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“I Am Other than My Appearance Indicates”

Sex-Gender Representation in Women’s Nineteenth-Century Civil War Reminiscences

*“And so that was the way by which you came to put yourself in
male attire?”*

*“Yes, sir! and the only thing that made me feel sorry, was to see
what a fool I had been, not to turn to a boy before, when it was so
easy! And from that day forth I was happy and prosperous!”*

—E.D.E.N. Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 1859

READING S. EMMA E. Edmonds’s contemporary Civil War memoir, *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army* (1865), against two later Civil War histories by well-known women’s war effort organizers—Mary Livermore’s *My Story of the War* (1889) and Annie Turner Wittenmyer’s *Under the Guns: A Woman’s Reminiscences of the Civil War* (1895)—provides a lens through which to view moments of gender flexibility in restrictive nineteenth-century U.S. sex-gender conventions.¹ The presence of cross-dressed women in these narratives can be seen as emerging from a discourse of sex-gender representation that resulted from opportunities for female travel, work, and self-invention provided by the Civil War.²

Cross-dressing, gender construction, and authenticity intersect in nineteenth-century U.S. Civil War narratives that record cases of women who disguised themselves as male soldiers.³ Women’s war narratives in particular register the provisional autonomy and transgressive nature of cross-gender impersonation. Written during and after the war by Northern and Southern women, these texts have prompted investigations of authenticity and historical veracity regarding gender imposture. For instance, Betty Fladeland uses a Union soldier’s diary to suggest that some female wartime cross-dressing may have been less successful

than was previously believed, while C. Kay Larson links women's Civil War military service with late-twentieth-century issues of women in the military and so strives to authenticate her nineteenth-century examples. Richard Hall's *Patriots in Disguise*, a general overview, proclaims its concern with "issues of credibility and authenticity" (205).⁴

Elizabeth Young's influential approach to women's Civil War cross-dressing texts purposely diverges from such readings:

My concern is less with the documentary recovery of the lives of women soldiers than with the symbolic significance of stories about them. . . . Civil War cross-dressing narratives suggest the particular symbolic opportunities the war afforded for the representation of female boundary-crossing. . . . [T]he woman soldier functioned as a figure of rhetorical excess, violating the literary boundaries of identifiable fact along with the social limits of appropriate femininity. (*Disarming the Nation* 150)

Young's work has reshaped critical response to such texts in its articulations of their significance beyond questions of authenticity. My approach is largely in agreement with Young's. As these war narratives discuss women who impersonated men, they may, at times, cross generic lines into the fictive, just as their subjects cross gender lines. Following Young, my reading of three of these texts recasts usual oppositional categories of historical veracity and fictionalization, considering instead the resonance of these historical/fictive cross-gender scripts in nineteenth-century U.S. Civil War and Reconstruction cultures. However, I depart from Young in my deliberate decision to allow the possible experiential accuracies of these texts to remain uncontested. That is, my critical approach neither relies on nor resists notions of authenticity. Rather, I follow current autobiographical studies by remaining mindful of gendered difficulties women have repeatedly encountered at the vexed intersection of self-construction and life writing. As Felicity Nussbaum has written regarding women's issues of representation and voice, "cultural constructions of self and gender intermingle with the individual subject's interest and engagement in taking up the particular discourses available at given historical moments" (149).

Where Young's critical focus is on "the symbolic significance of stories about" cross-dressing Civil War women and not on "documentary recovery of the lives of women soldiers" (*Disarming the Nation* 150), Jane Schultz's approach embraces documentary recovery—not recovery per se of women's lives but of the cultural moment they occupied,

the gendered context of the U.S. Civil War.⁵ Her archival work provides a fascinating, wide-ranging statistical frame for such texts. In particular, Schultz's extensive recovery of previously uncollected data expands the gendered contexts for works written by and about women during a time when "over twenty thousand women sought work in the military hospitals of the Confederacy and the Union," pursuing paid employment, adventure, or patriotic action through war nursing ("The Inhospitable Hospital" 363). I supplement and depart from Schultz's readings by drawing on results of her invaluable archival work as I conduct a cultural analysis of selected women's Civil War narratives and of ways in which the energetic war efforts of such women contributed to representation of gender issues of access and authority.

