach to celebrity publicity, the "Biographical Introduction" elucidates the ways in which advertisements for authors' public appearances resembled those of other spectacles in popular entertainment. As the "Biographical Introduction" states:

> It is quite true that if Charles Dickens visited Manchester or Birmingham to read 'Doctor Marigold' or 'The Christmas Carol,' he also had his agent and his yellow window-bills with the black and red printing; but the window-bill is limited to a size and is printed in a style fitting to the superior class of entertainment; while, in America, the posters of the popular lecturer are as showy and as exciting as those of Van Amburgh with his wild beasts, or the Hanlon Brothers with their feats on the trapeze. (xv)

Comparing author appearances to circus acts, the introduction classes the lectures in the realm of popular entertainment, accessible to a wide variety of audiences and thus increasing the authors' cultural currency. By commercializing authors' physical images, posters and advertisements made the author's identity more recognizable, and audiences were able to invest in the author's personality alongside their work. The work done in the authors' newspaper writing to establish their humorous voices was amplified by their performances on the public platform of the lecture, particularly as the advertisements and posters ensured the spectacular nature of the appearance and promised its value as a form of entertainment that all audiences could access.

In addition to the spectacular advertisements for authors in the United States, the newspaper and the promotion of the journalist figure in its pages contribute to the intertextuality of the authors' fame in the Civil War-era as the writers performed personas in their columns. For instance, in a sketch entitled "Hints to Comik Lekturers," Billings comments on the act of appearing before audiences as an entertainer, writing, "Whenever a man haz made up hiz mind that he iz a wit, then he iz mistaken without remedy, but whenever the publick haz made up their mind that he haz got the disease, then he haz got it sure. Individuals never git this thing right, the publik never git it wrong. The publik never cheat themselfs, nor other folks, when they weigh out glory" (89). Billings' statements address the politics of performing in which the audience's reception determines the performer's fame, negating the notion of authorial fame as self-generated. Later in his sketch, he also considers the

performer's self-perception, reflecting self-reflexive techniques that other celebrity authors in this study echo. Though writing of a performer in general terms, he ends the sketch by directing the focus to his own experience of the lecture circuit. Billings details his views of lecturing as a business, writing, "I hav got a very lonesum opinyun ov the comik lektring bizziness, and if I waz well shut ov it, and knu how tew git an honest living at ennything else, (except opening clams, and keeping a districkt skool,) i would quit tommorrow" (91). Given Billings' fame because of the lecture circuit, and thus his ability to form an opinion on its dynamics, his statements are ironic as he cultivated his persona as an experienced professional who had the ability to quit the profession that contributed to his fame.

Billings' sketch and its self-reflexivity foreground some of the concerns that this dissertation examines, especially as he portrayed one of the sources of his fame antagonistically. His sketch's engagement with his profession mirrors the critical commentary that Artemus Ward included in his sketches, particularly in his sketch "High-Handed Outrage at Utica." Ward wrote in his characteristic dialect, "In the Faul of 1856, I showed my show in Uticky, a trooly grate sitty in the State of New York. The people gave me a cordyal recepshun. The press was loud in her prases" (45). By noting the praise that he received, Ward promotes his show as a form of entertainment that both critics and audiences appreciate, thereby joining the Press in advertising his show. His self-promotion reflects Twain's advertisements of himself, and Ward's engagement with the Press is also a precursor to Twain's writing about the Press. Both authors considered the Press' powerful influence in establishing one's fame, which I will examine later in this chapter. Indeed, Ward published a sketch entitled "The Press," which criticized the authority held by editors in shaping an author's reception. Ward described the exchange with the editor as such:

> He sed my wax works was a humbug & called me a horey-heded itinerent vagabone. I thort at fust Ide pollish him orf ar-lar the Beneshy Boy, but on reflectin that he cood pollish me much wuss in his paper, I giv it up. & I wood here take occashun to advise peple when thay run agin, as thay sumtimes will, these miserable papers, to not pay no attenshun to um. Abuv all, don't assault a editer of this kind. (79)

Suggesting that the editor held power over him, Ward critiques the form that increased his fame and thus set a precedent that the other authors in this study, including Twain, will mirror in their critical engagement with the Press.[24] Identifying "these miserable papers" and advising against engaging with them, Ward cultivates a persona as a famed individual who editors included in their newspapers and granted publicity, regardless of their opinion of his work.

As Ward and Billings include fame as a subject for publication, they perpetuate their own mythologies, building brands of their names. In the dynamics of the newspaper publishing industry, the exaggerated publicity involved in author appearances include the fame of the author's name, as both Ward and Billings demonstrate. The introduction to Billings' collection notes, "The great secret of the popularity of *Artemus Ward* and of *Josh Billings* is simply that which the late Albert Smith of England so well understood years ago, never to publish any article, however trivial or lengthy, without the signature or the initials of the writer to it" (xxv). The visibility of the signature contributed to the building of a commercial brand through textual representations that preceded the author's fame in public performances. Viewed as sources of entertainment, the authors were attractive commodities for newspaper publishers who benefitted from the authors' fame and recognizable names, which the introduction acknowledges: "The newspapers of the

[24] The relationship between Twain and Ward is examined in Robert Rowlette's article "'Mark Twain on Artemus Twain': Twain's Literary Debt to Ward" (1973), though Rowlette's focus is on the similarities between the two authors' comic writing, as he notes, "Twain borrowed considerably from Ward . . . Mostly he borrowed the staples of the comic-writer's trade--jokes, anecdotes, catch-phrases, snappers, one-liners" (21).

Union are always ready to receive pithy paragraphs from clever men, and to attach the authors' name to them" (xxv). Because of the importance invested in the author's name, the author's identity generated value in newspapers, and their performances on and off the page are important to consider alongside each other, particularly as their written work addressed their extratextual performances.

As another contemporary of Twain's, Artemus Ward's relationship with different forms of performances particularly relied on his place in the newspaper. For instance, in his "Biographical Sketch," Melville D. Landon describes Browne's fame as wide-reaching when beginning at a local newspaper and before creating the Ward character: "His column soon gained a local fame and everybody read it. His fame even traveled away to Cleveland, where, in 1858, when Mr. Browne was twenty-four years of age, Mr. J.W. Gray of the Cleveland 'Plaindealer' secured him as local reporter . . . Here his reputation first began to assume a national character" (11). Describing Browne as a national character, Landon assures readers that Browne had gained widespread recognition, which further promotes his talent and persona. Additionally, the inclusion of a biographical introduction evinces the interest in Browne's identity outside the character he created and portrays him as a famed figure worth detailing in a biography. Retracing the beginning of Browne's career, Landon demonstrates the centrality of fame to discussions of the author's legacy, writing, "Tired of the pen, he resolved on trying the platform. His Bohemian friends agreed that his fame and fortune would be made before intelligent audiences. He resolved to try it" (13). As an example of fame's intertextuality, Browne and his Ward character "filled his pockets with a handsome exchequer" (Landon 14), and his place as a commodified individual influenced his writing.

In the case of Artemus Ward and Josh Billings, the invention of a new character helped to cultivate their fame as public figures in multiple contexts, and a

final contemporary of theirs, David Ross Locke and his character Petroleum V. Nasby, should be considered because of his invention of a character across newspapers and lectures. Deemed “Locke’s extraordinarily imaginative creation” (Carwardine 6), Nasby exemplifies the convergence of politics and entertainment as he responded to the political conflicts of the era, creating a vehicle for satire and social commentary. Carwardine describes Nasby as “a selfish and conniving political office-seeker: dissolute, whisky drinking, red-nosed, greedy, loud, unprincipled, bigoted, hypocritical, dissembling and sordid. The residents of Findlay, according to Locke’s modern biographer, speculated on the inspiration for the villain” (6). Nasby’s creation, described as a villain, has relevance for this study because of his identifiable persona that uses political conflict to increase his persona’s fame. As the other authors in subsequent chapters will exemplify, the first-persona narration included in political commentary allows for another drama in the narrative in which the self-reflexive protagonists perform their personas as they insert themselves into the drama of the political process.

Indeed, in Nasby’s book *Swinging Round the Circle* (1867), his twelfth chapter particularly foreshadows techniques used by other authors in this study, as the chapter’s title states, “The President’s 22d of February Speech.--The Account thereof of One behind the Scenes.--Hopes and Fears of the Democracy” (79). Described as a participant “behind the scenes, Nasby depicts the political process from a first-person, experiential perspective, writing, “I heerd Androo Johnson speak last nite! I stood beside him! I helpt hold him up! I *smelt his breath*” (79). As he reported from inside the political process, he promoted himself as someone with privileged access, and his perspective is deemed noteworthy as his book’s subtitle advertises the text as “His Ideas of Men, Politics, and Things.” The title humorously suggests the breadth of Nasby’s subject, though much of his text involves the

political commentary that would make his writing a favorite of President Lincoln's (Carwardine 15). As Nasby introduces the book in the guise of a political document, he states, "I didn't put these thots uv mine upon paper for amoozement. There hezn't bin anythin amoozin in Dimocrisy for the past five years" (7). The gravity of Nasby's statements is undermined by the heavy use of dialect that separates Nasby from traditional reporters because his writing exists in the realm of entertainment. As a performer, he provides an early example of humorous political writing that highlights his participation in the political process while also drawing attention to his distance from the politicians he profiles, reflecting the techniques of many humorous political reporters in his formation of a distinct character.

Indeed, the similarities between Twain's career and Nasby's exist in the writers' separation between the character they created and themselves. In an interview for the *Newark Courier* in 1871, a reporter asked Nasby, "Is this character of Nasby simply a brain-child?" (F. Hudson 693) and Nasby ironically replied, "Yes; I don't believe he ever existed in flesh and blood" (693). The irony of his response results from his participation in the interview as Nasby rather than Browne, as evident in the interviewer's first question, "Have you ever been interviewed before, Mr. Nasby?" (692). Because Browne confuses the distinction between Nasby as a character and Nasby as a subject for a newspaper interview, he enters a fictionalized figure into a factual form, which Twain also achieves through the Twain persona. However, the precedent that Twain set differs because of the difficulty in distinguishing between Twain and his creator, Sam Clemens. Cherches notes, "Appearing before the public pseudonymously, as was the custom with humorists of the time, Mark Twain was not a 'character' in the same way that Artemus Ward was distinct from his creator Charles Farrar Browne or Petroleum V. Nasby from David R. Locke" (81). The relationship between Clemens and Twain is the subject of numerous biographies, including Roy Morris, Jr.'s *Lighting Out for the Territory: How*

Samuel Clemens Headed West and Became Mark Twain (2010) and *Mark Twain: The Adventures of Samuel L. Clemens* by Jerome Loving (2010). The interest in Twain as a persona makes him a rich point of origin for this study because he dramatizes the obfuscated boundaries between the author's narrative voice and the author's public performance across multiple forms of media.

Whether Twain achieved the greatest fame of the four men is less significant to my argument than the importance of the variety of media he occupied to establish his fame, which demonstrates the mechanisms used to distinguish notable individuals. As I discussed in the introduction, Twain exemplified the intertextuality of celebrity that establishes public personalities as commercially valuable. The different media that comprised Twain's persona helped him create an intertextual and marketable identity. Judith Yaross Lee's article, "Brand Management: Samuel Clemens, Trademarks, and the Mark Twain Enterprise," particularly highlights Twain's use of various methods to market his persona early in his career, coinciding with his historical moment. She notes, "The post-Civil War period gave individualism a new push in the mythology of the self-made man, which mass media and celebrity furthered in the self-perpetuating cycle that made Mark Twain a topic of publications, as well as a contributor to and publisher of them" (29). Lee's article is valuable when considering the ways in which Twain engaged with the mythology of the self-made man to promote himself as a commercially valuable product. She notes: "he carefully mined, deployed, and directed the commercial value of his products (especially his copyrighted works) and his reputation (which he saw as a business asset)" (27). Highlighting the significance of Twain's reputation, Lee identifies an essential element of the cult of the individual by distinguishing between authors' personalities and their works. Echoing Cherches, her discussion of Twain includes his difference from Nasby and Ward, noting, "Ward and Petroleum V.

Nasby (David Ross Locke) never disappeared behind their creations as Clemens did . . . Performances—on page, stage, and in public—thus constituted Mark Twain as a self, a product, and a brand" (30). Lee's description of Twain in terms of commerce connects Twain and particularly American ideologies of capitalistic success, implying the importance of his entrepreneurial ventures in establishing him as a uniquely American icon.

As the figure behind the publishing house Webster & Co. and *Mark Twain's Patent Scrap Book*, Twain engaged in business practices that distinguished him from the other authors as a commodified, self-promoting persona in a variety of contexts outside his writing. Published by the "self-made man," Twain's texts indeed promote his creation. Addressing the book that was vital in increasing Twain's fame, Merco Portales writes, "Like Whitman before him, and Hemingway and Mailer after him, Twain began by writing self-advertisements for the legendary figure he eventually created for himself . . . in *The Innocents Abroad* I believe he chose to be his own best subject" (10). Portales' reference to "self-advertisements" characterizes Twain's career in multiple texts beyond *The Innocents Abroad,* giving greater significance to Twain's short pieces that address the press. As a trusted and notable figure, Twain's celebrity ultimately enhanced Twain's credibility, which manifested in his ability to compartmentalize the controversies marking his early career, which I will examine later in this chapter.

Twain's place in a post-Civil War context is significant as a point of origin. Examining the post-Civil War period shows that the rise of literary journalism occurs in conjunction with a related trend: an increased tendency to glorify the individual. Lee's article references the work of Rothenbuhler and his examination of the "cult of the individual," which bears greater significance than Lee allots in her study. Rothenbuhler's contribution to the collection *Media Anthropology*, as discussed in

the introduction, provides a significant new lens through which to view types of journalism described as literary, particularly in Twain's example.

Mark Twain embodies aspects of Durkheim's theory by earning mythic status as a celebrated individual. As a figure capitalizing on his subjective style despite journalistic convention, Twain's value as a point of origin lies in his ambiguous persona that lauded itself. The ambiguity of his identity results from his place in fictional and journalistic contexts because he did not belong wholly to the newspaper writing business, nor did he purely write fiction. Adopting the stance of a reporter both gave Twain greater authority in his later performances and undermined it, given Twain's subversion of journalistic convention. He reflects Underwood's assertion: "journalism's position as an activity that even its most honored practitioners have lambasted as compromised and second-rate sometimes blinds literary critics and scholars to the many interesting and complex ways that the journalist-literary figures' involvement with the press spurred their imaginative growth" (*Journalism* 11). For Twain, the concept of a mimetic form such as journalism proved limiting and thus inspired hybrid forms. Because of this, Twain's ambiguous persona contributes to a more expansive definition of literary journalism. Twain represents a faction of literary journalism that relies on a journalist-narrator character to examine specific restraints placed on the journalist and the public performer more broadly. Furthering elements of celebrity culture and the cult of the individual, the blurring of journalism and fiction was a vehicle for Twain to establish his humor, persona, and social commentary more fully. Because he repeatedly inserted himself into the narrative and celebrated his place in it, Mark Twain is an early example of the intersection between the cult of the individual and journalism, as demonstrated in his early works of journalism. His example reflects rhetorical

strategies that other self-aggrandizing journalist figures would exhibit throughout the history of American literary journalism.

Despite the precedent that Twain sets, the scholarship on his early career does not fully address the importance of his journalistic persona. Of the earliest phases of Twain's career, Harold Bloom argues, "This vital period of his life is potentially and frequently overshadowed by his later, international career. This 'prehistory,' which precedes his novels, romances, and travel books, his hobnobbing with millionaires and celebrities, and his acclaimed after-dinner speeches nevertheless saw the proper development of the 'Mark Twain' persona" (7). The early years of Twain's career from 1862 to 1875 are key in establishing the Twain figure but remain largely overlooked by scholars. James E. Caron has attempted correcting the omission, discussing the origin of Twain's career extensively in *Mark Twain, Unsanctified Newspaper Reporter* (2008). Caron's study is valuable because of the contextualizing information it provides for Twain's early career, including the significance of Twain's place in mining communities. Caron demonstrates the disregard for factual reporting among Twain's contemporaries, asserting: "the community of Virginia City during the 1860s was not altogether respectable. The manner in which journalism was practiced all along the Comstock was not respectable either, with slanders, sensationalism, mock feuds, and real duels all part of a newspaper staff's repertoire" (*Unsanctified* 27). Caron's reference to sensationalism in Twain's work predates concerns expressed by other critics of literary journalism, as subsequent chapters will examine.

Like the other literary journalists in this study, Twain exhibits approaches to unconventional journalism that often result from his persona's malleability. Twain's earliest writing, when viewed alongside the period that saw Twain's emergence as an international celebrity, demonstrates the ways in which the Twain character was

formed through numerous public appearances that fragmented his identity. In the early period of his career, Twain inhabited many media that were mutually reinforcing, and they allowed for Twain to publicize his engagement with the newspaper business during the first decade of his career. In the process, Twain reinvented his persona in each stage. The transformation of his persona can be analyzed in three stages: his early newspaper hoaxes, his lectures, and his first book-length publications that received international acclaim. At each stage, Twain offered a new version of the character he created, each of which benefitted commercially. Additionally and, perhaps more importantly, Twain's writing as an unconventional reporter and its resulting controversies differ drastically from the image of a beloved American icon that Twain would hold by the time of his death in 1910.

The Newspaper Hoaxer

To begin discussing Twain's performance as a journalistic figure, it is important to consider the creation of his pseudonym, given that his use of a pseudonym in his newspaper sketches is one of the most distinguishing characteristics of Twain's persona. While writing for a newspaper, Samuel Clemens began forming the Twain persona, and this juxtaposition between an invented persona and a factual medium presents an important tension. Rather than merely functioning as a pen name, "Mark Twain" highlights the ambiguities existing in works deemed factual. Twain demonstrates how the newspaper business, though thriving on a reputation for reliability and accuracy, is a constructed form that bore the possibility of flawed representations of actual events. Asserting his subjectivity in the form of an invented character therefore intimated the unquestioned objectivity of the newspaper as a necessary illusion to maintain its power.

By using a pseudonym to imply his role as a writer crafting a narrative, Twain

problematizes notions of a newspaper as a source of authority, much like the other journalists writing for the newspaper. In addition to using a pseudonym, Twain published newspaper hoaxes to undermine the newspaper's power because the hoax "thoroughly conceal[ed] its fictional nature behind the guise of realistic presentation" (Wonham 33). By utilizing invention instead of factual reporting, hoaxes lampooned the conventions of newspaper writing, and Twain's use of the newspaper hoax capitalized on a form that had begun causing controversy in newspaper writing during the commercialization of the newspaper business in the nineteenth century. Thirty years before Twain's own notorious hoax, *The Sun* increased its circulation numbers significantly by publishing "The Great Moon Hoax," a series of articles detailing discoveries of life on the Moon, including winged creatures. The Sun's circulation numbers, which rose to a "two and a half fold increase within a few days" (Vida 435), gained enough influence to inspire clergymen to plan missionary work on the Moon.

Unlike the wildly inventive nature of "The Great Moon Hoax," Twain's hoaxes apply sensational techniques to plausible news items, which indicates the constructed nature of news reports. Five months before the appearance of "Mark Twain," Samuel Clemens published his first hoax, "The Petrified Man," in the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise* on October 4, 1862, and the hoax marks an early example in Twain's career of questioning the integrity of newspaper writing. Mocking the popularity of newspaper stories about petrified objects, the hoax describes the pose of a fictional mummified figure, and the physical details of the figure read as if they belong to a plausible newspaper report. The reporter describes the mummy in the following measured statements: "the attitude was pensive, the right thumb resting against the side of the nose; the left thumb partially supported the chin, the fore-finger pressing the inner corner of the left eye and drawing it partly open; the

right eye was closed, and the fingers of the right hand spread apart" (*Early Tales* 159). Its thorough description is characterized by an objective tone from an omniscient narrator, reflecting the professionalism of newspapers that Twain mocks. Readers visualizing the description, as James E. Caron notes, find a winking man, thumbing his nose at the spectator.

The mummy's pose symbolizes the consequences of a commercialized news industry, as Bruce Michelson notes. He asserts, "Twain's dreamed-up stone corpse also winked at the riskiness of believing, and disseminating, news dispatches of any sort clattering in from nowhere, with no bylines affixed, on a national tangle of wires that only compounded the alienation from a verifiable source" (54). With the credibility of "news" in question, influenced by the introduction of the telegraph, Twain's tactics interrogate the trust granted to an industry in flux. Through the fictionalized mummy, Twain undermines the journalist's authority, highlighting the ways in which the journalist could defy journalistic integrity, and Twain's disregard for journalistic convention ultimately aids in his persona's fame. In the same year that Clemens adopted the pseudonym "Mark Twain," he began gaining notoriety for the character he created. The Virginia City *Bulletin* published an unsigned note in August of 1863 that declared, "At the solicitation of at least 1500 of our subscribers, we will refrain from again entering into a controversy with that beef-eating, blear-eyed, hollow-headed, slab-sided ignoramus—that pilfering reporter, Mark Twain" (qtd. in Bloom 10). The note's use of "reporter" to describe Mark Twain is noteworthy because it alludes to his place in the newspaper as a significant platform for his persona's creation. By highlighting the constructed nature of newspaper articles, Twain's use of his invented persona allows him to critique the newspaper business while also earning attention from a considerable number of readers. As the newspaper defended its reputation, it exemplifies the conflict

between institutional authority and the individual's autonomy, which characterizes the work of many other writers in this study. Within Twain's oeuvre, he engages with the newspaper as an institution in numerous subsequent instances after the publication of "The Petrified Man." For instance, the tension between Twain's persona-building and a newspapers' efforts to maintain its reputation is clearly visible in the "Bloody Massacre" newspaper hoax and its resulting controversy.

More dramatically than "The Petrified Man," the hoax asked readers to consider the facts of his narrative, rather than overlooking them amidst their emotional responses. Published as a news item in an October 1863 issue of the *Daily Territorial Enterprise,* "A Bloody Massacre near Carson" informed readers of the murder of a woman and children by her husband. The hoax describes the murders in graphic detail; for instance, Twain writes, "The scalpless corpse of Mrs. Hopkins lay across the threshold, with her head split open and her right hand almost severed from the wrist." Other gruesome images include that of the eldest daughter "frightfully mutilated, and the knife with which her wounds had been inflicted still sticking in her side" (*Early Tales* 325-26). The scene of the murdered Hopkins family ends with a description of Philip Hopkins' motivation to murder his family, revealing that the murder was the result of errors made by a newspaper. Hopkins is named as a victim of the San Francisco newspapers' involvement in hiding cooked dividends, and the final lines of the hoax state the San Francisco papers' error explicitly: "The newspapers of San Francisco permitted this water company to go on borrowing money and cooking dividends." The accusatory nature of the claim is strengthened by Twain's use of "permitted," which suggests the newspapers remained active in their inaction.

Printing his critique in the *Enterprise*, Twain tests readers' credulity by framing his article as a factual source of news. "A Bloody Massacre near Carson"

begins with a convincing frame: “From Abram Curry, who arrived here yesterday afternoon from Carson, we have learned the following particulars concerning a bloody massacre” (*Early Tales* 324). Twain’s text is made more trustworthy with the mention of Curry; Jeffrey Bilbro submits, “By using Curry's name, who was the founder of Carson City and a prominent citizen, Twain gives his story legitimacy” (208). Further, Twain obscures his role in the narrative by implying that he merely relayed the information, as Bilbro suggests in his claim that Twain “is simply repeating what he heard from a reliable source” (208). Shifting the responsibility for the report’s details to another source, Twain convincingly models his report on other reports belonging in a newspaper while also deceiving readers into believing he had gathered information as a responsible reporter would, further crafting his persona as a trustworthy newspaperman. The final statement of Twain’s hoax again removes the responsibility of the report from Twain personally, concluding, “We hope the fearful massacre detailed above may prove the saddest result of their silence” (*Early Tales* 325-26). The plural pronoun works to convince readers that the impersonal voice of the newspaper details the event, as it would in other news stories printed alongside Twain’s article. As a result, the fictional nature of the story is obscured by the “objective” style of the newspaper.

The details of the massacre, if read carefully by the community, would have been revealed as an impossible event. Richard G. Lillard notes: “Readers forgot that Empire City and Dutch Nick's were the same place,' that there were no trees for miles around, that there was no old log house, that Hopkins, a bachelor, was proprietor of the Magnolia Saloon in Carson City, and that no man with his throat cut from ear to ear could ride four miles” (199). Disregarding each of these facts, readers responding to the hoax also overlooked Twain’s commentary on the newspaper’s failings. As Henry Wonham states, “Clemens succeeded all too well at

simulating an authoritative tone" (64) in the hoax, and his article began a series of responses and chastisements from other newspapers. Questioning Twain's moral character, other newspapers focused on negatively characterizing Twain rather than directing their criticism towards the San Francisco papers' deceit. For instance, the *Evening Bulletin* mocked Twain by stating, "The man who could pen such a story, with all its horrors depicted in such infernal detail . . . can have but a very indefinite idea of the elements of a joke" (qtd. in Bloom 11). The *Bulletin's* criticism joined other articles condemning Twain for violating the trust granted to a newspaper by its readers.[25] Despite the elements of Twain's story signaling its impossibility, other newspaper writers upheld journalism's reputation as a vehicle for facts and transparency. Though Twain's article attempts to use unconventional means for reform, his perspective as an individual writer could not challenge the newspaper's power as an institution, leading Twain to continue his indictment of the very trust he was accused of violating.

As the controversy indicates the newspaper's authority, Twain portrays himself as the one wrongly accused of deceiving the public. In a mock apology titled "I Take it all Back" and published the next day, Twain claims: "it was necessary to publish the story in order to get the fact into the San Francisco papers that the Spring Valley Water company was 'cooking' dividends" (*Early Tales* 320). The strong declarative phrase "it was necessary" bears an authoritative tone that models the newspaper's tone. His assertive tone, contrasting with the sensational details of his massacre, explicitly condemns the newspaper in more instances, as he asserts, "The only way you can get a fact into a San Francisco journal is to smuggle it in through some great tragedy" (320-21). By explaining his article, Twain challenges

[25] The *Gold Hill News* likewise decried Twain's fictionalizing, informing its readers, "The horrible story of a murder . . . turns out to be a mere 'witticism' of Mark Twain. In short a lie – utterly baseless, and without a shadow of foundation" (qtd. in Bloom 11).

the newspaper's interest in sensational stories while also establishing his persona as a reformer who understood the dynamics of the publishing industry. Defending his motivation, Twain implies that his hoax was less significant as a crime than corporate deception. Bilbro demonstrates how Twain's article is an elaborate indictment of injustices perpetuated by the press, summarizing, "For Twain, the real horror was not the gory massacre but the cavalier way in which the newspapers cooperated with greedy speculators" (208). Bilbro's article joins the limited scholarship on "A Bloody Massacre," including Wonham's *Mark Twain and the Art of the Tall Tale* (1993), which has focused on characterizing the newspaper hoax as a form and documenting the resulting backlash from other publications. However, scholars have overlooked the hoax's importance as a precursor for Twain's later critique of the press, which reached wider audiences than newspaper editors and readers in the West. In the comments Twain made regarding the press, he establishes himself as a precedent for numerous other literary-journalist figures who built reputations based on their self-reflexive engagement with journalistic forms.

The Lecturer

Twain's work to cultivate a recognizable persona in his newspaper writing was furthered by his experiences on the lecture circuit, affording him an opportunity to address fame and celebrity. As Cherches notes: "the concept of stardom no longer applied to actors alone. Now any famous person who lectured in a star course, regardless of how that fame had first been earned, was a performing personality, and might justly be called a star" (42). The lecture circuit was a natural medium for Twain to occupy, given its ability to disseminate the author's image to wide audiences.[26] By appearing on the lecture circuit and in the popular press, Twain built

[26] Paul Fatout's book *Mark Twain on the Lecture Circuit* (1960) details the numerous national and international appearances that aided in Twain's fame.

a career that profited on a recognizable, commercially successful image. Additionally, he engaged with a form that promoted authors' personalities in addition to their work, predating other contemporary forms of self-promotion. Moran references the work of Aaron Fogel and his comparison between the nineteenth-century lecture circuit and the contemporary talk show. He writes: "in both forms the purpose is 'not narration … instruction, drama, or debate, but the suggestion and witness of personality'" (*Star Authors* 17). Moran's reference to the witness of personality demonstrates the lecture circuit's role in showcasing the author as a performer, which Twain exemplifies in his successful performances. Moran notes, "The most successful speakers were those like Twain who, rather than simply reading from the lectern on worthy topics, produced a winning 'performance'" (17). Twain's performances include his criticism of the press, which mirrors the commentary on the press from his contemporaries such as Ward and Billings, and his first lecture includes his skepticism of the press' veracity.

Twain gave his first of many lectures in San Francisco in 1866, in between his hoax and his 1869 publication of *The Innocents Abroad,* a book furthering his international fame. Twain's role as a lecturer provided another opportunity for him to perform a self that capitalized on his experiences writing for a newspaper. The lecture resulted from *The Sacramento Union* sending Twain to Hawaii on assignment, and it allowed him to again question falsehoods in the newswriting profession though also representing cultural attitudes of exoticism and essentialism in the nineteenth century. He says of the native Hawaiians, "It is said by some, and believed, that Kanakas won't lie, but I know they *will* lie — lie like auctioneers — lie like lawyers — lie like patent-medicine advertisements — they will *almost* lie like *newspaper* men" (*Twain's Speeches* 7). In the litany of liars Twain decries, he distinguishes newspaper writers as notable in their deceit, and the lecture set a

precedent for Twain's later appearances as a moralist, which reprised the sentiment Twain expressed during the "Bloody Massacre" controversy concerning a dishonest press. A minor comment in a lengthy speech whose focus was not the press, it would echo other statements Twain made while his fame on the lecture circuit grew, enhancing Twain's attempts to build a persona based on his distance from the Press.

Twain's most direct indictment of the Press's failings is his 1873 speech "License of the Press" before the Monday Evening Club at Hartford, Connecticut. Twain's lecture criticizes the public's inability to read newspapers with discernment, inferring the charges against him for misusing the power held by journalists in newspapers. Again, as in the "Bloody Massacre" controversy, Twain warns that the newspaper's reports are capable of deceiving its readers. Twain asserts, "It has become a sarcastic proverb that a thing must be true if you saw it in a newspaper. That is the opinion intelligent people have of that lying vehicle in a nutshell" (*Twain's Speeches* 47-48). Twain indicts the "lying vehicle" rather than individual journalists, opposing the institutional authority of the newspaper as a collective. He further elaborates, "But the trouble is that the stupid people -- who constitute the grand overwhelming majority of this and all other nations-- do believe and are moulded and convinced by what they get out of a newspaper, and this is where the harm lies" (48). Perhaps drawing on the backlash caused by "A Bloody Massacre," Twain censures newspaper readers, criticizing their trust in the newspaper's material, and defines the general public as another form of a collective that he opposes by advertising his knowledge of the newspaper's true dynamics.

In distinguishing himself from the collectives that he describes, Twain also depicts the journalistic profession in antagonistic terms. He separates himself from other journalists by identifying them as "a horde of ignorant, self-complacent

simpletons who failed at ditching and shoemaking and fetched up in journalism on their way to the poorhouse" (*Twain's Speeches* 49). In acerbic terms, Twain generalizes about the profession that first established his place in the public consciousness. He substantiates his criticism of journalists with numerous examples, including those that further promote and defend his reputation. For instance, Twain claims, "In a town in Michigan I declined to dine with an editor who was drunk, and he said, in his paper, that my lecture was profane, indecent, and calculated to encourage intemperance. And yet that man never heard it. It might have reformed him if he had" (51). By describing the drunken editor and questioning his professionalism, Twain challenges the profession's unattainable aim of pure objectivity. His comment is particularly ironic given the argument that Twain's pseudonym resulted from his well-known habit of ordering two drinks in bars in Nevada (Eichin 116). Twain's past reputation in the West, which more closely identified with the drunken editor, is replaced in his speeches with his conspicuous moralizing in front of an audience far removed from that of the miners seeking gold in the West.[27] Performing as a noble moral authority, Twain reinvents his persona in his public appearance, thereby cultivating his authorial personality on a public forum through his personal narrative.

Even if humorously adopting a morally superior stance in his anecdote, the rest of Twain's lecture contains moments of explicit moralizing. He addresses morality and the newspaper in his assertion, "It seems to me that just in the ratio that our newspapers increase, our morals decay. The more newspapers the worse morals" (*Twain's Speeches* 47). His statement contrasts with his previous image as

[27] Jeffrey Steinbrink joins other critics in contextualizing Twain's earliest journalism as a response "to the demands of a rough-and-tumble, adventure-hungry audience" (224). He quotes Paul J. Carter, Jr.'s assertion that "'Men who faced death daily from cave-ins, explosions and bullets preferred humor to news, except when the news concerned their fortunes. They wanted to laugh, not think'" (qtd. in Steinbrink, footnote 5).

a journalist accused of contributing to the public's decayed morals. The distance from newspaper hoaxer Samuel Clemens is directly addressed in his statement: "I know from personal experience the proneness of journalists to lie. I once started a peculiar and picturesque fashion of lying myself on the Pacific coast, and it is not dead there to this day . . . And habit is everything — to this day I am liable to lie if I don't watch all the time" (49-50). By referencing his past, Twain highlights the discrepancies between the content of his lecture and his writing that caused scandal in the West. Introducing himself into the lecture and providing biographical details of his former experiences, offering a confession of sorts, Twain further "hid the origin of his penname, one that evolved in the barrooms of early Virginia City, to present a 'respectable' persona to . . . other influential Easterners" (Eichin 113). Twain subsequently rewrites himself as the reformed sinner and the subversive individual who stands outside the established institution to condemn its practices.

Because of the numerous versions of Twain that exist, he exemplifies the complexities of literary celebrity, particularly in a journalistic capacity. Twain's persona notably obfuscates boundaries between his performed self and his identity as a newspaper writer because the lecture allows him to perform a version of himself that includes autobiographical elements crafted deliberately to support his argument regarding the corrupt nature of newspaper reporting. A sketch Twain wrote and performed the following year similarly destabilizes notions of an "authentic" self when the self is performed for an audience. In sharp contrast with the violent details of "A Bloody Massacre," Twain's 1874 sketch "An Encounter with an Interviewer" depicts an absurd event in which Twain dramatized the public's increased interest in the individual in a journalistic context. The action of "An Encounter with an Interviewer" results from the exchange between a reporter and his subject and, instead of recording factual information, the interviewer must engage in a nonsensical exchange driven by a character unwilling to comply with

journalistic convention. The interviewee avoids plausible facts with each question, and the interviewee ultimately confounds the interviewer, subverting the power dynamic that one would expect from an interview.

"An Encounter with an Interviewer" presented audiences with a humorous representation of a writer's experience with the cult of the individual. Sent to portray the interviewee as a person of particular interest, the writer finds a frustratingly nonsensical figure but still accepts his obviously inaccurate statements. For instance, when asked for his date of birth, the interviewee answers, "Monday, October 31, 1693," and the interviewer responds, "What! Impossible! That would make you a hundred and eighty years old" (*Tales, Speeches* 87). After a few more exchanges, the interviewer ceases questioning the interviewee's age, asking, "Had you, or have you, any brothers or sisters?" (88). The interviewer's gullibility, questioning the answers' plausibility and then accepting Twain's absurdity, culminates in the final ruse of the interview. Twain convinces the interviewer that the photograph on the wall depicts his deceased twin, as he relates another fictive story: "You see we were twins, —defunct and I, —and we got mixed in the bath-tub when we were only two weeks old, and one of us was drowned. But we didn't know which. Some think it was Bill, some think it was me." As Michelson asserts: "boundaries between common sense and stupidity seem to evaporate" (58). Michelson's use of "boundaries" is significant, particularly when discussing Twain, given the blurred line between Mark Twain and Sam Clemens. The difficulty in viewing them as discrete figures increased with Twain's rising fame, which also coincided with the complicated popularization of the interview as a journalistic practice in which interest in the individual is dramatized.

The sketch exemplifies the post-Civil War era impulse to laud the individual in print through the interview. The celebration of the individual, including the public's

interest in the personal life of a notable person, characterizes the emergence of the interview. Michelson writes, “Mark Twain was still relatively new as an American sensation—but so was the phenomenon of the interview . . . histories of the interview note that the term does not even appear in the *Oxford English Dictionary* before 1869” (56). Before dictionaries legimitized the interview as a journalistic practice, notable figures before Twain used the form to characterize individuals’ notoriety. Viktor Chagas notes the popular view amongst historians of journalism that Horace Greeley’s 1859 interview with Brigham Young in the *New York Tribune* mark the “first interview of the modern era” (62). Twain addresses the rising popularity of the interview in his sketch; the reporter says, "You know it is the custom, now, to interview any man who has become notorious" (*Tales, Sketches* 86). The form is an important innovation that responds to a uniquely American interest in an individual’s personal narrative, as the next chapter will examine in greater depth. “An Encounter with an Interviewer” thus dramatizes the power granted to a figure deemed worthy of interviewing and also exemplifies American ideologies of individualism by creating a platform for a variety of notable individuals to perform versions of the self for the public.

Because the interviewer records the subject’s speech, their perspective is granted tremendous agency, and this power dynamic expresses itself in Twain’s sketch. With interviewees relying on interviewers to represent them “accurately” in print, the act of creating a self is another opportunity for invention. Additionally, the process lends itself to the figures performing roles during the exchange. Alexander Freund highlights “the question of how the interview as an institution and a practice constitutes a self—the self of the interviewee and of the interviewer” (4). With notions of fame and celebrity being a part of the interview, the figures must contend with many other versions of themselves existing in print, as Twain demonstrates.

Considering the importance of fame and celebrity to Twain's sketch, Michelson describes "An Encounter with an Interviewer" as "a short, wild ride through multiple levels of lunacy inherent in the conducting, writing, doctoring, and eventual public consumption of printed conversation with media-savvy celebrities" (58). The "multiple levels of lunacy" include a figure's intertextuality, which inevitably characterizes each appearance of the figure as a new performance and aids in the literary celebrity's success.

The public consumption that Michelson references is an important element of Twain's character, given that his popularity drew large audiences. The response to Twain's sketch illustrates how effectively his dramatization of persona-building resonated with the public, as Louis J. Budd has discussed while documenting the numerous performances of "An Encounter with an Interviewer" in his article "Mark Twain's 'An Encounter with an Interviewer': The Height (or Depth) of Nonsense." The sketch's popularity can be attributed to a number of factors, including its accessible humor and its association with Twain, given his growing popularity after he published his novels. Additionally, Twain capitalized on the interview's place as an increasingly popular form, inviting audiences to identify with the interviewer as he expressed curiosity about the famous person he was sent to interview. The interviewer's curiosity is not satisfied, though the interview is staged as a performance that cultivated the audience's curiosity by presenting personal narratives on a public platform. Just as Twain emerged from behind the print of a newspaper, his sketch gave a form printed in newspapers a new space to attract audiences' attention and interest. A writer and a performer, Twain reimagined the theatrics from the period of his career in which he incited controversy through print exchanges. Read as more than a series of nonsensical exchanges, the sketch can be read as another technique through which Twain promoted his persona. Rather

than documenting the "real" identity of a person behind a public image, the interview perpetuates celebrity mythologies, and, reimagined from Twain's perspective, the interview was another way for Twain to inform audiences of the fallibility of mimetic representations in trusted publications.

Besides being a "media-savvy celebrity" (Michelson), Twain was also subject to the misinterpretations that provoked scandal through his newspaper work. Twain's sketch thus dramatizes the miscommunication resulting from items included in print. "An Encounter with an Interviewer" suggests that the power of one's reputation and the reputation of the publication obfuscate the public's ability to think critically about the information given them. Pre-empting the interviewer's misinterpretation of his subject, Twain offers him an absurd series of answers impossible to interpret while also alluding to the tensions underlying interviews given the contrived intimacy with which they depict their subjects. The interviewer asks, "Will you let me ask you certain questions calculated to bring out the salient points of your public and private history?" (*Tales, Sketches* 86). Twain is a particularly appropriate subject to field such a question, given the performed separation between his public and private selves. As a figure who created a character for himself, he muddles the line between the public performer and the private person. If audiences conflated Twain with the interviewee, Twain creates more confusion than clarity about his identity.[28] Further, he provides an implicit warning against believing everything that the interviewee shares. By publishing the conversation as a question-and-answer transcript, illuminating the interviewer's reluctance to question Twain's absurd statements, the interviewer acts as the fool of the story. As the frequent subject of interviews, Twain's statements bear greater significance as

[28] Budd's article notes, "The biographical approach is now common" (233) when considering the identity of the interviewee.

comments on the integrity of the journalist's profession. However, Twain's history with factuality in publications also diminishes his credibility, given Twain's constructed, self-referential persona, and his comedic approach to journalism reflects his ambiguous relationship to the profession, allowing him to inhabit multiple identities as a performer, former journalist, and sketch writer.

