

Karla Freire
HIST 102
Prof. Doubleday
10 May 2016



“I want you, Marjorie, -- I have always wanted you, and shall never cease fighting for you until I have you forever.” These are words of twenty-four year old Earl Stewart Wallace to Marjorie Smith, in December 1915.¹ Earl had been born in 1891 into an upper-class family of bankers from Drayton, North Dakota. By 1915 he was attending Law School at Harvard University, having received his Bachelor’s Degree at the University of Minnesota in 1913.² The object of Earl’s love, was born Marjorie Boynton Smith in January 1894, daughter of an upper class banker; she was reared comfortably in Freeport, New York. Marjorie’s father, Samuel Raynor Smith, had ties to the Wallace family since both worked in the First National Bank of Drayton, established by Smith in 1882. It was through these familial connections that Marjorie and Earl became acquainted in 1914, while they were attending Smith College and Harvard University respectively.³ Despite his polished upper-class upbringing and exceptional academic background, Earl was an emotionally intense young man fraught with insecurities and anxieties. His emotionally charged nature is always most evident whenever he expresses sentiments of

¹ Correspondence from Dec. 21, 1915. Found within Box/Folder 1-5 in Smith-Wallace Family Collection located at Hofstra University Library Special Collections Archive

² S.W.F.C. HU Library Special Collections Archive Series V, Box/Folder 41-3, 41-4

³ S.W.F.C. HU Library Special Collections Archive Series V

passionate love and desire for Marjorie. Earl's underlining of the word "want" within his letter to Marjorie demonstrates a sense of urgency and desperation for a reciprocation of the love he declares he has always felt for her.⁴

Their correspondence back and forth from Smith and Harvard, beginning in 1914, was often written on several small pieces of plain stationery. Earl's letters reflect his inner intensity in terms of their volume and length. Throughout their correspondence there are moments in which Earl calls attention to the excessive length of his letters. For example, in a 1916 letter addressed to Marjorie, or "Mardie" as he had come to nickname her affectionately, he acknowledges that he is running out of writing space and notes the "bulkiness" of his letter. He informs her that his letter consists of four sheets of stationery, written back to front, totaling "15 or 16 pages in all." Earl also makes an extra note at the end of the letter stating that his letter has "got to the two stamps this time," thus emphasizing its lengthiness.⁵ As a result of their length, the pages of Earl's letters are also usually organized by a number on the top of each page to avoid confusion. Apart from their length, Earl's letters contain his neat and mostly legible script. However, his underlining of words for emphasis is distinct and consistent as they appear in one of his earliest letters addressed to Marjorie from October 1914. Here Earl underlines the word "not" in order to clarify his strong stance against Harvard's football team to Marjorie.⁶ In addition to his use of word underlining, Earl also frequently uses his own, often uniquely misspelt abbreviations within his writing. His use of "tho" to abbreviate the word "though" in an early letter to Marjorie⁷ and

⁴ S.W.F.C. correspondence from Dec. 21, 1915

⁵ S.W.F.C. correspondence from Jan. 7, 1916 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 1-6

⁶ S.W.F.C. correspondence from Oct. 14, 1914 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 1-1

⁷ S.W.F.C. correspondence from Nov. 21, 1914 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 1-1

“enuf” to abbreviate “enough” in a later 1917 letter also addressed to Marjorie⁸, are just two examples of distinct abbreviations that become a staple of Earl’s writing throughout their correspondence. The use of abbreviations hastens communication, which is specifically what Earl desires to achieve in his letters given their usual lengthiness. His use of abbreviations, in a sense, mirror his own personality as his abbreviations speed up the conveyance of his thoughts and feelings for Marjorie with an urgency and intensity that matches his nature.