Civil War narratives written by S. Emma E. Edmonds, Mary Livermore, and Annie Turner Wittenmyer extend identity explorations in texts considered in previous chapters. For instance, in Sarah Kemble Knight's *Journal*, Knight's independent travels intersect with her (contradictory) insistence on her identity as a conventional woman. By sharply critiquing women whom she identified as acting unconventionally, Knight fostered a view of herself as a woman who, unlike women she observed on her travels, readily conformed to gendered expectations. Though Knight herself was a woman speaking and acting with a significant measure of autonomy, she allowed herself exploration of that identity only by presenting herself as a conservative woman traveling among women who behaved badly.

In her early periodical writing, Sara Willis, writing as Fanny Fern, used the concealment of her pseudonym to construct multiple female representations. As Fern explored various identities in her writing, her sex-gender identity became the subject of readers' heightened conjecture. Willis used the public anonymous and androgynous persona of Fanny Fern to revise audience expectations as well as her own understanding of conventional female speech and acts.

The third chapter's discussion of Louisa May Alcott's *Hospital Sketches* details Alcott's considerations of alternative sex-gender identities. Unlike Knight, Alcott was not compelled in her text to insist on female conformity. And unlike Fern, Alcott did not write anonymously, though she did use a transparent fictive persona in *Tribulation Periwinkle*. Prompted by the dramatic experiences of her six weeks of nursing in a war hospital, Alcott revised the asexuality associated with spinsterhood, using it to explore and develop female identity roles of nurse and author. Across the Federalist period to the Civil War and, turning to texts by Mary Livermore and Annie Turner Wittenmyer, to the post-Civil War

period, women represented women operating with varying degrees of cultural access and authority.

In *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army*, Edmonds, disguised to readers and fellow soldiers as "Frank Thompson," occupied an alternative sex-gender identity that gradually developed across texts by Knight, Fern, and Alcott. In *My Story of the War* and *Under the Guns*, Livermore and Wittenmyer, self-defined conventional women, retrospectively recorded their wartime observations of women who appeared to violate gender boundaries. In all three texts, these women, like Knight, Fern, and Alcott, wrote autobiographically, often disruptively, and attempted to negotiate complexities of nineteenth-century U.S. female positioning.

This chapter discusses sex-gender representation in women's nineteenth-century Civil War reminiscences in four parts: first, Edmonds's biographical contexts, a close reading of her wartime impersonations in *Nurse and Spy*, and her postbellum history; second, an examination of Mary Livermore's observations of cross-dressed women in *My Story of the War*; third, an analysis of an extended cross-dressing description in Annie Turner Wittenmyer's *Under the Guns*; and finally, a concluding section regarding representations of women's wartime cross-gender impersonation.

At the same moment the U.S. Civil War was breaking out, nineteenth-century sexology was attempting to codify identity within the sex-gender system. This emerging sexual science attempted to order, contain, and stabilize ambiguous and contradictory sex-gender constructions "into medicalized categories of deviant identity—hysterics, onanists, homosexuals" (Fradenburg and Freccero vii). Joseph Bristow has argued that "sexuality became such a significant topic of scientific investigation" in the latter half of the nineteenth century due to "multiple sources that constellated together . . . evolutionary and eugenic thought, the intensification of women's campaigns for the suffrage, and the development of sexually dissident subcultures" (57).⁶ These disparate sources and others disrupted and threatened social and cultural arrangements. The desire to codify sexuality emerged in response to such fears.

In the latter half of the U.S. nineteenth century, as cultural assumptions regarding sex and sex-gender identity were challenged, strategies to impose boundaries on such assumptions emerged. For instance, the Krafft-Ebing biological model of sexual orientation, popularized in the late nineteenth century, pathologized homosexuality with the "invert," a woman whose body is occupied by a man's soul. This codification labeled a wide and hitherto unnamed middle ground between perceived

binaries of female and male. As Christina Matta notes, “[f]rom their first appearance in U.S. medical literature, homosexuals had been included in the broader category of sexual inverts—a category that encompassed transvestites; women who smoked, whistled, or preferred sports and masculine dress”; men vain about their physical appearance; and men “who had effeminate voices” (78–79).⁷ Subsequently, inversion was listed in the American Surgeon General’s index as one of many female pathologies.⁸ Such scientifically supported cross-gender identification gestured toward real (a man’s soul) though limited (still a woman’s body) access to masculine agency for women. Sexological studies eventually “played a major role in enabling sex to be debated more widely and seriously at all levels of society” (Bristow 15). That is, sexological studies bestowed a legitimacy upon cultural discussions of sex and sexuality.