As a part of the posthumous interest in Twain's life, his views on the interview have been revisited. In 2010, the archives of the University of California published an essay Twain handwrote in 1889 or 1890 entitled "Concerning the Interview." Read alongside "An Encounter with an Interviewer" (1874), "Concerning the Interview" partly explains the interviewee's responses. In "Concerning the Interview" (1889), Twain narrates the experience of being interviewed, critiquing its effectiveness as he asserted, "The Interview was not a happy invention. It is perhaps the poorest of all ways of getting at what is in a man" ("Exclusive"). Twain describes the interaction in terms of the interviewee's internal monologue, narrating: "Yes, you are afraid of the interviewer . . . You close your shell; you put yourself on your guard; you try to be colorless . . . All the time, at every new change of question, you are alert to detect what it is the interviewer is driving at now, and circumvent him. Especially if you catch him trying to trick you into saying humorous things. And in truth that is what he is always trying to do" ("Exclusive"). Twain's description of the interview as deceitful contradicts notions of the interview as an authentic representation of a famed individual. The first assertion in Twain's essay signals how the interview involves a series of paradoxes; the subject agrees to a form that cannot succeed in its aims because the interviewee's awareness of the interview's dynamics prevents candid conversation. As a famed individual, Twain writes with authority because of his experience manipulating journalistic convention by

providing fictionalized accounts, highlighting the constructed nature of the interview to cultivate his fame while remaining an elusive figure.

The Author

As Twain's sketches, lectures, and comments following his newspaper hoaxes demonstrate, a rich tension forms between the myth of a notable person and their "real" identity underpinning their public persona. Whether in staged performances before an audience or in performances enacted through a narrative persona, Twain returned to his experiences as a reporter to demonstrate the cult of the individual's importance in shaping journalistic practice across different media. Less than a decade after he subverted readers' expectations as a newspaper writer, Twain revisited his days as a newspaper hoaxer in *Roughing It* (1872). In his autobiographical recollections, Twain promotes his ability to thrive in the profession he had entered by chance. The scene in which Twain describes beginning his job as a reporter detailed the financial necessity of writing for the newspaper. He recalls being "scared into being a city editor," and writes of his motivations in exaggerated terms: "I do not doubt that if, at that time, I had been offered a salary to translate the Talmud from the original Hebrew, I would have accepted" (*Roughing It* 295). Twain's humorous exaggeration suggests that his career as a journalist was characterized by desperation, and he depicts journalism as a business enterprise rather than a noble pursuit. By detailing the circumstances of the newspaper job, accepting the position irrespective of his skill, Twain does not portray himself as a journalist equipped to write at a newspaper, but rather as an opportunist lacking credentials. In the story Twain details in *Roughing It,* he exploits the journalistic profession to craft his comedic persona, predating the other authors in this study in his self-characterizations.

By portraying himself in self-aggrandizing terms, Twain supports his boasts regarding his ability to transform “a dearth of news” (296). Detailing his success, Twain dramatizes the material benefits of his talent, namely his ability to fill newspaper columns. For instance, he recounts one episode that involved embellishing details of the town’s hay business to hold readers’ attention. Though Twain found one hay truck, he claims, “I made affluent use of it. I multiplied it by sixteen, brought it into town from sixteen different directions, made sixteen separate items out of it” (296). The result of his fictional report, in his view, was that he “got up such another sweat about hay as Virginia City had never seen in the world before.” His moment of self-promotion, including such superlatives as “had never seen in the world before,” can read as an exaggeration included for comic effect. However, his chapter later includes a self-assured explanation that calls Twain’s earnestness into question. Notably, Twain summarizes, “I reasoned within myself that news, and stirring news, was what a paper needed, and I felt that I was particularly endowed with the ability to furnish it” (298). His statement anticipates criticism about embellished details, which could be construed as dishonest reportage. Offering readers an explanation of his thinking, Twain crafts a trustworthy persona in his personal narrative that evinces his narrative persona’s malleability. Twain’s concessions, as if acknowledging the ethical implications of inventing “news,” is therefore notable for its introspective nature. Writing, “I reasoned,” and “I felt,” Twain seemingly defends his choice to invent news stories, which was potentially a consequence of the controversy resulting from the “A Bloody Massacre.”

The scene in *Roughing It* joins other evidence that Twain’s self-promotion appeared many times throughout his career. In 1870, writing for *Galaxy,* Twain revisited the hoax seven years after its publication. The sketch, “My Bloody

Massacre," was then reprinted in *Mark Twain's Sketches, New and Old* in 1875. In the sketch, Twain reflected, "Ah, it was a deep, deep satire, and most ingeniously contrived. But I made the horrible details so carefully and conscientiously interesting that the public devoured *them* greedily" (*The Oxford Mark Twain* 244). The active phrasing "I made" exemplifies Twain's autonomy as a hoaxer willing to defy journalistic convention by inventing details. Indeed, Twain advertises his autonomy and the benefits he reaped from opposing the institutional authority of the newspaper. Twain elucidates the value of his hoax for his personal gain by emphasizing the fame he earned from writing the hoax, as he boasts, "It was the talk of the town, it was the talk of the Territory" (245). In patronizing tones, he concludes, "They found the thrilling particulars sufficient. To drop in with a poor little moral at the fag-end of such a gorgeous massacre, was to follow the expiring sun with a candle, and hope to attract the world's attention to it" (246). Describing the narrative techniques that helped establish his fame, Twain uses the self-referentiality of his text to heighten his importance as a writer who held the public's interest. Twain's sketch, published after he gained greater fame as an iconic writer, evinces the benefits of his self-congratulatory methods because he was able to return to the hoax years after its publication to remind readers of his persona's resilience, creating a character based on its ability to reinvent itself.

Conclusion: Mark Twain's Image and Posthumous Legacy

Given his malleable persona, Twain demonstrates the value of cultivating a recognizable image to present to audiences, reflecting the techniques of many other literary celebrities. Robert Taylor, Jr. compares Twain to his successors, writing, "The importance of Twain's image is established by the fact that the man's personality has been the subject of almost as much scrutiny as have his works. Like Hemingway in the next generation, Twain seemed almost to be intent at creating a

caricature of himself for public consumption" (2). Taylor echoes Michelson by discussing Twain in terms of public consumption, alluding to the commercial concerns of celebrity authorship and describing Twain's career as partly a consequence of American capitalist ideologies of selfhood. Because Twain's character also includes his recognizable image, his personality was easily commodified in visual media. His iconic physicality, described by Taylor as "the white suit, the corn cob pipe, the rocking chair photographs complete with suitable captions composed by Twain himself" (2), has earned Twain's place in numerous contexts, including his appearance on American postage stamps ("Mark Twain Immortalized on Forever Stamp"). Twain's commodified image exemplifies the celebrity author's relationship with market forces and the building of a brand that can inspire posthumous interest in an author's identity.

The posthumous fame of Mark Twain is easily recognizable in academic and commercial terms. Countless articles and volumes of criticism, as well as his place in headlines for the selling of his Connecticut farm (McKenzie) and the continued operation of the Mark Twain Riverboat attraction at Disneyland, attest to his continued ability to "transcend so effortlessly the divide between high and low culture" (*Star Authors* 20). His posthumous fame is partly due to the fame Twain experienced during his life, which was also documented in celebratory terms. In an 1874 issue of the New York City publication *Appletons' Journal of Literature, Science, and Art*, George Ferris names Mark Twain and his contemporary Bret Harte as "our most marked types of humourists" (16). Describing Twain amidst "reckless and quaint people, who had shot off at a tangent from the established order of society" (17), Ferris lauds Twain's "free Bohemian spirit" (17) while giving a brief biography in the light of *The Gilded Age*'s recent publication. Ferris notes: "During a considerable time he was city editor of the Virginia City *Enterprise,* and

some of the quaintest and brightest things which have appeared under his name originally enlivened its crimson catalogue of brutal murders and 'Judge Lynch' executions" (17). Ferris' comments elide Twain's subversion of journalistic convention and its resulting controversies though effectively illustrating Twain's ability to capitalize on an intertextual persona, supported by his comments on the Press across numerous platforms, to establish enduring fame.

As the beginning of this chapter briefly examined, numerous figures provide potential points of origin when examining the lineage of literary-journalist figures. Petroleum V. Nasby, Josh Billings, and Artemus Ward each engaged with performative forms of journalism while building recognizable personas. However, Twain's iconic status and his use of many different forms of media establishes him as the most appropriate point of origin for this study. Performing the role of a subjective journalist figure, Twain questions the authority of the newspaper and the journalist; examines the tension between newspaper as an institution and journalist as an individual; and explicates his motives as a writer to feign transparency in light of the newspaper business' corrupt nature. Through numerous forms of media, Twain reinforced his implicit assertion that journalism erases the individual's importance and privileges the newspaper's collective reputation. Yet, Twain maintained his personal cult of the individual as he responded to miners' interest in sensational content and perpetuated a recognizable persona for crowds. Before the recognizable image of Twain in a white suit and the news of his honorary degrees from Oxford and Yale, he transformed himself from a name on the Comstock to a figure on the lecture circuit. His transformation permitted the conspicuous moralizing that would separate the hoax writer in the West from the lecturer in the East. Further, his fame and the multiple versions of Mark Twain it produced during his

career preceded the postmodern journalist figure in future versions of unconventional journalism.

Chapter Two: Bylines and Bly: Nellie Bly and the New Journalism

As I argued in the previous chapter, Mark Twain's early career was the site of the cult of the individual's intersection with journalism in the post-Civil War era. His work demonstrates the convergence of celebrity, persona-creation and news-making, as the impulse for Twain to "make news" was key for him to maintain his place in the public consciousness; by commenting on his hoaxes in different media, Twain received attention and publicity for articles written about his controversial exploits. Twain's interest in the persona's power culminated in his public performances, including his commentary on the interview as a source of entertainment in "An Encounter with an Interviewer" in 1874, and as an invasive practice in "Concerning the Interview" in 1889. As Twain constructed his persona on the stage, he created a recognizable image that held commercial value and contributed to the intertextuality of his celebrity authorship in which his malleable, self-invented persona appeared across various forms of media.

As a point of origin, Mark Twain set a precedent for the rise of the literary celebrity's cult of the individual as it manifested in subjective, intertextual performances in the pages of newspapers into the twentieth century. In the context of the New York newspaper publishing industry, figures followed Twain's example by creating careers from marketable, journalistic personas and, in the process, they demonstrated the commercial viability of forming narratives that promoted one's self-mythology. By forming stories about a recognizable personality, they modelled the tactics Twain used to perform a version of himself, as is evident in the work of Nellie Bly, a journalist who emerged during the end of the nineteenth century, which is a period characterized by the commercialization of the news with mass-circulation newspapers such as the *New York World*. Forming her persona partly through her self-reflexivity, Bly followed Twain's example as she adopted the persona of a

journalist self-consciously, highlighting her relationship with the newspaper industry as a news reporter creating provocative headlines. Capitalizing on the *World*'s demand for sensationalist stories, Bly generated her own mythos through her writing, partly through her stunt reporting and partly through the commodification of her persona. For instance, Karen Roggenkamp notes how Bly earned a substantial income from speaking tours and from a book edition of her "Around the World in Seventy-Two Days" series in which Bly challenges Phineas Fogg's 80-day journey time in Jules Verne's novel (Roggenkamp 45–46). Through trade cards, board games, puzzles, and a "Where in the world is Nellie Bly?" tagline (Fahs 45–46), the *World* distilled Bly's career into a valuable brand. Rather than exist purely in the pages of the *World,* Bly thus emerges as a commodity in similarly performative ways as Mark Twain in which her physical image and publicized stunts gained attention from the public while selling newspapers.

As she wrote self-consciously about her role as a journalist, Bly emphasized the importance of her affiliation with a mass-market newspaper to legitimize her professional persona. While Twain's persona utilized humor and satire, Bly capitalized on her place at a mass-circulation newspaper to perform as a daring investigative journalist, known for inventing newsworthy episodes. Bly's work thus depicts journalism as a literal performance in which the drama of entering a situation becomes the story, and her persona operates on two levels as she assumes the identity necessary for the story while performing as a journalist in her writing. Alongside the exaggerated earnestness of Bly's work, the precedent that Twain set manifests differently in her reports because of the mass-circulation newspaper's influence on her sensationalist techniques and the gender politics that characterize her writing. As she embodied the role of a professional woman, she wrote articles that exemplify the convergence of politics, commerce and persona-building while

integrating important innovations in forms of journalism at the turn of the twentieth century. In responding to her socio-political circumstances, Bly's work draws on three developments at the turn of the century: the rise of human-interest journalism, the emergence of the interview, and the political urgency of contributions by female newspaper reporters. Drawing on each development, Bly's work supports an individualistic approach to journalism that utilizes self-reflexive narrative techniques, thereby exemplifying the influence of the cult of the individual at the turn of the twentieth century. Through her self-mythologizing and her work's emphasis on individual stories, Bly demonstrated the continued importance of individualism in the context of commercialized news production and evinced a self-promoting approach to journalism as she established herself as a celebrity through her journalistic assignments.

In a broader context, Bly's focus on individual stories evinces concerns about the individual experience in the context of organizational power. In his study *Self-Exposure: Human-interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940* (2002), Charles L. Ponce de Leon highlights the impact of the mass-circulation press on representations of individuality in newspaper articles. Examining celebrity journalism, Ponce de Leon describes the relationship between urbanization and autonomy, asserting, "In the view of many Americans, the emergence of an urban-industrial society had undermined the autonomy of the self. While it was still possible for ambitious, enterprising men to rise in status, the most readily available avenues for doing so were now within large, hierarchical organizations" (37). The paradoxical influence of hierarchical organizations on newspaper content included the proliferation of stories about individuals, as Ponce de Leon's study demonstrates; he claims, "One of the most remarkable traits of the mass-circulation press was its ability to make ordinary people visible at a time when

urban growth appeared to be submerging individuals into an anonymous mass" (48). By creating space in newspapers for stories about individuals, editors and journalists expanded the scope of stories deemed newsworthy, which allowed journalists to perform the act of finding news in their stories and to emphasize the individuality of the journalist, as Bly's writing exemplifies. Bly's first-person journalism dramatizes Ponce de Leon's argument regarding the role of individuality in mass-circulation press "by offering stories that stressed the continued importance of individual agency," as Leon asserts (82). As she self-consciously asserted her agency, Bly depicts her journalistic assignment as a political choice, which is notable given urbanization's dehumanizing influence.

An important aspect of Bly's work is her use of the interview, which allowed her to promote her persona while also commenting on the performance of journalism in her human-interest stories. The popularity of human-interest stories that legitimatized different modes of reporting relied on emphasis on the individual, which was facilitated by the interview. Nils Gunnar Nilsson states, "In human interest stories it is essential to bring the person involved close to the public and one way of doing so is to quote what he says, and how he says it" (713). Human interest journalism likewise brought reporters closer to the public as they inserted themselves into the narrative. In Bly's case, her presence in the narrative allowed her to comment on the gendered nature of power imbalances that she encountered. Bly's writing asserts its political importance by focusing on the power imbalances in such settings as the nineteenth-century asylum and political offices, as critics have noted; in her forward to a collection of Bly's work, for instance, Maureen Corrigan asserts: "she was both a reformer and a performer" (ix). Corrigan examines the way these two attributes interacted to propel Bly to fame as a reporter. She comments, "Bly's fans these days seem to want to stress the social justice aspect of her

escapades, as if to excuse all the publicity she generated about herself" (ix). The publicity that Bly generated is significant as it emphasized her persona, and Corrigan underscores "what a huge achievement it was for Bly to insist on her own byline, her picture in the newspaper, and her own self-worth" (ix). By insisting on creating a place for herself in the paper, Bly invented a recognizable identity that exploited the conventions of newspaper writing at the end of the nineteenth century to commodify her persona while highlighting the political importance of her presence in the newspaper.

Commercialization of the News and the Interview

Bly's commodified persona emerged as the newspaper industry became increasingly commercialized, partly by relying on stories of the everyday to reach wider audiences. As a result, Ponce de Leon's discussion of the relationship between human-interest stories, mass-circulation press, and urban growth is important to consider as it acknowledges the role of ordinary individuals in the news, which appealed to lower, working classes and increased circulation numbers. Newspaper owners' concentrated efforts to appeal to the lower classes motivated the emergence of the penny papers in the 1830s, which were the cheapest of their rivals whose papers sold for six cents. The penny newspapers targeted a wider readership, relying on advertisement revenue and thus large circulation numbers as "politically independent" papers ("American Newspapers"). To increase circulation numbers, newspapers offered more exciting and gripping stories to the public –a readership that included "any literate person walking down the street" ("American Newspapers") who passed the newsboys selling papers. Human-interest stories played a significant role in increasing newspapers' readership, as in the case of the New York *Sun* and its focus on ordinary individuals through reports of suicides and divorces (O'Brien 27). As the "flagship of the so-called 'Penny Press Era,'" the New

York *Sun* aimed to "satisfy the thriving immigrant communities' thirst for news, using simple language and covering human-interest stories" (Vida 431). The penny press' use of human-interest stories set a precedent that continued to develop in the nineteenth century as private and public spheres merged in news stories to expand the definition of newsworthy items, highlighting the commercial viability of individuals' narratives.

The example set by the founder of the *Sun*, Benjamin Day, of enhancing the newspaper's commercial value preceded the heightened commercialization of the news occurring by the end of the nineteenth century. Fifty years after the penny papers gained popularity, Joseph Pulitzer purchased the New York *World,* and his competition with William Randolph Hearst for the highest circulation rates at the end of the century confirmed the importance of commerce in influencing the composition of news[29]. When Bly began gaining recognition, she entered her narratives into a marketplace that valued commercially appealing stories written for entertainment, as Mark Canada discusses in *Literature and Journalism* (2013):

> By century's end, the media moguls William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer were seeing the circulations of their newspapers approach or top one million. No longer a 4-page miscellany of news, anecdotes, and advertisements, the postbellum newspaper was, in many cases, a 16-, 24-, even a 72-page index to all that was happening in America and the world, as well as a major source of entertainment. (10)

The possibility for the newspaper to be a source of entertainment is indeed a crucial innovation. In *Narrating the News,* Roggenkamp noted Pulitzer's focus on "the entertainment value of the newspaper, spotlighting such innovations as sports and

[29] This period has been widely discussed because of its significance to the history of American journalism. Critics such as Karen Roggenkamp in *Narrating the News* (2005) and W. Joseph Campbell in *The Year that Defined American Journalism*: *1897 and the Clash of Paradigms* (2006) elucidate the different developments in newspaper writing at the turn of the century, including the commercialization of the Press.

women's pages, large headlines, illustrations, and crusading investigative reports" (28). The innovations that Roggenkamp highlights each contribute to the commercial appeal of the paper and also the importance of reporting on individual experience. By giving space in the newspaper to "crusading investigative reports," turn-of-the-century editors further cultivated interest in the style of journalism that prized the individual's first-hand experience of events.

The investigatory style of journalism popularized in papers such as the *Sun* and the *World* includes the emergence and popularization of the interview as an act of direct engagement with an individual. Alice Fahs described the interview as "a form of human interest newspaper writing that came roaring into its own in the 1880s and 1890s" (108). Similarly, in his history of the news interview, Michael Schudson argues, "By the turn of the century, there was no question that the interview was the central act of the journalist" (567). The emergence of the interview demonstrates the prioritizing of individuals in news reports by emphasizing the importance of their speech as a reflection of the "real" person, one worth quoting in print. Because of the interviewer's focus on highlighting the individual, newspapers' attention to exchanges between reporters and a myriad of people in compelling ways merits examination, especially because the range of interviews considered as the potential first printed interview represented editors' interest in characterizing both ordinary and famed figures.

Identifying the first interview has interested scholars as early as 1934, which George Turnbull examined in his article, "Some Notes on the History of the Interview" (1936). Notably, as Turnbull indicates, the first interview is contested. Nilsson's article, "The Origin of the Interview," considers interviews from the penny papers in the 1830s for a potential point of origin, and his study joins Matthew Rubery's *The Novelty of Newspapers: Victorian Fiction After the Invention of the*

News (2009) in historicizing the interview. Rubery's study identifies the three interviews viewed as historically significant for the practice of interviewing: James Gordon Bennett's interview with Rosina Townsend during a prostitute's murder investigation in 1836, Horace Greeley's interview with Brigham Young in 1859, and Joseph McCullagh's interview with President Andrew Johnson in 1867 (112). The interview with Townsend is most indicative of the range of subjects considered worthy to be printed in a newspaper. Unlike Greeley and McCullagh, James Gordon Bennett did not conduct an interview with a famed man, but with a woman whose brief notoriety stemmed from newspapers' attention to a sensational story. Representing an individual whose stake in public life was minimal compared to that of Brigham Young, a church leader, or Andrew Johnson, a president, Bennett's interview demonstrated the form's power to enhance the notoriety of a formerly unknown individual. Acknowledging the interview's role in publicizing the stories of ordinary individuals is significant because of the political importance of commodifying individuals' narratives across a range of social statuses.

By proving that one did not need to hold a position of power to be interviewed, Bennett's interview reflected the drive from editors to make newspapers more appealing to readers of all classes, thus increasing the commercial viability of the paper. The vast difference between a conversation with a brothel owner and a president seem apparent, but both kinds of interviews respond to the interests of the audience with buying power. Schudson defines the interview as a "triadic relationship" in which an unseen public is an 'overhearing audience'" (568). In the period in which the interview emerged, newspapers' appeals to the "unseen public" manifested in news items that would be readily gripping and therefore commercially successful; more compelling stories meant more newspaper sales as newspapers engaged with American ideologies of capitalistic success. Additionally, the interview

represented American ideologies of individualism because of its history as an American form. Fahs characterizes the interview as a "distinctly American phenomenon –many British journalists, for instance, were scandalized by the rude pushiness involved in asking unsolicited questions of public figures" (108). The way in which the interview obfuscates the boundary between the public figure's personal and private life indicates its importance in the context of persona-building by allowing individuals to appear as knowable figures on public platforms, especially in the American context from which it emerged. The reading public and newspaper editors exemplified the value of the cult of the individual through the interview, a form that allowed interview subjects to build personas and dramatize their individuality.

Besides aiding the corporations publishing them, the interview was beneficial to the journalists conducting them. The use of the interview as a journalistic practice has many implications for the promotion of the self, including the writer whose consciousness shapes the written exchange. Rubery notes how the interview emerged as a tool for journalists to become characters in the story, writing, "As audiences recognized, the journalist was no longer an anonymous byline in many of these interactions but a visible actor within the story itself" (112). The post-Civil War era was significant for the increasing visibility of the journalist figure in news items because of the increasing popularity of the byline. From the interview's emergence, the anonymous byline was challenged; Horace Greeley was one figure who refuted the anonymous byline. In Hal Schindler's introduction for the *Salt Lake Tribune*'s reprinting of Greeley's interview with Young, he notes Greeley's role in "the first encouragement by a newspaper editor to members of his staff to create 'byline' journalism" ("Horace Greeley Goes West") when Greeley instructed a reporter to sign an article he had written. With reporters identifying themselves, their

presence was unavoidable to readers, thus encouraging journalists to become more central characters through the practice of interviewing.

Newspaper Women and Nellie Bly

Women writers conducting interviews found an additional incentive in the practice of interviewing by occupying public spaces previously limited to men, including newspaper offices. By asserting the value of their own voices in the interview, newspaper women demonstrate how the interview was a powerful tool when it emerged. Forming one of the core elements of immersive journalism, the interview placed women writers in a variety of situations, granting them more freedom in the choice of their subjects. Portraying themselves as assertive writers actively acquiring information, newspaper women could popularize images of themselves as committed investigative reporters like their male counterparts. Fah's study *Out on Assignment: Newspaper Women and the Making of Modern Public Space* (2011) extensively examines writing from numerous women writing at the turn of the century, including Jessie Wood and Kate Carew, who commented on the interview's popularity in their human-interest pieces in which they promoted their own personas.[30] Fahs describes the impact of human interest journalism in terms of its benefit to women's public personas:

> Such journalism offered Wood and other newspaper women the possibility of self representation and self-dramatization in a new theater of modern life. Not only could they seek out interesting subjects to write about, but also they could themselves become subjects for self-examination, self-reflection, self-invention. (101)

[30] For instance, Kate Carew published an interview with Mark Twain in a 1900 edition of the *New York World* in which the article's first sentence promotes Carew as "the *World*'s clever caricaturist" (The Complete Interviews 364).

Significantly, Fahs highlights self-invention in the women's articles, elaborating, "Newspaper women invented witty new personae in their columns, creating themselves as characters in a new public realm . . . [They] revealed newspaper women's pleasure in a new public theatricality and the possibilities it offered for a public performance" (101). Fahs' language emphasizes the significance of women prioritizing their individual selves while also acknowledging the performativity of the newspaper women's identities. Their performances were important politically because of the opportunities afforded them by the newspaper to assert their agency. Through self-reflective techniques, newspaper women could stress their roles as professional reporters whose first-person narration highlighted their place outside the domestic sphere as they created identities based on their profession.

Describing the newspaper women's writing as a performance of the self has particular relevance when considering the work of Nellie Bly, a reporter at the *World* who gained fame for her public performances. Bly, born Elizabeth Cochran, began writing for the *New York World* in 1887, and the *World* profited from Bly's writing; her immersive stunt journalism "provided for a steady supply of newspaper raw material" (Baldasty 95). Bly's work was not relegated to the women's pages, just as Bly did not remain confined to the newspaper office. Instead, she created journalistic events that capitalized on an era in newspaper writing during which daring exploits were welcomed and celebrated. Bly's mobility is indeed integral to her self-invention; similar to Twain's appearances across a number of platforms, Bly occupied a variety of spaces to create her persona and later gain attention in works recognizing her posthumous legacy. For instance, in an effort to celebrate the advances made by women writing for newspapers at the turn of the century, Jean Marie Lutes brought attention to the work of Nellie Bly by editing the collection *Nellie Bly: Around the World in Seventy-Two Days and Other Writings* in 2014. The first of its kind, the collection demonstrates the complexity of Bly's work and the dynamics of her

politically-minded persona. As a writer investigating social injustices, Bly examines the politics of newspaper reporting, questioning whose authority warranted space in daily newspapers and asserting the importance of the working woman. In 1885, her first piece for the *Pittsburg Dispatch* championed women's right to work, which represents the impulse to reform that characterizes much of her work.

As Bly asserted the importance of professional women, the commercialization of the newspaper industry included editors' efforts to further develop women's relationships with newspapers. Lutes' introduction to her collection of Bly's works notes the growing influence of women in the newspaper business, both as readers and writers, as she states, "Because advertising had become such a crucial source of revenue for newspapers (rather than political parties, which had funded journals since colonial times), news organizations were working much harder to appeal to women, who purchased most household goods" (xviii). Editors' appeals to women included the exponential increase in the number of female journalists at the end of the century; Jan Whitt writes, "During the 1880s, 288 of a total of 12,308 journalists were women; by 1900, that number had risen to 2,193 of 30,098" (5). As one of the women entering newspaper offices, Bly demonstrates the tension between women's prescribed roles and their professional aims because her work strove to discuss more pressing issues than previously given as assignments to newspaper women. Thus her career's beginning at the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* differed drastically from her time as a reporter in New York, and Lutes describes Bly's time at the *Dispatch* in terms of its limited possibilities, writing, "Bly was thrilled to have the job but she soon grew frustrated with her *Dispatch* assignments, which were too often about gardens, fashion, and butterfly collections, rather than the plight of working women or other subjects she considered more worthy" (xvii). Lutes' description alludes to the content of women's pages, which contained limited topics,

as opposed to the breadth of topics in Bly's work. The subjects on which Bly reported vary widely; her reports range from investigations of animal cruelty at the zoo to her interest in ballet lessons. Throughout her various stunts, Bly capitalized on the interview's power. Speaking with, and sometimes quoting extensively from, subjects of interest allowed Bly to enhance the dramatic value of her reports while also problematizing expectations readers might bring to the news item.

For instance, in an 1889 edition of the *World*, Bly visited the Trenton State Prison to interview Eva Hamilton, a woman accused of murder. Their conversation is advertised in the subtitle as "The first time she has been able to speak freely with a reporter and to give her side of this extraordinary scandal and romance" ("Mrs. Eva Hamilton" 1). The beginning of the article champions the interview as a tool for redressing an inequity and particularly Bly's use of the interview to create a new narrative for a familiar story. Bly informs readers:

> I interviewed Mrs. Eva Hamilton late this afternoon in her prison cell in the Trenton Jail. Everybody has heard Robert Ray Hamilton's side of the story. It seemed only fair that the woman be given a show. I have seen her. I have talked with her, and I write her story as she gave it. She has been judged in more ways than one. I smooth over nothing in the telling of what she told me. (1)

The introduction to Hamilton's story demonstrates a useful rhetorical style to further develop Bly's persona as a bold reformer. Bly provides the standard journalistic details –the who, where, and when—of her conversation with Hamilton alongside her motivation for offering Hamilton a public platform. By combining a standard reporting style with her first-person perspective, Bly enhances her credibility, not only to the *World*'s readership but also to Hamilton. In her short, declarative statements, Bly asserts her place as an earnest investigator who stresses her involvement in the narrative through her first-person narration. Additionally, Bly highlights her notable choice to offer a woman's perspective in light of a well-

publicized narrative about the woman's husband. In doing so, Bly demonstrates how her interview with an imprisoned woman depended on her role as both mediator and autonomous voice, maintaining her place in the interview as its principle instigator. Through her first-person narration, Bly implies the political significance of her work because it resists the publication of a male perspective as the sole source of events.

Bly's use of the interview also supports her self-characterization as a working woman. In Bly's dramatization of their meeting, she emphasizes her professional reputation; she tells Hamilton, "'I come to you from *The World* to state justly and exactly whatever you choose to say to the world in your own defense'" (1). Her statement advertises her professional reputation and commitment to accuracy and, importantly, references the mass-circulation audience for which she performed her narrative persona as her invitation to Hamilton to say her defense "to the world" implies. As she asserts her dedication to the profession, Bly highlights the importance of her physical presence in the prison as it suggested her commitment to her journalistic assignment and the impact of her reporting. Bly states, "Without a word, without one question, the desolate woman flung her arms around me and sobbed so terribly that I almost feared she could not be quieted" (1). Hamilton's reaction provides a dramatic response to Bly's decision to enter the conditions in which Hamilton was kept, and Bly's insertion into the narrative encourages greater empathy for her subject through the details she gathered first-hand. When preparing to listen to Hamilton's story, for example, she reports, "We sat down side by side on the cot," which she characterized as "extremely simple" (1). By visiting the site of Hamilton's imprisonment, Bly could observe and illustrate the prison's inhospitable conditions, including the state of her bed, while reminding readers that she entered a potentially dangerous and stigmatized location for the sake of her profession, seeking to illuminate possible injustices.

In short, Bly's presence serves Hamilton's interests along with her own because of the ways in which Bly states her intention. Shortly after she tells Hamilton, "'I come to you from *The World,*'" she declares, "'I am Nellie Bly, of *The World.* I have come to you to give you the same chance that has been given to Mr. Hamilton and the Swintons'" (1). In the space of a few sentences, Bly tells Hamilton her professional affiliation twice and reiterates her interest in fair reporting. As before, Bly assures her, "'I will faithfully report it'" (1). Explicating her aims in declarative statements, Bly contributes to the character she crafted of herself as a dutiful reporter, asserting her agency alongside the *World*'s institutional authority. Despite her affiliation with the *World,* Bly still establishes her voice as an autonomous journalist. From the beginning of the article in the subtitles that state her name, Bly distinguishes herself from the writers of the articles printed alongside hers. Because her article does not exclude a byline, Bly's article contrasts with the six other columns of news items published on the front page of the October edition of the *World* in which her articled appears.

Through her self-reflexivity, her byline exists as a part of the narrative, assuming greater significance than a mere name attributed to the text because her fame is written into the narrative. Hamilton's statements emphasize Bly's fame as she states, "'I know of you . . . and I will tell you the truthful story. It has never been told. They have told so many untruths about me'" (1). Aligning herself with Bly, Hamilton acts in the exchange as an ally of Bly's, supporting Bly's image as a writer opposing the model of the invasive journalist figure.[31] In return, Bly further refutes negative connotations of the interviewer's presence by limiting the number of words

[31] The success of Hearst's and Pulitzer's publications coinciding with the interview's popularity also aided in its contentious place in journalism. Schudson notes, "The artificiality of the interview, its association with 'new journalism', where journalists create or make the news rather than report it, at first kept its status within journalism precarious" (578).

she speaks in comparison to Hamilton. As promised in the first lines of the article, Bly presents Hamilton's perspective with little interruption, quoting her at length. However, she states "the truthful story" from Eva Hamilton after first inserting herself as the just reporter, and Bly demonstrates how the story of securing the interview could be stated in a way that made it news because of her self-conscious intervention.

While the politics of Bly's interview with Hamilton are implicit, Bly conducted other interviews that explicitly consider the role of women in politics, including interviews with suffragists and female presidential candidates. Bly's place at the newspaper thus allowed her to express her voice politically despite women being denied the right to vote, which she examines through her interview with suffragist Susan B. Anthony in 1896. Bly's article, entitled, "Champion of Her Sex," begins in admiring tones as she states, "Susan B. Anthony! She was waiting for me. I stood for an instant in the doorway and looked at her. She made a picture to remember and cherish . . . an image of repose and restfulness" (*Around the World* 130–31). Bly's tone characterizes Anthony as a heroic figure, which suggests Bly's support for Anthony's politics despite the lack of commentary enumerating Bly's political views at the beginning of the interview. Bly's brief physical description of Anthony contrasts with the extended quotations from Anthony in which her self-characterization comprises much of Bly's article. By granting Anthony space in the interview to speak with little interruption, Bly counters the act of silencing inherit in denying women the right to vote and other acts of silencing that Anthony details, including an incident at a Sons of Temperance meeting in which Anthony was told: "'we invited [the Daughters of Temperance] here to look and learn, but not to speak'" (134). While Anthony was not allowed to speak in the meeting, she can assert herself in Bly's article with bold declarations such as: "I vowed there and then

women should be equal" (135). The political importance of Bly's exchange with Anthony is thus twofold: Anthony can further the aims of suffragists by voicing her intentions in clear statements, and Bly can develop her image as a politically minded reporter whose choice of subjects suggest her earnestness and professionalism.

Bly's interview with Anthony also diverges from a strictly political conversation regarding Anthony's work with the suffragists by demonstrating Bly's interest in an individual's personal narrative. Bly's meeting with Anthony proceeds as an examination of Anthony's life, focusing on personal details such as her view on religion and death; she tells Bly, "'I don't know anything about Heaven or hell,'" and "'I don't want to die just as long as I can work'" (*Around the World* 135). Detailing her childhood, Anthony describes her namesake and other personal facts at length before discussing the suffragists' political aims, which results from Bly asking Anthony to discuss "the cause of your being a suffragist" (131). The focus remains on Anthony's individual experience of the suffragist movement, and her personal narrative precedes her political work. However, in representing Anthony's life aside from her political work, Bly acknowledges the potentially transgressive nature of her personal questions, particularly as she asks, "'Were you ever in love?'" (137). Bly qualifies the question by writing that she was "approaching a very delicate subject on tip-toes" (137). Though Bly informed readers of her hesitation, Anthony's response contrasts sharply with Bly's caution: "'In love?' she laughed merrily. 'Bless you, Nellie, I've been in love a thousand times!'" (137). The question ultimately furthers Bly's favorable depiction of Anthony as a political figure and knowable character in a human-interest story. As she introduces Anthony's politics through her personal narrative, Bly uses the interview to present an image of Anthony as far from an unknowable political figure, but rather a sympathetic individual whose interest in suffrage arises from her personal history. Rather than elevating the political realm to an inaccessible elitism, Bly places herself at the level of her

readers, curious to know more about the person behind the public image and enacts the tension between the private and public selves that is inherent in the lives of notable individuals.

Bly's final call to action further supplements her technique of representing a political cause through an individual's story, predating contemporary approaches to politics as subsequent chapters examine. She concludes her article in similarly admiring tones as she began it, stating, "Susan B. Anthony is all that is best and noblest in woman. She is ideal and if we will have in women who vote what we have in her, let us all help to promote the cause of woman suffrage" (*Around the World* 137). Bly's description of Anthony as an exemplary model for all women demonstrates the use of an individual's narrative to further a political aim and the conflation of an individual and a political movement. Depicted as the ideal female voter in a series of superlatives, the version of Anthony in Bly's narrative embodies admirable traits by appearing assertive and sympathetic, voluble and personable, as her potentially controversial views are tempered by an accessible personal narrative. Bly employs a similar technique in her interview with Belva A. Lockwood, a woman running for president in 1888, as she asks Lockwood, "'Do you mind telling me something of your home life?'" (119). Again, Bly expresses her hesitation, stating "It's a question I always feel delicate about asking, but it's always the most interesting thing about prominent people" (118). Self-reflexively acknowledging her encounters with prominent people, Bly suggests the importance of appealing to an audience's sympathies while discussing political issues and cultivating interest in the personality of a politician. Bly's statement regarding "the most interesting thing about prominent people" perpetuates one of the interview's purposes as a tool in promoting the individual as a subject of interest, dramatizing one's personal

narrative for public consumption and privileging the individual's narrative as a source of political significance, particularly as Bly highlights women's narratives.

Bly's inquiries into her female subjects' home lives can also be read as a way of undermining her political aim to advance suffrage's progress, as she does not position Anthony or Lockwood in purely public spaces. By including details of their domestic lives, Bly acknowledges discourses of traditional femininity that restricted women from the public sphere and professional spaces. However, Bly's questions align with her own professional aims as she acts as both political reformer and journalist, which manifests in her profiles' discussion of private and public spaces. Writing for the *New York World* during the Pulitzer era, Bly's writing responds to the pressure to increase circulation rates amongst mass audiences by preventing her depictions of women from appearing too radical in their politics. Posed as an interview, Bly's writing about the suffragists ultimately benefits from the trend in newspaper publishing at the end of the century to include human-interest stories about a range of subjects, seeking an affective response from audiences by characterizing individuals' personal narratives instead of detailing political movements in terms of politics strictly. Depicting the women as notable subjects worth profiling, Bly implicitly addresses the American fixation on the individual's narrative while also enhancing her own personal cult of the individual by cultivating her fame.

"Ten Days in a Madhouse"

The relationship between Bly's roles as "reformer and performer" is dramatized in her first publication at the *New York World,* "Ten Days in a Madhouse" (1887). By feigning insanity, Bly was able to enter the famous Blackwell Asylum to report on its hostile conditions. The series appeared in installments in the *World,* which helped secure Bly's place in the public imagination as her name appeared in

the headline, beginning in the second installment and continuing through many reports after "Ten Days" concluded, as Lutes notes ("Into the Madhouse" 18). With her name in the headline, Bly capitalizes on the dramatic value of a "sane" woman voluntarily entering an asylum[32] to perform a false identity and highlight areas for reform. Additionally, Bly's report examines the conflict between institutional power and individual rights in the women's mistreatment as she paradoxically represents the institutional power of the *New York World* to illuminate individual narratives. Asserting her autonomy as a reporter and as a woman who had not been diagnosed with psychiatric disorders, Bly offers a dual performance as journalist and asylum visitor while suggesting the continued importance of the individual in light of hierarchical, institutional authority.

Bly's engagement with the women as individuals often appears through her use of the interview, which further advances her political aims. The importance of the interview in the *Madhouse* series for the *World* is threefold: it supports Bly's commentary on the failure of the "experts" entrusted with determining the woman's sanity; it enhances the antagonism between Bly and the reporters doggedly pursuing her story; and it allows Bly to grant the women in the asylum the power to report their own stories. Bly's concern with the women's individual experiences informed her exchanges as she asked one of the women, "How have you been treated?" (75). Verbalizing the question permits Bly to demonstrate the individualized attention that the other authority figures would not give to the women, and it is also the implicit inquiry ostensibly motivating Bly's "mission" as she outlines it in her first report: "I was asked by *The World* if I could have myself committed to one of the Asylums for the Insane in New York, with a view to writing a plain and

[32] Given Bly's reference to the Blackwell Asylum as "the asylum," this chapter will refer to the institution as an asylum.

unvarnished narrative of the treatment of the patients therein" (19). By explicitly asking one of the women about her treatment, Bly suggests that the women's speech constitutes "a plain and unvarnished narrative," and she submits the women as reliable authorities on their own experiences. As she grants their narratives space in a mass-circulation newspaper such as the *World*, Bly also advocates for the women's public exposure, promoting their perspectives outside the asylum and advertising their mistreatment as a worthwhile subject for a series of articles that also promote her persona as a daring investigator.