Although the Smith-Wallace Family Collection contains very few of Marjorie’s letters in response to Earl, the ones that it does have, show Marjorie’s markedly neat script. She does not use any abbreviations and hardly underlines any words. However, unlike Earl, she does on occasion accidentally misspell certain words, such as “judgement” instead of “judgment.”⁹ Her occasional misspellings, however, become part of the subject in a later letter Earl is seen jokingly criticizing her grammar usage.¹⁰ Her letters are significantly shorter than Earl’s and less frequent as in an early 1914 letter Earl uses hyperbole to indicate her lack of correspondence with “I hope that you will be good enough to write me within the next decade or two.”¹¹ This suggests Earl places greater interest and effort in his relationship with Marjorie even as early as 1914. However, it should be noted that the frequency of her responses and number of letters increases as the years pass as by 1917, Earl notes he has “received three good letters” from her.¹²

⁸ S.W.F.C. correspondence from Feb. 19, 1917 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 5-7

⁹ S.W.F.C. correspondence from Mar. 30, 1916 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 2-4

¹⁰ S.W.F.C. correspondence from Feb. 19, 1917 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 5-7

¹¹ S.W.F.C. correspondence from Nov. 28, 1914 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 1-1

¹² S.W.F.C. correspondence from Feb. 19, 1917

Apart from the personality markers apparent from the physical and textual aspects of their letters, it was also through Earl and Marjorie's correspondence back and forth from Smith College and Harvard University that their anxieties, hopes, and loving sentiments were found. While Marjorie and Earl were exchanging letters at college, the United States found itself in an era of great social change. At the turn of the century, America faced the increasingly vehement call for political and social reform from Progressives, which included greater rights for women. The early decades of the twentieth century also marked a period of changing courtship practices between the young men and women across the nation. Thus, as Marjorie and Earl's relationship grew in affection and intimacy with every passing month of correspondence, so did America with its continuous, anxiety producing political and social transformation. These national anxieties were later further aggravated as America pivoted closer and closer to war by the mid 1910s.

One of the greatest sources of this national tension surrounding social change has its origins in the late nineteenth century, with newfound cries for greater opportunities for women meeting an ambivalent cultural response in regards to women's inclusion in the public sphere, particularly within the classroom. In a letter dated February 19, 1917, noticeably sometime after Earl's first declaration of love to Marjorie, Earl playfully criticizes Marjorie's grammar usage in a previous letter as a way of expressing resentment at her for forgetting to send him a Valentine on Valentine's Day, as he had done for her. He writes, "And now while I am angry, just for spite & not for correction, I want to tell you that the phrase " 'I don't feel so very badly' " is wretched English for a "girl graduate."¹³ Although Earl is not completely serious in his remarks, his

¹³ S.W.F.C. correspondence from Feb. 19, 1917 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 5-7

invocation and recognition of gender through his “girl graduate” comment implies an atmosphere of tension and clear divisions within a society that is still trying to grapple with the recently established female presence within the system of higher education at the turn of the century. Earl’s underlining of the word “ ‘badly’ ” in his criticism of Marjorie not only notes where her grammatical mistake lies, but also creates a heavy emphasis between her error and the significance of her error since he claims she used “wretched English,” particularly for a female college graduate. The “for” in his statement can be likened to a bridge linking and identifying a simple error to its significance as it is used to imply some type of prestige or status that accompanied being a graduate from an all-women’s college, such as Smith college.

Earl’s grammatical criticism of Marjorie’s reveals not only an important dimension of their relationship, but also the significance of such a comment in terms of the social response to women’s higher education. Author Lynn Gordon notes that discussion of the public roles of women had first begun emerge in antebellum America as they participated in several reform movements, such as the temperance movement and the growing education reform movement. This was met with great public anxiety, as this was a violation of the middle class Victorian concept of the “cult of domesticity.” This notion promoted a strict sexual division of labor in which women were to reside exclusively within the private sphere caring for the home and children, while men ventured into the public sphere of competitive and capitalist labor forces. Opponents of this blurring of strict gender roles claimed that women’s new roles in the public sphere would endanger both the traditional family household dynamic and the health and wellbeing of these women and their children.¹⁴

¹⁴ Lynn D. Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992), 13-14.