Though this chapter focuses on women’s nineteenth-century Civil War reminiscences, this is not to suggest that it is only during the war that gender, identity, and sex began to intersect. Androgyny, hermaphroditism, homosexuality, inversion, and lesbianism among other sex-gender constructions emerged at various times for various reasons. I agree with Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub’s assertions that

distinctions between male and female bodies are mapped by cultural politics onto an only apparently clear biological foundation. As a consequence, sex-gender systems are always unstable sociocultural constructions. Their very instability explains the cultural importance of these systems; their purpose is to delimit and contain the threatening absence of boundaries between human bodies and among bodily acts that would otherwise explode the organizational and institutional structures of social ideologies. (2)

Having said that, however, I also note that the U.S. Civil War provided a particularly fertile moment for considerations of sexuality. As Young writes:

Sexuality is consistently unstable in the disruptive Civil War moment recreated in these texts. Both lesbian possibilities and fantasies of male homosexuality surface, often in dynamic interplay with weakened heterosexual formations. Both orthodox and heterodox sexuality frequently operate as allegorical languages for describing national and regional relationships. (*Disarming the Nation* 19)

Women's Civil War narratives that recorded moments of cross-gender impersonation were thus permitted to begin to discuss the previously undiscussable. These narratives coincided with emerging theories of sexual orientation and helped reconfigure gender possibilities within dominant cultural imagination. Their wartime examples of women who tested gendered confines when they "laid aside, for a time, [their] own costume, and assumed that of the opposite sex" (Edmonds 6) and their ambiguous and mediated treatments of such women contributed to a larger national dialogue on gender and identity.

I.

In *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army* (1865), an immediate bestseller, S. Emma E. Edmonds's war impersonations cross boundaries of gender, race, class, and region as she passes as a male contraband, female contraband, Irish peddler, Confederate soldier, Canadian boy, and male Union orderly.⁹ Edmonds also disguises herself to readers, writing as a female nurse and spy who sometimes disguised herself as a man, when in reality she had enlisted as a male nurse ("Frank Thompson"), already in male disguise. Twenty years after publication of *Nurse and Spy*, Edmonds revealed her past identity as Frank Thompson and exposed the narrative deception (that her wartime employment was based on the perception that she was a man, Frank Thompson, and not, as her text maintains, a woman), a deception that was central to her book.

Sarah Emma Evelyn Edmonds was born in 1841 in Canada. At age seventeen, she disguised herself as a boy and ran away from home to avoid marriage. She eventually lived in Michigan, where she enlisted as a private in the Union Army under the name Franklin Thompson. Successfully disguised as a man, she fought in the war for two years. When she contracted malaria in 1863, she deserted to avoid discovery as a woman when hospitalized. Resuming conventional female clothing and behaviors, Edmonds later married and had children. She died in Texas in 1898.¹⁰

The "Publisher's Notice" framing *Nurse and Spy* (which indicates no knowledge of Edmonds's initial cross-dressing as Frank Thompson) promotes Edmonds's courage and skill—"in the 'Secret Service' as a 'Spy,' which is one of the most hazardous positions in the army—she penetrated the enemy's lines . . . no less than eleven times; always with complete success and without detection" (5)—while recognizing cultural

anxiety regarding a woman disguised as a man: "Should any of her readers object to some of her disguises, it may be sufficient to remind them it was from the purest motives and most praiseworthy patriotism, that she laid aside, for a time, her own costume, and assumed that of the opposite sex" (6). The "Publisher's Notice" anticipates cultural resistance by linking cross-gender disguises to "patriotism" and "purest motives." In this preemptive defense of Edmonds's cross-dressing, "patriotism" is employed as a gender-neutral term, a motivating, commendable nationalistic response that, the statement implies, transcends gender. The use of "purest," however, is freighted with more implications: it gestures toward the pure/chaste woman of the cult of true womanhood as well as refutes readers' suspicions of impropriety—for instance, promiscuity or other sexual acts then read as violations—in a woman disguised as a man. Thus, patriotic men and women, a category that includes traditional women, all acting from "pure" motives and, all, assumably, within the white monoculture, may be permitted to cross-dress.