Bly's introduction to her assignment is particularly telling of her dual interests as a self-mythologizing performer and politically-minded reporter. She details her exchange with the newspaper editor, which positions her assignment as a choice relying on her self-image. She asks, "Did I think I had the courage to go through such an ordeal as the mission would demand?" (*Around the World* 19). Discussed as an ordeal, the newspaper assignment connotes greater significance than a job; it serves as a reflection of Bly's character. With her courage to accept the job in question, Bly assures readers, "I said I could and I would. And I did" (19). In such terms, Bly depicts herself as the narrative's heroine, admirable for both her determination and then eventual success. Given this frame, Bly constructs her interiority retrospectively and displays it for her readers, performing her own personal narrative before examining those of the women in the asylum. Bly's self-characterization emphasizes her bravery, as she writes, "But not once did I think of shirking my mission" (21). By asserting her resolution without reference to the *World* as the institution that commissioned her, Bly re-iterates her autonomy in the assignment, placing the onus to carry out the challenges of the assignment on herself and the strength of her will, rather than resulting from the demands of the newspaper. Bly thus recasts the assignment as a personal mission through her self-

reflexivity, which distances her from institutional authority, both in terms of the newspaper and the asylum.

A part of her personal mission is described in terms of her talent as a performer capable of transforming her identity for the purposes of the story. The performative aspects of Bly's narrative are indeed written explicitly into the report's first paragraphs as Bly states, "I had some faith in my own ability as an actress" (*Around the World* 19), and she describes her feigned illness as a role in multiple instances. For instance, Bly describes the flawed nature of her diagnosis in the doctors' assessment through the dichotomy between her performance and her real self, writing, "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. Yet strange to say, the more sanely I talked and acted the crazier I was thought to be by all" (20-21). By highlighting the doctor's inadequacies, Bly narrates the failure of the institution to view her case individually, instead categorizing her as an "insane" woman without question. Bly thus emphasizes the asylum's power to uphold its authority over the individual by disregarding an individual's idiosyncrasies for the sake of maintaining institutional aims, and her personal narrative demonstrates the tension between an individual's autonomy and an institution's agenda that characterizes much of her work.

The tension in Bly's work also manifests in her similarities with the doctors as the dehumanizing effect of the doctor's assessment influences Bly's narration. She partly removes the mentally ill women's autonomy as she describes women in terms of their anatomy in homogenous terms, depicting the women as having "[v]acant eyes and meaningless faces, and their tongues uttered meaningless nonsense. One crowd passed and I noted by nose as well as eyes, that they were fearfully dirty" (*Around the World* 65). Writing voyeuristically, Bly discusses the

women as a collective, describing them as “the most miserable collection of humanity I had ever seen” (65). Bly’s phrasing indicates the distance between her and her subject, which she objectifies as a collection of humanity and discusses with a similarly unsympathetic eye as the doctors who misdiagnosed her. Indeed, Bly narrates her fear of the women, writing of them with dread: “my heart gave a sharp twinge . . . Not to be confined alone, but to be a companion, day and night, of senseless, chattering lunatics; to sleep with them, to eat with them, to be considered one of them, was an uncomfortable position” (52). Fearing the women, her alignment with the doctors can be read as a political act itself; asserting herself as an authority in the situation, Bly offers an observation that would develop her self-characterization as a sane woman and an attentive reporter.

By repeatedly deferring to the newspaper’s authority, Bly underscores institutional power, particularly in the *Madhouse* piece in which she depicted her fear of being recognized by other reporters. In the *Madhouse* narrative, reporters contribute to the dehumanized spectacle of insanity that degrade the women. The doctor and nurse note how Bly had already gained notoriety in other newspapers; the nurse tells the doctor, “‘I saw a long account of this girl in the *Sun*” (*Around the World* 54). Bly’s fear grants the reporters inordinate power as she states, “The reporters were the most troublesome” (48). Thus, when Bly asserts her status as a recognizable reporter, she associates reporting with the tireless efforts that she herself exhibits. At the beginning of the narrative, Bly describes the task in terms of writing for the paper, explicitly noting the question of sensationalism that could accompany her report. She quotes the editor directly, who tells her, “‘We do not ask you to go there for the purpose of making sensationalist revelations. Write up things as you find them, good or bad; give praise or blame as you think best, and the truth all the time’” (19). As a curiosity for their newspapers, Bly is an object to be made

into reading material because the reporters seek to commodify her experience. Other reporters attempt to enter the asylum to speak with Bly to discover the "real" woman, exemplifying the result of the individual's narrative having commercial value as a topic for newspapers. The very dynamic that Bly utilizes to establish her persona is thus a form of antagonism in her report, reflecting conflicts that other literary-journalist figures, including Mark Twain, dramatize in their commentary on the press.

Within Bly's examination of the individual's relationship to the institution, she considers how the horrors that she describes frequently involve the lack of autonomy granted to the women, including herself. Bly dramatizes her exchanges in which she asks for her book and pencil and is told, "'You can't have it, so shut up'" (*Around the World* 64). By demonstrating how the unfair treatment of the women partly stemmed from the denial of free expression, Bly further asserts the writing of her narrative as a political act and also confirms her supremacy over the authority figures in the asylum by ultimately characterizing them as antagonists. Indeed, Bly details the power imbalances that perpetuate the authority's unquestioned power over the patients, regardless of the reason for individual women's admittance to the asylum. In Bly's most explicit statement of the importance of autonomy to a woman's sanity, she states:

> Here is a class of women sent to be cured. I would like the expert physicians who are condemning me for my action, which has proven their ability, to take a perfectly sane and healthy woman, shut her up and make her sit from 6 A. M. until 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 . . . Two months would make her a mental and physical wreck. (67)

Bly contrasts with the women by having knowledge of the world, given her profession in which she would later write articles that emphasize her mobility and worldliness, most clearly signified by "Around the World in Seventy-Two Days."

Bly's denial of her autonomy is clearly flagged in numerous instances, perhaps most notably when she is subjected to the same baths as the other women. She states, "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" (*Around the World* 59). In her narration, Bly characterizes her objections to the assignment, thereby asserting her autonomy, writing, "As I saw some of the sore heads combed I thought this was another dose I had not bargained for" (63). Bly's concern with her own safety evinces her self-reflection that also manifests in some of the women's interviews. In one interview, Bly's subject considers how sanity is conflated with obedience in the asylum. The woman tells Bly, "'I suppose the only thing to do is to keep quiet and so avoid the beatings which I see others get. No one can say one word about me. I do everything I am told, and all the work they give me. I am obedient in every respect, and I do everything to prove to them that I am sane'" (76). As she defers her autonomy to the institution's demands, the woman suggests that her success in the asylum is defined by her willingness to remain silent and to suppress her individual will.

In a section of her narrative entitled "Some Unfortunates' Stories," Bly's role as a reformer is particularly evident in her use of the interview. The first woman Bly introduces, Louise, is quoted at length about being "'unable to eat the horrible food'" and her habit of "'pray[ing] nightly'" to die (*Around the World* 73). Bly presents Louise's experience in Louise's words without including any of the questions Bly might have asked. The focus shifts from Bly flagging her intervention as a journalist—the act of getting the story—to the actual story of the women's abuse. The story that Louise tells and that Bly reports portrays the coercive techniques the

doctors used to get the patients to speak, which Bly opposes by minimizing her presence and portraying the women as telling their stories freely. Through Louise's example, Bly addresses the injustices of the asylum most effectively by focusing her reportage on the ostensible subject of the piece rather than her persona-building. Having earned the attention of the *World*'s readership through her sensational techniques, Bly is then able to allow the women to seemingly author their own stories after having been denied their autonomy.

Bly's Self-Mythology in a Tradition of Asylum Narratives

The historical significance of Bly's piece is also vital to consider because of her place in a tradition. Importantly, Bly minimizes the importance of other narratives that preceded hers in documenting conditions in an insane asylum. She briefly notes, "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." Despite Bly's brief dismissal of other reports, similar narratives are crucial to acknowledge as Bly's report follows a tradition of asylum narratives, including articles from another New York reporter, Julius Chambers. Fifteen years before Bly's report on the front page of an 1872 edition of the *New York Tribune,* Chambers described his experience going undercover at the Bloomingdale Asylum in New York in an article entitled "Among the Maniacs," describing himself as "The *Tribune* reporter who under orders from this office had so successfully feigned insanity, and had been left within the walls of Bloomingdale Asylum" (1). Campbell's report demonstrates the performative style of reporting that characterizes Bly's narrative. Indeed, his statement contains similar language to Bly's narrative, as Campbell addresses the potential for sensationalist language, writing, "The detailed story of these adventures to be told by the reporter will be a plain, unvarnished tale, without reservation of names or facts" (1). Despite the similarity in language, a

significant difference between the articles written by Bly and Campbell is Campbell's use of the third person. As he refers to himself solely as "the reporter," Campbell masks his identity behind his profession, and his narrative evades the explicit self-promotion that Bly's narrative includes. Given Bly's politically urgent assertion of herself as a female reporter writing on behalf of female patients, the creation of her persona imbues her narrative with a broader political significance in comparison to Campbell's narration in the third-person that did not need to signal the importance of his place in the profession.

In addition to Campbell's report, women described the horrors of the asylum from their first-hand experience of wrongful imprisonment. Before newspapers published the articles from Campbell and Bly, the asylum was criticized in the Civil War era; Myra Samuels Himelhoch and Arthur H. Shaffer state, "By the 1850s and 1860s the administration of mental hospitals was coming under increasing criticism. Dissatisfaction often took the form of the publication of exposes by former patients who claimed that they had been illegally incarcerated despite the fact that they were sane" (345). The women's illegal incarceration distinguishes the asylum narratives from the wilful imprisonment accepted by Bly and Campbell, and also complicates the view of Bly as a unique reformer, as another woman preceded her in calling for asylum reform. Of the asylum narratives published mid-century, Himelhoch and Shaffer assert, "Perhaps the most spectacular revelations were those by Mrs. Elizabeth Packard, a patient in the Illinois State Hospital" (345). Imprisoned in the asylum for three years, Packard and her narrative are useful counterpoints to Bly's staged entry into the asylum. In *The Prisoner's Hidden Life, or Insane Asylums Unveiled: As Demonstrated by the Report of the Investigating Committee of the Legislature of Illinois, Together with Mrs. Packard's Coadjutors' Testimony* (1868), Packard states, "I have been Illinois State's Prisoner three years in Jacksonville

Insane Asylum, for simply expressing religious opinions in a community who were unprepared to appreciate and understand them" (14). As she identifies nonconformity as a reason for insanity, Packard writes of her imprisonment in terms that provide a precedent to Bly's because of the view of disobedience and autonomous assertions as a crime.

Packard's narrative is similar to Bly's in her use of other women's narratives, which Packard prefaces by stating, "And it is to add weight to these conclusions, that she has annexed to her narrative the testimony of several other married women, who have experienced a term of imprisonment in Jacksonville Insane Asylum" (v). However, the testimonies that Packard references contrast with Bly's because of Packard's explicit denial of the sort of self-promotion that characterizes Bly's text. Packard notes, "Of that part of Mrs. Olsen's thrilling narrative relating to myself, the writer would say that she feels a delicacy in allowing herself to be so lauded in her own book" (v). Her statement contrasts with the celebratory tone of Bly's assertions regarding the bravery required for undertaking her task. Also, in a similar way to Bly's article, Packard's narrative considers the conflict between institutional aims and individual rights: "the enlightened mothers of the present day are obliged to assert and defend their own identity, simply because the Government fails to do it" (iii). Describing the government in antagonistic terms, Packard emphasizes the importance of individual identities and the defense of them, elucidating her support of individualistic ideologies in a similar manner to Bly.

In Mary Elene Wood's description of Packard's narrative, the parallels between Bly's narrative and Packard's are important to consider because of the paradoxes that Wood identifies in "a variety of forms and strategies that weave themselves throughout the text in an effort to create a speaking female subject—Elizabeth Packard—who is rational yet 'feminine,' authoritative yet victimized,

autonomous yet selfless, politically-minded yet maternal" (27). Bly's role likewise embodies the paradoxes that Wood lists, particularly as her authority is contingent on her victimhood; by performing as a victim of the asylum's abuses, Bly could report on the experience of imprisonment as an insider. Bly's performance is also bound up in her performed femininity, offering sympathy and remorse for deceiving people with her feigned insanity. For instance, writing of Mrs. Caine, the women with whom she shared a room, Bly wrote, "How cruelly I tortured her and what a kind heart she had!" (*Around the World* 27). Writing of herself self-reflexively, Bly distances herself from the cruel doctors she depicted and created an image of herself as a conscientious individual, appealing to their sympathies of the *World*'s readership.

Discovering the "real" person behind a socially constructed image is Bly's mission in the *Madhouse* series, as it is in her political pieces. Nellie Bly's example demonstrates the journalist's pronounced role as storyteller as well as reporter, tasked with gathering facts and shaping them in a manner that will earn readers' sympathies. Additionally, she evinces ideologies of individualism by prioritizing the dignity of the individual in her choice of subjects, including herself. The details she provides regarding the conditions of the asylum are crucial for conveying the "reality" of the situation in which she immersed herself. Yet, the series remains a fiction because of Bly's status as a reporter who voluntarily enters the Asylum, unlike the women she met. Her choice to undergo the doctors' questioning and the poor conditions of the Asylum is a vital difference between her role in the narrative and that of the other women. Just as she serves as the narrative's protagonist, selecting the details she chose to include, Bly holds the greatest power of the characters because she is ultimately able to leave when she chooses.

Around the World in Seventy-Two Days **and Posthumous Legacy**

Bly's public visibility after the *Madhouse* series was heightened most clearly in her series of articles, *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days* (1890), which should be considered when examining Bly's self-promoting relationship with fame. In numerous instances in the article, Bly characterized herself in exaggerated terms as a public sensation, writing, "They say no man or woman in America ever received ovations like those given me during my flying trip around the world . . . It seemed as if my greatest success was the personal interest of every one who greeted me" (*Around the World* 273). Writing of herself as a celebrated woman, Bly comments on the value of her public exposure, which contrasts with the manner in which she entered the asylum, and reinforces the intertextuality of her persona as it earned public recognition. Expressing a malleable persona able to capitalize on opposing situations, Bly uses the *Around the World* series as an opportunity to dramatize the public recognition that was understated in her *Madhouse* narrative; for instance, Bly narrates, "I was up until four o'clock, talking first with a little newspaper girl from Kearney, Nebraska, who had travelled six hundred miles to meet and interview me" (278). Bly's reference to the little girl's story implicitly portrays her narrative as inspiring to other girls who viewed the chance to speak with Bly as an opportunity worth traveling long distances to undertake. She also identifies herself as a news item in contexts outside the *World,* thus proliferating the number of reports celebrating her journey in a place as different from New York City as Kearney, Nebraska.[33]

[33] Another example of Bly's fame outside New York is an 1894 article in which workers striking in Pullman, Illinois, invited her to speak. The article's title, "Cheers for Nellie Bly," promotes her efforts in a celebratory tone, and Bly's article briefly focused on her experience of meeting the men before centering on their stories, quoting directly from them. Bly reported, "I also said to these men . . . that if any of them wished to make any statements to me I would be glad to have them do so . . . If I attempted to tell half the tales of wrong I've listened to [sic] I could fill an entire copy of The World" ("Cheers").

The *World*'s influence is indeed a vital component in Bly's mythology; when considering Bly's fame, the *World*'s efforts to encourage public engagement with Bly as a familiar character are particularly significant. The *World* cultivated public interest in her journey through a number of tactics, including asking readers to guess how long it would take in days, hours, minutes, and seconds for Bly to circumnavigate the globe with the winner receiving a trip to Europe paid for by the newspaper (*Around the World* 142). Additionally, the *World* promoted Bly's trip in every edition of the newspaper from the beginning to the end of her trip with numerous reminders of the trip's importance included in the newspaper. For instance, the *World* notes how the way her journey interested readers from across the United States, stating, "Queries from all parts of the United States began pouring in Thursday night and continued all day yesterday. A Dakota rancher telegraphed that he had made a bet of $500 . . . Two young men in Newark want to deposit $250 with The World" (*Around the World* 270). By discussing Bly in terms of her financial value, the *World* explicitly commodifies her persona and attests to her fame that readers outside New York recognized. Since Bly did not write the report, the *World*'s narration accompanies her self-promoting tactics to exploit her individual narrative for the institution's benefit and to confirm the success of her public visibility to sell her story.

A part of Bly's public visibility and fame includes the promotion of her literal image that hinged on her characteristic dress, mirroring the importance of Twain's appearance to his persona. Discussing the importance of Bly's emergence as a celebrity, Lutes notes, "Plenty of women had travelled the world before Bly. None, however, had sought or attained her level of celebrity . . . The image of Bly in her traveling outfit . . . was so popular that women copied the uniform for more than [a] decade" (*Around the World* 142). Lutes' description is significant for its recognition

of Bly's image as a source of mythology; commodified alongside the narrative, her distinctive appearance allows her persona to transcend the newspaper and enter the popular imagination. For example, Bly's recognizable dress appears in drawings of Bly used for advertising the Wilson Biscuit Company and J.W. Brown and Company's High Grade Canned Goods in Philadelphia. In one advertisement, Bly stands on a fly, holding her satchel and an umbrella, with a caption stating, "When Nellie Bly went on the fly,/ To show what courage dared to try,/ She made the startled world confess:/ Men don't monopolize success" (Benitez). The advertisement suggests the commercial appeal of Bly's image as an adventurer and political symbol, as she is appropriated for the marketing tactics of a canned goods' company. Similarly, on an advertisement for Dr. Morse's Indian Root Pills, Bly stands on a globe, wrapping a belt around it while wearing her characteristic dress, which demonstrates how Bly's name and image formed a commercially valuable product that exert their value across multiple platforms. In both advertisements, Bly's journey around the world is commodified outside the newspaper's articles, evincing the intertextuality of Bly's fame in addition to the effectiveness of the marketing techniques encouraged by the *World* and Bly's self-characterization in crafting her recognizable persona.

Bly's pioneering stunts are one aspect of her writing that has distinguished her in her posthumous legacy and earned her places in multiple children's books as an adventurous innovator. For example, Bly is profiled in *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* (2017), *The Daring Nellie Bly: America's Star Reporter* (2013), and *Nellie Bly: A Name to Be Reckoned With* (2003), among others. As she is depicted in her characteristic Scotch Ulster overcoat on the covers of the books, writers representing Bly honor her efforts to craft a public image, demonstrating the importance of an iconic image in perpetuating her mythology. In her various

representations, Bly continues to be admired for the range of newspaper assignments she undertook, which is especially evident in the 2019 made-for-television film *Escaping the Madhouse: The Nellie Bly Story.* Portrayed by Christina Ricci, Nellie Bly is depicted as a strong-willed patient in the Blackwell Asylum, though several moments of invention contrast with Bly's narrative, including the challenges created by a male doctor's advances. The differences between Bly's narrative and the film demonstrate the malleability of her persona in a posthumous portrayal that confirms her continued fame while distorting her story for new audiences. Conducive to fictionalizing, Bly's narrative is sensationalized in a visual medium. [34]

Conclusion: Bly the Ballet Dancer, Bly the Columnist

The style of journalism Bly wrote exemplifies the newspaper's redefining of the term "news." In the same year Bly published her asylum narrative, the World filled three columns with Bly's article "Learning Ballet Dancing." The first line of the article, informing readers, "I have been learning to be a ballet dancer" ("Learning Ballet Dancing" 25). characterizes the rest of the piece which remained a first-hand account of her personal experience. It preceded the apex of Bly's reporting on herself in the 1893 article, "Nellie Bly's Column" ("Nellie Bly's Column" 31). The difference between her investigations into social injustices and her purely personal accounts resembles the vast difference created by her choice of interview subjects.

The use of the interview as a journalistic practice thus has many implications for the promotion of the self, but particularly the writer whose consciousness

[34] Indeed, Maureen Corrigan describes Bly in terms of fictional characters, writing, "She seems as self-generated as . . . Jay Gatsby. Like Gatsby, Bly came out of the nowhere of a small town to become the toast of New York City" (*Around the World* x).The comparison is especially logical, given Bly's presence in The Great Gatsby (1925); Corrigan noted how Bly is reimagined in Gatsby as Ella Kaye, the newspaperwoman portrayed as exploiting Gatbsy's mentor for his money.

controls the exchange. Undoubtedly, the interview was a part of a period in journalism known for conspicuous tactics to increase circulation rates. However, viewing the interview's beginnings and popularization as primarily serving the newspaper limits its importance for the journalists conducting them. In Lutes' introduction, she alludes to one of the most important elements of the interview in its ability to give voice to both the famed and the unknown. Lutes underscores the diversity of subjects in Bly's articles, writing: "she interviewed a broad range of people, from down-and-out prisoners to high-flying celebrities" (*Around the World* xix). The "broad range" in Bly's articles represents the broader trend in human-interest writing at the turn of the twentieth century to refute impartiality. Mary Elene Wood writes, "The exposé became the piece of the period, as reporters became detectives searching out the 'real story'" (108). As the real story often included the lived experience of various individuals, human-interest journalism and the interview evince American ideologies of individualism, particularly as the interview is historicized in an American context.

Bly's writing likewise demonstrates the prevalence of American individualism and her personal cult of the individual. Her work examines the tension between individual rights and institutional power while she created a persona that capitalized on its malleability and reliability as a daring investigator, regardless of the situation she entered. As her political interviews demonstrate, Bly's persona includes a political undercurrent that challenged the exclusion of women from political conversations, largely through the denial of women's right to vote. However, Bly also maintains certain expectations for a female writer by depicting her subjects sympathetically and combining political commentary with personal narratives. As they consider different institutions, including the presidency, asylums, and marriage,

Bly's articles affirm her autonomy, establishing her place in a tradition of literary-journalist performers.

Chapter Three: New Journalism and Gonzo: The Self-Mythologies of Hunter S. Thompson and Norman Mailer

Through Nellie Bly's engagement with human-interest journalism and the interview, her writing demonstrates the convergence of politics, entertainment, and persona-creation in similarly performative ways as Mark Twain's writing. Her work represents the individual's conflict with the institution in a number of forms as she addressed socio-political issues, including women's right to vote, asylum reform, and the visibility of the working woman and her mobility. Bly's writing is especially significant when considering the emergence of the celebrity journalist figure in the twentieth century because of the importance of her literal image and performances in public spaces that were integral to her approach to journalism. As a performative act, Bly's journalism evinces the efficacy of self-mythologizing when generating interest in the individual as a commercially valuable product across numerous platforms. As Bly assumed new roles in her different articles, she exemplifies the crafting of a celebrity persona through her self-characterization as a bold, daring reporter. Her willingness to enter a situation despite the incongruity of her persona to the demands of the assignment is notable, as seen in her *Madhouse* series. Describing institutional ills, Bly also dramatizes her dissimilarity to the women in the asylum, the ostensible subjects of her narrative, and she establishes herself as both narrator and subject through her descriptions of the women's different circumstances from hers.

The precedent that Bly set in her style of investigative journalism has resonance in the writing published in the era of New Journalism in the 1960s and 70s. The relationship between the New Journalism of the 1960s and the 1890s is valuable to consider because of the similar reception of each trend as well as the use of the term in both eras to connote unconventional and innovative journalism.

Between the 1880s and 1890s, the term “new journalism” gained traction to describe the style of newspaper writing that sought wider audiences. Karen Roggenkamp highlighted the first widely accepted use of the term “New Journalism” by Matthew Arnold in 1887. In his condemnation of the “feather-brained” style of writing, he asserted: “to get at the state of things as they truly are seems to feel no concern whatever” (638). Arnold’s critique addressed the fictional techniques used in journalism, including dialogue and scenes, with which many readers of New Journalism took issue, and his assessment found parallels in other contemporary reactions to the style of writing considered New Journalism. In 1897, cartoonist Samuel D. Ehrhart illustrated the controversy with a drawing of children reading newspapers and a man holding crime novels, the caption reading, “The ‘New Journalism’ Beats Him” followed by “Dime Novel Writer. –And they used to say that my books were bad for young peoples’ morals!” (Ehrhart). Others joined cartoonists in reproaching New Journalism, including sociologist Frances Fenton who attempted to quantitatively analyze the content of newspapers in 1910, listing such categories as “demoralizing,” “unwholesome,” and “trivial” (344). Ehrhart and Fenton exemplified how commentators considered New Journalism a reflection of an “immoral” readership whose interest in sensational content was confirmed by newspapers’ increasing circulation numbers.

Similarly, the New Journalism of the 1960s and 70s received negative attention for its stylistic deviations from traditional journalism, including the use of scenes, dialogue, neologisms, and first-person narration, and the concerns that critics expressed at the turn of the century regarding the trivial nature of New Journalistic stories were reiterated in the 1960s. As Hollowell writes, “By the end of the decade a variety of critics concluded that the new journalism was dangerous for a variety of reasons: it risked turning the reporting of news into mere entertainment; the new journalist’s use of scenes and dialogue distorted the facts” (45). Addressing

the potential for fictionalized or frivolous accounts, the critics that Hollowell cites, including Michael J. Arlen and Dwight Macdonald, echo Matthew Arnold's criticism by noting the challenges that New Journalism posed to objective journalism. In the 1960s and 70s, writers' use of first-person narration in journalistic accounts especially defied journalistic convention. In his discussion of critics' objections to New Journalism, Hollowell cites the concern that "the new reporting style would replace the hard-won tradition of objectivity with a cult of mere egotism" (45). By discussing the prevalence of the writers' subjectivities, critics demonstrate one of the defining features of New Journalism in its subversion of journalistic convention as well as its consideration of the individual's place in official accounts.

Indeed, a primary concern regarding the New Journalism is the use of the first-person, which is a central concern of this study. Given the idiosyncrasies of each writer's reports, the individual's voice in New Journalism has attracted attention because of the frequent use of first-person narration, contributing to the discussion about individualism's place in journalistic reports. Herbert Gold's article "On Epidemic First Personism" in the August 1971 issue of *The Atlantic* expressed such concerns, as he wrote, "First personism has become an epidemic contagion" (284). Gold's criticism exaggerates the presence of subjective narrative voices, but he expresses a popular concern that the author's self-directed gaze detracts from the text. For instance, a critique of Hunter Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971), which is a particularly famous example of New Journalism, perhaps best summarizes the opposing view: "literary critic Wayne Booth has complained that 'the thesis of *Loathing* is that Hunter Thompson is interesting'" (Hellmann 16). Given the focus on the author's self-conscious presence, the criticisms waged against New Journalism exhibit the controversial nature of texts that display individuals' self-reflexivity at the cost of the narrative they construct, in a similar fashion to the New Journalism at the turn of the century.

Critics of first-person narration in New Journalism address a select group of texts from the era, considering the number of works written using third-person narration that are also included in the broad designation of New Journalism. For example, Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965) is frequently cited as an example of the journalistic innovation of the time despite its third-person narration because of Capote's insistence on the book's generic designation as a nonfiction novel (Bolling 587).[35] Similarly, Gay Talese's 1969 book *The Kingdom and the Power* earned attention as an innovative examination of journalism, detailing the politics of working at *The New York Times* and the difficulties of writing objective journalism more generally. As Barbara Lounsberry notes: "his 1969 'human history' of *The New York Times*, is now seen as the first of what became a deluge of behind-the-media books" (37–38). Talese's discussion of journalism as a subjective mode resonates with the ideas presented in this study as he asserts, "The reporter's ego was also a factor in the news coverage—he wrote what he wrote best, he wrote what he understood, reflecting the total experience of his lifetime, shades of his pride and prejudice; he wrote sometimes to please the editor, at other times to call attention to his own style" (60). Talese's writing, straying from the concise style of traditional journalism, reflects the subjective mode that characterized works of New Journalism while also addressing the influence of the writer's ego. His writing thus subverts the expectation for traditional journalism to obscure the writer's opinions in a neutral

[35] Ben Bolling provides an interesting examination of *In Cold Blood*'s composition, particularly through the lens of celebrity and persona-creation as he highlights the conflation of Capote's work and his authorial celebrity: "When Capote finally focused on the work, following the textual production of *In Cold Blood*, his identity as celebrity-author had been compromised so that he could no longer divorce himself from the text that he conceived; his celebrity persona had become imbricated in the aristocratic and café society cultures that he had hoped to treat with the authorial remove he purported to employ in *In Cold Blood*" (587).

style by narrativizing his experience of news coverage.[36]

Works such as *In Cold Blood* and *The Kingdom and the Power* complicate discussions of New Journalism as a form purely self-directed in its narrative style. However, privileging works that use first-person narration narrows the definition of New Journalism, which is notable in its expansiveness. Named after Tom Wolfe's anthology *The New Journalism* (1973), the form is often discussed in terms of its indefinability. For instance, Ronald Weber writes:

> It became the catchall term to classify the nonfiction work of writers as diverse as Wolfe, Gay Talese, Norman Mailer, Terry Southern, and Truman Capote . . . It became the overarching term for such subtypes as saturation reporting, advocacy journalism, participatory journalism, underground journalism, journalit, and the nonfiction novel. It became, in short, *the* term, and whatever difficulties it offered in precise definition it referred clearly enough to a significant stir in American writing. ("Some Sort" 14, emphasis in original)

Weber's definition demonstrates the wide-ranging applicability of the term and the importance of the various subcategories when describing different forms of journalism. Given the multitude of ways to consider the form, I will focus on the writing considered participatory journalism, following Jason Mosser's study *The Participatory Journalism of Michael Herr, Norman Mailer, Hunter S. Thompson, and Joan Didion* (2012). Mosser's study demonstrates the ways in which participatory journalists act as prominent characters in the narrative, following Bly's example by immersing themselves in the drama of the event.

By creating characters of themselves, the journalists in Mosser's study wrote in a similar tradition as Bly who capitalized on her literal image to increase interest in both her persona and journalistic exploits. Like Bly, the New Journalists who advertised their distinctive personas earned recognition as celebrities. Mosser

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[36] Talese's importance has also been acknowledged in the 2003 publication of *Esquire* magazine's seventieth anniversary issue, re-publishing Talese's 1966 article "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold" and citing it as "The Greatest *Esquire* Story Ever" (Editors).

identifies the importance of their celebrity to their texts, writing: "like Capote and Wolfe, Mailer, Thompson, and Didion have achieved a degree of notoriety that makes it difficult for readers to read their texts without referring to what they know about these writers through their public, media-created images" (*Participatory Journalism* 10). Mosser's reference to the authors' extra-textual personas highlights the intertextuality of their fame, which follows Bly's example. Though separated from Bly's writing by more than half a century, the New Journalism should be considered in light of innovations belonging to Bly's era. For instance, the interview and the commercialization of the press both contribute to the success of the author's self-mythologies. As this chapter will examine, New Journalists such as Norman Mailer and Hunter S. Thompson capitalized on the financial incentive provided by magazines to publish unconventional journalism, and they cultivated interest in their personas through interviews on television and in print.

Given the writers' visibility across different media, the New Journalism of the 1960s and 70s is a significant period in this study because of the numerous personalities that comprise it. Wolfe, Mailer, Didion, Capote, and Thompson are among the recognizable celebrity journalist figures who published newspaper articles and essay collections that contributed to their personal mythologies, forming a coterie of writers who each built their brands individually and collectively as the New Journalists. The importance of the period is also visible in recent discussions of literary journalisms that use the form to discuss contemporary popular forms such as creative nonfiction, which the fourth chapter of this study will examine in greater depth.[37]

[37] The contemporary interest in the New Journalists is exemplified by the 2017 Netflix film *Joan Didion: The Center Will Not Hold,* which details Didion's life and popularity as a journalist (Dunne). Because her narrative techniques did not utilize exaggerated self-aggrandizement, in contrast to Mailer and Thompson, she is not examined in this study, though her interest in political reportage in *Political Fictions* (2001) evinces the importance of

Importantly, the New Journalism dramatizes American ideologies of individualism because of the ways in which it allowed for various personalities to express their idiosyncrasies, valuing their own perspectives to such an extent that they often eclipsed the ostensible subjects of their narratives. Indeed, the conversation surrounding New Journalism owes much to Wolfe's assertions regarding the journalist's subjectivity while he established himself as one of the form's most prominent personalities. Wolfe focuses on the voice of the narrator to discuss the role of journalist figures and particularly their lack of visibility that the New Journalism aimed to correct. Wolfe suggests, "The voice of the narrator, in fact, was one of the great problems in non-fiction writing . . . Readers were bored to tears without understanding why. When they came upon that pale beige tone, it began to signal to them, unconsciously, that a well-known bore was here again, 'the journalist,' a pedestrian mind . . . a faded personality" (*New Journalism* 31). Describing the journalist in terms of boredom and the absence of a personality, Wolfe justifies the exaggerated presence of the journalist in accounts such as his and those in the rest of the anthology. Notably, Wolfe identifies the importance of the personality, which attests to the influence of the cult of the individual in addressing journalistic innovation. Wolfe describes New Journalism's stylistic innovations and its departures from traditional journalism[38] in terms of the individual, writing: "it was a matter of personality" (31). Recognizing Wolfe's choice of the word "personality" is essential because of the distance it establishes between authors and

performance and celebrity to contemporary politics, which is a tension I examine in later chapters.

[38] Wolfe describes the difference between traditional journalism and the New Journalism in terms of conventions used in fictional works, writing, "They had to gather all the material the conventional journalist was after—and then keep going. It seemed all-important to be there when dramatic scenes took place, to get the dialogue, the gestures, the facial expressions, the details of the environment. The idea was to give the full objective description, plus something that readers had always had to go to novels and short stories for: namely, the subjective or emotional life of the characters" (*New Journalism* 35).

their work, emphasizing the author's importance as a character outside the text to enhance readers' interest in their writing.

Though this chapter does not examine Wolfe's work, his influence should be acknowledged as he spurred discussions of innovative journalism. Wolfe published *Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*, a collection of his articles written in the new journalistic style, in 1965, and Weber credits the publication for causing "the subject [to] burst with full Day-Glo coloring on the literary-journalistic scene—and with the book's strong sales . . . came the first winds of acclaim and denial, soon rising to a broadly joined and often noisy critical controversy" ("Some Sort" 13). The introduction of *Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* is collected alongside twenty-eight other articles in Ronald Weber's *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy* (1974), demonstrating the "broadly joined and often noisy critical controversy." Weber's collection, published merely one year after Tom Wolfe released the New Journalism anthology, details the varied reactions to the new form and its expansiveness. Hollowell adeptly observes: "the sheer number of new journalism articles and their impact on traditional practices is significant" (46). Though New Journalism inspired debate as early as 1958 with Norman Podhoretz's article "The Article as Art," Wolfe's involvement in the mid-sixties began a period of commercial success for many other New Journalists, including Capote and Talese, as discussed above.[39]

Because of the sheer volume of criticism on the New Journalism and the numerous writers who received acclaim, I consider two of its most self-aggrandizing personalities, Mailer and Thompson, and situate their writing using the historical precedent set by Nellie Bly, which is an important relationship that has not yet been examined in literary criticism. By examining *The Armies of the Night* (1968) and

[39] "The Article as Art" is also collected in Weber's *The Reporter as Artist* (123-136).

Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72, I consider the importance of the authors' dual performances as journalists and political figures, paralleling Bly's role as a performer and reformer because each author imbues their acts of investigative journalism with their self-mythologizing techniques. Additionally, each author cultivates an intertextual persona in which the performance of their celebrity appeared in contexts outside their writing and helps to define the author's public images and mythologies. By considering the performative nature of the author's public appearances, this chapter demonstrates the authors' use of journalism as a vehicle to promote their reputations as innovators within their institutional affiliations, expressing individualistic ideologies despite their places writing for famed institutions.

Whereas a self-mythologizing writer such as Bly reflected on the investigative power of journalism in her text, the form of New Journalism written in the sixties and seventies differs in its distrust of powerful journalistic organizations detailed in their texts, echoing other literary-journalist performers like Twain. As a result, this chapter examines the antagonism dramatized in works considered New Journalism, viewing Thompson and Mailer as alienated journalist figures who built their reputations on opposing journalism as an institution, Thompson through his fictionalized Gonzo journalism and Mailer in his consideration of generic distinctions between novels and works of history. The antagonism expressed in each work helps to establish the protagonists in mythic proportions as heroes in their narratives that detail the failures of objective journalism. By depicting themselves as practitioners of a more authentic journalism, Mailer and Thompson use their criticism of traditional journalism to exaggerate their personas' importance as writers self-consciously redeeming journalistic integrity through the characterizations of themselves. I argue that the tension that emerges from their work is one between their own self-mythologies and the obstacles posed by their journalistic assignments, which

reflects concerns addressed in Bly's assignments such as *Ten Days in a Madhouse* and *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days.*

The drama of being the story's hero is integral to the personas that Thompson and Mailer perform, and they both demonstrate their interest in appearing as self-made, independent political journalists. Yet, their reliance on the publications for which they write is antithetical to the ideals they purport to display in their narrative voices as the individualistic journalist figure. Thompson and Mailer depend on the reputations of their publications to establish their characters as the narratives' protagonists, integrating themselves into the journalistic establishment. For instance, while Bly uses the *World* as an integral component to her narrative persona*,* Thompson highlights the role of *Rolling Stone* in opposing his individualistic approach, and he uses his political assignments to examine the incongruity between his persona, his publication's reputation, and the situations he entered on assignment. Likewise, Mailer highlights his place outside the mainstream press to develop his reputation as a critic of journalistic institutions.

Thompson's work especially dramatizes his impulse to separate himself from other journalists by establishing Gonzo Journalism, a form that relies on his persona as a distinctive entity. By promoting Gonzo Journalism as distinct from New Journalism, Thompson brands his writing through his character's identity, which advertises his rejection of objective journalism and the authority placed in it. Through his invention of the Gonzo journalist, Thompson refutes the anonymity of an objective journalist's voice, instead crafting a version of journalism that depends entirely on his idiosyncratic definition of it. Replacing the objective journalist with the Gonzo Journalist, Thompson demonstrates the New Journalist's distrust of institutional power, which increased the power placed in his own voice. James E. Caron highlights the reporter's participation that characterizes Gonzo journalism, noting: "once the conventions of gonzo journalism allow for this kind of equal footing

between observer and observed, the persona gains the potential for displacing the reporter's assignment. In other words Thompson can become the hero of his own story" ("Gonzo" 2). Thompson's presence in the narrative complicates the distinction between private and public selves, which is characteristic of celebrity authorship, and also confirms his place as an important figure in the lineage of celebrity literary journalists whose self-reflexivity complicated the main journalistic assignment.

Introduction to the New Journalism

The dynamics of celebrity authorship, as has been discussed in the previous chapters, is especially prevalent when considering the New Journalists. One similarity between Bly's fame and the New Journalists' fame is the importance of visual media. In their public appearances, images of New Journalists such as Wolfe and Thompson are recognizable, given Wolfe's characteristic white suit and Thompson's bucket cap and aviators. As they appeared on public platforms, they manufactured their personas through the literal image they created by sitting for interviews, for instance. Additionally, their commodified selves have transcended their work in similar ways to Bly. As Bly's image has been reimagined in children's stories, Hunter S. Thompson costumes are available to purchase online.[40] The posthumous commodification of Bly and Thompson follows the authors' performances on public platforms in which their reputations were established outside their work, particularly through interviews.

Since writers like Bly incorporated the interview in her writing, New Journalists used the interview as a source of self-mythologizing by appearing on

[40] One company's product description on Amazon alludes to moments in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas,* exclaiming, "Rock this full Raoul Duke costume kit when you're driving to Las Vegas! Better pack your suitcase full and include a flyswatter. Watch out! This is Bat Country!" Their product is listed alongside a Dr. Gonzo companion costume, complete with a synthetic wig. (Largemouth).

television shows and in publications such as *Playboy* to discuss their work and personas. For instance, in 1974, Craig Vetter interviewed Hunter S. Thompson for *Playboy*, telling Thompson, “Some people would say . . . that you come on like journalism’s own Hell’s Angel” (“Conversations” 16). Years earlier in 1967, Thompson appeared on a talk show from the Canadian Broadcast Company after publishing his first book on living with the Hell’s Angels for a year. One of the men described in the book rode onto the stage on his motorcycle and confronted Thompson for exploiting the Angels as material for his report. In a voiceover, the Hell’s Angel was described as “here to challenge his biographer, a tense, young literary journalist named Hunter Thompson” (CBC). The confrontation between Thompson and the Angel results from Thompson’s implied financial success and the Angel’s accusation that Thompson capitalized on their narratives for financial gain. Calling the book “sixty percent cheap trash,” the Angel tells the interviewer, “There was nothing about money, nothing about a share in the book, nothing about anything” (CBC). In the confrontation, Thompson’s reputation as an investigative journalist, willing to engage with the Angels’ hostility, is solidified outside his work, further cultivating his persona across forms of visual media.