The emergence of women as educators in antebellum America soon led to the creation of higher educational institutions solely for women and later on their integration in traditionally all-male institutions. Gordon points to economic factors for the rise of women's higher education as economic necessity in the antebellum North led unmarried women to become teachers, which was deemed as a "'respectable' " form of income for women in the late nineteenth century.¹⁵ This coupled with a shortage of primary school teachers in the North and West drove women into secondary institutions such as Emma Willard's Troy Female Seminary and Mary Lyon's Mount Holyoke in which a varied curriculum prepared young women for careers in education.¹⁶ The creation of seminaries specifically aimed to aid women's educational advancement, however, did not come without public ridicule. For example, Lynn Peril provides an example of the constant mockery of female higher education when she refers to an 1835 Massachusetts newspaper editorial suggesting ridiculous female college degree titles for potential graduates such as an "M.S.B. (Mistress of the Scrubbing Brush)" and honorary degrees in "H.W. (Happy Wife)." ¹⁷ These openly offensive remarks regarding the content matter covered in female colleges and its validity in official publications suggest the popularity or at least a large amount of support for these types of opinions within a sector of society. It is this type of documented existence of misogyny regarding women's education that makes Earl seemingly insignificant grammatical criticism of Marjorie's writing greatly important since his words carry the weight of a controversial past and an uneasiness surrounding women's advancement in society that continued to markedly color public opinion over eighty years later in 1917.

¹⁵ Quoted in Gordon, 15

¹⁶ Gordon, 14-15.

¹⁷ Quoted in Lynn Peril, *College Girls: Bluestockings, Sex Kittens, and Coeds, Then and Now*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 27.

The national percentage of students attending women's colleges by the time of Marjorie's graduation from Smith College, in late 1916, was approximately eight percent.¹⁸ The founders of eastern women's colleges like Marjorie's, maintained that their schools provided women with the same educational experience as the most prestigious men's college "without sacrificing femininity".¹⁹ Thus, the curriculum at these Seven Sister colleges, as they were later nicknamed, included Latin and Greek courses, a variety of different natural and social sciences, fine arts, and physical education. Religious education, chapel attendance, and Bible study were also enforced.²⁰ This extensive curriculum, which included social sciences and fine arts are heavily reflected in the early correspondence between Marjorie and Earl. For example, in a letter dated January 19, 1915 Earl mentions her studies of Logic and Drama shortly before "pre-Exam times."²¹ In a later letter, Marjorie informs Earl and asks of his opinion in regards to a philosophical debate that occurred during her "Bible class to-day,"²² therefore mirroring this compulsory religious element to women's education at the time.

The arrival of Progressivism on college campuses, like Smith College and Harvard University, introduced further social change within the nation. According to Gordon, the second and third generation of college women, dating from 1890-1910 and 1910 onwards, respectively became less preoccupied with studies and "demanded more purely recreational activities and more contact with men than their predecessors." These new generations of college women demonstrated a growing interest in domesticity. College women now showed a greater interest in

¹⁸ Gordon, 26.

¹⁹ Quoted in Gordon, 26.

²⁰ Gordon, 27.

²¹ S.W.F.C. correspondence from Jan. 19, 1915 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 1-3

²² S.W.F.C. correspondence from Mar. 5, 1916 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 1-16

marriage than before. For example, after 1905 the strength of this increased interest in domesticity resulted in higher marriage rates for college graduates. This was attributed to their socio-economic backgrounds, as women from elite backgrounds could afford to prioritize finding a suitable husband over their studies.²³ This shift in values amongst upper class college women, like Marjorie, is evident within her correspondence with Earl. Although it is apparent that Marjorie has to study for exams throughout the school year, in a 1915 letter Earl implies her carefree attitudes towards exams, as she is engaging in recreational activities during this time instead of studying. He writes “I hope that your exams are not giving you cause for much worry. From your tales of golf, skating, and movies I know you are well at ease.”²⁴ Thus, it appears that Marjorie is the opposite of what was described in the nineteenth century as an unpopular “bluestocking” or a boring, overly educated woman likely to remain single.²⁵