Additionally, to dress as a man "for a time" indicates temporary cross-dressing, implying that a woman's permanent passing as a man is what truly threatens the culture, which should recognize that

whether [a woman's] duty leads her to the couch of luxury, the abode of poverty, the crowded hospital, or the terrible battle field—it makes but little difference what costume she assumes in the charge of her duties. Perhaps she should have the privilege of choosing for herself whatever may be the surest protection from insult and inconvenience in her blessed, self-sacrificing work. (6)

The publisher's assertion that woman's "costume" "makes but little difference"—that her dress is indeed a costume, a disguise—attempts to define dress as only superficially related to gender. That is, a woman performing her duty is womanly no matter how she is "costumed." Male attire is chosen for protection as she pursues her duty; a true woman, the paragraph reassures readers, would not pass as a man for any other reason. This sex-gender assertion is ironized by the reality of Emma Edmonds, who began passing as a man as early as 1858, when she ran away from home.

The notice prepares readers for the moment in the text when Edmonds learns that "one of the Federal spies had been captured at Richmond and was to be executed" (105) and decides that, as she is "dissatisfied" with nursing (104), she will apply for this "situation of great danger and vast responsibility" (105). Passing to interviewers as Frank

Thompson, she continues to pass to her readers as an undisguised woman applying for work as a federal spy. Questioned about her patriotism and use of firearms, she then has "a phrenological examination, and finding that my organs of secretiveness, combativeness, etc., were largely developed" (106), she is granted the position.¹¹ She is instructed to disguise herself as a Black man in order to cross enemy lines:

I commenced at once to remodel, transform, and metamorphose for the occasion. . . . I purchased a suit of contraband clothing, real plantation style, and then I went to a barber and had my hair sheared close to my head. Next came the coloring process—head, face, neck, hands and arms were colored black as any African, and then, to complete my contraband costume, I required a wig of real negro wool. (107)

Edmonds's verb sequence accurately represents her view of stages of changes in gender, class, and race: clothing remodels her, a haircut transforms her, and darkened skin coloring metamorphosizes her. Standard rhetoric about regretfully sacrificing her hair—a conventional form of female desexualization—is absent from this businesslike account, unintentionally revealing changes in sex-gender appearance that Edmonds had already made to become Frank Thompson.

Though Edmonds had few resources that would have enabled her knowledge of the codification of the sex-gender system then in progress, her self-construction as a model soldier nonetheless resisted the pathology of inversion. That construction destabilized sexology's definition of so-called androgyny as an illness that diminished female identity: Frank Thompson was demonstrably healthy and energetic. Edmonds's self-construction also rejected sexology's belief that women were able to engage in physical activity and/or violence only by becoming male—that is, that there existed no wholly female physical activity or violence. As Schultz writes, "androgyny implies a merging of masculine and feminine qualities, a collapsing of sexual distinctions" ("Embattled Care" 104). Edmonds's construction of herself was neither androgynous nor male. Instead, her aptitude for soldiering was not masculine but appeared as natural to her as conventional aspects of the code of pure womanhood.

Yet Edmonds's cross-dressing was not as absolute as her descriptions at times may have implied or as she herself might have hoped. Schultz reads "the wish [of Edmonds and other Civil War female cross-dressers] to cross-dress as a man" as "closely related to the wish to escape womanhood, at least for a time. Even if Edmonds had no intention of denying

