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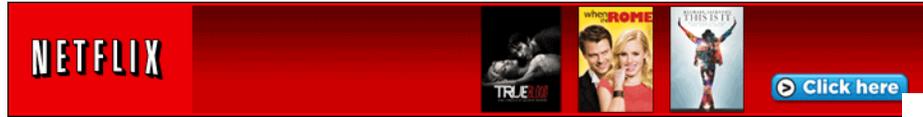
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The American Girl Reporter Abroad and James's Superabundance Problem

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Abstract:

Henry James created one of American fiction's most vivid images of the female reporter in the character of Henrietta Stackpole, Isabel Archer's intrepid friend in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). An American journalist whose letters for *The New York Interviewer* are "universally quoted," Henrietta comes to Europe to write a series of letters from abroad. Scholars have long noted the self-referential potential of James's namesake reporter, but they have rarely taken her seriously. In the preface to the 1908 edition of *Portrait*, James apologizes at length for allowing such a minor character as Henrietta to "pervade" his novel, observing that "she exemplifies, I fear, in her superabundance, not an element of my plan, but only an excess of my zeal." A bit player who ends up taking up a surprising amount of space, the Progressive-minded Henrietta is often discussed in terms that echo James's own dismissive commentary, as a character who somehow got away from him—particularly when he revised *Portrait* for the New York edition, some twenty-seven years after its original publication.

This paper considers precisely how and why Henrietta Stackpole got away from her author. In the process, it pays special attention to an under-examined figure of the Progressive Era, the globe-trotting girl reporter. It reads Henrietta against the backdrop of the real-life American newspaperwomen who traveled and lived abroad in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century—and who embodied a modern phenomenon of publicity and progressivism often identified as peculiarly American. The "superabundance" that James associates with Henrietta reflects, at least in part, the explosive possibilities of transnational publicity, which promised to spread American democracy abroad but also launched an unpredictable exchange of ideas and judgments—about women, about progress, about reform, about the United States itself. James's difficulties with Henrietta bear reluctant witness to the female writers who made careers out of such unpredictable exchanges at the turn of the century. Distinguished by their mobility and intrepidity, these women included Nellie Bly, who wrote her first book about spending six months in Mexico and attained media stardom in 1890 when she circumnavigated the globe in 72 days; Elizabeth Banks, who became known for her "Campaigns of Curiosity" in London in the 1890s; Ida Tarbell, who went to Paris as an unknown in 1891 and ended up writing a biography of French revolutionary hero Madame Roland; and Ida B. Wells, whose first anti-lynching pamphlet, *Southern Horrors*, was published in London as U.S. Atrocities and whose British lecture tour in 1893 catapulted her into prominence at home and abroad. Whether they were advocating American technological superiority like Nellie Bly or exposing American hypocrisy like Ida B. Wells, the comings and goings of these newspaperwomen forged a highly visible model of the Progressive woman writer embedded in a publicity machine without national borders. James did not like this model at all. But as Henrietta's evolution reveals, he felt obliged to reckon with its startling power.

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