Norman Mailer likewise appeared on television for an interview that mirrored Thompson’s as it consisted of dramatic confrontation. In 1971, Mailer and Gore Vidal were guests alongside Janet Flanner on *The Dick Cavett Show*, participating in one of the shows’ most notorious interviews. Mailer called Vidal “a liar and a hypocrite,” and claimed that Vidal’s review of *The Prisoner of Sex* exploited Mailer’s stabbing of his wife (CEHitchens33). Using Vidal’s work to belittle him, Mailer retorted, “I’ve had to smell your works from time to time and that has helped me to become an expert on intellectual pollution.” As they exchanged insults, Mailer and Vidal create a spectacle of their dispute in front of an audience, leading Janet Flanner to interject, “You act as if you were in private . . . Very odd! You act as if

you're the only people here." She points to the audience and says, “They’re here.” Flanner’s comments emphasize the performative nature of their exchange, directly addressing the obfuscated boundaries between public and private that characterizes celebrity authorship and the aggrandized performance of the self that Mailer embodies. For *Slate*, Troy Patterson identifies the feud as “Mailer's most legendary advertisement for himself”—a purposeful description that alluded to Mailer’s *Advertisements for Myself* (1959) and exhibited Mailer’s self-directed persona (Patterson). Mailer’s confrontational persona characterized the interview as he asks Cavett, "Why don't you look at your question sheet and ask your question?” (CEHitchens33). Cavett’s response, “Why don’t you fold it five ways and put it where the moon don’t shine,” suggests his offense at the implication that the interview is an unnatural construct wherein the interviewer merely reads a list of questions, but the confrontation highlights the inevitably staged nature of an interview such as that between Mailer, Vidal, Flanner, and Cavett and the subsequent potential for constructed identities in their public performances.

The interviews in which Thompson and Mailer crafted their personas comprise one aspect of their celebrity authorship, which consisted of numerous commercial concerns that complicate notions of their celebrity statuses as purely self-engineered. Though appearing as notable individuals on television programs, their relationships with the publishing industry demonstrate their indebtedness to market forces for their celebrity. John J. Pauly examines the financial reward involved in publishing New Journalistic accounts in “The New Journalism and the Struggle for Interpretation,” by discussing the task set before *Harper’s* editor-in-chief Willie Morris in 1967 to “make the nation’s oldest magazine more relevant and contemporary.” The first achievement that Pauly lists for the revitalized *Harper’s* is “an entire issue [devoted] to Norman Mailer’s edgy account of the March on the Pentagon” (589). Mailer’s place in *Harper’s*, encompassing a full issue, exemplifies

his publishers' assistance in establishing his celebrity status, which is further evidenced by the financial reward of writing for a famed publication. Pauly writes of the "ever-larger advances being given Norman Mailer" (600), citing the $10,000 H*arper's* paid for the 1968 'Steps of the Pentagon' article and the subsequent $17,500 advance from New American Library for its book version. With such large sums paid during an attempt to revitalize a major magazine, the influence of the marketplace contributes to Mailer's role as a commercially valuable writer as well as public performer, exemplifying the multi-dimensional dynamics of New Journalism and celebrity authorship more generally.

Despite the importance of the publishing world's commercial realities, matters of style and form often dominate the discussion with many questions of the "newness" of New Journalism, as Pauly discusses. The question of New Journalism's innovativeness has been considered at length (Hellmann, Hollowell), along with other commonly examined considerations that Pauly works to qualify. Published in 2014, nearly 50 years after Morris' task was set before him, Pauly's article particularly addresses the "familiar claim that the New Journalism was an expression of its times." Though the well-discussed "pervasive social changes" in the 1960s (Hollowell ix), are significant in discussions of New Journalism as this chapter will consider, the societal changes must be considered alongside changes in magazine publishing, which Pauly's article effectively demonstrates. He writes, "New Journalism was more than a response to a moment of widespread discontent, more than the coming of age of a new generation of inventive writers, and more than the sign of a wider revolt into style" (591). Pauly's statement echoes sentiments expressed by some of New Journalism's most notable scholars and contributors shortly after the New Journalism gained popularity. Addressing Wolfe's introduction to the New Journalism anthology in 1977, Hollowell notes, "Although Wolfe's history of the new journalism stresses the creativity of the innovative reporters, the

economics of publishing life and the financial plight of struggling newspapers and magazines also gave new impetus to experimentation" (38).[41] As one of the personalities who would benefit from a recognizable persona, Wolfe's emphasis on the individual reporter mirrored the approaches to individualism that other writers of the era also expressed. By investing the individual with more importance than institutional authority, whether embodied in publications or governments, New Journalists constructed accounts that suggest the reporter's autonomy, despite the commercial impetus from their organizations that undergirded their agency.

The relationship between New Journalists and traditional journalism exemplifies the tension between institutional authority and the individual reporter that Thompson and Mailer particularly addressed in the personas they created. They illustrate Hollowell's claim, "The new journalist's stance is often openly critical of the powerful interests that control the dissemination of the news" (22). Hollowell's observation alludes to the social and political conditions that contributed to the increased number of unconventional, first-person journalistic accounts. Michael E. Staub, examining the impact of war coverage in Vietnam, likewise highlights the conditions that inspired the suspicion of the press that consistently informed the work of Mailer and Thompson. Staub surmises, "It was, probably even more significantly, precisely the atmosphere of social crisis that had begun to make the traditional media seem so suspect and that had called attention to the way the media's claim to be 'objective' was frequently a smokescreen for bias" (55). Staub's reference to the media's ostensible objectivity and the era's social crises parallels

[41] Editors at the struggling newspapers and magazines, such as the version of *Harper's* that Mailer helped revitalize, confirmed Hollowell and Pauly's assessment of the commercial advantages of New Journalism. Former *Esquire* editor Harold Hayes is quoted declaring in 1972, "If there's been any great change to accelerate the possibility of writers dealing more flexibly with the language and with form, it's not because of the birth of a new journalism form, but because there is a commercial disposition among magazines to see that imaginative writing now is more appealing to their readers" (qtd. in Hollowell 39).

Bruce-Novoa assertion regarding the need for unconventional forms of journalism, asserting, “When the world is falling apart, journalistic order is a farce” (40).[42] Staub and Bruce-Novoa’s discussion of the social conditions of the time includes the country’s disillusionment with authority figures, particularly during the Vietnam War, and “the crash-and-burn end of the optimistic sixties”(Stiles and Harris 315), which Thompson and Mailer epitomized in their confrontations with members of the traditional press.

The journalistic order that Bruce-Novoa identifies is subverted in Thompson’s work through his fictionalized Gonzo journalism, which encapsulates the chaos of the political climate. Rather than adhere to journalistic convention, Thompson embodies the destabilized relationship with the press that characterized the era, particularly in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971). Classified as fiction, *Fear and Loathing* depicts protagonist Raoul Duke and his attorney, Dr. Gonzo, undertaking two journalistic assignments in Las Vegas: the Mint 400 motorcycle race and the National District Attorneys Association’s Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. The Duke character Thompson crafted blurs boundaries between journalism and fiction as Duke reflects Thompson’s drug-fueled approach to journalism and, in his fictionalized narrative of a journalistic assignment, Thompson embodies the era’s disorder. Greg Wright explains Thompson’s relationship to fiction in terms of the “chaos, violence, disintegration” of the 1970s: “his reportage

[42] One could point to the Watergate scandal as a part of the world “falling apart” and certainly as a key event in American journalism’s development. As Michael Nelson suggests, “Richard Nixon’s resignation made 1974 a landmark year for investigative journalism” (426). Thompson himself identified Watergate as a significant moment for journalism: “One of the most extraordinary aspects of the Watergate story has been the way the press has handled it: what began in the summer of 1972 as one of the great media-bungles of the century has developed, by now, into what is probably the most thoroughly and most professionally covered story in the history of American journalism” (*Essential Writing* 249). His commentary contributes to the thorough coverage of Watergate, adding his subjectivity to a story that he saw as resisting objectivity, especially given Richard Nixon’s involvement.

flirts with fictionality almost as a defense mechanism, a (self)reflexive response to the unpleasantness of its subject matter" (624). Similarly describing Thompson's version of journalism as a response to social chaos, Bruce-Novoa writes, "Thompson developed the Gonzo style at the beginning of the 1970s as a response to the fear and loathing he felt for what was happening to the American Dream . . . Thompson believed in that Dream, in the terms of the individualist, the nonconformist, the frontiersman, the doer as opposed to the watcher" (39). Notably, both Bruce-Novoa and Wright describe Thompson's writing in terms of the self and the individual in an American context, evincing the centrality of Thompson's subjectivity to his work and the importance of the persona's performance rather than journalistic convention. As a response to social changes, Thompson's focus on the individual further demonstrates the ways in which conceptualizations of individualism are subject to historical and social conditions.

By crafting a fictional persona, he alludes to the journalist's narrative inventions, especially given the indistinguishable boundary between Thompson and Duke, his fictional construction. As Thompson humorously asserts in the jacket copy of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, "Only a goddamn lunatic would write a thing like this and then claim it was true" (*Great Shark Hunt* 108). Given Thompson's fictionalized persona, his relationship to other figures in the journalist-performer tradition has been examined in scholarship and newspaper articles. In a *Wall Street Journal* article, Tom Wolfe discussed Thompson's work as "part of a century-old tradition in American letters, the tradition of Mark Twain, Artemus Ward and Petroleum V. Nasby." Wolfe described the tradition as "a form that was part journalism and part personal memoir admixed with powers of wild invention" ("'The 20th Century'"). The wild invention in their work included the humor and exaggeration that establishes their reporting as unconventional and enters their writing into conversations regarding the lineage of journalist-performers across

multiple contexts. James E. Caron specifically discusses the tall tale tradition in relation to Thompson,[43] asserting, "Thompson is a spit-polished, copper-bottomed, double boiler yarnspinner" ("Gonzo" 1). He concludes, "For both writers, facts are just so much cord-wood fuel for the imagination" (1). The introduction to Caron's analysis characterizes the authors and their motivations, highlighting the interest in both writers as comical figures writing in factual forms. Though responding to different historical and cultural conditions, Thompson and Twain are discussed as similarly subversive for the personas they created, evincing the centrality of their personas to their work as celebrity literary journalists.

Wolfe's reference to personal memoir is significant as it acknowledges the self-directed narrative that disrupts journalistic convention in the work of Twain and Thompson, complicating boundaries between their real selves and their narrative personas. Both Twain and Thompson demonstrate the emphasis placed on the persona's performance in unconventional journalism, and Jeffrey Steinbrink briefly discusses the persona's power in the work of Thompson and Twain in an article published in *Studies in American Humor*, asserting the role of truth in fiction. After proposing many similarities between Twain and Thompson, including their "mutual impatience with these strictures" of traditional journalism (221), Steinbrink suggests:

> Above all, both have an almost sacramental regard for honesty. At first this may seem something of a paradox, given their willingness to stretch the truth in their abundant fictionalizing, but, again, both regard fiction as a means of making the truth more emphatic, not of distorting or misrepresenting it. Behind

[43] While considering Twain's influence on Thompson, some critics question whether Mark Twain's early journalism can be discussed in terms of Gonzo Journalism the way Thompson can be discussed as a tall tale writer. Steinbrink clarifies in the beginning of his article that he "is not about to argue that Mark Twain was our first Gonzo Journalist" (221). Wolfe's assertions differ, as he suggested: "in the 19th century Mark Twain was the king of all the gonzo-writers." Though applying the label "Gonzo" to Mark Twain's work is problematic, critics' impulse to compare the writers is notable.

> the facade of exaggeration and outrageousness, Clemens and Thompson mean to approach their audiences with point-blank candor. (227)[44]

Steinbrink's analysis emphasizes the nature of the writers' performances as authentic, distinguishing between their facades and their authorial voices, though his statements conflate the writers and their narrative inventions. In considering the writers' purported candor, critics demonstrate a popular approach to Twain and Thompson by discussing the authors as synonymous with their textual personas. Their similarly self-reflexive styles indeed obfuscate the boundaries between their different selves, creating the illusion of transparency through their moments of self-examination. Robert Taylor asserts, "[Twain's] habit of self-examination predated by a hundred years the practice by New Journalists in the 1960s of revealing their presence in the text" (50). Taylor's observation echoes the comparisons drawn by Steinbrink and Wolfe, which supports a chronological view of journalist-performers across numerous eras, given their similar self-reflexive characterizations as journalists.

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas is especially notable because of the self-conscious performance of a journalist figure that partially resembles the performances of other journalist figures in this study by displacing the ostensible subject of the narrative. As Steinbrink asserts: "the Gonzo writer, in addition to maintaining an idiosyncratic style, takes a major part among his own *dramatis personae*" (footnote 6). Steinbrink's discussion addresses a vital element of Thompson's persona by noting the performative nature of the Gonzo journalist. While crafting a persona defined by his historical and social conditions, Thompson redirects the narrative's focus from the journalistic assignment to the performance of

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[44] Matt Taibbi's introduction to *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72* likewise asserts: "on the page, Hunter is the most instantly trustworthy and sympathetic first-person narrator America has had since Mark Twain" (xxi).

the journalist. Steinbrink astutely notes, “So massive and ubiquitous does he become, in fact, that at times there is room for little else on his pages . . . to a considerable extent he *becomes* the story” (225, emphasis in original). Like Bly, Thompson responds to the political exigencies of his time while also asserting his persona’s agency, though his response to the politics of the 1970s included fictionalizing reports and obscuring the boundary between himself and Duke. For instance, in a scene at a hotel, Duke claims, “Thompson is on his way out from L.A. with a new assignment—a new work order”(*Las Vegas* 78), jesting at Thompson’s involvement in the narrative despite Duke’s central role as the protagonist. Thompson’s dramatization of the journalistic assignments thus humorously subverts the earnestness of traditional journalism given the farcical nature of his account, which includes details of a series of his drug binges rather than thorough coverage of either event.

Ultimately, the text elides the aims of professional journalists by providing more details about the variety of drugs Duke consumes than either event, beginning in the first line of the book, which Johnny Depp repeats in the 1998 film adaptation (Gilliam). Duke narrates, “We were somewhere around Barstow on the edge of the desert when the drugs began to take hold” (*Las Vegas* 3). Though the narrator’s unreliability is suggested in the book’s first line, he maintains the meta-journalistic nature of his account in subsequent scenes. After a hallucination of bats swarming his car, he claimed, “I was, after all, a professional journalist; so I had an obligation to *cover the story*, for good or ill” (4, emphasis in original). Though purporting to be a professional journalist, Duke fails to cover the story, and his report on the Mint 400 occupied merely one chapter. He dismisses the race by claiming, “The idea of trying to ‘cover this race’ in any conventional press-sense was absurd” (38). The irony of Duke’s statements is exaggerated later in the narrative as he returns to Las Vegas for the drug conference. Of the conference, he concludes, “I suspect we could have

done the whole thing on acid" (143). In describing his drug binges, Duke problematizes the authority invested in journalist figures as his version of the journalist figure reports events in varying states of sobriety rather than approaching journalism as an esteemed profession. Duke exemplifies Wayne C. Booth's assertion regarding Thompson's "steady polemic against 'classic journalism'" (11) by including self-reflexive moments that contributed more to the narrator's comical persona than the journalistic assignment, thus opposing expectations for a professional journalist to support Thompson's idiosyncratic approach to reportage. In crafting a self-directed narrative voice, Thompson's character confronts institutional authority, investing more significance in the autonomy of the individual.

Booth's assertion also describes Thompson's characterization of the press in which he depicts traditional reporters as responsible for the chaos they report. In an example of the narrative's indictment of the press, Duke brazenly asserts, "Why bother with newspapers . . . The press is a gang of cruel faggots. Journalism is not a profession or a trade. It is a cheap catch-all for fuckoffs and misfits—a false doorway to the backside of life" (*Las Vegas* 200). Duke's condemnation of the press at the end of the narrative reflects instances earlier in the text in which members of the press are negatively characterized, contributing to the text's commentary on the state of traditional journalism after the Vietnam War. Duke shifts blame for the narrative's failure from his drug use to the newspaper, asserting, "This whole goddamn nightmare is the fault of that stinking, irresponsible magazine" (87). In his depiction of the correspondent from *Life*, he equates his lack of sobriety with that of a member of the traditional press, as the correspondent "was losing grip on the bar, sinking slowly to his knees, but still speaking with definite authority" (87). The symbolic nature of Duke's description resonates in its political context as the authority of official reports was under question because of the differing accounts produced during the United States' involvement in Vietnam, despite the news'

authoritative claims to truth.[45] The ambiguous position of the reporter in Thompson's narrative thus reflects the questionable status of traditional journalists who were villainized at different points of the Vietnam War, depending on public sentiment. Given this context, Duke's tumultuous relationship with journalism encapsulates the difficult task for a journalist to report news without bias because of the inevitable subjectivity of the individual and the influence of institutional authority on claims to truth.

Reflecting Duke's hostility to journalistic convention within the text, Thompson's meta-narratives on *Fear and Loathing* also depict his text's problematic relationship with forms of journalism. In detailing his idiosyncratic composition of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Thompson described "imposing an essentially fictional framework on what began as a piece of straight/crazy journalism" (*Great Shark Hunt* 106). The paradoxical nature of journalism described as straight and crazy reflect wider aims of New Journalism to disrupt generic distinctions by combining fictive techniques with factual information. Indeed, Thompson acknowledges the relationship between his work and New Journalism, writing: "although it's not what I meant it to be, it's still so complex in its failure that I feel I can take the risk of defending it as a first, gimped effort in a direction that what Tom Wolfe calls 'The New Journalism' has been flirting with for almost a decade" (108).

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[45] Thompson's interest in the government's censorship of the media can be traced till the end of his career; in Thompson's later years, "Fear and Loathing in America," about 9/11, is one example of Thompson's interest in how the news was reported. Addressing a key element of conventional journalism, "the five Ws," Thompson reported, "OK. It is 24 hours later now, and we are not getting much information about the Five Ws of this thing. The numbers out of the Pentagon are baffling, as if Military Censorship has already been imposed on the media" ("In America"). The censorship Thompson references shaped news dissemination in the 1960s, as many have discussed. *Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War* by William M. Hammond and *The Vietnam War Debate* by Louis B. Zimmer are examples of studies that examine the government's involvement in the distorted media coverage of Vietnam.

Thompson's comment, seeking to defend his work by aligning it with the New Journalists, suggests that classifying it entirely as fiction oversimplifies Thompson's project, despite the debates regarding his merit as a journalist. Whether "Gonzo journalism" is an oxymoronic phrase is still a significant point of contention when discussing Thompson, especially given the critics who would categorize all his work as fictional. For example, when it was announced in 2014 that Thompson would be inducted into the Kentucky Journalism Hall of Fame, *The Atlantic* reported that a local radio station assured listeners, "'We double-checked . . . It's not an April Fool's joke'" (Kevin). While *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* complicates generic distinctions between fiction and journalism, it is valuable in discussions of unconventional journalism as it also contributes to the meta-journalism deployed in numerous instances in Thompson's work, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Norman Mailer and the Political Journalist

In addition to its value as a meta-journalistic text, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* contributes to discussions of American mythologies. In a broader sense, Duke's account, combining details of his drug intake and his failure as a journalist, contradicts the text's optimistic view of the American individual. Before covering either event, Duke narrates, "But what was the story? Nobody had bothered to say. So we would have to drum it up on our own. Free Enterprise. The American Dream. Horatio Alger gone mad on drugs in Las Vegas. Do it now: pure Gonzo journalism" (*Las Vegas* 12). Citing the American Dream and the rag-to-riches narrative of Horatio Alger, Duke highlights two dominant mythologies in the conceptualization of the American individual. Given the conflicted role of the journalist, failing to fulfil his assignment, *Fear and Loathing* suggests the difficulty in achieving the ideals that are embedded in the American mythology of self-made success, though acknowledging the prevalent national mythologies in which individuals achieve

success based on the strength of their ingenuity. Using fictionalized journalism as a vehicle, Duke and Thompson question the factuality of the American Dream, speaking with a waitress and a cook at a diner who imply that the American Dream is "the old Psychiatrist's Club" (165). By destabilizing the national mythology of the indefinable American Dream, Thompson highlights its place as a dominant narrative while questioning its validity. Though *Fear and Loathing* does not overtly examine politics like many of Thompson's later texts would, it dramatizes the era's disillusionment with prevailing ideologies, instead prioritizing subversive approaches to official accounts.

By challenging the conventions of objective journalism, Mailer likewise uses journalism as a vehicle to question dominant narratives through his self-characterization. He mirrors Thompson in producing a recognizable persona that addresses broader concerns regarding the multiplicity of interpretations available to writers of journalism and history. As many personalities characterized themselves in works of New Journalism, their work ultimately exhibits individualistic approaches to meaning-making. Hellmann writes, "Almost by definition, new journalism is a revolt by the individual against homogenized forms of experience, against monolithic versions of truth" (8). The journalist's assertion of their autonomy evinces political ideologies that contest absolute trust in authorities such as the government. Further, Hellmann suggests the importance of poststructuralist thinking when considering the rise of the New Journalists as they question a homogenous truth through their reports, instead privileging multiple sources to make meaning. Calling attention to the constructed nature of their reports, the authors engage in poststructuralist practices by questioning the nature of newspaper reports as sources of authority, and they invest greater significance in their individual modes of making meaning, destabilizing a monolithic portrayal of events.

Contemporaneous discussions of the subjective elements of official accounts

provide insights into the techniques used in the work of Mailer and Thompson and can be considered for their challenges to objectivity. Poststructuralist theorists writing in the 1960s and 70s illuminate the difficulty in viewing history objectively, highlighting the importance of the writer's subjectivity in constructing a narrative that inevitably reflects the biases of the writer. Emerging from the poststructuralist tradition, E.H. Carr's writing is especially useful for understanding the crisis of representation in journalistic texts by Thompson and Mailer. Published in 1961, E.H. Carr's *What is History?* argues that the objectivity of the historian is impossible, noting the writer's selective structuring of information that creates inherently subjective accounts. He asserts, "The historian is necessarily selective. The belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy, but one which it is very hard to eradicate" (12). Carr's statement suggests that the individual creator bears the greatest responsibility for a historical account, thus identifying the individual's consciousness as the center of history's interpretation. Indeed, Carr submits, "The cult of individualism is one of the most pervasive of modern historical myths" (33).[46] By allowing the cult of individualism to influence his theoretical understanding of historical accounts, Carr demonstrates its pervasiveness while also identifying the parallels between the myth of objectivity and the myth of individualism.

As Carr claims, the myth of objectivity purports the absence of a guiding consciousness, which can also be perpetuated by the myth of individualism if the individual is viewed as an abstract, universal entity. Carr suggests: "we shall arrive at no real understanding either of the past or the present if we attempt to operate

[46] In Carr's discussion, he emphasizes the importance of the individual while also suggesting that the individual "is a social phenomenon, both the product and the conscious or unconscious spokesman of the society to which he belongs; it is in this capacity that he approaches the facts of the historical past" (35). His definition of the individual aligns with the arguments in this study because of the authors' relationships with their social and historical conditions while they emphasized the importance of the individual's subjectivity.

with the concept of an abstract individual standing outside society" (35). The abstract individual, free from historical, political or cultural circumstances, parallels the omniscient narrator whose subjectivity is obscured in historical accounts. In Carr's view, recognizing the historian as the creator and source of historical experience allows for the individual's place in a specific set of cultural and political circumstances to be illuminated and thus the falsehood of an abstract, universal individual to be resisted. Refuting the figure of the abstract individual, Carr asserts: "our first concern should be not with the facts which [a work of history] contains but with the historian who wrote it" (22). Carr thus defends a form of individualism by emphasizing individuals' biographical information as necessary for understanding the narratives they produce. Prioritizing the individual's biography, he imbues the individual with importance that exceeds the content of the narrative and distinguishes each historical narrator as unique guiding consciousnesses.

Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* (1968) demonstrates Carr's theories by prioritizing the role of the historian. Unlike Thompson, Mailer encourages discussions of historiography in his writing by subtitling his text "History as a Novel, The Novel as History," and dividing the narrative into two halves that highlight "the competing claims of three forms of knowing the past—the journalistic, the historical, and the novelistic" (Gordon 475). As novelist, historian, and journalist, Mailer occupies an ambiguous position that ultimately frees him to write unrestricted by the norms of his peers' journalistic profession. Mosser suggests, "Mailer bends all three to suit his purposes"("Genre-Bending" 307), and one of Mailer's most prevalent concerns is the public performance of his persona as a famed writer, presenting himself in self-aggrandizing terms.

Writing in the third person, Mailer emphasizes his fame as an author; an important element of Mailer's narrative is his self-reflexive discussion of his own fame. Kenneth A. Seib asserts, "A man of national renown—perhaps infamy—Mailer

stands both in and above the events he narrates" (91). Referencing Mailer's explicit place in the narrative, Seib notes the participatory element of Mailer's work that includes his engagement with the press. Mailer assesses his relationship with the media in terms of his personal resentment: "Mailer had the most developed sense of image . . . people had regarded him by his public image since he was twenty-five years old . . . newspapermen and other assorted bravos of the media and the literary world would carve ugly pictures on the living tomb of his legend" (5). Describing his legend and the importance of his image, Mailer promotes his place as a literary celebrity and exemplifies Moran's statement, "Celebrity seems to enforce self-reflexiveness: for those authors who experience it, it often becomes a constant preoccupation—they talk and write about it constantly, both in fictional and non-fictional forms, usually describing fame as a negative influence pervading their whole life and work" (*Star Authors* 10). Mailer's description of the ugly pictures carved by members of the media particularly evince his character's preoccupation with fame as a negative force. Further, by describing his fame, Mailer dramatizes Carr's theories regarding the importance of the historian's presence, establishing the historian as a subject of greater interest than the historical event.

The Armies of the Night emphasized the historian's importance from its first words. The text began, "From the outset, let us bring you news of your protagonist. The following is from *Time* magazine, October 27, 1967" (3). Mailer then negates the importance of the *Time* article, writing, "Now we may leave *Time* in order to find out what happened" (4). In introducing the *Time* excerpt, Mailer shifts the focus of the text to himself rather than the march. Offering "news of your protagonist" and introducing his account as a response to *Time*, Mailer implies the inaccuracy of the *Time* article, promoting his work as the most factual account. Despite his assertions, others verified the veracity of traditional publications. Robert Merideth demonstrates the contrast between Mailer's self-aggrandizement and the perspectives of other

participants, writing, “Dwight Macdonald (who was there . . .) observes that the *Time* account of Mailer was ‘reasonably accurate’” (438). Mailer’s assertion of his subjectivity, defying the official account in *Time*, promotes his persona as a partly self-engineered celebrity worth describing in newspapers, and his self-reflexive narration defends the image he crafts as a subversive figure. Merideth asserts, “*Time* is the source that has most to do with his image. The motive is Mailer’s concern, conscious or not, for his own image . . . not for political realities that the march and the weekend represented” (438). The emphasis on image in Merideth’s analysis is significant because Mailer’s perceptions of his portrayal in the media motivate several instances of meta-journalism in *The Armies of the Night* that condemn both mainstream and subcultural reportage. The narrative thus operates as a broader commentary on the nature of reporting through the vehicle of the Mailer character, particularly given the context of poststructuralism in which he wrote.

As he questions *Time,* Mailer also exemplifies poststructuralist thinking by explicitly addressing the distortions caused by textual representations. James E. Breslin asserts: “it is as writer, not as political activist, that Mailer finally defines himself in this book” (158). As a mythologized writer, Mailer questions the efficacy of narrative accounts in representing events, particularly in their failure to accurately portray his persona. He writes:

> The papers distorted one’s actions, and that was painful enough, but they wrenched and garbled and twisted and broke one’s words and sentences until a good author always sounded like an incoherent overcharged idiot in newsprint . . . So a great wall of total miscomprehension was built over the years between a writer, and the audience reached by a newspaper. (65)

Mailer’s discussion positions the individual writer in relation to the audience receiving his performance, and the performative qualities of his persona are emphasized in his use of the term “audience” rather than “readers.” He underscores

the constructed nature of textual constructions and implies that his text would correct the "total miscomprehension" that accumulated in other representations of himself. As a result, Mailer elucidates Carr's statement that "history is what the historian makes" (26) by commenting on the act of writing history and its potential for inaccuracies, emerging as a constructed persona himself in his use of the third person. Acknowledging the writer's agency, Mailer depicts the relationship between the writer and the press as antagonistic, reflecting the hostility of the era through his self-characterization.

Later in the narrative, Mailer dramatizes his combative assertions in a public address, giving his words over to the possibility of distortion in the press. When given the stage to address the protestors, he performs his resentment for journalists and reports the event ironically. He asks the reporters to stand when he addresses the crowd and mocks them when they refuse, saying, "'Yeah, these reporters will kiss Lyndon Johnson's *ss and Dean Rusk's *ss and Man Mountain McNamara's *ss, they will rush to kiss it, but will they stand up in public? No!'" (51). His use of asterisks ironically models the traditional accounts that he ridicules in his address to the audience. The *Time* article he excerpts in the opening of the book includes the censorship he later decries. *Time* reports, "When hecklers mustered the temerity to shout 'Publicity hound!' at him, Mailer managed to pronounce flawlessly his all-purpose noun, verb and expletive: '**** you'" (3). The antagonism expressed towards Mailer implies the aspect of his persona that earned news coverage for its confrontational approach to politics. Unlike the reporters he condemns, Mailer describes politicians with hostility and expletives, distinguishing his reporting as a closer representation of public sentiment, though his use of asterisks implies his partial alignment with the press as a member of it. Because of his place as both a subject of the news and a reporter, he represents the conflict between the individual and the institution as he participates in the journalistic establishment he condemns.

Discussing the issue of censorship subsequently allows Mailer to extend his admonishment to publications outside the mainstream press. Describing an article he wrote for *Liberation* in 1959, “then an anarchist-pacifist magazine, of worthy but not very readable articles” (103), Mailer criticizes editorial decisions regarding censorship, given subcultural magazines’ purported opposition to the mainstream press. He concludes: “these editorial anarchists were decorous; they were ready to overthrow society and replace it with a communion of pacifistic men free of all laws, but they were not ready to print cunt” (103). Unlike the traditional press and writers at subcultural publications, Mailer prints an expletive, implying the similar hostility in his writing and his political philosophy. As a result, Mailer illustrates the use of censorship in establishing the fictionalized nature of a text, which his text attempts to rectify by criticizing false constructs like censorship. In doing so, Mailer mirrors other journalist-performers like Twain and Bly who used the press to highlight inconsistencies in others’ political philosophies, but Mailer’s account differs by addressing the multiple outlets of information that proliferated during the Vietnam era, thus participating in the period’s destabilized view of meaning-making.

Within his account, Mailer problematizes his relationship with the media through his self-conscious identification as a writer. Of the reporters who refuse to stand, Mailer explains that they remain hidden because “‘they are the silent assassins of the Republic. They alone have done more to destroy this nation than any force in it’” (51). Though asserting his visibility as a hostile reporter, Mailer narrates, “They will certainly destroy me in the morning, he was thinking.” As he qualifies his brazen assertion with a self-conscious reservation, acknowledging the Press’ power, Mailer subjugates his narrative to the dominance of traditional accounts and focuses more on his personal image than the press’ relationship to political events. Mailer’s political commentary suggests his individualistic, affective approach to a collective experience. He writes, “But it was for this moment worth it .

. . the frustrated bile, piss, pus, and poison he had felt at the progressive contamination of all American life in the abscess of Vietnam, all of that, all heaped in lighted coals of brimstone on the press' collective ear" (51). Describing the national sentiment in terms of his feelings, his narrative ultimately operates as a personal reflection in which he writes in affective terms, describing his response to the press in terms of his own feelings regarding the era's conflicts. His text is thus questionably journalistic in nature because of its disproportionate relationship between personal narration and news of the march. In his self-reflexive narrative techniques, Mailer ultimately uses the press as an antagonist to sustain a performance of a famed writer attempting political reportage, especially given his recognizable status in different media accounts.

In asserting his place as a famed author in a significant moment of history, Mailer contradicts the figure of the abstract individual present in objective narratives that suggest a homogenous experience. As a result of the narrative omniscience in traditional journalism, national, political and historical idiosyncrasies of the individual are erased, which Carr notes while drawing parallels between the historian and the Robinson Crusoe myth; he suggests, "The lasting fascination of the Robinson Crusoe myth is due to its attempt to imagine an individual independent of society. The attempt breaks down. Robinson is not an abstract individual, but an Englishman from York" (31). The Crusoe myth concretizes the incongruity of the abstract individual's prevalence versus the biographical information that characterizes him as a distinct individual. The unique circumstances of his life diminish in importance as fantasies of individualism are projected onto him, which establish Crusoe as a mythologized figure independent of society. By referring to the Crusoe myth, Carr contributes to the discussion on the individual's relationship with society and also the narratives that are crafted about an individual's place in society and its history. Considering history through the lens of the individual also elucidates the position of

the historian. Like the individuals' circumstances in their narratives, the historian's social, political, and cultural circumstances contribute to the narrative's meaning, as Mailer's account demonstrates. Through his discussion of censorship and the multiplicity of journalistic reports, Mailer exemplifies the vexed relationship between journalism and politics during the Vietnam era by nominating the individual's experience as the most trustworthy account.

Thompson as a Political Journalist

The uneasy relationship between journalism and politics influenced Thompson's work during the 1970s as he produced an entire string of "Fear and Loathing" titles: "Fear and Loathing at the Watergate," "Fear and Loathing in Washington," and *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72*. In his review of *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72*, Wayne C. Booth details the trope of journalistic antagonism in Thompson's work while comparing Thompson's account to Theodore H. White's *The Making of a President*, another text he identifies in "the flood of books on the 1972 race" (7). Booth references "the journalists' five W's," and Thompson's role in "achiev[ing] a new journalism built on contempt for them" (9). As discussed above, Thompson's relationship with the press is defined by the disdain he expressed for their profession, depicting reporters as "fuckoffs and misfits," which is partly a response to the political unrest of the time. Stefanie Stiles and Randy Harris echo other critics in describing the tension between Thompson and the press as a result of the political exigencies of the time, writing, "The intellectual content of Thompson's screed against conventional journalism is that the press is (1) not what it seems and (2) sanctioned in its illusory activities by the political system that it pretends to examine" (330). Stiles and Harris articulate a popular reading of Thompson's work as a response to his era, which is a useful entry point into Thompson's reportage. However, like Mailer, Thompson's writing is

also an example of a celebrity literary journalist's experience navigating the dual concerns of political commentary and persona-creation, particularly in *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72.*

Throughout *Campaign Trail '72,* Thompson's mythology precedes the assignment in a number of ways, especially through the autobiographical references to his past as a sportswriter that are an integral element of his interpretation of the campaign. By focusing on his past experiences in journalism, Thompson performs a version of himself that aligned with his self-characterization in other texts, affirming the brand he built through his unconventional journalism. For instance, Thompson's article "The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved" (1970) demonstrates the convergence of political critique, sports journalism, and persona-creation, which also occurred in *Campaign Trail '72.*[47] Thompson's discussion of sports is significant as another way in which he asserts his role as an unconventional journalist. Winston identifies the "anti-professionalism" (413) in Thompson's work while examining Thompson's relationship with sports journalism because of the reputation of the form as an inferior type of reportage. Referencing the work of Mark Douglas Lowes, Winston submits that sports journalism exists outside "hard news" and is "considered as more like entertainment or fashion news, not ultimately expected to criticise in any radical or fundamental sense, nor to contaminate, or even overcomplicate, reportage that is not necessarily being presented as 'real news' anyway" (406). Winston's discussion suggests the subversive nature of Thompson's

[47] Staub examines Thompson's commentary regarding the Black Panthers in his article about the Derby, noting, "Hunter Thompson highlighted and spoofed the mass media hype surrounding the [Black Panther Party]" (61). As Thompson speaks to a Derby attendee after claiming he worked for Playboy, he alleges that his role as a member of the press was to "take pictures of the riot," and he asks, "'Don't you read the newspapers?'" Staub notes: "Although Thompson was most definitely playing a con game—no riot was planned, no Panthers were in sight, and he didn't even really work for *Playboy*—what he managed to elicit from his interlocutor was of course exactly the sense of irrational alarm that the mere mention of the Panthers could produce at that historical moment" (61).

journalism because of the boundaries it blurs between forms of journalism considered serious or trivial. More importantly, Thompson's use of sports journalism contributes to the persona he constructs as an improbable political reporter whose subjective experience of the campaign implies the importance of individuals' personal histories when crafting reports of events.

Thompson's comparisons between football and the campaign also reflects the impossibility of complete objectivity given the gendered nature of his report. The frequency with which Thompson addresses the campaign in terms of football indicates the intrusion of his subjectivity when covering the campaign in a particularly masculine manner. He states, "I can already feel the compulsion to start handicapping politics and primaries like it was all just another fat Sunday of pro football" (*Campaign Trail '72* 38). Writing in affective terms, Thompson trivializes the importance of the campaign as he suggests its similarity to a weekly sports match. Within Thompson's comparisons to football, he also underscores the competitiveness and aggression in politics that demonstrate a performatively masculine approach to covering the campaign. He writes, "The only other group I've ever dealt with who struck me as being essentially meaner than politicians are tight ends in pro football. There is not much difference in basic temperament between a good tight end and a successful politician" (68). The comparison he draws implies the uniquely American aspect of his assignment in which football is valued to such an extent that it enters conversations about the country's leadership, while he also suggests the male-dominated nature of professional football and the 1972 political campaign. His form of journalism expresses the importance of multiple aspects of the journalists' identity, including gender and personal history, which further cements the value he places on elucidating the individual's identity while detailing the assignment, much like the other writers in this study.

Mirroring the other celebrity literary journalists who write themselves into

their narratives, Thompson's explicit participation in the event supports an individualistic approach to political reportage. Further, his meta-narrative evinces his attempts to form his persona based on his explicit personal biases. He writes:

> That actually isn't much fun, writing about it . . . the High is in the participation, and particularly if you identify with one candidate . . . I don't think that I could do it if I didn't care who won. It's the difference between watching a football game between two teams you don't care about, and watching a game where you have some kind of personal identity with one of the teams if only a huge bet. You'd be surprised how fast the adrenaline comes up, if you stand to lose $1,000 every time the ball goes up in the air. (*Campaign Trail '72* 473)

In describing political reportage as a game, he implies that more is at stake in the writing of politics than merely representing the events, but rather engaging in them for personal gain. By stating that "the High is in the participation," Thompson promotes his inevitably subjective, biased involvement in politics as a part of his narrative persona, suggesting that his piece might not exist if he did not include his personal motivation. Additionally, he writes of the event in a manner that suggests his own idiosyncratic manner of making meaning from the political process, namely by interpreting it in terms of a game. Thus, the event is a vehicle for Thompson's self-characterization as a former sportswriter and political candidate while also destabilizing the relationship between a reporter and politics.

Thompson's relationship to the campaign includes his humorous, ironic assertions that align with his view of the campaign as a game. For example, he ironically asserts, "At this point in the campaign, I was no longer functioning with my usual ruthless objectivity" (*Campaign Trail '72* 386, footnote). Thompson's statement contributes to the account's subversion of journalistic convention; as he ironically and humorously identifies his "usual ruthless objectivity," Thompson rejects the earnestness expected from traditional journalistic accounts. Further, Thompson plays with the facts of the campaign, as later confirmed by George McGovern's campaign strategist, Frank Mankiewicz, who stated *Fear and Loathing on the*

Campaign Trail "was the most accurate and least factual portrayal of that campaign" (Gibney). The most notable and widely quoted example of Thompson's disregard for some of the facts of the campaign is his claim that presidential candidate Edmund Muskie was under "The Ibogaine Effect" (*Campaign Trail '72* 134) and that NBC news anchor John Chancellor was also involved in drug use. In straying from factual journalism, Thompson uses the unexpected conflation of drug culture and the political process to fabricate events that supported his defiance of journalistic conventions while also trivalizing the importance of professional reputations. Thompson evinces the convergence of political reportage and entertainment by imbuing his article with humorous elements, predating contemporary entertainers who similarly use humor in their political commentary.

