



Sari Edelstein. *Between the Novel and the News: The Emergence of American Women's Writing*

Sari Edelstein. *Between the Novel and the News: The Emergence of American Women's Writing*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014. 226p., 7 ill. ISBN 9780813935904. US \$29.50.

Sari Edelstein's *Between the Novel and the News* offers a bold corrective. While scholars and teachers have often connected male realist writers to journalism – the opening of Howells's *The Rise of Silas Lapham* in which the eponymous character is being interviewed for a newspaper series is a quintessentially realist moment – critics have not given similar attention to how women writers in the long nineteenth century struggled to use and counter journalistic depictions of women and journalistic modes of narration. As Edelstein writes, “women writers have long regarded the press an ideological problem whose social and political influence had serious repercussions for lived experience” (148).

She develops this argument over five major chapters that trace groups of works in conjunction with advancements in American journalism, a shorter introduction, and a conclusion. With a focus on Judith Sargent Murray's *The Story of Margaretta*, the first chapter thinks about how women-authored seduction novels commented on the partisan fights carried out between Federalists and Republicans at the end of the eighteenth century. The second chapter discusses how authors, including Catherine Maria Sedgwick, used sentimentalism to establish an alternative ‘truth’ grounded in ethics rather than in the ‘facts’ touted by the penny papers that sensationalized women's (often dead) bodies in the 1830s. Interested in E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* (1859) and antebellum story-papers, the third chapter considers “the era's anxieties about the breakdown of the national as well as the gender conventions that female authorship threatened to overturn” (68). Chapter four examines how Elizabeth Keckley and Louisa May Alcott practiced eyewitness reportage in their fictionalized memoirs, which gestures toward the rise of embedded reporters during the Civil War. Edelstein concludes at the end of the century with a chapter that explores how various women writers – Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Ida Wells-Barnett, and Edith Eaton – “simultaneously reproduce and criticize the sensationalist practices of mainstream newspapers” and what came to be called yellow journalism (15).

The great strength of this book is its ambition. Edelstein pulls together a range of authors who work over a long period of time and offers a compelling argument about how women, in order to write public words, necessarily had to grapple with the newspaper technologies and trends of their time. To make her temporal argument clear, Edelstein offers wonderful



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succinct explanations of print history – the developments in paper making and press technology as well as the corresponding trends in journalism – over the hundred-odd years featured in the book and compellingly ties them to standard and lesser-read fiction by women. The seven accompanying illustrations also do a great job communicating how newspapers were material and how their size, shape, organization, and formatting influenced their reception and communicated their intentions – facets with which these women authors grapple. My favorite image was of a Southern Civil War newspaper printed on old wallpaper which accompanies Edelstein's argument about Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper."

Overall, the book is an impressive piece of scholarship that illuminates the complicated relationship between women's writing and journalism. It is indispensable to those seeking to understand more about U.S. periodical culture and American women's writing.

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