her femininity in masculine cross-dress, the fact that she assumed a male identity must be seen in larger cultural terms as a critique of the restrictions upon mid-century womanhood" ("Performing Genres" 89–90). Young goes further, taking the title under which "Edmonds's memoirs were first published"—*Unsexed*—and reading it as "a word that succinctly captures the extent to which she not only assumes masculinity but abandons femininity" (*Disarming the Nation* 151). While I agree with Schultz that Edmonds's cross-dressing "must be seen in larger cultural terms," I differ with Young's assertion that Edmonds "abandons femininity." Indeed, I remain unconvinced that such abandonment was possible for a woman in Edmonds's circumstances and cultural moment. The act of a woman's passing as a man among men layers rather than abandons femininity. The abandonment Young reads in the title she references is, I suggest, more a reflection of a mix of dominant-culture fears regarding cross-dressing, sensationalistic marketing strategies, and the desire for high book sales in the struggling Civil War publishing industry than it is a reflection of Edmonds's femininity.

Edmonds's awareness that cross-dressing violated prevailing assumptions led her to follow her description of her disguise with contextualization of it as a patriotic act:

Do my friends wish to know how I felt in such a position and in such a costume? I will tell them. I felt just as happy and as comfortable as it was possible for any one to be under similar circumstances. I am naturally fond of adventure, a little ambitious and a good deal romantic, and this together with my devotion to the Federal cause and determination to assist to the utmost of my ability in crushing the rebellion, made me forget the unpleasant items, and not only endure, but really enjoy, the privations connected with my perilous positions. (121)

The war opened a location for Edmonds to explore "natural" interests in adventure, ambition, and romance, qualities not typically encouraged in cultural constructions of women. Further, the federal government implicitly valued these qualities, resulting in the federally sanctioned occasion for a disguised white woman to pass as a Black man. Such an opportunity would have been unavailable in peacetime, except perhaps on the stage, where wartime danger would have been replaced by a different sort of daring and audience. Edmonds was indeed "happy" and "comfortable" as she "enjoy[ed]" her transformation: it legitimated qualities typically discouraged in women and supported her role and purpose in the great Federal cause, while eliding cultural disruption.

The women writers discussed in earlier chapters detailed similar pleasure and well-being regarding their occupying less normative female positions. In her *Journal* Knight's enjoyment of her travels, her observations, and the wit that her travels inspired in her is clear on every page. Fern's delight in the playful and varied literary impersonations enabled by her pseudonym and anonymity is equally apparent. Even in the more serious sections of Alcott's *Hospital Sketches*, Trib is consistently represented as vibrantly and deeply engaged in her experiences.

Edmonds's impersonations invert conventions of nineteenth-century passing narratives which characteristically use disguise to pass higher (whereas Edmonds was lower) in the class hierarchy and which typically portray deceiving the less observant upper class as easier than deceiving the watchful underclass. According to Edmonds's narrative, she—a white, literate female—passes undetected as a Black, ignorant boy when viewed by Rebel soldiers and by male and female slaves. The components of the putatively successful passing are uncomplicated: skin dye, “a wig of real negro wool,” and “a suit of contraband clothing, real plantation style.” Here, skin color and hair transform race; clothes transform class; and their combination transforms gender.

However, Edmonds's passing identity is contested in a scene in which her skin dye has begun to fade:

[O]ne young darkie looked up at me in a puzzled sort of manner, and turning round to one of his companions, said: “Jim, I'll be darned if that feller aint turnin' white; if he aint then I'm no nigger.” I felt greatly alarmed at the remark, but said, very carelessly, “Well, gem'in I'se allers 'spected to come white some time; my mudder's a white woman.” This had the desired effect, for they all laughed at my simplicity, and made no further remarks upon the subject. (116)

The narrative suggests boundaries of race, class, and gender (“I'll be darned if that feller aint turnin' white”) are permeable, easily crossed and recrossed. If challenged, the impersonator may employ accented speech and strategic humor to deflect questions. Yet the Black man who speaks in this scene knows better: he relies on authority of his own racial identity (“then I'm no nigger”) to suggest an impermeable boundary being unimaginably breached. The laughter, then, is perhaps directed not at Edmonds's feigned “simplicity” but rather at this non-Black stranger explaining her deteriorating appearance with the (laughable) notion of beginning Black and subsequently “coming white.” (That

Edmonds's impersonation would be detected by a Black audience without her realization seems more likely than her passing undetected.) This possible penetration of her disguise, however, may be less important than its ultimate success: she remains unexposed, gains information she needs, and returns safely to Union camp. Though Edmonds's secret may have been detected, her passing was not revealed. Because her identity as white, female, literate, and Northern remains concealed enough for her safety, Edmonds has, to a significant extent, successfully crossed race, gender, class, and geographic lines in this impersonation.