In his personal participation, Thompson also reflects techniques used by his predecessors, including Nellie Bly. Namely, in detailing his improbable place on the campaign trail, Thompson characterizes himself in self-aggrandizing terms; Thompson asserts, "I am the only journalist covering the '72 presidential campaign who has done any time on the other side of the gap—both as a candidate and a backroom pol, on the local level" (*Campaign Trail '72* 246). Given the nature of his political campaign on the Freak Power ticket, Thompson's comparison is comical. He claims: "despite all the obvious differences between running on the Freak Power ticket for Sheriff of Aspen and running as a well-behaved Democrat for President of the United States, the roots are surprisingly similar" (246). Examining his personal interest in the campaign, Thompson elevates his own importance in the narrative by suggesting the similarity in campaigns despite the inevitable incongruity between a presidential campaign and his bid for sheriff of Aspen. Through his reference to the Freak Power ticket, Thompson incorporates his past into the tensions in his piece, which dramatizes his relationship with journalism as well as politics. Thompson thus performs as a former politician and establishes his personal mythology as both

experienced participant and commentator, reflecting the influence of his personal cult of the individual by cultivating interest in his past and its humorous incongruity with his role as a journalist.

Thompson's self-characterization suggests his authority in covering the campaign by asserting his prominence in the corps of journalists. Describing himself as a former politician, he asserts his individuality in an additional manner than merely through his comical, drug-fueled persona's idiosyncratic style. He asserts:

> I was the only one in the press corps that evening who claimed to be as seriously addicted to pro football as Nixon himself. I was the only out-front, openly hostile Peace Freak; the only one wearing old Levis and a ski jacket, the only one (no, there was one other) who'd smoked grass on Nixon's big Greyhound press bus, and certainly the only one who habitually referred to the candidate as "the Dingbat." (*Campaign Trail '72* 45)

Thompson's repetition of "the only one" explicitly emphasizes his individuality as a valuable rhetorical strategy to differentiate his approach from the homogeneity of the press corps. Thompson's description of his appearance also aids in his critique of traditional journalism as his dress appeals to an audience outside Washington that ensures Thompson's popular appeal and added to his mythology as an "outlaw journalist."[48] Branding himself as a reporter who smoked marijuana while reporting the event, Thompson uses the campaign to heighten the incongruity between his characterization and the expectations for a traditional journalist.

Given Thompson's emphasis on his individuality in journalism and politics, his characterization of other journalists represents their lack of individuality, as he conflates their publications with their identities, writing, "Time magazine was dining with Newsweek, watching one another on the night before their magazines close for publication . . . Knight Newspapers and the Wall Street Journal were sitting at

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[48] One of Thompson's many biographies is William McKeen's *Outlaw Journalist: The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson* (2009).

another table, but they decided to join the circle. So did the New York Times" (*Campaign Trail '72* 314-15). Without identifying individual journalists, Thompson displays the significance of the publications' reputations that practice more traditionally objective journalism than his own, thus denying their writers' subjectivities.

In considering journalism as an institution, Thompson's meta-narration also demonstrates the postructuralist thinking that was contemporaneous with his career by highlighting the constructed nature of his text. He reflects theories posed by Hayden White who examined historiography as a subjective form of writing and challenges the view of the historian as scientifically-minded when producing historical accounts, highlighting the imaginative possibilities inherent in structuring a historical text. For instance, Hayden White's seminal text *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (1973) argues that the construction of nonfictional texts must necessarily rely upon fictive structures. His text is a significant entry point when considering the innumerable interpretations of historical events because of his focus on the process of narrativizing history. Introducing his analysis, White states, "I will consider the historical work as what it most manifestly is—that is to say, a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing* them" (2, ellipsis in original). Describing a historical text as a verbal structure and a narrative prose discourse, White examines the historical account as a linguistic construction, which, as he acknowledges, invites discussion of realistic modes of representation. Given the unifying aim of realism in traditional historical texts, White's discussion is important for the way it highlights the impact of realism in veiling the constructed nature of historical texts. As a convention of historical texts, realism is a tool for narrativizing historical events that raises further questions about the nature of historical representation.

Thompson describes the failure of realism and the multiplicity of interpretations created by textual representations in a similar way as Mailer. He states, “Even reading and watching *all the news,* there is no way to know the truth—except to be there” (*Campaign Trail ’72* 180). Thompson’s statement emphasizes the importance of the writer’s subjectivity, which conflicted with the aim of objectivity in news accounts, and he espouses one of the central tenets of New Journalism by acknowledging truth as a malleable concept. Though offering another journalistic account, Thompson underscores the distance between the reader and a news story as he highlights the inefficacy of reportage, given its constructed and inevitably biased nature despite its claims to objectivity. Additionally, in evincing the failure of journalistic accounts, Thompson highlights the difference between his lived experience on the campaign trail and his written account, describing the two poles in terms of “the massive, unbridgeable gap between the cranked-up reality of living day after day in the vortex of a rolling campaign—and the fiendish rat-bastard tedium of covering the same campaign as a journalist, from the outside looking in” (246). Describing the distance as “massive, unbridgeable,” Thompson frames his narrative as a consequence of journalism’s failures to encompass the affective experience, or the “cranked-up reality,” of an event as complex as a political campaign. In language that exemplifies his dramatic experience of representing a “vortex of a rolling campaign,” Thompson crafts a subjective account of objectivity’s failures, which relies on his pronounced distance from traditional journalism to examine his own affective responses.

Thompson’s most explicit rejection of the journalistic institution is his assertion: “The only thing I ever saw that came close to Objective Journalism was a closed-circuit TV setup that watched shoplifters in the General Store at Woody Creek, Colorado” (*Campaign Trail ’72* 33). Recognizing the impossibility of fully mimetic accounts, Thompson questions language’s efficacy in representing events

and privileges numerical data, claiming, “With the possible exception of things like box scores, race results, and stock market tabulations, there is no such thing as Objective Journalism. The phrase itself is a pompous contradiction in terms” (33). Thompson’s idiosyncratic analysis of journalism allows him to invent his identity as a noteworthy practitioner of a potentially more authentic journalism by questioning the conventions of traditional journalism. He exemplifies Hellmann’s statement, “Because it is a product of the human mind and language, journalism can never passively mirror the whole of reality, but must instead actively select, transform, and interpret it” (4). Hellmann describes the impact of the writer’s interpretation that writers like Thompson self-reflexively narrates. His comments regarding objective journalism distinguish his writing from others in the journalist-performer tradition because of its explicit rejection of mimetic modes, problematizing the validity of the role of the journalist that he aims to perform.

Hellmann’s statement also reflects White’s concern with the selectivity of the historian and connects White’s discussion to the broader project of the New Journalists by considering the relationship between realism and artistic representation. White submits, “a common problem . . . is, the nature of ‘realistic’ representation, which is *the* problem for modern historiography . . . I ask: what are the ‘artistic’ elements of a ‘realistic’ historiography?” (3, footnote 4). White’s question identifies a central tension between the invented nature of a historical text and its aim of mimesis, and also refutes the dichotomy between “artistic” and “realistic” representations. Citing “serious doubts about history’s status as either a rigorous science or a genuine art” (2), White demonstrates the historian’s role in dismantling distinctions between scientific and artistic methods in the construction of historical accounts. White’s statement reflects the techniques used by the literary journalists in this study who combine their investigative journalism with elements used in fiction, including scenes and dialogue, thus depicting realistic representations while

attentive to aesthetic concerns.

In characterizing his own writing as unique from the journalistic establishment, Thompson self-consciously highlights his writing's construction and the obstacles that could have prevented its existence, primarily the deadlines he faces. He writes, "This is about the thirteenth lead I've written for this goddamn mess, and they are getting progressively worse . . . which hardly matters now, because we are down to the deadline again" (*Campaign Trail '72* 166, ellipsis in original). By highlighting his struggle to meet the deadline, Thompson illustrates the factors that prevent him from existing entirely outside the journalistic corps. Though he creates a character that promotes its status as an anti-journalist, he still notes the relationship to journalistic convention he maintained, including the confines of deadlines. Additionally, Thompson's description of his assignment betrays his responsibility to an institution, further undermining his individualistic depiction of his style of journalism. For instance, he states: "it will not be long before the Mojo Wire starts beeping and the phones start ringing and those thugs out in San Francisco will be screaming for Copy. Words! Wisdom! Gibberish! Anything!" (166). Thompson's statement bears his idiosyncratic style as he identifies "those thugs out in San Francisco," but his relationship with an organization defines the anxiety he dramatizes. Given the hysteria that characterizes Thompson's text, he demonstrates his inability to redefine journalism entirely in his own terms because of the institutional pressures that are vital to his character's existence. Without the demands from his publisher and editors, Thompson's style and its distance from traditional journalism would lose much of the dramatically performative elements that distinguish his character from other journalists, thus creating a contradictory relationship between Thompson and journalism as an institution in which he is beholden to journalism's conventions despite his resistance to them.

Thompson's relationship with *Rolling Stone* defines his place in the narrative,

though he approaches institutional authority as antagonistic, unlike Bly's relationship with the *World.* Besides Thompson's own barriers that he creates between himself and the other journalists, he reports on the attempts made to blockade him from the campaign. He writes, "Mister Nixon's press handlers, for instance, have made it ominously clear that I shall not be given White House press credentials. The first time I called, they said they'd never heard of *Rolling Stone*. 'Rolling what?' said the woman" (*Campaign Trail '72* 28). In staking his involvement with journalism both on his Gonzo brand and *Rolling Stone* as an institution, Thompson defines the antagonism he faces as both internal and external, dependent on his own definition of journalism and the competing concerns of the US government and *Rolling Stone* magazine. The incongruity of the government's concerns and the *Rolling Stone* assignment aligns with Thompson's duel agenda of infiltrating the journalistic corps while conspicuously flagging the absurdity of his assignment and the comical nature of his presence on the trail. For instance, Thompson notes, "I had my professional reputation to uphold. I was, after all, the National Affairs Editor of *Rolling Stone*" (443), which is another ironic assertion of Thompson's anti-professionalism as he was denied press credentials based on the questionable reputation of his publication.

His earliest article, printed in the men's magazine *Rogue* in 1961, demonstrates his partially hypocritical position in the press from the beginning of his career. Writing of Big Sur, California, Thompson describes Big Sur as "a place that a lot of people have heard of, and that very few people can tell you anything about" ("Big Sur" 36). He thus advertises the exclusive nature of his assignment and acts as one of the "very few people," though the rest of his article undermines the value of his report. A part of its status as a mythologized haven is lost with the increasing attention paid it, and Thompson portrays the area as partly spoiled by the media attention that draws visitors to it. Thompson writes:

> Time was when this place was as lonely and isolated as any spot in America. But no longer. Inevitably, Big Sur has been "discovered." *Life* called it a "Rugged, Romantic World Apart," and presented nine pages of pictures to prove it. After that there was no hope. Not that Henry Luce has anything against solitude—he just wants to tell his seven million readers about it. And on some weekends it seems like all seven million of them are right here. (36)

Thompson highlights Life's role in contributing to the problem in Big Sur, much as he would again later in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. However, Thompson's reportage contributes to the media attention that destroys Big Sur's seclusion.[49] As a result of his publication, Thompson establishes his ambiguous place in the journalistic corps, despite its importance to his persona. Robert Alexander notes how Thompson "self-identified, however ambivalently, as a reporter . . . [and] display[ed] what seems to be an ironic identification with the journalistic professionalism of those other members of the press gathered for the event"(23). Given the ambiguity of Thompson's role as a journalist, he demonstrates concerns that other authors in this study dramatize, approaching journalistic assignments as a self-identifying journalist, regardless of his distance from traditional journalism.

Conclusion: The Posthumous Legacies of Thompson and Mailer

[49] McKeen writes, "The Big Sur article pissed off the community," and demonstrated how Thompson was guilty of acting as a member of the press, much like those about which he wrote. McKeen relates, "There were also those who felt the article would increase the influx of sex-crazed morons into the area (*Rogue,* after all, didn't have the literary credibility of *Playboy*)." He concluded, "The *Rogue* article was a mixed blessing: it was Hunter's first national publication, and it was also the reason used to evict him" from an estate in Big Sur (67).

Perhaps Thompson's greatest achievement in establishing a contradictory relationship between himself and traditional journalism was his invention of Gonzo journalism. The descriptions of Gonzo Journalism in his report indicate his attempts to characterize himself through his unique approach to journalism while also betraying Gonzo's inevitable failure to be a polished, professional form. In *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72,* Thompson notes, "What follows, then, is one of the most desperate last-minute hamburger jobs in the history of journalism—including the first known experiment with large-scale Gonzo Journalism—which we accomplished, in this case, by tearing my Ohio primary notebook apart and sending about fifty pages of scribbled shorthand notes straight to the typesetter" (169). Performing as a journalist, Thompson dramatizes his inability to conform to journalistic expectations, partly through his failure to meet his deadline. He elevates his piece to "the most desperate . . . in the history journalism," writing in superlatives to exaggerate his importance as an innovative journalist who engaged in "the first known experiment" with his own self-referential version of journalism. The Gonzo label is thus crucial for distinguishing Thompson from the other New Journalists while also proving his similar impulse to characterize himself as uniquely disruptive in his style of first-person journalism.

In the process of characterizing the antagonism he faced given the realities of publishing, Thompson cultivated a persona that was defined by his improbable place in the journalistic corps. The mythology of Thompson's persona, combining his role as a magazine employee and a public performer, has influenced numerous representations of Thompson in popular culture. In a clip from a game show that airs in the 2008 documentary *Gonzo: The Life and Work of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson*, the announcer asks, "'Will the real Hunter Thompson please stand up?" (Gibney). Thompson himself addressed how his public and narrative personas created a myth that transcended his work, blurring his public and private selves; in

an interview, he admitted, "'When I get invited to speak at universities, I'm not sure if they're inviting Duke or Thompson, so I'm not sure who to be . . . this myth is growing and mushrooming and getting more and more warped'" (Matthews). The myth of Thompson's persona is notable for the ways it eclipses his work, much like the other writers in this study. Thompson's editor at *Rolling Stone* and the magazine's co-founder, Jann S. Wenner, confirms, "'Hunter wanted a persona, but he became a hostage to that persona . . . Hunter did become, in a way, a prisoner of his own fame'" (Gibney). As a celebrity literary journalist, Thompson's image proliferates across numerous platforms, including the documentaries that increased the recognizability of his persona.

As a result of Thompson's persona becoming so recognizable, film critic Leonard Maltin comments, "'He built a reputation so that even people who didn't necessarily read him knew about him or knew of him'" (Thurman). With an increasingly significant public presence, including numerous speeches and interviews, Thompson's personal cult of the individual grew while amplifying his identity as both a performer and writer. Interviews with Thompson and the various characters in his life reveal the importance of performance to understanding his work; indeed, many of those interviewed are actors, including Johnny Depp and Bill Murray who both starred as Thompson (or journalists based on Thompson) in the three cinematic representations of his work: *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998), *Where the Buffalo Roam* (1980), and *The Rum Diary* (2011). Besides the three films, multiple documentaries, biographies, and interview collections have attempted to offer an image of the "real" Thompson, which remains elusive, particularly in a posthumous context.

NBC News anchor Brian Williams, reporting on Thompson's suicide in 2005 provided a concise list of Thompson's various roles, proclaiming, "Hunter S. Thompson was a lot of things: a journalist, an author, a patriot, a professional

trouble-maker, a complex walking monument to misbehavior" (Gibney). Importantly, the clip of Williams' newscast was a part of *Gonzo: The Life and Work of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson,* a documentary with a title emblematic of one of the central discussions with Thompson's work by considering the ways in which his life and work intersected and diverged. Because of the persona cultivated on the page and in representations of his life, Thompson represents a tradition of writers whose nonfictional personas and public presences complicate distinctions between their public and private selves. As a cultural icon, Thompson's legacy includes his appearances in unexpected places, such as the 2018 romantic comedy *The New Romantic* in which the protagonist vies for the Hunter Thompson Award in Journalism. When a friend who has also dressed as Hunter S. Thompson for a party says, "'I didn't take you as a Hunter Thompson fan,'" she claims defiantly, "'He's the very godfather of Gonzo journalism'" (C. Stone). Though the characters allude to his work, they imply the recognizability of his persona. Thompson's legacy in popular culture is also reflected in recent publications, including the 2018 publication of *Hunter S. Thompson: The Last Interview and Other Conversations* in which the publisher notes, "More than a decade after his death, Hunter S. Thompson is as popular—and as relevant—as ever" ("Spring Preview"). Characterized as a timeless and commercial figure, Thompson exists in posthumous portrayals that continue to promote his fame.

Likewise, Mailer's persona continues to have relevance in a contemporary context. Mailer's persona as a confrontational, rebellious figure was highlighted in an article published a year after his death in 2007 in which his notoriety contributed to the discussion of the contemporary scandal surrounding James Frey's fabricated memoir *A Million Little Pieces* (2003). In a *Vanity Fair* article entitled, "James Frey's Morning After," Evgenia Peretz characterizes Mailer as "the torchbearer of the rebel-

genius tradition," and claims, "Mailer welcomed Frey into the elite circle of bad boys" (Peretz). Mailer's quotations affirm his status as a famed persona, as he tells Frey, "'For 40 years they stomped on me. Now you have the privilege of being stomped on for the next 40 years.'" Peretz describes Mailer as "he compared them both to boxers" and demonstrates the separation between Mailer's persona and his work as she quotes him telling Frey, "'You're never going to be one of the ones that the newspapers love or that wins awards. [You're] always going to take a beating publicly. And that's endurable if you just focus on what matters, which is the work.'" The irony in Mailer's statements results from his place in the article, which capitalizes on his reputation without reference to any of his publications. The article exemplifies the contemporary intertextuality of celebrity authorship, profiling an author whose scandal occupied numerous editorials and television reports, and Mailer's involvement in the article highlighted the enduring power of his persona.

Mailer's quotations addressing a writer's self-characterization are useful in considering the self-aggrandizement involved in both his and Thompson's writing. He questions the mimetic nature of self-representation, asserting, "'That's why a writer writes his memoir, to tell a lie and create an ideal self. Everything I've ever written is memoir, you know, is an inflated vision of the ideal Platonic self'" (Peretz). Addressing the multiple versions of the self created by textual representations, Mailer also evinces the authority with which he can speak as a writer whose identity is constructed across his numerous texts, including *The Armies of the Night* and *Advertisements for Myself.* In his self-directed gaze, Mailer constructs a self that exaggerated his place in his narratives in a similar way as Thompson. Their writing thus navigates the political conflicts of their era while also establishing significant personas in the public imagination. Subverting expectations for traditional journalists, they join other journalist-performers in using journalism as a vehicle for persona creation and social commentary, while responding specifically to

poststructuralist concerns of their era and theorists' assertions regarding the centrality of the individual to interpretations of historical events.

Chapter Four: David Foster Wallace and the Commodified Individual

As the last chapter examined, the New Journalism of the 1960s and 70s included numerous examples of the unconventional journalist's self-mythologizing reportage that responded to the social conflicts of the era. Because the Vietnam War inspired distrust in institutional authority, the writers' works questioned the traditional journalists' omniscience and focused on the social and political factors that challenged the possibility of omniscience. The journalistic figures who received attention in the Vietnam Era by discussing drug use or distortions in media representations are important precursors to the writers in the 1990s; as this chapter will examine, the context in which 1990s literary journalists wrote contrasted with the 1960s as an "interwar" decade (Cohen 4) but similarly included new methods of representing public life, most notably in the rise of the Internet and the increased hours of news coverage given to political scandals. With Bill Clinton's affair heavily publicized, the blurring of the public and private spheres also characterizes popular literature of the time, notably in the increasing popularity of memoirs. As literary works of self-representation were commercially successful, the 1990s' political and social changes influenced works of unconventional journalism with self-consciously autobiographical narrators, such as journalistic works written by David Foster Wallace.

While gaining attention for his fiction, Wallace accepted offers to write a commissioned oeuvre of essays and journalistic pieces in the 1990s for publications such as *Harper's, Esquire, Premiere,* and the *Harvard Book Review* in which he examined the implications of various modes of entertainment, including state fairs, Adult Video News conventions, lobster fests, cruises, and television. His frequently cited essay "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction," a consideration of irony's decreasing power because of its use by the media and wealthy corporations,

joins others in his first collection of essays, *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* (1997). In many of the collection's essays, Wallace capitalized on his position as an outsider to comment on the greater significance of different forms of entertainment; for instance, Wallace's celebrated essay "Consider the Lobster," the title essay of his 2005 collection, ruminates on the ethics of boiling lobsters at a Maine lobster festival instead of reporting on his experience eating the lobster for *Gourmet,* the food magazine that commissioned the piece. As a writer promoting his persona's incongruity to his various assignments, Wallace wrote his reactions to each situation into the narrative by creating a character that relished his "anti-journalist" identity in his numerous self-reflexive moments. The character of the anti-journalist reporting on different situations indicates the highly participatory nature of Wallace's journalism, which opposes the omniscient narrating voice of traditional journalistic accounts and enters Wallace's work into discussions of literary-journalist performers.

Wallace's journalistic oeuvre remains underexamined compared to his works of fiction. In "Seething Static: Notes on Wallace and Journalism," Christoph Ribbat acknowledges that "not much critical attention has been paid on Wallace and his position in the larger context of late-20th century American journalism" (Hering, chap.15). The critical commentary that has addressed Wallace's journalism positions him alongside other New Journalists, which Ribbat acknowledges, writing: "there are plenty of parallels, of course, in the way both Wallace and the New Journalists ignored the conventions of journalistic prose, moving away from the routine of the plain, clean, and straightforward." Ribbat's description of journalistic convention as "plain, clean, and straightforward" opposes Wallace's maximalist, subjective style while also implying traditional journalism's absence of self-reflexive moments that create multi-layered performances. Punctuating his encounters with his self-conscious speculation on their significance, Wallace alludes to the lack of

transparency in journalistic texts that obscures their writers' perspectives in objectivizing language. Rather than "straightforward," Wallace's narrative voice mirrors those of other unconventional journalists' narrating voices as he exerts a postmodern subjectivity, drawing attention to itself as the guiding consciousness and highlighting the destabilized and pluralistic nature of meaning-making.

Given the participatory nature of Wallace's journalism, which includes tensions created by the use of autobiographical elements in a journalistic narrative, Wallace's place amongst notable literary journalist figures is valuable, particularly because of the intertextual fame that Wallace experienced. Like the writers investigated in previous chapters, Wallace generated interest in his persona on and off the page, whether in television interviews, magazine profiles, or through in-text representations of himself in fictional and nonfictional modes. In crafting an intertextual persona, Wallace resembles the New Journalists or Mark Twain by demonstrating the prevalence of a journalistic oeuvre as one of many elements contributing to a writer's mythos; exemplifying their dexterity in both nonfictional and fictional modes allowed each writer to fulfill and promote the myth of the genius writer. Additionally, producing works of fiction and nonfiction multiplied the number of textual representations of each writer if their works included moments of self-representation, as Wallace's work did.

Wallace's writing at the end of the twentieth century and the particular tensions he represents are heightened because of his historical context with its notable focus on the self and the proliferation of contexts in which representing the self was profitable. As previous chapters have examined, marketing the self as a valuable commodity in the twentieth century is specific to certain social and political moments, but the enduring view of the individual as commodifiable creates a historical timeline. Viewing Wallace as the unknowable "real author" whose persona is ubiquitous in discussions of his work allows one to identify the most pertinent

precursors to Wallace's example, including Hunter S. Thompson. Writing for *Salon,* Daniel B. Roberts argues, "In his nonfiction, Wallace most closely resembled another writer before him, a man who was also considered something other than a journalist: Hunter S. Thompson" (Roberts). Roberts' phrasing, considering Thompson and Wallace as "something other than a journalist," has value in considering the ways the writers are fiction writers rather than journalists, including both authors' use of exaggeration which reflects a maximalist reporting style. Rather than aim for concision, both writers included lengthy instances of speculation, detailed description, and moments of invention, which subverts the journalistic convention of thoroughly fact-checked accuracy while emphasizing the presence of their personas.

Addressing their similarities, Cory M. Hudson suggests, "In Wallace studies, Wallace casts a long shadow that has started to eclipse his writing à la Hunter S. Thompson, where the popularized caricature of Wallace—his bandanaed- average-Joe-nice-rural-Midwest-boy image—shrouds the body of work he produced" (4). The way Wallace cultivated a recognizable image is a notable similarity to Thompson's mythology, but it should be considered alongside Wallace's gestures towards autobiography in his journalistic texts, as this chapter will examine.

Further, the writers' moments of invention emphasize the pluralistic nature of meaning-making, challenging definitions of truth in nonfictional textual representations. Roberts submits, "What Thompson did differently that Wallace emulated (consciously or not) is more about a slippery definition of honesty and truth" (Roberts), referencing Wallace's well-documented fabrications, including composite characters and invented incidents in his essay about attending the Adult Video News Awards.[50] Further, Roberts' referencing of a "slippery definition" implies

[50] Writing about Wallace's journalistic piece on the *Adult Video News*'s annual awards show, "Big Red Son," Christoph Ribbat quotes the President of Adult Video Network Publications,

the postmodern difficulty in defining abstractions such as “authenticity” and “truth,” which Wallace and Thompson underscore in their highly subjective, and thus unconventional, journalistic accounts that are made more complex because of the fame Wallace and Thompson experience as recognizable figures. Their characters’ similar questioning of the definition of “reality,” whether because of drug use or multimedia entertainment, responds to their respective historical moments in which cultural shifts manifested in excessive consumption. In Wallace’s instance, consuming hours of news broadcasts or products of celebrity culture signifies the obsessive interest in factual representations as forms of entertainment for consumption. Both Wallace and Thompson write on the political process as another spectacle for consumption, which both writers enter as journalists and spectators, allowing them to consider the nature of politics in the twentieth century as a performance.

Unlike the previous writers examined in this study, Wallace’s place in a lineage of famed unconventional journalists is marked by his repeated questioning of “authentic” representations, particularly in the 1990s with the prevalence of advertising. In order to understand the influence of his nineties moment, this chapter aims to contextualize Wallace’s journalistic narrative persona by examining his discussions on the manufactured public persona of the individual in politics alongside important developments in the 1990s, such as increased television news coverage and the increased number of published memoirs. In his 2000 essay “Up, Simba!”, his *Rolling Stone* essay on John McCain’s presidential campaign, Wallace identifies the primary anti-individualizing factors of the nineties as marketing and

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Paul Fishbein, who wrote regarding Wallace’s essay: “’your funny and beautifully-worded article is also a shoddy piece of journalism, rife with errors and innuendo’” (qtd. in Kipp). Ribbat contends that Wallace’s article contains “factual mistakes,” but dismisses Fishbein’s complaints as “nitpicking at best (and motivated more by the essay’s aggressive questioning of pornography’s ethics)” (Hering, chap. 15).

advertising, which jeopardize the possibility of authenticity in media representations because of their primary interest in sales and profits. As a packaged product, the individual becomes a commodity, re-enacting a pre-determined and rehearsed identity across different platforms, which Wallace demonstrates as vital to political campaigns. Thus, in Wallace's article, the political campaign represents a site of identity-formation in a media-saturated context, and both McCain and Wallace enter the narrative as characters, challenging the journalist-candidate relationship by problematizing the conventions of each role.

The essay on McCain reflects three factors defining the 1990s and its expression of American ideologies of individualism, which Wallace examines through the lens of politics: the commercial viability of the individual's story, the obsessive multimedia presentation of individuals, and the ultimate ironic depersonalizing of an individual in the packaged, rehearsed presentation of them. In the process of following McCain and his media corps, Wallace demonstrates the inescapability of McCain's historical context to his campaign, which includes the challenge of combatting cynicism from young voters while distinguishing himself as a unique candidate. Wallace's article ultimately suggests the significance of a collective, depersonalizing noun like "the Establishment" being used in politics, especially at the turn of the millennium, given the use of a political campaign to express the politician's individuality.

News Production in the Nineties

In between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the attack on the World Trade Center, the 1990s has been called a "period . . . of tranquillity and security in America" (Andersen). The decade has been viewed so positively in retrospect that it

led novelist Kurt Andersen to publish an article in *The New York Times* entitled “The Best Decade Ever? The 1990s, Obviously.” He highlights the diminished threat to national security and the prosperous economy that was yet to face the 2008 stock market crash and a decade of Iraqi invasion. Critic Samuel Cohen echoes Anderson’s sentiments in his study *After the End of History: American Fiction in the 1990s* (2009), identifying, “no felt threat of harm to American soil as during the Cold War” (4). Because of an overall feeling of national security, Cohen notes how the nineties was an “interwar decade” (4).

Before examining the developments that characterized the 1990s politically as an “interwar decade,” and thus an era of self-reflexivity in the United States, the economic climate must be considered to better understand the dehumanized view of individuals as consumers. The corporate view of the individual as a customer is heightened in the post-Vietnam, post-Reagan era; as Van Gosse and Richard Moser assert: “the United States after Vietnam is the epitome of a postmodern capitalist-democratic state, where an extreme liberalism regarding personal liberty coexists with a rigorous corporate-driven regime of consumption” (3). The “capitalist-democratic state” being defined by a “regime of consumption” has particular resonance after the Reagan era in which images of Wall Street tycoons proliferated in popular culture whether in the character of Gordon Gekko in *Wall Street* (1987) or Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* (1991). The notable greed and brash commercialization of the 1980s thus helped to solidify the image of the self-made, successful entrepreneur amongst a population of consumers, dramatizing the tension between “personal liberty” and a “regime of consumption” as Gosse and Moser describe.

The division between the consumer and the entrepreneur, and the repercussions of the heightened commercialization of the 1980s, influenced a

number of developments in the 1990s that profited from the view of Americans as consumers primarily, including the increase in news production and consumption. In the 1990s, the frequency of news production increased exponentially; William L. O'Neill notes, "A few years earlier NBC had produced three hours of news for one channel. By 1998 it was producing twenty-seven hours of news a day for three channels—NBC, CNBC, and MSNBC" (344). The increase in news outlets led to "event journalism" so that a range of stories, from the OJ Simpson murder trial to the news of Clinton's impeachment trials, received similar treatment through news channels' exhaustive coverage. The event journalism of the 1990s relied on audiences' willingness to consume hours of coverage, as if to shorten the distance between celebrities and politicians and the viewers that event journalism needed for its success. The lives of celebrities and politicians implicated in the televised scandals were thus commodified in order to keep viewers invested in the twenty-four-hour news coverage and, in the process, the extensive news coverage obfuscated boundaries between public and private spheres. With the obsessive attention to the personal lives of individuals in public office generating news content, the viewer's role as consumer helped transform private details into public spectacles, which is especially pertinent in the coverage of Bill Clinton's affair.

Considered in terms of private lives made public, the news coverage of Clinton's affair and impeachment trial provides an exceptional example of the 1990s' distinguishing characteristics, as many critics have noted. Writing at the beginning of the new millennium, Bruce Miroff asserts that Clinton's impeachment trial epitomizes the era, writing, "He is the archetypal story of the 1990s, with all the vital ingredients: self-absorption, ambition, sex, celebrity—and the promise of transcendence" (109–10). The qualities that Miroff identifies as "vital" to the 1990s, namely sex and celebrity, distinguish Clinton's trial from previous impeachment trials because of the

publicized details released regarding Clinton's sexual relationships. Gosse and Moser assert, "Watergate was about genuine abuses of power . . . Contrast that with the attempted removal of another president for lying about his sexual dalliance with an intern, which threatened no one" (4). The contrast between Watergate and Clinton's affair is exacerbated by the increased news coverage that invited greater attention from the public, securing their place as consumers of event journalism. Rather than passive observers, the public participated in the scandal by choosing to "tune in" and increase news channels' ratings, thus repeatedly enacting the capitalist relationship of consumption and demand that bolstered the success of event journalism.

Further, as Miroff demonstrates, Clinton shaped his persona as an attractive commodity by becoming a performer. As a politician generating spectacles from his persona's appearances, Clinton offered the public a performance that conflated entertainment and politics. Gil Troy describes Clinton as a "shamelessly entertaining Baby Boomer politician who considered becoming a professional musician [and] could blow out a tune energetically on the saxophone. He demonstrated his mastery on *The Arsenio Hall Show* in 1992 and at the 1993 Inaugural Ball" (10). Troy's comments reflect the significance of a politician's public appearances including a late-night talk show as well as political forums; by giving performances on both platforms, Clinton built an intertextual identity as a celebrity, reflecting the quantifiable value of marketing oneself across different media. His election demonstrates, in part, the public's willingness to accept the convergence of entertainment and politics, but also the advantage of commodifying oneself as a performer to gain recognition in other spheres, such as politics. As I will examine later in the chapter, Clinton's example of crafting a performer persona through public appearances has parallels in other forms of celebrity, including celebrity authorship.

In the context of marketed identities and intertextual personalities in the 1990s, Clinton's persona is indeed significant, given the derisive responses it provoked from critics who viewed Clinton's performances as exercises in narcissism. As O'Neill argues, "It all worked out pretty much as *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert had predicted the previous August . . . 'The nation handed its highest office to a man who embodies the narcissistic extremes of the baby-boomer generation. It's all about Bill'" (343). The reading of "narcissistic extremes" in Clinton's election and the subsequent impeachment trials notably reflects trends in the 1990s more generally. Gosse and Moser submit, **"**What passes for public life at the millennial moment has a cartoonish cast, a cheapness symbolized by the descent in scale and gravity from one impeachment to another" (4). With Clinton's presidency contributing to a discussion of the "cheapness" of public life at the turn of the millennium, the increasingly indistinguishable boundaries between private and public, politician and celebrity, cultivate a social context in which self-promoting individuals could profit from modelling Clinton's example. Given that an individual's affair could fill hours of television, the performance of a self could become its own self-generating event journalism.[51]

Benefitting from tactics that some view as narcissistic, Clinton exemplifies the profitability of persona-building in an era in which the primary role of viewers and audiences as consumers situates political figures as protagonists in a marketable story. Writing in 1999, journalist Jacob Weisberg examined the impact of Clinton's

[51] The O.J Simpson trial likewise afforded journalists with the opportunity to cover an instance of event journalism extensively as a form of human-interest journalism. Writing candidly of the trial's importance, journalism professor Earl L. Conn states, "Human interest still defines the news . . . the dramatic, the unusual, the sensational – in a word, human interest – attracts the reader's eye. The O.J. Simpson story had it all. Celebrities, sex, violence, race, emotions, drama. Whether we like it or not, most of us are drawn to these stories" (64).

commercial relationship with the public, asserting, “To a public that consumes quantities of confessional entertainment and self-help advice, Clinton’s turmoil seems not bizarre, but familiar. His cyclical progress through stages of sin, denial, contrition, and forgiveness has humanized him like no previous president” (qtd. in Miroff 109-110). Weisberg’s assessment, as it cites “confessional entertainment,” alludes to the presentation of private issues as public spectacle, which positions the individual’s story as a source of entertainment. Clinton’s role as protagonist whose confessions were broadcast and dramatized has resonance in other areas of public life because of its explicitly performative nature, transforming the private life of an individual into a performance.

Clinton’s presidency was a significant aspect of a decade that offered numerous incentives for individuals to act as protagonists in various marketable stories. As Troy states, “The twentieth century was a centrifugal century, propelling Americans away from communal norms toward their own individualistic paths” (7), noting the importance of American ideologies of individualism in an expansive timescale. A part of the twentieth century’s performances of individuality included the dramatization of one’s own story for an audience, either in literary works or on television. The influence of daytime talk shows is frequently cited in histories of the 1990s, particularly as guests on Oprah Winfrey’s talk show presented their stories to audiences, telling personal stories on a public platform. Julie Rak identifies the importance of confessional television, writing, “The Oprah Winfrey Show is the engine of an intimate public” (227), which is a useful description for considering forms that publicize private details for audiences. An intimate public is cultivated by shows such as Winfrey’s, given that Winfrey encouraged guests to narrate their own stories for an audience, creating protagonists of stories deemed worthy of appearing on a public stage. Suggesting that self-narration is profitable, Winfrey helped

cultivate the appeal of the individual's story by providing first-person narratives with television viewers and a studio audience who acted as willing consumers.

The 1990s Memoir and Creative Nonfiction

Winfrey, like Clinton, was just one figure in the multi-faceted social and political landscape of the 1990s that encouraged individual-centered approaches to narratives, and both Clinton and Winfrey contributed to the accelerated proliferation of personal narratives in public spheres. Similar to the way in which news coverage expanded to twenty-four-hour coverage, the publication of memoirs increased exponentially. Leigh Gilmore substantiates the quantifiable increase in memoirs, writing, "A crude analysis using the Worldcat database shows the number of new English language volumes categorized as "autobiography or memoir' roughly tripled from the 1940s to the 1990s" (*Limits* footnote 1, page 1). Gilmore has written extensively on the significance of memoirs gaining commercial popularity in the 1990s, which highlights the ways in which individuals used literary forms to maintain myths of individualism. In *The Limits of Autobiography,* Gilmore writes, "Suddenly it would seem, memoir has become *the* genre in the skittish period around the turn of the millennium . . . more first books are marketed as memoir, and even academics . . . are producing personal criticism, hybrid combinations of scholarship and life writing" (1, italics in original).[52] Her comments address the pervasiveness of first-person narration across disciplines, supporting this thesis' claims regarding the prevalence of individualist ideologies in multiple arenas. Indeed, Gilmore's article, "American Neoconfessional" argues that the popularity of memoirs "reawaken[s] national fantasies of individualism," and "displace[s] histories of racial and gendered violence with tales of individual hardship and redemption" (658). Gilmore's

[52] The increase in published memoirs similarly led to a *New York Times Magazine* special issue declaring "nothing less than the 'triumph' of literary memoir" (*Limits* 1-2) in 1996.

statements regarding the myth of individualism are especially significant in the context of the 1990s, given the post-Reagan, pre-9/11 "interwar" period in which American individualism as an ideology was lauded as the opposite of communism in the United States. Through the power of choice as a consumer or through aspirations of self-made entrepreneurialism, the American individual maintained its allegorical status as an antidote to foreign governments.

Such individualist mythologies help to explain the country's obsessive attention to its own president's affairs or the popularity of self-narrating guests on television shows and, additionally, the "fantasies of individualism" resonate in the success of the memoir form, which increased attention to individuals' stories on and off the page. Publishers' abilities to generate interest in the memoirist by increasing the writer's intertextuality exemplifies the marketability of the memoirist's public persona; in Michael Shnayerson's article, "Women Behaving Badly," published in *Vanity Fair* in 1997, he writes, "Off-the-book-page coverage—meaning news stories and author-profiles, in addition to the usual book previews—is, indeed, one reason publishers have scooped up memoirs as eagerly as they have" (60). Shnayerson's reference to "off-the-book-page coverage" is vital for understanding the performative aspects of the narrative persona that add to its commercial value, exemplifying the multimedia efforts to sell the individual's story. Shnayerson notes, "With a memoir, as editor Julie Grau, at Riverhead Books, puts it, 'You can send the 'I' out on tour'" (60), and the public appearances based on the narrative persona implicitly suggest the commodification of the individual, whether through interviews, book tours, or journalistic profiles. The text of the memoir then exists alongside a collection of self-reflexive media, all celebrating the "I" of the memoir.

Given the increase in the number of memoirs being published, many critics referred to the kind of "narcissistic extremes" that had been noted of Clinton's presidency, which indicates some critics' wariness of self-reflexivity across different

spheres of public life. For instance, in novelist William Gass' 1994 article, "The Art of Self: Autobiography in an Age of Narcissism" he disparages the "narcissism" involved with writing about one's self, suggesting that the memoirist "will think of himself as having led a life so important it needs celebration, and of himself as sufficiently skilled at rendering as to render it rightly" (3). Gass implies the disparity between the traditional memoirist, such as politicians or political figures, and the memoirist whose confessional narratives gained attention by virtue of being published.[53] Considering how many people wrote about their lives that had been unknown previously, *Washington Post* writer Lorraine Adams declared "the rise of the 'nobody' memoir," a trend which critics cite as evidence of the inevitably narcissistic nature of memoir-writing. The title of William Grimes' 2005 article summarizes criticism of the memoir concisely, stating, "We All Have a Life. Must We All Write About It?"