However, Earl’s work ethic, in terms of academics, sharply contrasted with Marjorie’s. Here Earl is seen applying the same intensity found in other areas of his life to his studies. A consistent theme throughout Earl and Marjorie’s correspondence is Earl’s exhaustive work ethic. For example, in a 1915 letter Earl writes to Marjorie that, “I was and have been extremely busy (how trite that phrase sounds to me—and to you, no doubt). When one is over his head in work he forgets nearly everything and everybody—even himself.”²⁶ By acknowledging the “trite” nature of using busyness as an excuse in regards to the brevity of his most recent letter to her, he expresses the dedication he has for his studies. His self-awareness regarding his ability to

²³ Gordon, 4-5.

²⁴ S.W.F.C. correspondence from Jan. 24, 1915 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 1-3

²⁵ Peril, 28-30.

²⁶ S.W.F.C. correspondence from Feb. 22, 1915 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 1-3

forget himself and others because of his work, points to an unhealthy intensity attached to studying. In this aspect, Earl also reflects Helen L. Horowitz' assertion that a shift in collegiate life occurred within several prestigious institutions, such as at Harvard University. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the fact that in previous generations of college undergraduates, "scholastic rank, the faculty's measure of a student's success in recitation of exams, carried no prestige"²⁷ was eliminated. Specifically in Harvard Law School, Horowitz notes, "only academic achievement counted." Excellence and long hours of dedication to the study of law were valued over any factors such social status as well.²⁸ This shift in collegiate culture by the time of Earl's attendance at Harvard Law School likely contributed to his work ethic, in addition to the introduction of Progressivism to his own college campus. In response to this movement, Frederick Rudolph notes Harvard now exalted and emphasized "'a rich return of learning, poetry, and piety...'" to the public.²⁹ It is possible Earl might have held himself up to this standard, since his intense dedication to his law studies would later enable him to become an effective lawyer for the benefit of a larger society.

The introduction of Progressivism to college campuses also heralded changes regarding the interactions between the opposite sex and courtship practices. This shift in gender relations also led to questions regarding the difficulties of male and female friendships, particularly with the possibility of friendship transforming into unreciprocated love for one of the parties involved.³⁰ This unreciprocated love within a friendship is seen early on in Earl and Marjorie's

²⁷ Quoted in Helen L. Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1987), 33.

²⁸ Quoted in Horowitz, 75.

²⁹ Quoted in Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History*, (Athens: Georgia UP, 1990), 359.

³⁰ Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History Of Courtship in America*, (New York: Basic, 1984), 192-195.

relationship. This is evident from early correspondence as Earl seems to place greater interest in their relationship with an emotional intensity that appears unusual for an exclusively non-romantic friendship. For example, Earl has a habit of hinting at the infrequency of Marjorie's correspondence in comparison to his. In one of the earliest letters from 1914, Earl writes "It's so long since I had heard of, or from you—despite the fact that since last Thanksgiving I have sent you as many as one letter and two or three cards..."³¹ Earl's "despite the fact," suggests a light reproach for Marjorie's lack of correspondence to his letter and three cards. The large amount of cards and letters also suggests a greater emotional attachment to their relationship on Earl's behalf. His preoccupation with her lack of response to his letters continues in another early 1914 letter as he writes "Letters from you (that is, which come to me) are so rare and unusual that I should be satisfied no matter what the form or subject matter."³² Here Earl does not merely hint at her apparent lack of interest in their correspondence, he openly acknowledges the infrequency of her letters. He also indicates his great and dedicated interest in Marjorie since he does not care how her letter to him is sent or what it is about, he just desperately wants a single response from her. Within this letter Earl also writes "I am anxiously looking forward to Wednesday—when I shall see you again—and when I mean to make you eat the caricature of every beast you have sent me." By stating that he is "anxiously looking forward" to their meeting he is indicating that he has missed her or simply longs to be in her presence once again. Although the expression of these feelings does not necessarily indicate Earl holds romantic feelings for Marjorie at this point, the early date of this letter coupled with Earl's frequent correspondence and apparent