After she returns to camp, Edmonds abandons the disguise because "it was not safe for me to palm myself off again on the rebels as a colored boy. . . . I should be in danger of being recognized" (147). She subsequently appears "in military uniform" (177). This impersonation as a young white male Union orderly necessarily begins without explanation. Were Edmonds to explain to readers why she is, seemingly inexplicably, in disguise to her Union employers, she would have to reveal that she enlisted as a man, Frank Thompson, and that she has continued to pass as a man. This information would be far too disruptive of cultural assumptions as well as the narrative established in the text. Rather than provide such an explanation, Edmonds instead abruptly appears in the guise of a male orderly.

Community perception of her as a boy and the attendant dangers of her participation in battle free memories of an earlier self: "I remembered that when I was a child . . . [my mother] was afraid I would meet with some violent death, for I was always in some unheard of mischief, such as riding the wildest colt on the farm, firing off my father's shotgun, and climbing to the highest point of the buildings" (218). Childhood and now adulthood dangers are identified by a lack of social and spatial confinement. Edmonds's connecting these stories of selfhood points to gender issues of access and authority. Her mother's gendered experience suggests to her that such acts will result in violence, while Edmonds's own unexamined experience leads her to conclude that she lives a charmed life—after all, "bullets seemed quite harmless as far as I was personally concerned" (218). She attributes her survivals and successes to individual luck, eliding the suspension of gender roles (a girl allowed to roam freely, a woman disguised as a man) that resulted in her access to masculine agency.

This elision is underscored when Edmonds asks a dying soldier on the battlefield if she can help him. She looks at him and is "*satisfied* . . . that my suspicion was well-founded" (271; emphasis added). He in turn examines her with "an earnest gaze, and, as if *satisfied* with

the scrutiny" (272; emphasis added) confides to her: "I can trust you, and will tell you a secret. I am not what I seem, but am a female. I enlisted from the purest motives, and have remained undiscovered and unsuspected. . . . I wish you to bury me with your own hands, that none may know after my death that I am other than my appearance indicates" (272). Edmonds, a woman disguised as a man, hears the dying confession of a woman whom she initially believes to be a man but, with scrutiny, identifies as a woman.¹² The dying soldier initially believes Edmonds to be a man and may or may not then identify her as a woman. Despite these dual impersonations and their suggested detections, the text partially encourages an ungendered reading: Edmonds honors the confession and gives the woman "a soldier's burial" (272)—one soldier respecting the dying wishes of another.

This battlefield encounter of two women—one fatally wounded, one for whom bullets are harmless—secretly impersonating male soldiers suggests an alternative narrative of selfhood for Edmonds. The two women gaze at each other until both are "satisfied." The possibility of mutual though unstated recognition is implied, as well as another female representation and the opportunity for Edmonds as Franklin to record the voice of another disguised woman. The soldier's confession that she enlisted from "the purest motives" recalls the "Publisher's Notice" proclaiming Edmonds's disguises as also stemming from "the purest motives." In recognizing the soldier as a woman, hearing her confession, and protecting her sex-gender identity, Edmonds discovers and rejects (buries) a cross-gendered alternative self. Her burial of the woman inters her recognition of the dangers of cross-gender impersonations, just as she evaded the realizations that slaves may have detected her contraband impersonation and that suspended gender roles in childhood and adulthood have allowed her significant freedoms.