However, critics who defend the popularity of memoir note the ways in which personal stories are valuable as more than commercially viable products because of their potential for political significance. The contributors to the guide *Keep It Real: Everything You Need to Know About Researching and Writing Creative Nonfiction* (2009) assert, "What critics overlook is that many notables would have remained nobodies if it weren't for their self-directed gazes" (97). The contributors identify the tradition of narratives that "rail[] against the political by trotting forth the personal," citing Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), and claiming, "Since the 1960s groups marginalized or overlooked by society have made their way to the center by the power of one person's personal story" (97-98). By

[53] Neil Jumonville argues, "The 1990s celebrity memoir, whether in hip-hop poetry or the O. J. Simpson story, was part of a flood of 'the temporarily newsworthy' belch of self-fame" (150), which emphasizes the diverse areas in which self-narration generated profits while furthering mythologies of individualism. If an individual's story could be presented in a way that filled hours of television or pages of a memoir, it could potentially be packaged and marketed, no matter how temporary its appeal.

privileging the non-famous voice, the guide's contributors allude to values held by the *Annales* school of history that Samuel Cohen references in *After the End of History*. He notes how the *Annales* school of history

> became more prominent in the 1960s [and] deemphasized 'great man' history and accounts focusing solely on governments and states and the corresponding use of official documents as historical sources. Instead, these historians argued for and modeled a 'new history,' a practice that focused on social history, on the kinds of historical sources (such as oral histories recounting the everyday lives of regular people) that could provide information about social history. (22)

Cohen's description of stories focused on the everyday reflects the emphasis in many memoirs of the 1990s on non-famous individuals, including Mary Karr writing of her childhood in *The Liar's Club* (1995) and Frank McCourt's coming-of-age memoir *Angela's Ashes* (1996). By "deemphasizing 'great man' histories," the subjects of the memoirs assert the authority of their narrative voices and the validity of self-narration, which differs from explicitly political accounts but similarly values narratives constructed from lived experience. Cohen's reference to a trend that reconsidered sources of authority in the 1960s is particularly significant because of the relevance it has to the New Journalist project of prioritizing subjectivities over official accounts. The attention paid to first-person narrating voices in the 1960s and the 1990s, though separated by the distinguishing characteristics of the 1990s that this chapter has examined, evinces a continued interest in personal narratives in a number of contexts.

In addition to the contexts discussed above, the increasingly pervasive influence of first-person narratives manifested in another important manner by entering the academy. In 1994, Lee Gutkind founded *Creative Nonfiction,* the first literary journal devoted to personal narratives. Christened the form's "Godfather" (Wolcott 214), Gutkind addresses the relationship between first-person journalistic practices in the 1960s and 70s and the creative nonfiction of the 1990s. Speaking at

the 2005 Mid-Atlantic Creative Nonfiction Writer's Conference, Gutkind references canonical writers to legitimize the genre in his talk, countering the claim that interest in nonfictional narratives constitutes a "moment." Asserting, "It's a movement," Gutkind offers a brief history of the form, beginning with Ernest Hemingway in the 1930s and emphasizing New Journalism's innovations in the 1960s. Gutkind submits, "of course, creative nonfiction wasn't phrased then. No one was talking about creative nonfiction, and no one began talking about it until . . . twelve or thirteen years ago" ("Creative Non-Fiction Movement"). The influence of self-mythologizing nonfiction writers in the 1960s has been examined extensively from a critical standpoint with collections dedicated to individual writers such as Norman Mailer and to the collective group of unconventional journalists, as I examined in the previous chapter, but New Journalism's relationship to creative nonfiction as it developed in the 1990s lacks critical commentary, discussed mostly by Gutkind and in guides to writing creative nonfiction.

As editor of *Keep It Real,* Gutkind claims that creative nonfiction "liberates the traditional nonfiction writer—the journalist" ("Creative Non-Fiction Movement"), which is significant because he identifies the journalist, rather than the biographer or academic, as the traditional nonfiction writer. Under the heading "Evolution of the Genre," the author[54] describes the period of New Journalism as an era in which writers found freedom from traditional genre distinctions. The author describes the

> group of hardworking reporters and magazine writers [that] began to chafe under the normal restrictions of journalistic writing. They started to break the rules . . . [They] embraced a much more personal voice, no longer camouflaging the narrator's personality. They cultivated the subjective voice, believing that the writer's point of view had become an integral part of any story. (*Keep It Real* 50)

[54] A number of contributors wrote articles for *Keep It Real,* and chapters omit author names.

The description of New Journalism also pertains to the creative nonfiction of the 1990s and its use of the personal voice, emphasizing the writer's point of view as integral to the story. Indeed, the origin of the phrase "creative nonfiction" can be traced to the period of New Journalism; writing in 2015 for *Creative Nonfiction,* Dinty W. Moore notes, "The earliest use of the term seems to be in a review of Frank Conroy's *Stop-Time*, written by David Madden . . . in the 1969 *Survey of Contemporary Literature*, Madden calls for a 'redefinition' of nonfiction writing in the wake of Truman Capote, Jean Stafford, and Norman Mailer" (Moore). His observation refutes claims that Gutkind was responsible for the term "creative nonfiction," and, more implicitly, that Gutkind was the first voice to encourage discussions regarding the aesthetic possibilities for nonfiction writing and the subsequent skepticism regarding the form, particularly given the similar hostility to creative nonfiction that New Journalism experienced.[55]

Though there are many similarities, an important difference between the nonfiction of the 1960s and the nonfiction of the 1990s is the rise of institutionalized creative nonfiction in university courses at the end of the century, a phenomenon that Mark McGurl examines in his study *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (2009). McGurl submits the importance of creative writing programs' influence on postwar fiction, partly because of the sheer volume of creative writing programs that have proliferated since the 1940s. McGurl states, "The handful of creative writing programs that existed in the 1940s had, by 1975,

[55] Similar to discussions regarding New Journalism, many critics question creative nonfiction's validity. As writers document lived experience with attention to aesthetics, many contend that "creative" and "nonfiction" are oxymoronic. Of the questions surrounding its definition, the essayist Dinty W. Moore concludes, "'This shouldn't be so hard . . . It is just two words'" (LeMay). Yet, despite it being "just two words," questions about the name reveal the skepticism regarding the form's legitimacy. Gutkind provides a helpful overview of the questions the name, acknowledging, "The word 'creative' has been criticized . . . because some people have maintained that being creative means that you pretend or exaggerate or make up facts and embellish details" ("What is Creative Nonfiction").

increased to 52 in number. By 1984 there were some 150 graduate programs (offering the M.A., M.F.A, or Ph.D.), and as of 2004 there were more than 350 creative writing programs in the United States" (24). The reasons for the proliferation of writing programs can be investigated further, but universities' increased interest in writing classes is worth consideration, given the significance one can identity and extrapolate from students' desire to enter creative fields through writing programs.

McGurl identifies "the shimmering vision of self-realization-through-learning" and asserts, "We go to school, or are made to go, to become *richer* versions of ourselves" (3). McGurl's reference to the "richer versions of ourselves" recognizes the self's importance, an awareness that contributes to mythologies of the self-made individual. The desire to be self-made corresponds to the creative writing programs' illusory path to guaranteed success and fame; as Andrew Martin asserts, "Writing students . . . inevitably want to become writers," and institutional support further validates the students' aim (Martin). Martin's article references the essay collection *MFA vs NYC: The Two Cultures of American Fiction* (2014) and the claim by its editor, Chad Harbach, that "Everybody wants to sell something to someone, even if 'sell' sometimes means 'give for free to a graduate student-run literary journal based out of North Dakota'" (qtd. in Martin). The relationship between commerce and the production of art, as represented in the institutionalizing of creative writing, increases the importance of the entrepreneurial impulse, placing the responsibility on the writer to fulfil the myth of the self-made artist. In doing so, the claim that "Everybody wants to sell something to someone" includes the selling of the self as a commercially viable artistic talent.

The combination of commerce and the self's importance within creative writing programs reflects broader trends regarding capitalistic success. McGurl describes how the focus on the self extends beyond works of literature into many

areas of the post-industrial economies, focusing on the rhetorical power of "self-realization" to influence choices in education, including the decision to enter a creative writing program as an effort to better one's self. McGurl writes:

> the category of 'personal experience' has over the course of the twentieth century, and in the postwar period in particular, achieved a functional centrality in the postindustrial economies of the developed world . . . This would extend from the self-observation of society as a whole in the social sciences, media, and the arts, to the 'reflexive accumulation' of corporations which pay more and more attention to their own management practices and organizational structures, down to the self-monitoring of individuals who understand themselves to be living, not lives simply, but *life stories* of which they are the protagonists. (12)

McGurl's consideration of creative writing programs repeatedly highlights the focus on the self that construes writing programs as engaged in self-reflexive practices, all of which heighten the individual's importance as a protagonist whose story merits telling. Though his focus is on fiction, McGurl's discussion also applies to the writing of nonfiction because of the privileging of the individual in creative nonfiction, positioning the self as the protagonist and guiding consciousness in the text, and also the commodity sold by the text.

McGurl's mention of a self being viewed as a protagonist and the "self-monitoring of individuals" corresponds to the increased number of narrative depictions of the self that others have documented. Further, McGurl's reading of creative writing's place in the academy and the focus on the self more generally is a part of a conversation that considers prominent self-reflexive media at the turn of the millennium. In "Why Writers Love to Hate the M.F.A," Cecilia Capuzzi Simon submits, "Other realities conspire to make the M.F.A. one of the fastest growing graduate degrees. Among them: the pervasiveness of digital media and celebrity culture, where anyone with a blog feels like a best-selling novelist-in-waiting; the rise of memoirs, a natural extension of the online selfie writing culture" (Simon). Simon's comments are notable for their reference to the pervasiveness of celebrity culture,

which influences contemporary authorship in nonfictional and fictional forms. As memoirists earned attention in the 1990s, fiction writers produced by graduate writing programs likewise faced the potential for a commodified persona while marketing their books.

The Paradox of David Foster Wallace

In the 1990s, David Foster Wallace exemplified many of the issues that critics such as Simon discuss, including the pervasiveness of celebrity culture, memoir's popularity, and the proliferation of graduate writing programs. For instance, having emerged from a graduate writing program, Wallace assesses the influence of institutionalized creative writing in a 1988 essay published in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*. Wallace's essay "Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young" highlights his era's evolving relationship with fiction because of the increase in writing programs, as he writes, "And there are more such programs in this country now than anywhere anytime before. The once-lone brow of the Iowa Workshop has birthed first-rate creative departments at places like Stanford, Houston, Columbia, Johns Hopkins, Virginia, Michigan, Arizona, etc." ("Fictional Futures" 46). Wallace's emphasis on the trend as a uniquely American phenomenon suggests the particularly American emphasis on entrepreneurship that creative writing programs support. Whether an Ivy League university or a state school, the wide range of institutions offering creative writing programs indicates the national interest in producing entrepreneurial writers. He concludes, "Never has a 'literary generation' been so thoroughly and formally trained, nor has such a large percentage of aspiring fiction writers eschewed extramural apprenticeship for ivy and grades" (46). As a writer who was "thoroughly and formally trained," Wallace evinces the sort of success story whose personal cult of the individual possibly contributes to the proliferating of writing programs.

Wallace's awareness of creative writing's place in the academy contributes to his larger analysis of the era in which he wrote. A.O. Scott describes Wallace's tone as "the voice that spoke directly from and to his cynical, media-saturated, mid-nineties moment" (Scott). Speaking to his mid-nineties moment, Wallace also engages with the increased popularity of memoir in his fiction. Wallace's ninth chapter of *The Pale King* (2011), his final novel published posthumously, offers a belated "Author's Foreword" that addresses the reader directly and proposes the book's status as a memoir. Wallace's narrative intrusion begins, "Author here" and elaborates, "Meaning the real author, living human holding the pencil, not some abstract narrative persona" (67). In discussing memoir's popularity, Wallace examines the challenge of addressing readers from a first-person perspective, given the unclear distinctions between public and private realms at the end of the twentieth century. Despite his assertion that the "living human" speaks, the statement remains a textual representation, and Wallace's authorial persona invites discussion of contemporary authorship's limitations. Mike Miley argues, "The David Wallace sections in *The Pale King* represent Wallace confronting not only his own vanity but also the role the contemporary writer performs on our media stage" (192). Indeed, the curiosity that Wallace incites by referencing the "real author" reflects the hypermediated context of the nineties, presenting the author as an image and a performer in multiple contexts and thus creating many layers between the "real" author and the author's representation across different forms of media.

Wallace admits the difficulty in addressing the reader as the "real" author, especially at the turn of the millennium, writing: "one disadvantage of addressing you here directly and in person in the cultural present of 2005 is the fact that, as both you and I know, there is no longer any kind of clear line between personal and public, or rather between private vs. performative" (*Pale King* 80). Wallace's reference to performances of the personal inspires his list of multimedia examples,

resembling Simon's list of the "realities conspir[ing] to make the M.F.A. one of the fastest growing graduate degree," as he submits, "Among obvious examples are web logs, reality television, cell-phone cameras, chat rooms" (80). His final example is "the dramatically increased popularity of the memoir as a literary genre," referencing the profitability of personal stories made public. He cites statistical evidence to support his claim:

> Of course *popularity* is, in this context, a synonym for profitability; and actually that fact alone should suffice, personal-motivation-wise. Consider then in 2003, the average author's advance for a memoir was almost 2.5 times that paid for a work of fiction . . . all sorts of US writers . . . have recently hit it big with memoirs, and I would be a rank hypocrite if I pretended that I was less attuned and receptive to market forces than anyone else. (80-81)

Wallace's explanation for categorizing his novel as a memoir satirizes the memoir trend, but his relationship with memoir before *The Pale King* demonstrates his personal gain from publishers' interest in nonfictional narratives. Though Wallace never wrote a text marketed as memoir, he produced a body of journalistic texts on commission, which capitalized on an autobiographical narrator and helped to build his personal cult of the individual as his name appears prominently on the magazines' covers. The packaging and selling of Wallace's essays in book-length formats further demonstrates the marketability of Wallace's autobiographical persona, and the expansion of Wallace's oeuvre at the turn of the millennium to include journalistic texts should be examined for the dialogue they created with their historical context and the implications they have for marketable identities.

By engaging in self-reflexive practices to destabilize boundaries between the speaker and subject, Wallace indeed shared characteristics with other unconventional journalists, especially as his persona was mythologized in representations outside his work. For instance, Wallace's posthumous legacy inspired the 2015 biographical film *The End of the Tour.* The film depicts the final

stop in Wallace's book tour for *Infinite Jest* (1996) and the exchanges he had with David Lipsky, a journalist for *Rolling Stone* magazine. In his review, Wallace's contemporary Bret Easton Ellis laments "the coronation of Wallace since his suicide in 2008 as St. David, based on a particular and very American brand of sentimental narrative" ("Novelist and Screenwriter"). He criticizes the film's depiction of Wallace as a "voice of reason, a sage" and a "tortured everyman." In addition to the film's depiction, Wallace's real-life persona draws criticism from Ellis who claims: "for the most part he was a fake-out artist with a disingenuous persona." Yet, he concludes, "I have no problems with David, the man of contradictions—it's the rewritten construct of what Wallace became, misinterpreted by a generation of fans." The rewritten construct, such as the version produced in the film, is worth considering because of the power it grants Wallace's persona, reinvented in the form of a visual dramatization.[56] As Christian Lorentzen writes: "now that he comes to the screen, bandanna and ad hoc spittoon in tow, he stands to become a hero to audiences who haven't read a word of his work. The cult could become a church" (Lorentzen). Lorentzen's mention of heroism and cult-like adoration reflects the importance of celebrity authorship and the cult of the individual to discussions of Wallace's legacy, but also the important distinction between Wallace and his work that is compromised in popularized representations. With images of Wallace proliferating after his death, the author's mythology enacts a fiction of its own that entwines with his oeuvre of fiction and potentially elevates his intertextual persona to greater significance than his writing.

The commentary from Lorentzen and Ellis, and the film that inspired it, exemplify the profitability of discussions of Wallace outside his fiction by producing films or newspaper articles that attract consumers and revenue. Sam Leith concisely

[56] Wallace is also rewritten in D.T. Max's 2012 biography *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story*.

summarizes how Wallace has evolved posthumously into a commercial product, writing, “Since his suicide, David Foster Wallace has made the transition from major writer to major industry” (Leith). The result of such intense interest in Wallace as a person, aided by his association with the myth of the tormented genius writer, earns profits while eclipsing critical discussions of his fiction. As Cory M. Hudson notes, “With so many empirical roads leading back to Wallace the living, breathing human being in formal critiques about his writing, David Foster Wallace studies is infected with a Barthesian ‘prestige of the individual’ plague” (4). Hudson’s statement has merit, warning against relying on overly biographical readings of Wallace’s work, but it elides the inescapability of Wallace’s persona in the works that include his narrative persona as a part of its composition. While the posthumous portrayals have begun a new phase in Wallace studies, witnessing the impulse to read Wallace’s work through the lens of his suicide, the blurring of mimetic representations of Wallace and his oeuvre began before his death and used autobiographical elements to enhance his mythos, which his writing in *The Pale King* and his journalistic writing evince, as will be discussed later in the chapter.

Emblematic of the individualist narratives of the 1990s, Wallace’s persona furthers discussions on the importance of extratextual elements to contemporary authorship, given the ways he negotiated his fame. The complexity of his personal cult of the individual results from the numerous ways in which he cultivated his public image, whether in his numerous interviews or photos. John Jeremiah Sullivan, an essayist who has been compared to Wallace, notes: “For someone who clearly squirmed under the eye of scrutiny like a stuck bug, Wallace *submitted* and subjected himself to so much of it. He had more author photos than any of his peers” (Sullivan, emphasis in original). Wallace thus exemplifies Joe Moran’s claim in *Star Authors* that “authors actively negotiate their own celebrity rather than having it simply imposed on them” (10). Indeed, David Lipsky’s extended interview with

Wallace, published as the book *Although of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself* in 2010, contains numerous moments in which Wallace describes his relationship with his fame. For instance, Wallace refers to "[t]his machine that has you out here, asking about my reaction to a phenomenon that consists largely of your being out here" (32). Wallace's self-reflexivity regarding his fame includes his awareness of the journalist's role in crafting an author's image, which will have particular resonance in his journalistic accounts in which he cultivates his personal brand as an anti-journalist. Acting as a part of the machine to which he refers, Wallace dramatizes the tension between the forces that establish celebrities and the celebrities themselves.

As Lipsky's text demonstrates, the posthumous interest in Wallace has increased the availability of "off-the-book-page" textual materials that indicate Wallace's engagement with celebrity authorship, and also with creative nonfiction. The *David Foster Wallace Reader* (2014) includes published materials from his teaching career, including the syllabus for his creative nonfiction class. The very fact that Wallace's teaching materials are available to read demonstrates the intensity of the public's interest in his life, mining all aspects of his career for more material to consume. Wallace's syllabus ironically engages with his personal cult of the individual as he asserts:

> the reader does not automatically care about you (the writer), nor does she find you fascinating as a person, nor does she feel a deep natural interest in the same things that interest you. The reader, in fact, will feel about you, your subject, and your essay only what your written words themselves induce her to feel. (*Wallace Reader* 158)

Underscoring the "written words themselves," Wallace's description is ironic because of the interest that developed in him apart from his writing. His relationship with readers is complicated by his numerous images and public appearances, which attracted interest in him but remain mediated by virtue of their constructed nature.

Existing as a figure in interviews and magazine profiles, Wallace signifies the tension between readers' curiosity and the portrayals that invite their participation in negotiating the authorial identity across multiple contexts.

McCain's Campaign and the Anti-journalist

In Wallace's engagement with the definition of creative nonfiction, he acknowledges the importance of the authorial persona in nonfictional works while identifying the persona as a construction. The persona that Wallace constructed is especially pertinent when discussing his journalism, as Wallace's style dismisses conventions of the journalistic form. Writing for *The Boston Globe*, John Freeman asserts, "It's not always the accuracy of the claim that keeps you caring, but hysterics with which it's expressed" (Freeman). By emphasizing Wallace's hysterics, Freeman's statements highlight the appeal of Wallace's style, which often evacuates the journalistic form of its claims to accuracy, as critics have discussed.[57] Likewise, Glen Kenny, Wallace's editor for his three essays in *Premiere,* recalls in an interview dismissing some of Wallace's fabrications because "'the writer's a very big deal!'" (Kipp). Kenny's comment epitomizes the issues with Wallace's journalistic persona, which emphasizes Wallace as a narrator, regardless of his subject, and reflects techniques used by other writers in the literary-journalist performer tradition. He positions his journalistic assignment as secondary to his self-reflexive performance in the text, and his style solidifies his place as a commercial figure as his performance of self-consciousness in his texts attracted publications' attention.

Wallace's approach to journalism reflects the interest in the individual's experience that characterizes the 1990s, responding to ideologies of American

[57] See "Seething Static: Notes on Wallace and Journalism" by Christoph Ribbat for more extensive analysis of Wallace's factual inaccuracies.

individualism, especially as he self-consciously ruminates on the experience of being an individual in the media-saturated context of the 1990s. The self-conscious performance that Wallace offers in his journalism defines his characterization of other public figures, such as John McCain who is the ostensible subject of Wallace's essay, "Up, Simba!". While critics contemplate the authenticity of Wallace's persona, Wallace likewise contemplated the sincerity of others, as evidenced by his essay, later published as *McCain's Promise: Aboard the Straight Talk Express with John McCain and a Whole Bunch of Actual Reporters, Thinking About Hope* (2008). Originally published in *Rolling Stone* and collected in *Consider the Lobster*, the essay was re-published as a book in 2008 during McCain's second campaign for president, and its origin as a *Rolling Stone* article influences Wallace's consideration of commercial concerns in politics. As Wallace reflects on the commodification of politicians, he questions the impact of successful marketing and advertising, which is a dominant theme in his essay about McCain's campaign. Wallace's essay illustrates the ambiguities in the political process based on the inability to distinguish between a candidate and anti-candidate, his journalistic presence and the journalistic conventions against which he writes, and he portrays the political process as an elaborate performance in which journalists and politicians occupy destabilized roles in a hyper-mediatized environment.

Wallace and McCain are unlikely doubles with parallels worth examining, especially because of Wallace's narrative intrusions that examine the act of writing political journalism. His succinct characterization of McCain is useful for considering Wallace's relationship with the narrative; he describes McCain as "the campaign's narrator and narrative at once, a candidate whose biggest draw of course is that he's an anticandidate" (*Consider the Lobster* 174). In a similar way, Wallace embodies the roles of speaker and subject as he underscores his position apart from traditional journalists. As it examines the construction of an anticandidate's

persona, “Up, Simba!” demonstrates anxieties with the performances of authenticity that characterize politics, which also influences his narration. Though different contexts—winning votes or gaining readers—Wallace and McCain both occupy positions in which they sell their work and their personas, and their presentations of themselves invite discussions of the destabilization of authenticity and sincerity in a postmodern context. As both McCain and Wallace discuss their authenticity, they suggest the difficulty of considering public personas in terms of their “real” identities as the individual is packaged and commodified in media representations.

Wallace’s doubling with McCain reflects the broader trend of personal approaches to politics that theorists have analyzed. In *Media and the Restyling of Politics: Consumerism, Celebrity and Cynicism* (2003), John Corner and Dick Pels write, “This new visibility of persons and the affective identification they attract represents a broader cultural shift that fits the individualisation of political trust into more general sociological patterns of de-institutionalisation and personalisation” (7). Corner and Pels’ statement demonstrates the increasing importance of the commodified individual in a political context, which Wallace describes as integral to media representations in the 1990s. Their reference to de-institutionalisation and personalisation is also significant to consider when examining Wallace’s narration, which dramatizes the individual’s experience of the journalistic corps and political campaigns. As he highlights the perception of McCain as an “honest politician,” questioning whether an honest politician is an inevitable oxymoron, or an anticandidate, in the twenty-first century, Wallace interrogates the authenticity of the individual presented in a political campaign, given the influence of political parties, advertising, and marketing. He attempts to individualize McCain, but ultimately challenges one’s ability to access the true identity of a political candidate.

As discussed in Wallace's article, the expectations for a traditional candidate, one using any tactics necessary for election, contributes to the rehearsed, scripted nature of politics in which any individual could fill the role of the standardized politician. Wallace notes, "McCain's opening remarks . . . are always the same and always take exactly 22 ½ minutes" (*Consider the Lobster* 21-22). Because of the rehearsed aspect of McCain's appearances, the non-mediatized McCain is unknowable and elusive, though the campaign's emphasis on his authenticity alludes to the importance of the individual. Wallace writes: "going Negative himself[,] McCain runs the risk of looking like just another ambitious, win-at-any-cost politician, when of course so much time and effort and money have already gone into casting him as the exact opposite of that" (205). Wallace's description suggests the importance of distinguishing McCain as an individual rather than "just another ambitious" politician. The use of "casting" suggests the theatrical nature of politics, which has particular resonance in the immediate aftermath of the Clinton-Lewinksy scandal, a drama that occupied numerous hours of television as a spectacle. As the title of Wallace's essay refers to the cameraman lifting the camera (208), Wallace highlights the performative aspects of the campaign and the subsequent difficulty in representing McCain without discussing the factors in 2000 that produce destabilized representations, such as maximalist media coverage and commercial incentives to commodify the individual.

As Wallace identifies questions of representation through McCain's campaign, he also demonstrates the possible separation between a famed individual's reputation and the content of the individual's work. A significant observation in Wallace's essay is the discrepancy between McCain as a figure and his policies, with the emphasis being on McCain as a figure. Wallace writes: "the campaign media focus so much attention on McCain's piss-and-vinegar candor and

so little attention on the sometimes *extremely* scary right-wing stuff this candor drives him to say" (*Consider the Lobster* 185-86). Because the media stress McCain's delivery, his persona is privileged more than his policies, and Wallace's essay likewise emphasizes McCain's appeal as an individual.[58] Wallace suggests, "One reason a lot of the media on the Trail like John McCain is simply that he's a cool guy. Nondweeby" (187). Describing McCain as a likable person, Wallace engages in the individualization of politics that prioritizes the candidate's personal characteristics. He elaborates, "At 63, he's witty, and smart, and . . . he'll tease the press and give them shit in a way they don't ever mind because it's the sort of shit that makes you feel that here's this very cool, important guy who's noticing you and liking you enough to give you shit" (187). Wallace's description promotes the non-mediatized image of McCain that his journalistic writing seeks to find by considering how the media objectifies their subjects. Emphasizing McCain as an individual, Wallace's essay contributes to the illusion of a knowable McCain in the performative context of a political campaign, and he implicitly suggests the increasing significance of portraying knowable, familiar figures in media representations at the turn of the millennium.

By considering McCain as an individual, Wallace also depicts McCain as a heroic figure, which signifies the tension in the celebrity politician's persona of presenting one's self as familiar yet exceptional. In *Celebrity Politics* (2013), Mark

[58] Indeed, one of the most humorous moments in the essay results from discussions of McCain's humanity: "As one national pencil told *Rolling Stone* and another nonpro, 'If you saw more of how the other candidates conduct themselves, you'd be way more impressed with [McCain]. It's that he acts somewhat in the ballpark of the way a real human being would act'" (187). Acknowledging the humor in a politician's distance from "a real human being," Wallace comments, "And the grateful press on the Trail transmit – maybe even exaggerate – McCain's humanity to their huge audience . . . so paroxysmically thankful for a presidential candidate *somewhat in the ballpark of a real human being* that it has to make you stop and think about how starved voters are for just some minimal level of genuineness in the men who want to 'lead' and 'inspire' them" (187-88).

Wheeler references the importance of the "paradoxical combination of an individual's ability to be mediated as being both ordinary and extraordinary" (25). Wallace constructs an image of McCain that is ordinary and extraordinary; he portrays McCain as "witty, and smart, and . . . very cool" while also stressing the importance of McCain's military history. The most significant obstacle preventing Wallace from dismissing McCain as another politician is McCain's past as a prisoner of war and, in a number of instances, Wallace returns to the image of John McCain in a cell in Vietnam, writing, "But the point is that with McCain it feels like we *know,* for a proven fact, that he is capable of devotion to something other, more, than his own self-interest . . . that with this guy it's maybe the truth" (165-66). Thus, Wallace conveys a paradoxical view of McCain as knowable and mythic because of the heroism that Wallace depicts as unfathomable. When describing McCain's history in the military, Wallace emphasizes its heroic nature, interrupting the narrative to implore readers, "Try to imagine it," and, "Try for a moment to feel this" (164). In a broader context, the attention given to McCain's heroism reflects the questions of individuality that exist in discussions regarding the personalization of politics. By abandoning journalistic convention to consider the emotional appeal of McCain's story, Wallace locates the interest in McCain's campaign in the personal and sentimental qualities of his public persona rather than in the details of his political career. In doing so, Wallace contributes to the public's interest in personal attributes of political figures to establish the primacy of the individual in public affairs, and he reflects enduring mythologies of American individualism, particularly by depicting McCain's past in terms of heroism.

Though attempting to characterize McCain in a number of ways, Wallace destabilizes his portrayal of McCain because of the frequent equivocations in Wallace's article. Wallace assesses McCain's campaign as "maybe both the truth

and bullshit—the man does want your vote, after all" (*Consider the Lobster 166,* emphasis in original), which demonstrates Wallace's inability "to call or decide McCain's campaign in either/or terms: salesman or leader, straight talk or bullshit" (Hering, chap. 16). By focusing on the media's influence, Wallace dramatizes the difficulty of representation, including political journalism, and he examines the contradictory nature of political campaigns as they navigate the boundaries between performance and authenticity. Wallace writes, "Jim C. urges *Rolling Stone* not to be so cynical as to reject out of hand the possibility that the two can coexist—human genuineness and political professionalism—because it's the great yin-and-yang paradox of the McCain2000 campaign" (*Consider the Lobster* 217). In the contradiction that Wallace presents, he signals the importance of affect that prevents him from focusing on McCain's political professionalism while also self-consciously indicating his own cynicism as his writing diverges from objective journalism. In constructing a subjective account of the campaign, Wallace questions the validity of McCain's claims to truth in a postmodern context in which Wallace's skepticism characterizes any mention of truth or "human genuineness." As he mentions truth and genuineness in conjunction with "bullshit" and "the great yin-and-yang paradox," Wallace destabilizes their meaning, reflecting the poststructuralist skepticism of truth claims, especially in a hyper-mediatized environment. Wallace appeals to the reader through transparency, complicating McCain's message of delivering the truth by questioning the truth that McCain purports to tell. Highlighting McCain's mention of truth in a performative context, Wallace ultimately questions the reference to truth in a political context because of its destabilization after poststructuralist thinking.

Wallace's destabilized portrayal is enhanced by his discussion of commerce's increasing importance to political campaigns at the turn of the

millennium. The description of McCain and his campaign is marked by American modes of capitalism, as he discusses sales, marketing and advertising. Wallace explains, “The point, to put it as simply as possible, is that there’s a tension between what John McCain’s appeal is and the way that appeal must be structured and packaged in order to get him elected. To get you to buy” (*Consider the Lobster* 231). His claims conclude with the importance of McCain as a commodity, which contrasts with his attempts to humanize McCain. Indeed, Wallace considers a candidate’s emotional resonance with voters in terms of marketing, citing “many elements of the McCain2000 campaign—naming the bus ‘Straight Talk,’ the timely publication of *Faith of My Fathers,* the much hyped ‘openness’ and ‘spontaneity’ of the Express’s media salon, the message-disciplined way McCain thumps ‘Always. Tell you. The truth’” (229). The emphasis on truth and transparency in McCain’s campaign invites cynicism in Wallace’s narration; he claims that McCain’s tactics “indicate some very shrewd, clever marketers are trying to market this candidate’s rejection of shrewd, clever marketing” (229). Described as a marketing tool, McCain’s claims to honesty are undermined by Wallace’s cynicism regarding consumerism’s influence on politics, and the essay dramatizes Wallace’s personal response as both consumer and writer whose interpretation of McCain exhibits the primacy of the individual’s interpretation in its subjective analysis of McCain’s individuality.

As Wallace’s article elucidates McCain’s contradictions and complexities, a second thread develops in which Wallace depicts himself as the anti-journalist, referencing the improbability of his presence on the campaign trail in numerous instances and echoing Thompson in his performance. The foreword to “Up, Simba!” comically states, “My own resume happens to have ‘NOT A POLITICAL JOURNALIST’ right there at the very top,” and emphasizes the commissioned nature of the piece by introducing *Rolling Stone* as “very flattering and *carte*

*blanche*ish" because they allowed Wallace to choose the candidate he would cover (*Consider the Lobster* 156). Wallace notes that he is one of the four writers chosen for the piece, but he lessens the significance of being commissioned by claiming, *"Rolling Stone* sent the least professional pencil it could find" (161). Wallace's affiliation with *Rolling Stone* distinguishes him from the rest of the press corps as Wallace's self-conscious position is an important rhetorical strategy. He underscores the incongruity between himself and the other reporters, identifying them with objectifying language such as the Twelve Monkeys or the national pencils, and subsequently establishes himself as an individual who prioritizes transparency in his journalistic approach.[59] For instance, Wallace's emphasis on the accuracy of his account is described in terms of the "reality" of the campaign trail: "If this all seems really static and dull, by the way, then understand that you're getting a bona fide look at the reality of media life on the Trail, much of which consists of wandering around killing time on Bullshit 1" (178). Wallace's comments on the narrative further refute the objective style of traditional journalism while he presents his account as sincere in a similarly self-conscious style as McCain's campaign. Wallace's claims to truth hinge on his representation of himself as an unconventional reporter whose position outside of the journalistic corps implies his authenticity through his assertions of individuality.

Writing of the group as a collective, Wallace's satirizing of the journalistic corps further manifests in the absurd journalistic excesses that punctuate his narrative; for instance, while describing the bus driver, Wallace states, "Jay refuses to speak on-record to *Rolling Stone* about what music he listens to" (*Consider the Lobster* 183). By including a trivial detail such as the bus driver's music taste,

[59] For example, Wallace notes: "the 12M all nod somberly and take down whatever he says in their identical steno notebooks" (179-180). By describing the journalists in terms of their indistinguishable characteristics, Wallace underscores his individual voice by commenting on the situation rather than acting as one of the reporters with an identical notebook.

Wallace caricatures investigative reporting with insignificant details that contribute to his maximalist style. Creating interest in the bus driver's music taste, Wallace responds to his nineties context by offering a comedic examination of the impulse to report extensive details in contemporary event journalism, allowing a variety of individuals to have moments of fame by granting figures on the story's periphery a place in the narrative.

The meta-journalistic elements of Wallace's article additionally support the narrative's aim to interrogate the role of affect in politics as he considers young voter's lack of interest in politics. Wallace directly addresses the possible apathy created by contemporary politics, writing, "It's way easier to roll your eyes and not give a shit. You probably don't want to hear about all this, even" (*Consider the Lobster* 187). Questioning the reader's interest, Wallace reflects on the article's position alongside other pieces in *Rolling Stone* as he states, "In fact, even if you're reading other stuff in *RS*, it's doubtful you're going to read much of this article – such is the enormous shuddering yawn that the Political Process evokes in us now" (161). Ironically, Wallace's appeal to the reader is highly marketable in *Rolling Stone* in which he explicitly acknowledges the lack of interest in politics, capitalizing on his unconventional journalistic voice to address readers of a music magazine. Acknowledging the reader's cynicism, and especially the use of demographic data to target audiences, Wallace portrays himself as the sympathetic narrator whose awareness of marketing enhances his transparency and thus commercial appeal. His awareness of his publication's reputation further influences his statement regarding *Rolling* Stone's role as a "politically featherweight organ whose readership was clearly not going to help Mike Murphy's candidate in SC or MI or any of the other upcoming sink-or-swim primaries" (159). Alluding to the left-leaning politics of *Rolling Stone,* Wallace highlights the inherent biases in political reporting, which allows him to examine his own involvement as a reporter. Wallace's presence as a

writer from *Rolling Stone* is characterized by his voyeurism, given that he never speaks with McCain or anyone in "McCain High Command." Yet, he asserts his subjective experience of the campaign to demonstrate his involvement with the political process as an antidote to disengagement. Confronting voter apathy, Wallace dramatizes the individual experience of politics, which contextualizes his article as a response to the contemporary focus on the individual's emotional involvement with public affairs.

As Wallace examines affective responses to politics, he privileges personal experiences of established institutions, reflecting the conflict between the individual and the institution that characterizes the work of the New Journalists. In a passage that outlines the role of affect in contemporary politics, Wallace writes of politicians as:

> Men who aren't enough like human beings even to hate—what one feels when they loom into view is just an overwhelming lack of interest, the sort of deep disengagement that is often a defense against pain. Against sadness. In fact, the likeliest reason why so many of us care so little about politics is that modern politicians make us sad, hurt us deep down in ways that are hard even to name, much less talk about. (*Consider the Lobster* 187)

Considering politicians as a collective, Wallace's discussion of affect attempts to consider the issues with contemporary politics that are omitted by media narratives. He exemplifies Douglas Kellner's statement: "An informed and intelligent public thus needs to learn to deconstruct the spectacle to see what are the real issues behind the election, what interests and ideology do the candidates represent, and what sort of spin, narrative, and media spectacles is being used to sell candidates" (125). Kellner's reference to the packaging of the candidate has relevance when considering Wallace's narration because of the use of affect that distinguishes Wallace from the other reporters. Further, Wallace's engagement with "spin, narrative, and media spectacles" demonstrates the distance between a politician's

performed sincerity and the skepticism with which it is received, as represented by Wallace's article. For example, Wallace wonders "whether anything past well-spun self-interest might be real, was ever real, and if so then what happened?" (*Consider the Lobster* 166). Wallace's questions cultivate skepticism in the depiction of McCain he presents, which exists in a context of postmodern reflexivity. As the guiding consciousness, Wallace's equivocating narrative voice contributes to the uncertainty of textual representations that his article examines. Wallace's narrative intrusions thus undermine the claims to sincerity that he and McCain emphasize in their performances as he questions their claims' potential to escape the artifice of media packaging.

The most notable example of Wallace's role in undermining the claims of McCain's authenticity comes with the story of Donna Duren during a Town Hall Meeting in which a mother in the audience asks about the negative campaign tactics of McCain's opponent, George Bush. After Duren tells the story of her son receiving a call that impacted his political idealism, Wallace depicts McCain's expression as "pained and pale and looks actually more distraught even than Mrs. Duren's face had looked" (*Consider the Lobster* 219). Compared to Alison Mitchell's report[60], Wallace's narration excludes quotations from the scene, instead filtering the exchange through his interpretation. Rather than accept the exchange between McCain and Duren as authentic, Wallace questions whether Duren had been planted or paid to create the moment in which McCain's concern is laudable. The

[60] Alison Mitchell's 2000 article for *The New York Times* contrasts with Wallace's essay in a number of obvious ways, given its place in a mainstream newspaper, but her use of quotations from McCain and Duren are notable differences because of Wallace's exaggerated subjectivity that dominates the text. Perhaps most indicative of the difference between Wallace's maximalist style and the concise style of traditional reportage is Mitchell's brief conclusion: "Mr. McCain has tried to portray himself as a new kind of politician, above the usual campaign practices" (Mitchell).

moment with Donna Duren combines the importance of commercialization, the relevance of multimedia representations, and the question of politicians' authenticity. The scene contributes to the conclusion of Wallace's essay, which deliberates on the dynamics of contemporary politics and the representation of the individual. Wallace repeats McCain's slogan of "Doing Something" instead of "Being Somebody," and his essay reveals the difficulty in separating the person and the person's publicized actions, reflecting concerns inherent to celebrity authorship. In questioning the exchange, Wallace dramatizes the view of "politics as theatre, focusing on spectacle, style, emotion, and the cult of personality" (Corner and Pels 8-9), as he demonstrates his inability to report on the exchange with Duren without commenting on its performative aspects. Focusing on the exchange as a performance, Wallace challenges the potential of an authentic, non-performative McCain as his discussion of affect in politics notes the possibility of manipulation through the performance of a character that capitalizes on the efficacy of politicians' personalities through emotional appeals.

Wallace's search for an authentic McCain ends with Wallace returning to the story of McCain as a prisoner of war, which Wallace emphasizes as the most notable aspect of McCain's campaign because of its distance from the rehearsed and repeated version of McCain that Wallace describes as a product to be sold. Wallace returns to the question of whether McCain can sell authenticity, an oxymoronic aim, which depends on the voter's interpretation of the candidate. He writes: "whether he's truly 'for real' now depends less on what is in his heart than on what might be in yours" (*Consider the Lobster* 234). Directly addressing the reader, Wallace references the pluralism of meaning-making by basing the interpretation of McCain in the reader's subjectivity. The conclusion of Wallace's essay fully enters a realm of subjectivity and affect as he describes the subjectivity of the media, asserting, "And the media . . . is itself composed of individual people . . . don't forget

they're human, or that the way they're going to resolve this tension and decide how to see McCain (and thus how to let you see McCain) will depend way less on political ideology than on each reporter's own little interior battles between cynicism and idealism and marketing and leadership" (231-32). Significant in Wallace's discussion is his own interior battle that he dramatizes in his discussion of McCain; ostensibly reporting on the campaign, Wallace constructs his narrative around the self-reflection that he describes as integral to a reporter's view. As Wallace's interiority dominates the narrative, he answers the question of how best to present McCain by distancing McCain from the narrative, using him as a symbol of the conflict between rhetoric and authenticity, which Wallace embodies. In the process of displacing the subject of the narrative with his own interiority, Wallace actively constructs his self-mythology as an anti-journalist by gesturing to his own identity in numerous instances, establishing his place in the literary-journalist performer tradition.