³¹ S.W.F.C. correspondence from Oct. 14, 1914 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 1-1

³² S.W.F.C. correspondence from Oct. 14, 1914 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 1-1

slight resentment at her lack of response to his letters, suggests there is some element of romantic interest in their relationship, solely on Earl's behalf. Based on this notion, the playful teasing Earl directs at Marjorie in this letter when he states "I mean to make you eat the caricature of every beast you have sent me," in reference to a series of humorous sketches they send each other in their correspondence, can be interpreted as his way of flirting with her rather than simply a form of his humor. This letter also features the first appearance of Earl's nickname for Marjorie, "Enigma," presumably because he still does not know much about her due to her lack of correspondence. It is also the first time Earl ends his letters with "Yours, Earl" instead of the more formal "Sincerely Earl S. Wallace," as was seen within his first three letters to Marjorie³³. The shift in Earl's tone when closing his early letters clearly suggests a greater amount of intimacy between him and Marjorie than seen before, even though this shift appears to have been accomplished within a short time span (one month).

Any doubts regarding the nature of Earl's feelings towards Marjorie vanish with a 1915 letter in which Earl openly declares his love for Marjorie. He acknowledges that he has always been interested in her, even before their correspondence at college. He writes, "Years ago—nine years ago...I first saw you, then a mere slip of a girl. I was then but a youngster but I have carried that memory to this day."³⁴ With this detailed recollection of Earl's apparent lifelong romantic feelings for Marjorie, he appears to confirm early twentieth century thought which doubted the possibility of a non-romantic relationship between men and women.³⁵ Author Ellen K. Rothman notes "the editor of *Ladies' Home Journal* decried the fact that "there is absolutely

³³ S.W.F.C. correspondence from Oct. 4, 1914 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 1-1

³⁴ S.W.F.C. correspondence from Dec. 21, 1915 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 1-5

³⁵ Rothman, 194

no halfway station between being a stranger and a lover. Friendship is never thought of.’”³⁶ This belief that opposite sex friendships could not exist without any romantic or sexual attraction was a notion that was heavily promoted within other forms of popular entertainment well into the late twentieth century. By the 1980s, “popular culture seemed unable just to yet imagine a male-female relationship that would not start or end in sex,” as was exemplified in the film *When Harry Met Sally* (1989).³⁷

Following this early recollection, Earl continues his letter and states he has “always wanted” Marjorie and “will not be discouraged no matter what you answer.”³⁸ Here Earl demonstrates with his characteristic underlining of words that he is determined to romantically pursue Marjorie, even if that means bypassing her possible rejection of his advances. This type of relentless pursuit also supports Rothman’s assertion that unreciprocated declarations of love, particularly when expressed by males, introduces a tension or strain to a friendship.³⁹ For example, Earl states “It is your answer wherein lies the dread uncertainty and for your answer I shall wait with anxiety I never before have known. Please do not delay an instant. If you could know the torture of every hour that must pass before your letter can possibly reach me you could not hesitate.” By expressing his own anxiety regarding the possibility that his love may or may not be reciprocated and torturous preoccupation with the speediness of her response, Earl creates an atmosphere of great tension between them. This pressure to answer as quickly as possible to such an intense declaration of love places Marjorie in a difficult and possibly awkward position

³⁶ Quoted in Rothman, 194

³⁷ Quoted in Mark Peel, Liz Reed, and James Walter, “The Importance of Friends: The Most Recent Past,” in *Friendship: A History*, ed. Barbara Caine (London: Equinox, 2009), 339.