Young's analysis of this passage disallows its authenticity and instead reads it an invented scene that allows Edmonds to contemplate wartime cross-dressing:

Improbable as an actual event, this encounter between the two women offers a covert symbolic meditation on Edmonds's own experience "passing among the wounded." In this moment of mutual identification, the cross-dressed soldier not only recognizes Edmonds as a kindred cross-dresser but provides a mirror-image to describe Edmonds herself. Edmonds's account of the other woman reveals her own "looks"—idealized as "sweet face," "golden locks," purest motives—to an astute reader. (*Disarming the Nation* 153–54)

I agree with Young's reading up to a point, diverging, however, from her emphasis on improbability and actuality. This battlefield encounter between these women provides rich implications—actual and imaginary—of crossed-dressed women soldiers scrutinizing other soldiers for revealing sex-gender markers, as well as male soldiers viewing other male soldiers for similar markers. In the life Edmonds was then leading as a cross-dressed woman soldier, all other soldiers would have been potentially female, potentially—with careful scrutiny—like Edmonds herself. She was surrounded by and an active participant in wartime blurrings of probability and improbability.

A variety of readings, some contradictory, are prompted by this scene. The burial enables multiple forms of identification for Edmonds: she identifies the soldier as a woman, she identifies *with* the soldier, and, as Young asserts and Schultz implies, she identifies *as* the soldier. Yet the scene also allows for rejection of such literal and metaphorical identification as the cross-dressed soldier is buried and so cast off. In both readings burial of the cross-dressed soldier occurs—as rejection and as reluctant abandonment of a fulfilling self. If the wo/man in the uniform of the U.S. Army standing over the grave is, by some definitions of the time, an androgyne, then androgyny here is American, nationalistic, and patriotic. The icon of the U.S. soldier as the “true” American is joined by the androgyne and also by Alcott's nurturing female soldier. The latter two representations are each compelling in their own right as figures who depend on, yet challenge, gender roles.

The scene also invites speculation regarding lesbian impulses. Young interestingly reads the “intimations of same-sex intimacy” as signaling that “the sustained adoption of male dress . . . [also allows] pleasures of masculine agency and romance with women” (*Disarming the Nation* 155–56). While these women do indeed share intimacies, such intimacy is seemingly allowable only because one of the women is dying. To this mix of fascination, identification, scrutiny, and desire, Schultz adds a “spiritual affinity” that emerges from cross-dressing:

The soldier's twice repeated words of trust communicate the cross-dresser's code to Edmonds, who knows, before the wounded soldier tells her, that he is a woman. Likewise, the code obviates the need for Edmonds herself to be revealed. The resonating experience of the cross-dressers brings them into rare alignment: their spiritual affinity silently promises confidentiality and affirms labor in the third space, the invisible space between, where conventional gender identity does not figure. (“Performing Genres” 86)

The scene offers compelling possibilities of same-sex attraction (two women recognizing each other, immediately trusting each other, one begging the other to "bury me with your own hands") while resisting others (whatever this attraction is, it will certainly have a brief duration, with one woman dying and the other likely to be killed at any moment).

In all cases, for Edmonds, cross-gender impersonation results in autonomy and authority (even disguised as a male contraband in proslavery territory, she has authority to deceive). Yet to access masculine agency and elide nineteenth-century U.S. restrictive sex-gender conventions, she must put off fears of detection and death as she puts on male clothing. Despite her cross-gender impersonation—or perhaps because of it—her text must subordinate issues of gender under the guise of duty and pure motives. Here, "radical notions of gender do not secure radical gender politics" (Young, "Confederate Counterfeit" 210). Edmonds tests confines of gender in her cross-dressing and her narrative. She also consistently reinforces cultural constructions of gender (e.g., duty, pure motives, individual luck) that guard her self-definition as a heterosexual woman. She thus allows herself to maintain a somewhat coherent subject position in her text and, correspondingly, in her life. Such moments reflect Edmonds's awareness and manipulation of sex-gender ideology and rhetoric.

The women writers discussed in previous chapters exhibit similar awareness of social expectations regarding female behaviors. Across the various genres adopted by these women, all mix the genuinely uncommon with the overtly conventional in their female (self-) representations. Their generic choices of degrees of fiction and nonfiction, while interesting and significant, are nonetheless subordinated to their keen recognitions of what may be publicly expected from white middle-class women.