By focusing on his place in the narrative, Wallace presents a paradox, given his conflation between his status as an individual reporter and the publication for which he writes. As he consistently refers to himself as *Rolling Stone,* Wallace underscores the reporter's inability to be an individual, and, by doing so, Wallace reflects the de-personalizing influence of contemporary politics in which politicians perform sincerity and journalists evade their subjectivity. He asks his readers to consider "if you, like poor old *Rolling Stone,* have come to a point on the Trail where you've started fearing your own cynicism almost as much as you fear your own credulity and the salesman who feed on it" (*Consider the Lobster* 233). Writing of his experience as representative of a general public sentiment, Wallace uses the title of *Rolling Stone* ironically to obscure his identity though his exaggerated self-reflexivity dominates the text. As he assumes the identity of the publication for which he writes, Wallace satirizes the professionalism of political journalists through his

alignment with a publication that he discussed as peripheral to the political process. Suggesting the obfuscated boundaries between politics and entertainment, as represented by a music magazine, Wallace contributes to discussions regarding the convergence of politics and entertainment at the turn of the millennium.

As the beginning of this chapter examined, politicians entered the realm of entertainment in notable ways in the 1990s and their hyper-mediatized context included the prevalence of daytime talk shows and the rise of the Internet. Because of the media's heightened influence, whether through extended news broadcasts or personal blogs, Wallace's essay reflects his concerns regarding the cost of the media's influence. Wallace's interest in the non-mediated individual extends to his discussion of previous presidents and their notability because of their contrast with contemporary politicians whose authenticity is questioned. Wallace notes, "All politicians sell, always have. FDR and JFK and MLK and Gandhi were great salesmen. But that's not all they were. People could smell it. That weird little extra something. It had to do with 'character' (which, yes, is also a cliché—suck it up)" (*Consider the Lobster* 228). Wallace's extended discussion of the characteristics of a "real leader" again point to the value of media's absence; in Wallace's description, the media—especially the intertextuality of media depictions—introduces the doubt in authenticity that he repeatedly mentions. The tension that Wallace outlines is that of the media removing authenticity from the individual, as the media implies commodification and the gain of a profit. Wallace's focus on the tremendous effort involved in assembling and maintaining the Campaign's Press Corps indicates the media's obsessive focus on representing the candidate throughout the campaign and thus reflecting the numerous versions of McCain across various platforms, including television, print, and in person at Town Hall Meetings. Thus, the first sentence of Wallace's essay, signalling "yes, yes *more* press attention" (160), acknowledges the distance from the knowable individual John McCain that is

created by layers of press attention. The press as a collective thus contributes to a homogenizing of candidates with the same aims and similar tactics.

In a hyper-mediated context, the poststructuralist concerns examined in the previous chapter are exaggerated in Wallace's frenetic narration. Emphasizing his place outside the press corps, Wallace acknowledges the uncertainty of textual representations in a context of marketing and advertising in which his portrayal of McCain is subject to similar concerns as McCain's campaign. If viewed as a series of ambiguities, Wallace's essay liberates itself from concrete conclusions regarding the suitability of McCain as a presidential campaign. Rather, Wallace positions the argument in his uncertainties and equivocations. Wallace asks, "Unsimplistic enough for you now?" (*Consider the Lobster* 229), and the questions Wallace introduces in the essay demonstrate an anxiety with viewing politics in decisive terms. He asserts: "the only thing you're certain to feel about John McCain's campaign is a very modern and American type of ambivalence, a sort of interior war between your deep need to believe and your deep belief that the need to believe is bullshit, that there's nothing left anywhere but sales and salesmen" (229). The abstraction of belief is vital for Wallace's argument in which he implores readers of *Rolling Stone* to believe in his transparency, as contrasted with the impenetrability of McCain's persona, given the layers between McCain and the audience.

In his article, "David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction," Adam Kelly examines issues that have been discussed thus far regarding the destabilized position of referents such as authenticity and sincerity. Addressing Wallace's narrative persona, Kelly asks, "If, according to Wallace, a writer must anticipate how his work will be received by readers in a complex culture, and thus about communicating what sounds true, rather than simply what is true, is he really being fully sincere?" (Hering, chap. 11). Kelly's question considers the difficulty in discussing sincerity that characterizes Wallace's work, which includes Wallace's

framing of communication as a corollary to marketing. Wallace asserts,

> But if you're subjected to great salesman and sales pitches and marketing concepts for long enough—like from your earliest Saturday-morning cartoons, let's say—it is only a matter of time before you start believing deep down that everything is sales and marketing, and that whenever somebody seems like they care about you or about some noble idea or cause, that person is a salesman and really ultimately doesn't give a shit about you or some cause but really just wants something for himself. (227)

Describing communication as fraught because of marketing's influence, Wallace highlights the individual's interiority in a performative context. His thinking reflects the questions Kelly poses regarding the indistinguishable nature of intention in commercial exchanges; Kelly writes, "In the age of advertising, it becomes impossible to separate in an absolute manner those communications genuinely directed toward the benefit of the receiver from those that serve primarily to draw attention to the sender" (Hering, chap. 11). In the paradoxes that Wallace describes in McCain's campaign in which he seeks voters' trust while offering a performance, McCain reflects tensions found in Wallace's narration. Assuming they similarly wish to sell a version of authenticity to readers, their unknowable intentions are further complicated by the act of transforming an experience into language and negotiating their extratextual personas. They raise the question of whether authenticity is achievable in contemporary media portrayals, though both evince the importance of cultivating an image of authenticity through their personas.

Conclusion: Wallace's Anti-Journalist Legacy

One of the recurring issues in Wallace's essay is the drama of Wallace learning how to be a political journalist, which focuses the narrative on his relationship with other members of the press rather than the details of the campaign or McCain's policies. The drama of Wallace's subjectivity experiencing the

campaign trail pervades the narrative, as he addresses the inadequacy of journalism in portraying “authentic” characterizations of politicians because of the elusiveness of authenticity. In questioning the concept of authenticity, Wallace builds his persona as an unconventional journalist. Though Wallace purports to be “not a political journalist,” his reportage includes numerous details that contradict his claim to existing outside of the press corps. For instance, the details he writes about the campaign trail are exact, as he describes the campaign routine: “The schedule is fascist: wake-up call and backup alarm at 0600h, express check-out, Baggage Call at 0700 to throw bags and techs’ gear under the bus, haul ass to McCain’s first THM at 0800, then another, then another” (*Consider the Lobster* 174-75). Though characterized by Wallace’s comedic style, the passage relates concrete details that a journalistic report would include, and thus Wallace writes a version of journalism that honors his subjectivity while still acknowledging journalistic convention, complicating his relationship to the form because of the influence of his personal cult of the individual.

In considering Wallace’s journalistic persona, a number of his essays could be examined for the tensions they display between Wallace’s journalistic persona and his assignment. As discussed earlier in the chapter, Wallace was commissioned to write journalistic essays because of the strength of his personality as a marketable writer, and the considerable oeuvre of essays he published contribute to his posthumous legacy. For instance, after his death in 2008, Little, Brown published a collection of Wallace’s essays entitled *Both Flesh and Not* (2012), which included fourteen essays that had not been included in his previous two essay collections. With topics ranging from the 1991 film *Terminator 2* in his essay “The (As It Were) Seminal Importance of Terminator 2" (1998) to the novel *Wittgenstein’s Mistress* (1988) in his review "The Empty Plenum: David Markson’s *Wittgenstein's Mistress"* (1990), Wallace addresses various forms of entertainment with differing levels of

cultural capital. His expansive range of topics marketed in a posthumous essay collection demonstrate the enduring interest in Wallace's legacy, which was cultivated in his lifetime through self-reflexive reports, such as "Up, Simba!". Given Wallace's self-directed gaze, he exemplifies the increasing interest in the individual's personal narrative in his nineties context, and the public's response to his persona, reimagining his life through biographies and cinematic representations, confirms the efficacy of his performances, much like the other writers in this study whose personas are commodified across numerous forms of media.

Chapter Five: Sarah Vowell and the Performance of the Journalist in Infotainment

The previous chapter examined the convergence of politics and performance through David Foster Wallace's article on John McCain in which Wallace demonstrates the similarities between his political writing and McCain's campaign. Wallace's writing, reflective of his nineties context, is notable because of his exaggerated self-reflexivity, which had resonance in critiques of the nineties as a narcissistic decade. By developing a self-reflexive persona, Wallace examines the performative elements of politics and political journalism as he reiterates his position outside the corps of journalists. Wallace performs the character of a journalist figure whose anxieties regarding traditional journalism characterize the text. As a self-characterized faux journalist, Wallace encourages consideration of performative, immersive journalism that follows in the tradition of Thompson, Bly, and Twain. As Wallace's writing also demonstrates, their immersive journalism is imbued with self-mythologizing techniques, highlighting the ways in which the cult of the individual pervades journalistic forms.

Writing for newspapers and magazines, the authors in this study cultivate a tradition that has resonance in other media, including television and radio. Unconventional journalists in broadcast journalism merit consideration in this study, especially given the intertextual nature of each author I have examined. Beginning with Mark Twain, each author has utilized a number of platforms to build their personas, including the lecture circuit, speaking tours, and televised interviews, and the final chapter of this study considers the literary output of broadcasts journalists to further examine the role of intertextuality in building personas. Additionally, the construction of a journalist character in a variety of media forms should be acknowledged for the performative nature of promoting oneself as a journalist in

broadcasts using first-person narration. To begin considering the relationship between broadcast journalism and the cult of the individual, I assert the importance of the radio program *This American Life* as a vehicle for persona creation. *This American Life* is a rich example of the convergence of the personal voice and performance, and the use of the personal voice differentiates *This American Life* broadcasts from traditional journalism, suggesting its place among other unconventional forms of journalism. The program's title alludes to its focus on the individual and, indeed, *This American Life* continued the trend in the 1990s of privileging the stories of individuals, as the first broadcast of *This American Life,* then known as *Your Radio Playhouse,* aired in 1995, a year after the first issue of *Creative Nonfiction* was published.

This American Life has contributed to conversations regarding the nature of journalistic practice at the turn of the millennium, particularly in terms of the relationship between journalism and objectivity. Marc Fisher describes the program as "a radio show that is helping to spark a new approach to American journalism" (40). Fisher acknowledges the unconventional nature of *This American Life* by positioning it in a broader context of news production, writing, "At a moment when the definition of news is up for grabs, 'This American Life' is probing the boundaries" (40). Fisher's consideration of *This American Life* as a form of news indicates the malleability of journalistic forms, as this chapter will consider. His analysis emphasizes the aspects of the program that challenge traditional approaches to broadcast journalism, including the program's use of strategically edited representations of its subjects to produce a sense of authenticity. He describes the moments in *This American Life* in which the program's creator, Ira Glass, incorporated elements that are typically removed from broadcasts, noting:

> Glass and everyone else can be heard doing what everyone else in the history of broadcasting has edited out: swallowing saliva, smacking their lips . . . What broadcasters usually discard to produce a smooth, authoritative sound is not

> only left in, but manipulated, highlighted, accented to add meaning . . . to be part of the writing. (43)

By examining *This American Life*'s aims to represent its contributors authentically, Fisher considers the ways in which the program maintains its similarities to traditional journalism by employing a set of conventions for an intended effect. Additionally, the use of sounds excluded from other broadcasts, producing "a sense of ease, informality and direct, unfiltered access" (Fisher 43), establishes *This American Life* as a program that encourages discussions about the paradoxical nature of personal narratives, as they aim to manufacture unmitigated connections to the narrative's writer despite the inevitable distance created by the narrative's textuality.

The distance between writers' lived experiences and the constructed representations of their lives is an important consideration for the performers' gesture towards intimacy in personal narratives. As discussed in the introduction, the intersection of fiction and journalism provides space for the performance of a persona and the narrativizing of personal lives, which *This American Life* demonstrates in its numerous stories that utilize first-person narration.[61] *This American Life*'s presentation of journalistic reports in a performative style reflects the methods used by writers examined in previous chapters with the importance of the literal performance characterizing broadcasted stories on public radio, and the

[61] A particularly famous contributor to *This American Life* is David Sedaris whose personal narratives have achieved bestseller status. By the third broadcast in December of 1995, Sedaris began performing the type of work that would make him a bestselling essayist. Glass promises, "More fun a-comin'!" before Sedaris' segment, which Sedaris fulfills with his light-hearted anecdote clearly geared for entertainment (Sedaris). Under the title "Poultry Slam 1995," Sedaris' segment is described on *This American Life's* archive as: "Writer David Sedaris tells of the giddiness he felt when he purchased a taxidermy turkey head—attached to its foot." Notable in the description is Sedaris begins his narrative with, "July 19, 1992. This afternoon at the 26th Street flea market, I had one of those experiences that remind me why I shop in the first place." Phrased like a diary entry, complete with the date, the performance prominently displays Sedaris' interiority.

performance is significantly two-fold, given the performance of the self within the narrative.[62]

As the previous chapters have considered the self-made mythologies that narrative personas perpetuate in journalistic forms, this chapter will continue to examine the influence of an autobiographical narrative persona in a journalistic capacity, but also with consideration of historical writing, which shares the journalistic values of omniscience and objectivity. By considering the work of Sarah Vowell, a contributor to *This American Life,* this chapter aims to understand the tensions inherent in representing historical memory and political commentary when the writer's persona is presented as highly commercial outside the text and notably self-reflexive within the text. This chapter develops considerations that Wallace's writing addresses in its representations of performance and politics by considering historical representation as a vehicle to discuss one's engagement with politics in an era of infotainment. Legitimizing its aims under the guise of historical writing, Vowell's work is thus valuable to consider in terms of its political commentary, and Vowell's persona problematizes her political engagement through her comedic, episodic style. As she frequently evacuates her texts of their historicity, Vowell replaces her ostensible subject with numerous moments of self-characterization, particularly through her critique of George W. Bush's administration, and she subsequently evinces the value placed on individuals' narratives, regardless of the conventions of historical writing.

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[62] Additionally, Fisher notes the inclusion of the personal voice in traditional news broadcasts, positioning *This American Life* in a context of widespread uses of personal narratives. Citing a significant news broadcast, he writes, "'NBC Nightly News' is now peppered with segments called 'In His Own Words,' in which the subject of the story, without benefit of narration, tells the tale. It's highly edited, of course, but the theory is that the viewer will not feel that" (43).

The author of seven works of nonfiction, Vowell has written four books about American history: *Assassination Vacation* (2005)*, The Wordy Shipmates* (2008)*, Unfamiliar Fishes* (2011), and *Lafayette in the Somewhat United States* (2015)*.* In each work, Vowell writes in a casual, accessible style that emphasizes her position as narrator. In a similar fashion to the New Journalists' personas, Vowell's self-characterization is a fictional construction that gestures towards journalism but ultimately highlights her persona. As this chapter will discuss later, her many humorous anecdotes include moments of autobiography, which exist alongside scholarly research. As a result, she exemplifies the conflict between the primacy of the personal narrative and the presentation of political engagement. By combining her personal voice with textual research, Vowell's work also questions the linear nature of historical texts, which follows in a tradition established by the poststructuralist theorists discussed in the third chapter of this study. Mirroring techniques used by New Journalists such as Norman Mailer, Vowell implies that one's access to history must be through the self and that history can be made comprehensible through recourse to the self as she casts the impetuses for her projects in terms of the personal. By reflecting on her personal experience of historical markers, Vowell produces historical narratives that partly defer to the individual experience as a source of authority rather than using traditional historical inquiry, which problematizes the conventionally objective approach to historiography and supports this study's claim regarding the increasing prevalence of the cult of the individual in traditionally depersonalized forms.

As a result of her highly constructed, self-reflexive persona, Vowell elucidates conflicts apparent in popular forms of infotainment at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Dramatized in Vowell's work, the impulse to combine entertainment and information is indicative of a broader trend in popular forms, as

this chapter will examine. Because of her casual approach to her political commentary, combining her opinions with travel narratives and personal anecdotes, Vowell's fragmentary writing reflects the commercially appealing style of soft news in which multiple segments contribute to the program's easy consumption. Distinguished from traditional journalism, soft news presents itself as widely accessible by self-consciously and intentionally combining fact and opinion, information and entertainment. The parallels between Vowell's texts and popular contemporaneous forms of entertainment are thus significant to consider because of the ways in which they contribute to discussions of information consumption in popular forms, including the commercialization of current events through radio and television. If read as political commentary, Vowell's text demonstrates the collapsing of boundaries between politics, entertainment, and performance that writers such as Wallace considered, and Vowell's persona as a non-expert has relevance when considering the contemporary political process in which performers present fragmented, self-promoting approaches to politics. Vowell's anecdotal style and the development of her persona is thus a response to the presentation of politics in popular forms that depict contemporary political engagement as potentially superficial because of the combination of entertainment, politics, and the cult of the individual.

The Influence of Infotainment

At the turn of the millennium, conversations regarding infotainment proliferated with the increased popularity of journalistic performers such as Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert and the influence of satirical programs, including *Saturday Night Live*. Daya Kishan Thussu notes, "Entertainment had truly entered politics in the US by the presidential elections in 2000. Both Democratic and

Republican presidential candidates appeared on a special prime-time edition of *Saturday Night Live* the night before the election" (11). In this context, infotainment is valuable to consider for its influence on political discourse. Defined as "broadcast material that seeks to inform and entertain" ("Definition of Infotainment"), infotainment's appeal to mass audiences as a visual medium is especially significant because of the impact on the information presented. Also considered "soft news," infotainment "has more entertainment appeal and requires less cognitive effort, engaging audiences who otherwise may be less motivated in attending to public discourse" (Meddaugh 378). In drawing larger audiences, the commercial concerns of infotainment can encourage reductive strategies to sell the program to audiences. By potentially simplifying messages through forms of entertainment, infotainment presents tensions that often center on the personality that contributes to the program's entertainment value, which Colbert evinces.[63]

In the same year Vowell published *Assassination Vacation* (2005), the first episode of *The Colbert Report* aired, following the precedent set by *The Daily Show* by delivering satirized news, combining comedy and news reportage to emphasize Colbert's persona. The competing concerns of entertainment, politics, and performance converge on Colbert's show, which is significant for the discussions it furthered concerning infotainment.[64] With characters such as the Colbert persona

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[63] Delli Carpini and Williams acknowledge the "[d]ifficulty of distinguishing between entertainment and information, implication being that they're mutually exclusive [The opposite of *news* is not *entertainment,* as the news is often diversionary or amusing (the definition of entertainment) and what is called "entertainment" is often neither.]" (162). The rise of infotainment as a classification for shows like *The Colbert Report* demonstrates the prevalence of art forms that capitalize on the difficult distinction between information and entertainment in satirical programs.

[64] Colbert's exaggeratedly patriotic persona exemplified the particularly American nature of infotainment. Daya Kishan Thussu placed the history of infotainment within an American context, writing, "The US, the home of the idea of a mass society and mass communication, could also be said to be the inventor of the infotainment industry, starting with the penny press in the 1830s" (3).

offering critiques of the Bush administration in entertaining formats, the framing of political commentary in humorous contexts has commercial value that manifests in Colbert's popularity. From Colbert's example, the presentation of a constructed persona can be examined, particularly as Colbert's performance as a political commentator satirizes its self-aggrandizing tactics. With such emphasis on the Colbert character, as distinguishable from the performer Stephen Colbert, *The Colbert Report* furthers inquiry into the techniques of infotainment as well as the active construction of a persona that obfuscates boundaries between performers and their performances, reflecting techniques used by Mark Twain on the lecture circuit.[65]

Colbert's background as an actor is relevant when considering the effects of combining political engagement with entertaining forms, as his distance from politics contributes to the constructed nature of his program and has resonance in other contexts. Geoffrey Baym has written extensively on the power of Stephen Colbert's persona, identifying Colbert as "the pretend pundit and increasingly real political activist" who is also "deeply egotistical" (211, 213). The reference to political activism in Baym's analysis evinces "the unavoidable interweavings of politics and theater, and of journalism and public performance" (227). Baym examines Colbert's testimony before Congress concerning immigrants' rights after accepting the United Farm Workers' invitation to work alongside migrant farm laborers for a day.[66] Baym

[65] Indeed, Robert Hirst, the general editor of the Mark Twain Project at the University of California at Berkeley, asserted, "Colbert is clearly the offspring of Mark Twain" ("Robert").

[66] Baym is especially effective at documenting the varied editorial reactions to Colbert's testimony, citing the critics who expressed outrage at Colbert using the "serious" platform of a congressional hearing to offer a performance partially in character and the critics who applauded the point Colbert makes. Though still widely recognized as a humorist, his performance as a journalist was still valuable. Challenged by Congressman Lamar Smith who asked, "'would you call yourself an expert witness when it comes to farm labor issues?'", Colbert responds that his firsthand experience working alongside the laborers gives him more authority than the members of Congress listening to his address (Baym 21).

notes, “Colbert’s *Harvest* thus ultimately asks us to consider the boundaries of acceptable means of political reasoning. It calls on us to recognize that which most in the political and journalistic establishment would have us ignore—that journalism is often spectacle and politics often the empty performance art of which some accused Colbert” (227). Baym’s analysis echoes critics in the previous chapter who examine the relationship between politics and performance, questioning the limitations of a political figure’s performance. In examining a pertinent example of politics and entertainment’s convergence, he highlights the importance of Colbert’s self-aggrandizement in his program’s project of satirizing the American political process, thus demonstrating the prevalence of the cult of the individual in overtly political performances.

Colbert’s example as an actor entering politics reflects the contemporary subversion of power structures in political discourse that allows for entertainers to challenge traditional journalistic authority. In “Let Us Infotain You,” Michael Delli Carpini and Bruce Williams write, “The resulting media environment is rearranging traditional power relationships as the authority of journalists, public officials, and other political gatekeepers is increasingly challenged by other producers of political and social meaning” (161). Referencing the authority of journalists, Delli Carpini and Williams illustrate concerns that have been examined in previous chapters by noting the displacement of journalistic authority by figures with celebrity personas. They write:

> This new media environment is a hostile one for maintaining the always fragile distinction between public affairs and entertainment. The division of media organizations into separate news, entertainment, and sports divisions, while still in place, has become more porous, and thus journalists, management executives, public officials, and entertainers can develop celebrity identities that transcend any specific job description and allow them to move freely between both types of media and decreasingly distinct genres. In turn, the distinction between fact and opinion or analysis is much less clearly identified by simple rules such as where it appears, who is saying it, or how it is labeled.

(166)

In a context of broadcast journalism, the porousness of boundaries between entertainers and journalists allows figures to increase their visibility and cultivate their fame. For example, NBC news anchor Brian Williams often appeared on *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon* in comedy sketches. With broadcast journalists utilizing opportunities to build their fame intertextually, they perform versions of themselves that exaggerate the performative nature of their professions, challenging the polarity between information and entertainment. As the distinctions between the two is less distinguishable, the journalistic profession can be a site for celebrity performances, mirroring politics' engagement with celebrity culture, which I examined in the previous chapter.

The presentation of a performer as a political figure merits consideration in a literary context, as Sarah Vowell also demonstrates by approaching politics from her background as a radio broadcaster. As a performer who voiced the teenage superhero Violet Parr in the Pixar film *The Incredibles* (2004), Vowell is known for her literal voice alongside the literary voice of the narrator she affects in her nonfiction. Michiko Kakutani astutely describes Vowell as "a multiple-hyphenate writer-humorist-public radio personality" (Kakutani), demonstrating the importance of the performative aspects in Vowell's career from multiple arenas. Combining disparate areas in her writing, which return self-consciously to first-person narration, Vowell exemplifies concerns that have been considered in this study, including the marketing of a public persona and the persona's appearance across different media while challenging traditionally objective forms through her writing. Further, her political commentary reflects Jeffrey P. Jones's assertion that "various actors (politicians, institutions, movements, bloggers, talk show hosts, and so on) are involved in a dispersed and widespread creative construction of truth" (129). Jones'

use of “actors” is important in acknowledging the performative nature of contemporary political discourse in which writers such as Vowell discuss their views on politics across numerous forms of media. Jones’ reference to the media’s construction of truth demonstrates the multiplicity of meanings produced by journalistic narratives despite claims of objectivity. Vowell’s engagement with numerous forms of media reflects the dispersed nature of contemporary political discourse that allows for her to construct her persona while also problematizing uniform sources of journalistic authority and distinctions between entertainers and political analysts.

Given her relationship with the entertainment industry, Vowell’s presentation of herself as a historian is significant, as she capitalizes on the self-conscious subversion of historical conventions in an effort to promote herself as politically aware. On a 2015 episode of the late-night talk show *Conan*, Vowell described her style of writing and the readers it attracts by comparing it to the traditional writing from which it differs. By doing so, Vowell appeals to a particular demographic, portraying her style as progressive and cognizant of contemporary social conflicts. She tells O’Brien, “You know those history books, like the big door stoppers? I call those ‘the books Republican dads get for Christmas’ . . . that genre of history book. But it turns out . . . Republican dads do get my books for Christmas. They just get them from their lesbian daughters and . . . their vegan sons” (Team Coco). Vowell concludes, “I write about stuff that Republican dads care about, but I write about it in a way that their lesbian daughters can get with.” O’Brien’s response, though said in jest, reveals a pertinent concern with Vowell’s writing and persona, as he remarks, “That’s the best marketing ploy I’ve ever heard.” Vowell’s appearance is marked by the dynamics of marketing, as Conan jokes that Vowell’s book is available “in time for the holidays and holiday shopping,” displaying a copy of her book. These

comments establish a relationship and tension between the traditional, supposedly objective standpoint of historical writing, Vowell's own explicitly liberal political perspective, and a context in which she markets her book, rendering her persona inherently performative and commodified.[67]

The clip, available on YouTube under the clickbait-style title "Sarah Vowell: GOP Dads Get My Books From Their Lesbian Daughters," contributes to Vowell's marketable persona and highlights the performative aspects of contemporary authorship in which appearances on late-night shows such as *Conan* enhance the author's commercial appeal. Vowell's interview offers viewers a comedic persona regardless of the content of her text, which she speaks of in generalities to appeal to an identifiable demographic. As an author and a public personality, cultivating her persona on talk shows and public radio, Vowell demonstrates the influence of the "celebritization of society" that Robert van Krieken references (5). She combines performance and commerce by marketing her books in her public appearances, which necessarily relies on the strength of her personality to appeal to various audiences. Given the frequency with which she appears on the *New York Times* bestseller list, Vowell's credibility is strengthened as each appearance can include mention of her bestselling status and her numerous reviews, the blurbs of which fill the front pages of her texts. Vowell has also given lectures at the Library of Congress and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, demonstrating the varied nature of her public appearances (LibraryOfCongress, MIT Comparative). Vowell thus exemplifies the dynamics of celebrity authorship in which an author's commercial success is partly based on the opportunities for media visibility that

[67] The politics of Vowell's explicitly liberal persona aligns with the audience that *This American Life* typically attracts. Megan Alpine notes, "*TAL* attracts a specific demographic of listeners: its audience tends to be white, middle- or upper-class, highly-educated, and liberal" (Alpine).

celebrity authors must utilize to commodify their personas alongside their work, and the various platforms across which Vowell appears evinces the degree of cultural capital that celebrity authors exert while being commercial figures.

As Vowell notes, the incongruity between historian and late-night talk show guest contributes to the interest in Vowell as an unconventional writer of history. A decade before appearing on *Conan*, Vowell published *Assassination Vacation* (2005), in which she combined travel writing, historical research, and journalistic reporting to examine the first three presidential assassinations. Vowell's comedic narrative intrusions mirror the kind of self-reflexivity she exhibits on *Conan*. By frequently commenting on her experience of the research she conducts and the sites she visits, Vowell crafts a persona that is part entertainer and part researcher, part historian and part autobiographer. Rather than existing purely as a textual construction, Vowell's narrative voice translates to a broadcasted performance to reach wider audiences and, like that of Sedaris, Vowell's character in her texts can be conflated with the persona she enacts in public appearances. The conflation between narrator and public persona is intensified by the number of platforms on which Vowell promotes her texts, including radio and television, which complicates Vowell's role as either entertainer or writer and dramatizes the increasing difficulty in posing the two as distinct polarities. This multi-dimensional persona reflects the malleable identity of the celebrity author who can enter political discourse while also maintaining a marketable commercial persona, evading rigid categorical distinctions and forming fluid identities that can be advertised across various distinct platforms outside her text.

Because of the self-reflexive aspects of Vowell's narration, reviewers of her work often point to her ambiguous status as public persona, historian, and radio personality to consider the limits of her narrative voice. Michiko Kakutani articulates

a chief objection to Vowell's style in her review of Vowell's book on Hawaiian history, *Unfamiliar Fishes*, by identifying Vowell's "relentlessly casual, David Sedaris-chatty style" (Kakutani).[68] Kakutani's use of "chatty" alludes to the importance of Vowell's career as a public personality and the subsequent intersection of her roles as performer and writer. Considering Vowell as a guest on talk shows introduces broader points of speculation in Kakutani's review. Kakutani asserts: "her highly personal approach — like her guest appearances on television programs like 'The Daily Show' and the 'Late Show With David Letterman' — underscores our blog-era culture's appetite for spontaneity and subjectivity, its tolerance of self-absorption and craving for entertainment" (Kakutani). Portraying Vowell's work as a response to cultural trends highlights her writing's commercial appeal while denigrating her use of the personal voice for exemplifying the negative traits of her social and cultural context. Vowell's style, foregrounding her subjectivity, promotes the collapsing of narrator and talk show guest, which strengthens Kakutani's claim regarding the high value placed on entertainment, particularly through individuals' narratives. Given Vowell's interest in writing ostensibly historical narratives, the presence of her self-reflexive character suggests her place in a context that values the subversion of historical omniscience to gain recognition as an entertainer, illustrating a broader trend of prizing the individual's performance that is not purely unique to Vowell and her work.[69]

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[68] Similarly, Peter Duffy acknowledges, "Some of the passages would probably have worked better on radio," but maintains, "this is a delightful read, full of wonderful surprises about our nation's history told without the institutional omniscience of the made-for-C-SPAN historian" (36). Duffy's reading emphasizes the inescapability of Vowell's hyper-mediatized extratextual persona when considering her work.

[69] Additionally, Kakutani's review evinced the gendered response to Vowell's work that differs greatly from reception to David Foster Wallace's self-directed gaze, for instance. In *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* (1994), Leigh Gilmore asserted, "The near absence of women's self-representational texts from the critical histories that authorize autobiography indicates the extent to which the genre that functions as the closest textual version of the political ideology of individualism is gendered as 'male'" (2).

Kakutani's reading of Vowell echoes reviews from other critics who also identify the similarities between Vowell and famed performers whose work capitalizes on their level of public recognition. For the *National Book Review,* Ann Fabian highlights the hybrid nature of Vowell's work, asking "Would it be better to shelve her alongside our still-missed monologist Spalding Gray? Or next to Amy Poehler and Tina Fey? Or maybe to rethink what we mean by history and set her up with Ken Burns and thank them both for bringing the past into the 21st-century" (Fabian). Fabian's questions contextualize Vowell in the entertainment industry by referencing performers, comedians, and a filmmaker, suggesting Vowell's potential place amongst various popular, recognizable figures. Additionally, Fabian highlights the similarity between Vowell and other performers whose partially autobiographical personas inform their public appearances. For instance, Spalding Gray's monologues, such as *Swimming to Cambodia* (1987), reflect the interest in personal narratives as forms of entertainment, which Vowell's appearances on talk shows evince. By accepting opportunities to discuss her work on television and radio, Vowell suggests that her extratextual persona, partially dependent on the strength of her personality, has value in itself as a source of entertainment in a similar fashion to the performers Fabian cites. Like Poehler, Fey, and Gray, Vowell illustrates the value of building a brand from one's persona, which evinces the commercial value of performing as a version of one's self to enhance the performer's cultural capital.

Despite the questions that Vowell raises regarding performers' relationships with their work, her place in literary criticism remains limited. Suzanne Ferriss includes Vowell briefly in the conclusion of her 2014 article, "Chick Non-fic: The Comedic Memoir," asserting, "But others of their comedic generation, such as Sarah

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Gilmore's reference to individualism's relationship with autobiography exemplified the impossibility of establishing an abstract individual in representations of the self, as Vowell's writing demonstrates.

Vowell and Amy Sedaris, could—and should—be included in a broader consideration of chick non-fic" (217). Ferriss's description of Vowell as a comedian is useful for considering the ways that Vowell's malleability as an entertainer and public figure disrupts the conventions of historical writing. Partly following Ferriss' suggestion, this chapter considers Vowell in the broader context of American individualism and persona-creation. If considered as a writer of history, Vowell destabilizes the position of the historical writer as she uses her writer's persona for entertainment in a commercial context. Vowell's relationship with historical writing thus depends on her place in an infotainment context, which filters historical information through an entertaining style, as her Trail of Tears broadcast demonstrated.

Trail of Tears Broadcast

Vowell's first appearances on *This American Life*, broadcast during 1997 to 1998, demonstrate the performative, autobiographical elements of her texts that complicate critics' attempts to categorize Vowell's writing generically. Vowell's first explicitly historical piece applies journalistic techniques to her experience of retracing the Trail of Tears with her sister to learn more about the forcible removal of their Cherokee ancestors. The conflicts that arise from Vowell's approach can be outlined using her Trail of Tears piece because it introduces several important concerns regarding the intersection of personal narratives and historical events. Her first broadcast demonstrates her approach to a historical tragedy through historical tourism, which is inherently paradoxical because of the gravity of the tragedy in comparison to the superficiality of tourism. Combining historical narration with her personal reflections, Vowell highlights the limitations involved with constructing narratives on past events and using historical tourism as a vehicle, especially as she

focuses on the forms of historical tourism that lend themselves to personal reflection and a limited, subjective perspective.

Vowell's basis for historical inquiry is her personal engagement, as the Trail of Tears broadcast demonstrates, framing her narrative in personal reflection. She states, "Every summer when we were children, our parents would drive us to a place about half an hour from where we lived called Tsa-La-Gi . . . There's a re-created colonial village, a museum, and— this was our favorite part—an amphitheater which staged a dramatic re-creation of the Trail of Tears" ("Trail of Tears"). The childhood memory is significant as it illustrates a historical representation made accessible to children, and Vowell's description of the amphitheatre as their "favorite part" underscores their approach to the historical event as an attractive spectacle. Further, by citing a dramatic re-creation, Vowell bases her project in the realm of historical tourism, which offers a combination of entertainment and information that she depicts as rich for personal reflection. Considering her ancestry, Vowell describes the importance of the Trail's representation to her conception of her personal history, narrating, "So all my life I knew I wouldn't exist but for the Trail of Tears, and it struck me as a little silly that most of the things I knew about it were based on an amphitheater drama I haven't seen for nearly 20 years" ("Trail of Tears"). The disconnection between Vowell's childhood memory and her knowledge of the event provides impetus for her project and demonstrates her general concern with entertainment's relationship with historical representation, which is contradictory as signified by the Trail's distance from an amphiteater drama. Vowell represents herself as a conflicted narrator, but the conflicts she examines are the result of an issue in the representation of history, which transcends Vowell's experience. Vowell's childhood memory thus signifies the complexities of historical tourism as inspiration for further inquiry but also

entertaining spectacle, representing a central contradiction that Vowell examines as she constructs her personal history.

As the memory demonstrates, Vowell's project is predicated on contradictions, which becomes an important motif in Vowell's work. In light of historical tourism's contradictory nature, Vowell considers its value as a form of research and personal engagement with past events because of its contrast with textual representations. Addressing the impetus for the trip, Vowell submits, "At first, I thought I'd read some books about it, which I did. But then I wanted to see it, feel it, know how long a trek it was." The impulse to experience the length of the Trail of Tears suggests that such an experience is knowable outside a text, despite the historical separation between Vowell and those who were forced to travel the Trail. Vowell emphasizes the interconnectedness of personal history and large-scale historical events, even if experienced through the reductive lens of historical tourism, which positions her as a spectator and one with a personal stake in the narrative. Vowell's contradictory position mirrors the paradoxical nature of her narrative, as it suggests that a historical tragedy can be understood from retracing its geographic locations. Vowell supports the aims of historical tourism by stating that the experience of the physical trail as a road trip would benefit her understanding of the event, and her description of her sensory impressions ensures that the focus of the narrative remains on her personal experience.

As the focus remains on Vowell's personal understanding, she characterizes herself in terms of the ambiguous national identity that her work often describes, exemplifying the worrying consequences of positioning oneself as a representative figure. Her experience is defined in terms of her emotional response, which inevitably limits her perspective to herself, though she extrapolates her experience to represent national concerns. Vowell describes listening to a Chuck Berry song

while on the trip, stating, “I feel a righteous anger and bitterness about every historical fact of what the American nation did to the Cherokee. But, at the same time, I'm an entirely American creature. I'm in love with this song and the country that gave birth to it” (“Trail of Tears”). By describing herself in terms of her national identity, Vowell implies that such an identity is definable, just as the premise of her trip considered the Trail to be knowable. Vowell evades the ambiguity of the American identity by identifying the contradictions in her emotional response, privileging her internal conflict over the tensions inherent in constructing meaning from historical tourism. Further, Vowell prioritizes sources of entertainment over historical tragedies in discussing America to demonstrate the embeddedness of entertainment to her overall project, which signifies the superficiality of the American identity she describes. Though Vowell does not reflect on the constructed nature of the nationalism she examines, her emphasis on forms of entertainment indicates the intersection of history, politics, and entertainment that produces the contradictory identity she embodies as she defines her personal history through inconclusive encounters with historical representation.

The distance from the past created by historical accounts is exacerbated by the neglected gestures towards historical memory that punctuate Vowell’s accounts as she investigates historical amnesia. By presenting herself as the exaggerated focal point of the narrative, Vowell confronts the question of representing a historical narrative in a manner that makes amnesia its subject and also influences the style of narration she uses. In her use of the travelogue and first-person narration, Vowell engages with “a cultural crisis concerning American history and American memory, a crisis we might call American amnesia” (Peterson 4). For instance, Vowell considers a sign that reads, “’On this site, in the summer of 1839, there camped 1,000 Cherokees, men, women, and children en route to their new home,’” and

notes its proximity to “the place students go to sneak cigarettes or get stoned” (“Trail of Tears”). The contrast between the historical tragedy—which is itself misrepresented in the phrase “their new home”—and contemporary neglect of its monuments inspires Vowell’s observation: “it's striking how the two American tendencies exist side by side, to remember our past and to completely ignore it and have fun” (“Trail of Tears”). Her assertion informs much of her work but is especially poignant in the context of her Trail of Tears piece in which she examines historical tourism as a possible antidote to historical amnesia but discovers its limitations. Preserving history in a context of tourism, sites of historical tourism construe the intersection of entertainment and information as superficial but significant for its gesturing towards historical memory, though the attempt to remember a historical event might remain an unfulfilled attempt. Vowell’s engagement with the site thus implies its importance and its limitations, which contributes to the contradictory nature of historical engagement that motivates her project and reinforces the importance Vowell places in personal engagement with historical information, prioritizing the individual’s subjectivity in the interpretation of history.

At the same time, the historical amnesia that Vowell describes as characteristically American assumes that individuals can consider their identity as distinct from historical forces, rather than inevitably shaped by them. In an explicitly comparative moment, Vowell addresses the entwining of her personal narrative with those whose “lives are pummelled by history,” which should be considered in full:

> On this trip, I've been so wrapped up in all the stories of all the deaths on the Trail of Tears . . . I realized that there are lots of ways that lives are pummeled by history. If the Trail of Tears is a glacier that inched its way west my uncle is one of the boulders it deposited when it stopped. He had to work the farm, and the farm he worked was what was left of his grandfather's Indian allotment. And then came the Dust Bowl, and then came the war. All these historical forces bore down on him, but he did not break. Compared to him, compared to the people we descend from, I am free of history. I'm so

> free of history I have to get in a car and drive seven states to find it. ("Trail of Tears").

In Vowell's conceptualization of history, she objectifies the past as a brief narrative that can be summarized and contrasted with her experience. Written as a terse list, the events that Vowell describes are more inaccessible by virtue of her subjective style, which demonstrates her dismissal of the past she narrativizes. Her list of events culminates in the conclusion that history belongs to figures whose stories can be sought but are ultimately objectified and simplified as a list of wars and natural disasters, creating a tension between herself as an individual and history as an ambiguous force and evincing the individualistic approach to history that characterizes Vowell's work. In approaching history through the lens of the individual's experience, Vowell's work exemplifies the influence of individualist ideologies in traditionally objective forms.