³⁸ S.W.F.C. correspondence from Dec. 21, 1915 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 1-5

³⁹ Rothman, 194-195

if she does not reciprocate his feelings. Even when in the following letter, dated five days later, it becomes clear that Marjorie has reciprocated his love, as he writes of Marjorie recognizing she loved him, “quite a lot,”⁴⁰ some tension is created as they try to make sense of this new dimension in their relationship. For example, Earl writes of his shock when he learns that Marjorie had had another romantic suitor throughout their correspondence, and that she was contemplating accepting his marriage proposal. He also goes to explain his insecurities and feelings of jealousy, as he writes “you would tell me of your men friends, of your parties with them and of other things that have driven me into a jealous rage.” These momentary feelings of shock and admittance of jealousy have the potential to create tension within their newfound romantic relationship. The revelation of another suitor, in particular, is discussed at length as Earl assures her that if he had known of her other suitor he would have let her make her final decision of whom to stay with as he is a firm believer in the rule “that ‘lets the best man win’ ”. Rather than express anger or jealousy at this situation as he had before with her other “men friends,” he readily accepts Marjorie’s reciprocation of his love and towards the end of the letter mentions engagement and marriage.

However, in some ways Marjorie’s swift reciprocation of feelings towards Earl is not surprising. According to Rothman, at the turn of the century women “were more eager of friendship, because they were more wary of love.” Rather than worrying over “unchecked passion,” as women had in previous generations, during this time period women instead expressed anxiety over not loving someone enough.⁴¹ A fear of not being able to demonstrate as

⁴⁰ S.W.F.C. correspondence from Dec. 26, 1915 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 1-5

⁴¹ Rothman, 195-196

much love and affection as a male could within a romantic relationship led women to welcome friendship instead of romance. This general fear amongst women might possibly explain Earl's claim of Marjorie's indifference throughout the earlier part of their correspondence and unexpected reciprocation of feelings immediately after he declared his love for her. It is then possible that Marjorie had been harboring some sort of faint romantic feelings for Earl during their early correspondence, however, she did not express them at all or reciprocate them until he openly expressed his romantic feelings first. In a 1916 letter Marjorie writes to Earl, "when I accepted you I doubt very much that I loved you but felt that I had the capacity for a very great love."⁴² Here Marjorie acknowledges she did not hold the same intense feelings of love that Earl had at the time, although her feeling of having "the capacity for a very great love" points to some romantic interest in Earl. She also expresses worry over "the distinction of like and love," thus like the women of her era she demonstrates a fear over quantities of affection. She then continues to express her own anxiety and worries about loving him and of love in general. Marjorie writes, "All my love which had been pent up just burst forth although restricted at first for I was a little bit scared of you and of this love." Here, rather than a lack of feeling or affection as the source of her love-related anxieties, Marjorie displays a fear of "unchecked passion," much like the women of previous generations. She recognizes her withholding of feelings in her attempts to avoid confronting the love she held for Earl. Thus, within the same letter Marjorie appears to express the eagerness for friendship and wariness of love notable for women of the era. However, she does so by worrying over both a common lack of sentiment and an uncommon excess of sentiment for Earl.

⁴² S.W.F.C. correspondence from Feb. 24, 1916 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 1-13

Earl and Marjorie's strong romantic sentiments towards one another led to their engagement in 1916 and marriage in May 1917.⁴³ Their correspondence throughout the early facets of their relationship and courtship reflected the social anxieties surrounding women's education and the social effects of Progressivism on both college campuses and courtship practices in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Earl and Marjorie's correspondence ceases in late August 1921.⁴⁴ Shortly after the cessation of Earl and Marjorie's correspondence, Earl experiences a nervous breakdown. The emotional intensity that Earl displays in his letters to Marjorie in regards to both his personal relationships and work ethic appears to have taken its toll on Earl's mental health, as his breakdown was attributed to the great stress of having to settle his deceased brother-in-law's estate, while working as attorney in Minneapolis. Earl's severe distress culminates with his suicide in November 1921, leaving Marjorie and their two young sons behind.⁴⁵ Despite the tragic conclusion of Earl and Marjorie's relationship, their correspondence continues to serve as a rich testament of a love that developed and flourished amidst great political and social change in America at the turn of the century.

⁴³ S.W.F.C. HU Library Special Collections Archive Series V

⁴⁴ S.W.F.C. correspondence from Aug. 23-29, 1921 located in HU Library Special Collections Archive, Box/Folder 11-12

⁴⁵ S.W.F.C. HU Library Special Collections Archive Series V

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