Vowell's consideration of wars and natural disasters reflects the view of history that Eakin submits in *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography* (1992), particularly in his chapter, "Living in History." When discussing Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925), Eakin acknowledges the importance of war as a historical marker, and his analysis is significant because of its emphasis on the individual's experience of history through works of autobiography. Vowell's first-person narration characterizes her claim, "I have to get in a car and drive seven states to find it," and her assertion, "I am free of history," reflects Eakin's discussion of the relationship between the individual and history, of which he writes, "'The relation of the individual to history'—the very formulation suggests that the 'individual' is to be distinguished from 'history' . . . history is to be encountered" (*Touching the World* 178). The self-conscious encountering of history characterizes much of Vowell's writing, particularly in her Trail of Tears piece in its suggestion that the violence of a historical event should constitute an element of her identity. On a

literal journey to recover the past, Vowell inevitably separates herself from it by depicting it as something to be found. Vowell combines travel narrative and personal history to make historical events a character that “pummels” lives, and yet, like a reader, she can only act as a spectator through her acts of autobiography that assert her distance from the past.

The presentation of Vowell’s narrative on a public broadcast exacerbates the issue in her work regarding the consumption of history as a spectacle. While introducing Vowell’s piece on the Trail of Tears on the third of July, Ira Glass of *This American Life* wonders, “But, besides repeating it to someone else, what are you supposed to do with history? Especially history as ambiguous as that of our beloved United States of America” (“Trail of Tears”). Vowell’s broadcast engages with Glass’s question by transforming her examination of personal history into a public performance in the context of public radio. The engagement with history exemplified in Vowell’s story implicitly argues for the packaging of history in accessible formats, including oral narratives, which contains an episodic style that listeners can consume as a form of infotainment. Additionally, Vowell references relatable collective experiences that appeal to listeners as she directly addresses them, using the contradictory nature of national traditions to establish rapport with her listeners. While considering the neglect of historical markers, she implores listeners:

> Look at how we treat all our national holidays. Don't we mourn the dead on Memorial Day with volleyball and sunscreen? Don't we, the people, commemorate the Fourth of July by setting meat and bottle rockets on fire? Which makes a lot of sense when you remember that a phrase as weird and whimsical as "the pursuit of happiness" sits right there in the second sentence of the founding document of the country. (“Trail of Tears”)

By alluding to the myth of a collective American identity through national holidays, Vowell chooses paradoxical images to question the different acts of commemoration that suggest Americans’ insufficient recognition of historical memory. In doing so,

Vowell's focus on a general American attitude towards the past mitigates her project's failure to approach the actual experience of the Cherokee's forcible removal. Writing of herself as guilty of general American tendencies, Vowell portrays her interest in the past in terms that reflect the inconsistencies of historical tourism while performing her internal narrative for public audiences who act as voyeurs in a similar way as she does.

Consequently, the threads that Vowell's narrative presents are valuable for their contradictions, which she attempts to dismiss with generalities about a uniform American identity. She tells listeners, "Perhaps we should be embarrassed by certain discrepancies between our Trail of Tears and theirs. We're weak. We're decadent. We're Americans, which means road trip history buffs one minute, amnesiacs the next. We want to remember, except when we want to forget" ("Trail of Tears"). Discussing historical memory through her paradoxical relationship to it, Vowell problematizes the individual's engagement with history and emphasizes the limitations of narrativity through her journalist reportage. While at Ross' Landing, which Vowell identifies as "one of the starting points for the water route of the Trail of Tears," Vowell's sister Amy tells her, "'I think it's a sad story,'" and her summation epitomizes their separation from the historical event and the limitations of their project ("Trail of Tears"). They exemplify Peterson's claim: "It seems epistemologically naïve today to believe in the existence of a past to which a historian or novelist has unmediated access" (8). Within Vowell's broadcast, she dramatizes the antagonism created by an inaccessible past, particularly through her criticism of a general, American attitude to history that represents a disengagement with historical narratives.

Presenting historical engagement in performative terms, the value of Vowell's Trail of Tears broadcast thus results from its easily palatable philosophy on the

contradictions of historical representation, allowing Vowell to market her project across different platforms. While promoting *Assassination Vacation,* Vowell answered questions on a 2005 episode of the *Talk of the Nation* program on National Public Radio, opening a discussion on her methodology when writing about American history. Vowell reflects on her road trip along the Trail of Tears with her sister and discusses the contradictory nature of historical tourism, telling the audience:

> It also seemed like a very, like, accurate way to talk about the United States because we were talking about this horrible story, this genocide, and a lot of American history is pretty grim going, but we were doing it through tourism . . . America's really good at violence, but we're also really good at fun . . . the contrast between telling this horrible historical story and being on a fun road trip with my twin sister [] seemed like a very . . . rich way to talk about the United States of America. ("Death Takes a Holiday")

Vowell's reflection, explicitly written into the narrative as discussed above, exists in a marketing context, appealing to listeners by emphasizing the role of fun in her narrative rather than focusing on the "horrible story." In justifying her project, Vowell distances herself from the genocide by explaining to an audience her view of history in terms of personal engagement, allowing her to recast her narrative as a point of discussion in a public forum. Capitalizing on the unlikely combination of entertainment and information, Vowell demonstrates the commercial aspects of her work as she markets her approach to history in a public appearance intended to promote a different work than her Trail of Tears broadcast. The convergence of marketing, historical representation, and Vowell's personal engagement emblemizes tensions that distinguish Vowell's performative approach to history as self-consciously paradoxical and inconclusive regarding the lessons to be extracted from historical tragedies.

Assassination Vacation

In Vowell's Trail of Tears broadcast, she questions the uses of historical markers, presenting a narrator who is antagonized by the inaccessibility of history. The broadcast contrasts with Vowell's first book-length work on American history, *Assassination Vacation* (2005), which reflects Eakin's assertion that "history is to be encountered" because of the ways in which Vowell seeks historical narratives. While Vowell questioned the American attitude towards history on *This American Life,* she deploys the attitude she decried in *Assassination Vacation*, displacing her historical and political narrative with a personal narrative that undermines her attempts to engage with history. In a number of examples, Vowell writes herself into the narrative as its primary focus, compounding the concerns addressed by other authors in this study to another degree by representing herself as part-historian, autobiographer, and journalist, thus reflecting the extreme pervasiveness of her personal cult of the individual in her ostensibly historical narrative. In the process of prioritizing her personal narrative, Vowell responds to her social context in which forms of infotainment provided space for the building of a persona. Through a series of anecdotes, she reimagines her subjects as characters in an entertaining narrative that conflates information and entertainment, thus dramatizing the paradox present in the title of her book. The levity of "vacation" paired with the gravity of "assassination" infers the paradoxical relationship between Vowell's humorous style and the text's subject matter, which includes her personal reflections that establish her self-reflexive persona in numerous varied contexts.

The introduction to her topic is punctuated by many moments of autobiographical detail that establish Vowell as a comical figure. Highlighting banal details, Vowell describes herself as a "cornflake-consuming, wheat-intolerant guest" and notes, "The guest, normally a silent morning reader of newspapers, is expected

to chat with the other strangers staying in the strangers' home" (*Assassination Vacation* 2). The scene she sets at the bed and breakfast, emphasizing its contrived homeliness, provides a pertinent introduction to her project which contrives to produce entertainment from a range of serious topics. She capitalizes on the contradictory nature of discomfort at the bed and breakfast, and the situation produces incongruities that are reflected in Vowell's larger project. As she describes herself in paradoxical terms, Vowell makes light of her self-consciousness, writing, "Seated at the head of the table, I am the black hole of breakfast, a silent void of gloom sucking the sunshine out of their neighborly New England day" (2). Presenting herself in such a way, Vowell writes herself into the narrative as one of its focuses through her commonplace details and exploits her persona as the entry into her narrative rather than the violence that she will discuss in term of entertainment. As a prominent subject of the text's introduction, Vowell demonstrates her individualistic approach that utilizes her persona as a source of entertainment and builds her brand as an entertainer, regardless of the subject matter, which reflects the prevalence of the individual's narrative in Vowell's context at the turn of the millennium.

The beginning of *Assassination Vacation* indeed positions the text in terms of entertainment as Vowell describes attending the musical *Assassins*, which inspires contradictory images in the preface. Because the text begins with *Assassins,* a highly stylized representation of historical events, the text's preface alludes to the contradictions inherent in presenting violent historical episodes in comedic tones. The first line emphasizes the humorous and paradoxical elements of her text, as she writes, "One night last summer, all the killers in my head assembled on a stage in Massachusetts to sing show tunes" (1). Vowell's description of *Assassins* is significant, given the musical form's incongruity to the nature of the

events it dramatizes. Presented in a musical, a form that opposes historical realism, the events that will inform Vowell's text are distilled into entertaining spectacles in *Assassins*, and Vowell's manipulation of the events aligns itself with the aims of the musical. Like the musical, Vowell's statement sanitizes the violence of assassination by describing it in terms of entertainment. Introduced as actors on a stage, the killers in the opening statement are presented as characters of a drama that can be crafted for consumption, which Vowell's narrative intrusions confirm. Vowell's opening statement casts the characters in imaginative terms, writing "the killers in my head" as the sentence's subject, emphasizing the fantastical nature of assassins singing show tunes. With the inclusion of *Assassins,* the text indicates the mitigatory effect of recasting historical tragedies in the context of entertainment by distilling historical events into a spectacle, producing incongruities that contribute to the spectacle's entertainment value.

The introduction to *Assassination Vacation,* establishing the text's place among other forms of infotainment, importantly highlights the cost of displaying one's subjectivity more prominently than the ostensible subject of the text. For instance, in her initial comments on George W. Bush, Vowell presents her political commentary in general terms with a casual style that evades detailed criticism of Bush's presidency. In her first mention of Bush, Vowell considers the director's note in her *Assassins* program and writes, "Of course talking about the murders of previous presidents is going to open the door to discussing the current president. That's what I like to call him, 'the current president'" (*Assassination Vacation* 5). Vowell's phrasing signals her casual approach, identifying her narration as "talking about the murders," and introducing her discussion of Bush in terms of "going to open the door." In her casual phrasing, Vowell dismisses Bush in vague, reluctant terms, suggesting the superficial approach to her criticism. Vowell's comments

include conspicuous evasions; she acknowledges, “I find it difficult to say or type his name, George W. Bush. I like to call him ‘the current president’ because it’s a hopeful phrase, implying that his administration is only temporary” (5-6). Inferring the reader’s similar political views, Vowell does not elaborate on her objections, instead referring to Bush as a name and a title. Granting this “Bush” a limited place in her narrative, Vowell inadvertently undermines the political aspect of her work by outlining his administration with reticence, eluding to her political engagement without substantiating her claims. The result of her evasions is her appropriation of the political climate as another technique for framing her project as relevant and timely, appealing to audiences who may similarly share vague disapproval of George W. Bush and building her persona in terms of its political dissidence.

When describing her disapproval, Vowell pairs her comments with popular forms, which further mollifies her criticism as she presents others’ disdain for Bush in the context of entertainment. Her evasive commentary echoes the *Assassins* director’s note from which she quotes, offering the note as a substitute to detailed analysis of Bush’s presidency. She notes, “Timothy Douglas, the *Assassins* director, doesn’t say the president’s name either, but he doesn’t have to. Clearly, Douglas is horrified and exasperated by the Iraqi War” (6). Including the note in which Douglas cites “my own mounting frustrations,” Vowell pairs her subjective commentary with Douglas’ statements, combining her brief commentary with a performative context and evading details of their criticism in the process. By utilizing politically driven performances, Vowell situates her narrative in a political conversation had by entertainers[70] to demonstrate the popular appeal of her political views and to reflect

[70] Alongside the note in the *Assassins* program, Vowell presents a literal comic context for further comments on Bush, writing: “at the annual Just for Laughs Comedy Festival . . . I listened to American comic Rich Hall sing a country song he wrote about the current president called ‘Let’s Get Together and Kill George Bush,’ a song the audience of Quebeckers loudly adored” (*Assassination Vacation* 48

upon the influence of political entertainment as it pervades the public consciousness in addition to servicing her own biases.

Demonstrating the blurred distinctions between information and entertainment, Vowell's text exploits a trend that includes successful performers such as Colbert who capitalize on current events through comedy. The comedic presentation of politics distinguishes soft news as a form that relies on commentary from a character performing as a non-expert and capitalizing on self-promoting techniques to imbue political commentary with comedic elements. Locating her journalistic authority in her experience, Vowell suggests the recourse to the individual that characterizes personal journalism and satirical representations of news broadcasts. Vowell's project is distinctive from the aims of soft news because the prominence of historical information in her text contrasts with the overtly journalistic approach to news that characterizes soft news. However, she similarly crafts the presentation of current events in a mode driven by her political views, which mirrors the exposure of biases visible in comedic presentations of politics.

Importantly, Vowell's text raises questions regarding the ethics of presenting large-scale political issues purely through one's subjectivity. Vowell's commentary on George Bush mirrors her brief handling of 9/11, which she presents through her limited subjective perspective as she embeds her comments in descriptions of her ancestry. The only mention of 9/11 in *Assassination Vacation* is filtered through her personal experience, as she concludes a section about her pro-slavery great-great-grandfather with a mention of the attack, writing: "If I were to travel back in time and confront my great-great-grandfather the terrorist, what would we have to say to each other? . . . I could tell him about the morning in September idealistic young men not unlike himself flew into the city where I live and taught me the meaning of the word crushed" (64). Narrated as a personal tragedy, 9/11 functions as a brief note in the

narrative, which allows Vowell to allude to its significance without noting any deaths or details of the destruction. Vowell's reference consequently supports her narrative's aim of filtering large-scale historical events through her subjectivity, resulting in significant omissions that maintain the levity of her narrative. The historical proximity to 9/11 from her 2005 publication date amplifies the significance of Vowell's omissions; by combining a mention of her pro-slavery ancestor with the attack, Vowell implies the past-tense nature of 9/11 rather than highlighting its political relevance. By presenting the attack in such terms, Vowell gestures towards political engagement but distills political issues into brief moments of personal reflection, demonstrating the evasions in her work that create a division between her self-representation and her political criticism. The effect of Vowell's pronounced subjectivity is the text's attentiveness to Vowell's persona at the cost of thorough political engagement, which other journalistic performers demonstrate as they privilege their own cult of personality over the issues that they purport to investigate.

Vowell's brief mention of 9/11 parallels other moments in which she alludes to important political issues through personal reflection, presenting the issue in self-conscious terms that lessen its impact. In Vowell's description of visiting the National Museum of Health and Medicine, she describes an encounter with military guards that illuminates the ways in which her self-reflexive perspective detracts from the political commentary of her text. Considering the contrast between her and her cab driver, Vowell eludes to Islamophobia, but pairs her comment with an absurd image. She writes,

> Being searched and questioned by camo-clad armed soldiers is disquieting enough if you are a small, meek white woman whose bag contains nothing more menacing than a Lemony Snicket novel and cinnamon gum; but if you are the Arabic-speaking cab driver who drives her there and you are ordered to get out of the car to open the hood, the sweat stars to spurt off your forehead as if your turban is wound of a garden hose that just got turned on. Maybe the terror of getting past the

> checkpoint is part of the medical museum experience. (*Assassination Vacation* 49)

Vowell's description of the garden hose emblematizes her distance from the political issues inherent in the soldier's exchange with the cab driver. Her trivializing of the cab driver's experience maintains the light-hearted tone that evades serious critique. Additionally, Vowell includes more details of her personality in the description, building her persona through her encounter with the cab driver. Their exchange elucidates the all-encompassing nature of Vowell's persona-creation. Inserting descriptions of herself in the scene and including her perspective while attempting to characterize another person with a vastly different experience from her own, Vowell thus dramatizes the influence of the cult of the individual on all aspects of her reportage, attesting to the widespread prevalence of persona-creation and betraying the cost of valuing an individual's personal narrative more fully than the text's ostensible subject matter.

Vowell's engagement with the political conflicts of her era mirrors her discussion of historical events through her personal narrative, given her text's complicated boundaries between journalist, historian, and autobiographer. Through her personal narrative, Vowell conveys the inevitable mythologizing that influences historical accounts such as her own, particularly in her representation of Abraham Lincoln. Describing the timing of Lincoln's assassination, Vowell considers its religious implications in her casual, comedic style, asking, "What kind of moron does away with the president he hates at the kickoff of Easter weekend? Sunday morning, pulpits across the land shouted analogies comparing the martyred president to the martyred Christ" (*Assassination Vacation* 248). The depiction of Lincoln as a Christlike figure solidifies his position as a symbol that others, including Vowell, can interpret. Her discussion of martyrdom acknowledges how Lincoln's

myth is subject to posthumous rewriting, and she capitalizes on his malleability as a figure to consider the ways in which historical figures are mythologized. She notes, “A controversial politician widely blamed for the causalities and hardships of war, Lincoln was suddenly and forever upgraded to the persecuted savior who died so that the country might live” (249). Describing Lincoln’s legacy in such terms predicates her own challenge of depicting Lincoln in terms that recognize his mythology while questioning the value of grand historical monuments that result from widespread adoration, including the Lincoln Memorial. If a symbol of worship, the monument gestures towards an established narrative of heroism and potentially discourages active engagement with historical narratives, perpetuating a form of historical amnesia. If replacing inquiries into the past, the monument can act as a conclusion to a historical narrative rather than as an impetus to consider its importance further.

Vowell’s personal engagement with the Lincoln Memorial complicates the issue of active historical engagement with mythic figures, as she writes of Abraham Lincoln as a personal hero. Conscious of the grandeur of monuments like the Lincoln Memorial, Vowell’s text indeed upholds Lincoln’s memory in hyperbolic and admiring terms, asking “Did a fellow as shrewd and sad and poetic and miraculously the right man for the right job at the exact right moment as Abraham Lincoln truly walk the earth until gunned down?” (*Assassination Vacation* 11). Describing the circumstances of Lincoln’s presidency as unequivocally “right,” Vowell views Lincoln with a similar adulatory gaze as one commissioning a monument to commemorate a political leader. Vowell emphasizes her position as one who worships Lincoln, admitting, “Lincoln is my favorite president” (244), which influences the shape of her narrative. She writes, “This tour of the assassinations of Lincoln, Garfield, and McKinley ends up at the Lincoln Memorial because that’s where I’m always ending

up. It is the closest thing I have to a church" (15). Writing of the Memorial in terms of religious worship, Vowell perpetuates the mythologizing of Lincoln through her personal experience of his monument, which refers to her subjectivity rather than the historical narrative of which he is a part. Replacing Lincoln with his memorial further establishes him as a symbol for Vowell's form of historical reflection, marked by her conflation of historical fact and personal belief and reflective of the poststructuralist view of history as dependent on the individual's interpretation.

If considered in terms of historical amnesia, the highly subjective style of Vowell's narration exemplifies deterred engagement with historical memory, as one consequence of Vowell's self-directed gaze is her presentation of historical information to enhance her narrative presence. For instance, when describing her affinity for the Lincoln Memorial in her conclusion, Vowell submits, "It's my favorite place partly because of its blankness . . . Inside the Lincoln Memorial I know what Frederick Douglass meant when he described what it was like to be invited to Lincoln's White House: 'I felt big there'" (247). Comparing herself to Douglass epitomizes the issue with Vowell's representation of the monument. As she considers the monument's "blankness," she diminishes important context to emphasize her experience of the site. Her presence in the narrative precludes the importance of Douglass' response, as Vowell's experience of tributes to Lincoln vastly differs from Douglass' experience but is presented as similar. Her earlier assertion in the text regarding Douglass is subsequently less credible; she claims, "Frederick Douglass, by calling forth Lincoln the man, by mapping how time and circumstance and experience changed him and deepened him and emboldened him to not just say the right thing and not just personally do the right thing, but make right the law, is the most meaningful of all tributes" (119). She challenges her depiction of Douglass as the most meaningful tribute, however, by celebrating the

Lincoln Memorial more than Douglass' memory. Her place in the narrative reduces the potency of Douglass' presence because of the numerous moments in which she espouses her interest in Lincoln, which becomes its own tribute. In her praise of Lincoln, Vowell reflects a difficulty in representing the past because of her exaggerated subjectivity that operates as a source of authority, disrupting her descriptions of the historical figures to locate the narrative's central drama in her experience of the memorials that are, themselves, distant from the past they aim to represent.

Vowell's discussion of Lincoln, a figure whose mythology continues to inspire numerous representations in film and literature,[71] reflects the difficulty of representing historical events in a manner that does not perpetuate historical amnesia through the removal of specific details from a historical narrative. While discussing memorials to Lincoln, Vowell asserts, "The problem with the fog of history, with the way the taboo against speaking ill of the dead tends to edit memorials down to saying nothing much more than the deceased subject's name, is that all the specifics get washed away, leaving behind a universal nobody" (118-19). Her assertion speaks to her project at large as she endeavours to imbue historical monuments with narratives that grant figures a level of accessibility, including such a mythic figure as Lincoln. However, in the highly subjective style of her account, Vowell exemplifies the problematic nature of experiencing Lincoln's myth as a source of personal reflection, which draws attention away from Lincoln and onto to her experience of material reminders of past figures. Such an approach further evidences the "fog of history" she contemplates because of her representation of Lincoln as an elusive, rewritable figure.

[71] The continued interest in all aspects of Lincoln's life are evidenced by publications as recent as the 2018 books *Lincoln's Last Trial: The Murder Case That Propelled Him to the Presidency* by Dan Abrams and David Fisher and *Presidents of War* by Michael Beschloss.

Through her focus on statues and historical sites such as his birthplace, Vowell demonstrates how Lincoln exists through material objects onto which the viewer's projections can be made. Vowell's treatment of Lincoln reflects Kenneth J. Winkle's assertion, "Each generation has tried to forge its own 'usable Lincoln'" (335). Referencing *Assassination Vacation* among other texts, including Jan Morris's *Lincoln: A Foreigner's Quest* (2000) and James A. Percoco's *Summers with Lincoln: Looking for the Man in Monuments* (2009), Winkle identifies the trend in constructing images of Lincoln that also privilege the writer's subjectivity. He submits, "A newly fashionable, and often whimsical, journalistic approach takes readers on a personal journey of discovery across the American landscape in search of an elusive 'real Lincoln' . . . Through it all, this multifaceted 'imagined Lincoln' has remained . . . a venerable, if supremely malleable, American icon" (Winkle 336). Winkle's description is useful in considering the position of Lincoln in Vowell's text because of the way she addresses his mythos as a form of historical amnesia. Additionally, Winkle notes the importance of whimsy, contributing to the indistinguishable boundary between information and entertainment. As a malleable figure, Vowell's Lincoln evidences the sorts of projections of the self that transmute the figure's own narrative for the narrator's purposes. Vowell's version of Lincoln reflects Vowell as a narrator, further distancing the reader from the historical past.

Since the section on Lincoln comprises the longest of the book, his presence is an important contrast to the other presidents in her text whose commemoration present different considerations regarding historical amnesia. In many instances, Vowell describes forgotten monuments; for example, she depicts the neglected statue of politician Roscoe Conkling, writing, "He ran this town, this state, the whole country sometimes, and now, standing catty-corner from a Dunkin' Donuts, the only attention he is paid is from the dogs and drunks peeing at his granite shoes"

(*Assassination Vacation* 152).[72] As a material part of the city, the statue gestures towards historical memory but becomes a symbol of neglect. Though she pays attention to the statue, Vowell describes it in the same setting as a fast food chain and in a state of desecration, which suggest its ineffectualness without the narrative she provides to contextualize Conkling. As the spectator who can provide the contextualizing narrative, Vowell emphasizes the potential discrepancy between historical memory and the material gestures towards it because she highlights her interest in historical markers as remarkable, advertising her attentiveness and subsequent distance from others who ignore historical markers.

Conclusion: Vowell as the Multi-Hyphenate Unconventional Journalist

Because Vowell tours multiple historical sites in her narrative, reporting her encounters with tour guides and museum curators, her text is partly journalistic in nature, though her consideration of historical events complicates the generic distinctions that could be used to describe her text. Presenting historical events through a present-tense journalistic narrative, she exemplifies Huyssen's statement concerning the constructed nature of historical accounts: "The temporal status of any act of memory is always the present and not, as some naive epistemology might have it, the past itself, even though all memory in some ineradicable sense is dependent on some past event or experience" (3). As a work of unconventional journalism, *Assassination Vacation* dramatizes the distance between Vowell and the past events she examines because of her persona's frequent narrative intrusions, situating her narrative in its contemporary context.

Because she also responds to trends in infotainment through her

[72] In a similar instance in which Vowell acknowledges the absence of Garfield-related memorials, she writes, "No plaque marks the spot where Guiteau gunned down Garfield—zip. I am pro-plaque . . . So here's my paper Garfield plaque" (159).

engagement with her context, Vowell's text exemplifies Peterson's statement regarding "the problem of historical memory in contemporary America, where capitalism in the interest of net profit packages history as entertainment or spectacle" (6). Vowell's humorous narrative presents historical events as sources of entertainment as she considers the impact of historical amnesia on the sites she encounters, which is partly contingent on her presentation of her narrative in present-tense terms. As a journalistic narrative, *Assassination Vacation* considers the tensions involved in representing history because of the book's context in which the packaging of history influences its commercial viability, and Vowell's consideration of historiography inherits the complex balance between commercial value and cultural capital. Vowell's texts responds to theorists' considerations of the marketing of history, precisely because of the character she uses to narrate the difficulty in conceptualizing history. Vowell's narrative persona inherently demonstrates an anxiety with constructing historical accounts as her narrative diverges from historical accounts, focusing on the narrator's experience of the historical narratives she encounters.

With the difficulty in presenting historical information written into the text, punctuated by personal anecdotes and humorous asides, Vowell represents the precarious position of historical memory rather than simply representing historical events. As the narrative's drama shifts to her interiority, she evacuates her text of its historical inquiry by presenting the past through her present-tense examination of historical sites. As one example of a rewritten historical narrative, challenging the linearity of historical narratives at many points and upholding its value in others, *Assassination Vacation* establishes the subjective nature of history while arguing for the personal investment in history that adds narrative layers to plaques and monuments.

By placing her narratives in an exaggerated present tense, repeatedly returning to her impressions of historical events through historical tourism, Vowell's narrative persona emblemizes the uncertainty regarding the construction of historical narratives while also building Vowell's personal brand as a highly commercial author whose personal narrative contributes to her text's accessibility and thus marketability. Vowell's persona responds to contemporary concerns regarding celebrity authorship because of the development of a character that can be marketed outside of her book, particularly in performative contexts such as talk shows and radio broadcasts. Vowell's marketing of her literal voice alongside her narrative voice ensure that elements of her career rely on the crafting of her public persona as engaging and widely accessible, including in her broadcasts on *This American Life.*

Because of Vowell's experience promoting her persona in performative arenas, she is a rich example of the complexity of contemporary authorship. Acknowledging Vowell's transition from radio personality to author helps elucidate the importance of intertextuality to her project because she represents the use of varied media in establishing her persona, allowing her to examine the contradictions in representing American history from a variety of angles. More importantly, Vowell's intertextual persona demonstrates the prevalence of the cult of the individual in a similar fashion as each other in this study, though her engagement with the importance of the individual's narrative includes the relevance of the infotainment context in which the individual's persona contributes to a blurred distinction between information and entertainment. As a hybrid journalist, historian, autobiographer, and performer, Vowell epitomizes the diversity of the literary celebrity's roles while raising questions about the ethics of the cult of the individual in traditionally objective forms, which can be considered further in future studies of the celebrity author's persona-creation.

Conclusion: Digital Afterlives

In “Modernism, Celebrity and the Public Personality,” Rod Rosenquist asserts: “it takes more than an individual to produce celebrity value” (439), and this is an argument that encapsulates some of the themes of this dissertation. As I have argued, each author in this study has engaged in a variety of practices to produce their celebrity value, including capitalizing on financial imperatives in publishing, immersing themselves in political conflict and, perhaps most importantly, appearing across various media to create an evolving model of the journalist figure. They demonstrate Rosenquist’s statement by engaging in a complex network of marketing dynamics and sociopolitical circumstances to gain fame and often iconic status as culturally significant figures. Examining Twain as an origin point, this study has established a historical tradition that considers conversations regarding journalistic figures in five distinct periods: post-Civil War, the turn of the twentieth century, Vietnam Era, 1990s, and the turn of the millennium. By considering each period’s relationship with the primacy of the individual, I have highlighted the different social, political, and commercial factors that led to the conditions giving rise to each author’s creation of a persona.

This thesis has argued that each of its authors constructed journalistic reports with similarly self-mythologizing techniques, responding to the unique cultural and political circumstances of their respective eras while similarly recognizing the predominance of the individual’s agency in a traditionally objective form. By considering the importance of the individual’s autonomy through journalistic reports, I have demontrated how each writer responds to and cultivates an American mythology of individualism as a prevailing ideal. Promoting the belief in the individual as noteworthy, each writer attests to the commercial viability of personal narratives in a traditionally objective form such as journalism by gaining fame from incorporating self-reflexivity into their work.

Given the expansive time scale of this study, I have demonstrated how each author exemplifies the increasingly pervasive significance of the individual as an ideal around which they structure their narratives, prioritizing subjective experience to distinguish themselves as notable and innovative through their self-mythologizing techniques. These techniques include intertextual performances through television appearances, print interviews, and recognizable visual images associated with their characters. By considering the authors chronologically, I examined the various innovations that contributed to a historical tradition in which each author belonged, responding to such historical events as the popularization of the interview at the end of the twentieth century, the burgeoning volume of first-person reportage in the 1960s and 70s, and the creation of the twenty-four hour news cycle at the turn of the millennium. At each stage, the writers here used journalistic innovation to address the journalistic establishment and conventions of journalism, promoting their idiosyncratic styles while offering meta-journalistic commentaries that questioned the possibility of objectivity in investigative reporting.

As each author demonstrates, the cultivation of a journalistic persona in works from each era forms a tradition that includes the convergence of celebrity, politics, commerce, and performance in first-person, unconventional journalistic forms. By mythologizing the journalist figure through their highly subjective accounts, each author affirms the prevalence of the cult of the individual regardless of the historical moment because of the centrality of the individual in their reporting. Irrespective of the setting, whether a political campaign or an insane asylum, each writer prizes the subjective voice to an extent that their characters always create an additional narrative of the personal drama of encountering the journalistic mission while fulfilling the assignment.

In each chapter, my focus has been on the authors' literal images as well as their self-characterizations across multiple platforms that support the

characterizations of themselves they construct in their texts. Beginning with Twain's iconic white suits, I considered the importance of the authors' recognizable physicality to enhance their commercial appeal and mythology as extra-literary figures. For instance, Nellie Bly's characteristic traveling dress accompanied her appearances in advertisements and posthumous representations in children's stories, and Hunter S. Thompson's white bucket hat, floral shirt, and yellow aviator sunglasses are distinctive elements of his cinematic representation as well as being reproduced for purchase as a costume. In their recognizable images, the authors in this study assume lives off the page, commodified in intertextual performances.

Each writer's political engagement created a common thread from Twain to Vowell, given the performativity of their political views in public spaces, whether on the lecture circuit or television shows. By asserting themselves as political figures, the authors have also formed images of themselves as representative figures for anti-establishment political views, challenging institutional authority. At the same time, each author has responded to the exigencies of the publishing industry by marketing their texts within the framework of journalistic authority and has responded explicitly to the restrictions created by journalistic convention. As a result, their engagement with their individual mythologies do not wholly evince an individualist ideology. Influenced by the demands of their organizations, they write in terms of their relationship to the institution, granting their various publications authority as characters in their texts. For instance, Thompson and Wallace describe their relationship with *Rolling Stone* numerous times in their reports, capitalizing on the publication's reputation to create comical moments while promoting their personas' incongruities with the publication. Conversely, Nellie Bly incorporated her institutional affiliation into her narrative identity by discussing the *World* as a wide-reaching publication, able to publicize social ills. Whether aligning themselves with the reputations of their publications or opposing them, the authors in this study

dramatize the inherent tension between the implied entrepreneurial nature of the celebrity author and the commercial realities of publishing, which challenges the view of the author in the popular imagination as a self-made success.

Because this study has examined extratextual elements of the literary journalist's celebrity, the importance of media visibility has been central to each authors' career, and the relationship between the authors and the representations of them across different platforms invites discussions regarding the nature of public identities. As Boone and Vickers assert, "The increased emphasis on media visibility, in turn, is reshaping understanding of what constitutes identity for new generations for whom subjectivity is synonymous with performing versions of oneself in the public eye" (907). Boone and Vickers' statement demonstrates the pervasiveness of media visibility in public performances of the self, which increasingly includes digital identities. Writing in 2011, their reference to new generations alludes to the contemporary significance of digital identities as one form of media visibility and the increasingly blurred distinction between private and public selves that online identities facilitate, which is especially pertinent in the context of persona creation. As individuals form versions of themselves across various platforms online, they demonstrate the widespread nature of the cult of the individual in which non-famous individuals manage and curate the appearance of their personas, further evincing the dominance of the individual's narrative in contemporary life.

P. David Marshall has examined the explosion in the number of online identities through the lens of persona creation, which is the next area of exploration for further studies into celebrity journalistic personas. While this study ends with the rise of infotainment, further work can and should be done in a contemporary context that considers the developments of the last twenty years in digital persona creation. Marshall and Barbour write, "Something quite extraordinary has shifted over the last

twenty years that has led to this intensive focus on constructing strategic masks of identity. The catalyst is the development of online culture and its invocation to personalize the expression of a public self--essentially a persona--regularly and incessantly" (1). Marshall's statements demonstrate the richness of online persona creation as a topic for further investigation because he highlights the regular and incessant revisions that lead to proliferating versions of the self. As the authors in this study illustrate, the celebrity persona is dynamic, which is mirrored in the versions of the self that online media cultivate by granting numerous personal narratives a platform to undergo frequent alterations. With various individuals creating versions of themselves online, opportunities for the cult of the individual to promote interest in the individual, rather than the individuals' work, are more readily available because of the many online platforms that encourage the indistinguishable boundary between individuals and their work.

Thus, considering contemporary digital identities supports this thesis' claims regarding the all-pervasive nature of crafted public personas and their relationship to celebrity culture. Theresa Senft notes the prevalence of celebrity culture in online identities, writing, "What marks today's Internet as different from yesterday's is not the presence of celebrity or corporations but their current pervasiveness and ubiquity" (350). Senft's reference to the pervasiveness of celebrity is essential for understanding how a form such as literary journalism contributes to the proliferation of self-branded celebrity identities. As numerous different kinds of writers are celebritized, including the literary journalist, they demonstrate the immense variety of individuals who can build their personal brands across multiple forms of media, including digital platforms.[73]

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[73] Marshall's article examines the rise of the personal website in the 1990s to consider the democratization of persona creation. He writes, "For a moment in the 1990s, the individual, through their personalized website, inhabited a space that was seen as powerful and

Further, examining the concerns of this dissertation in light of digital identities allows for a broader consideration of forms of unconventional journalism. In an article for the *New Statesman,* Juliet Jacques described the uses of Twitter for new forms of opinion journalism and its influence on traditional journalism, writing, "Arguably, it has led mainstream media outlets to become even more reductive, running shorter pieces and more 'listicles,' in an attempt to hold readers' attention as the boundaries between journalism and blogging, comment sections and Twitter collapsed ever further" (Jacques). The boundaries that Jacques describes are pertinent in the discussion of unconventional journalism because of the blurring between traditional and non-traditional forms. Importantly, Jacques also notes the subsequent imperative for journalists to "build[] a 'personal brand' to increase our chances of getting further commissions." Given the expanding body of scholarship on the numerous digital platforms that lend themselves to the formation of personas and celebrity identities,[74] scholars of celebrity and literary personas should not overlook the importance of unconventional journalism on platforms like Twitter as another avenue through which personas are formed and advertised, and the relationship between unconventional forms of journalism and persona creation online merits examination for its contribution to the discussion regarding the personal brands of unconventional journalist figures.

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significant in its mode of expression. Embedded in this shifted power . . . was the new digital--not mechanical--democratization of media production where the individual could now produce in a manner equal to the culture industries themselves" ("Monitoring Persona" 123). In identifying the personal website as a source of persona creation, Marshall describes the individual's increased visibility in the digital age. Importantly, Marshall identifies the "the mediatized and narrativized public self" (127), highlighting the relationship between forms of media and narratives in creating the public self.

[74] Texts such as *Twitter: Social Communication in the Twitter Age* (2013) by Dhiraj Murthy and *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology: How We Use Selfies, Blogs and Wearable Devices to See and Shape Ourselves* (2014) by Jill Walker Rettberg are only a couple examples of the scholarly interest in digital identity formation.

Finally, in further studies of the unconventional journalist figure, scholars should consider the importance of digital identities to engage more extensively with the afterlives of heavily mythologized authors. The digital afterlives of the authors contribute to their mythology while also problematizing the author's self-characterizations, as evident in the afterlife of David Foster Wallace in which the political urgencies of the time have encouraged revised views of his personal mythology. In 2018, Mary Karr criticized Wallace's biography in a post on Twitter, writing, "Deeply saddened by the allegations against Junot Diaz & I support every woman brave enough to speak. The violence David Foster Wallace inflicted on me as a single mom was ignored by his biographer" (Price). Another writer responded with a screenshot of Wallace's biography, writing, "I'm sorry your abuse has been relegated to two piddling lines in an otherwise nuanced biography." The lines from D.T. Max's biography indeed describe the incidents in brief terms, stating, "One night Wallace tried to push Karr from a moving car. Soon afterward, he got so mad at her that he threw her coffee table at her" (212). Together, the three writers produce another chapter in Wallace's posthumous legacy that is worth considering for the ways in which it responds to ideas presented in this dissertation.

The exchange on Twitter is a rich example of the intertextuality of celebrity authorship that challenges the author's mythology, which includes the myth of the genius. Without considering any of Wallace's work, the exchange instead values the extra-textual elements of Wallace's persona that helped solidify his place as a culturally significant figure through interest in his personal life. Additionally, Karr's tweet questions a famed author's legacy while contributing to her own persona in a mediated space. Demonstrating her support for an increasingly publicized political issue, Karr exemplifies the importance of mediated authorial identities in considering the commodification of the individual in and outside the literary sphere. As she engages with followers to elaborate on Max's biography, Karr asserts her agency

while also challenging posthumous textual representations that evince the interest in a celebrity author's personal life, which Karr demonstrates as problematic when represented incompletely. Like numerous other contemporary authors, Karr demonstrates Marshall's statement, "Monitoring one's persona has become an essential experience of contemporary life where a constant ritual of editing, writing, connecting, and publicizing a public persona defines the sense of self" ("Monitoring Persona" 116). By both challenging Wallace's legacy and rewriting the representation of herself depicted in Max's biography, Karr promotes a version of herself that cultivates her persona's public visibility on an online platform, exemplifying the opportunities to craft a politically engaged persona through digital media.

Karr demonstrates the malleability of the public persona through the revisions that complicate the writer's mythology in their posthumous portrayals. Given Karr's commentary, the cinematic representation of Wallace in *The End of the Tour* (2015) signifies the efforts made to memorialize Wallace through biographies and biographical films and, further, exemplifies the tendency to portray Wallace sympathetically despite the aspects of his persona that merit derision. In attempting to rewrite a biography that contributes to Wallace's posthumous legacy, Karr illustrates the inequalities inherent in persona formation in which the representations of an author can obscure elements that detract from their reputations by privileging dominant narratives, including that of the male genius writer. Her tweet represents issues in mythologies of authors in which the distillation of their identities into recognizable personas often supports gendered notions of literary celebrity, and the relationship between patriarchal structures and literary celebrity is an area for further examination beyond the scope of this study.

Digital platforms thus demonstrate the active negotiation of fame that literary celebrities enact in their performances and the numerous factors that influence

whose celebrity is valued more prominently than others. The question of the extent to which authors create their personas and have them created for them by readers, interviewers, and publishing companies has been implicit in this thesis as a number of different forces determine a literary celebrity's reputation. Considering the posthumous legacy of each author complicates the question of characterizing the author's persona because of the multiple representations that contribute to their image, including those that exist in digital media. In their afterlives, the legacy of the author is largely determined by many forces besides the author. As Franssen and Honings assert:

> When the oeuvre is complete and the author can no longer talk back, literary celebrity only exists by the grace of the author's afterlives—the posthumous image of the writer as created by readers, critics, editors, fans and adaptors . . . they ensure a prolonged afterlife for their idol, but at the same time they re-author, in a sense, the author's image and oeuvre. The question, then, becomes: who is the author of the author's life story, and how does that story evolve after the author's death, as his image takes on an afterlife of itself? (3)

Studies such as this dissertation contribute to the ways in which authors are mythologized after their deaths. The future areas of exploration are immense and, though not comprehensive, this study has aimed to illustrate the ways in which celebrity authors' personas are rich for examination because of their relationship with ideologies of individualism, which are important for considering the numerous examples of the cult of the individual across various platforms, including literary journalism.

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