In a later disguise as a rebel boy, Edmonds is conscripted into the Southern Army and crosses multiple boundaries with bewildering rapidity: a white woman passing as a Northern spy passing as a Southern boy fighting as a Confederate soldier and then crossing Union lines and passing immediately as a Union soldier. Fighting her way to the Union side in battle, she turns and "discharg[es] the contents of my pistol" (316) in the face of a Southern officer. Afterward, informed "that I would not be permitted to go out again . . . in the capacity of spy" for fear she would meet with "those who had seen me desert their ranks, and I would consequently be hung up to the nearest tree," she "turned [her] attention to more quiet and less dangerous duties" (318). But when a shell explodes

outside Edmonds's tent, she is, as Schultz writes, "unmanned by . . . the sudden ferocity of what appears to be a benign shell [which] reprises the immediate danger that she herself has always been in through potential detection" ("Performing Genres" 89). As a result, Edmonds becomes ill and feverish. Regarding this breakdown, Schultz writes that "[h]ere detonation and detection are linked: something finally explodes inside of Edmonds (her successful performance of masculinity perhaps) and she is returned to a feminine reality consonant with loss" ("Performing Genres" 89):

All my soldierly qualities seemed to have fled, and I was again a poor, cowardly, nervous, whining woman; and as if to make up for lost time, and to give vent to my long pent up feelings, I could do nothing but weep hour after hour, until it would seem that my head was literally a fountain of tears and my heart one great burden of sorrow. (359)

Edmonds's alertness regarding sex-gender ideology again emerges in this rhetoric. She invokes another female representation and voice—in this case putatively her pre-cross-gender impersonation self ("I was again poor, cowardly, nervous, whining"). This characterization points to Edmonds's initial attraction to a role that would allow her to engage fictive stories of selfhood and to the overwhelming consequences that readers would expect for a woman who had had such alarming access to and (ab)use of male power. Yet, crucially for my reading, Edmonds's earlier weak self is only putatively suggested. Edmonds, after all, was never a subservient, weeping female. Indeed, largely by her own account, she was a fearless child who grew into a cross-dressing salesman and later a successful soldier. Her tears may emerge as grief for her soldier identity as she embraces femininity with its accompanying restrictions. She may also construct herself as a weak, sobbing woman to provide a favorable substitute in her readers' minds for the soldier who had coolly used power and, mere lines earlier, had detailed the bloody damage her shot did to the Confederate captain—"his handsome face was very much disfigured, a part of his nose and nearly half of his upper lip being shot away" (317). Instead, she represents herself as powerless, as any conventional woman would be, able only to "do nothing but weep hour after hour" (359).

Her liminal gender progression continues as she was released from "further duty as 'Nurse and Spy' in the Federal army" and "procured female attire, and laid aside forever (perhaps) my military uniform; but I had become so accustomed to it that I parted with it with much

reluctance" (360). (In reality, Edmonds, fearing detection, deserted the hospital and Army.)¹³ Clothing initially characterized as "costume," only superficially related to her identity as a woman, has now become customary—that is, a significant part of her self-representation that she lays aside yet lingers over. Finally unwilling to permanently pass as a man or a woman, Edmonds concludes her book by rhetorically returning to possibilities of her previous cross-gendered identities: "I am about to return to the army to offer my services in any capacity which will best promote the interests of the Federal cause—no matter how perilous the position may be" (384).

The text's illustrations participate in Edmonds's vacillation regarding typically oppositional categories of male and female.¹⁴ The page that lists the illustrations is subtitled "Disguises and other scenes," which emphasizes cross-gendered visual representation. A range of female representations and potential female voices appear in the illustrations. Of thirteen engravings, seven are of Edmonds disguised as a man (one as a male contraband, five as a Union orderly, and one as a rebel boy). In contrast, the frontispiece shows Edmonds in female riding attire, posed next to a horse; though she is dressed as a woman, her activity-specific clothing and her hand on the mane of the saddled horse (which paws the ground in anticipation), suggests readiness for action at a moment's notice. These illustrations visually extend female scripts of the written text.

In the end Edmonds's *Nurse and Spy* made public a wider variety of gender representations—woman as male contraband, orderly, soldier. Though modified by their temporary nature, their liminal wartime location, and their patriotic rhetoric, these representations, imbued with the authority and wider distribution of print, contributed to the larger national discourse on sex-gender identity. Edmonds reentered this cross-gender conversation in 1883, when she publicly revealed herself as "Frank Thompson," seeking Congressional action to receive a military pension and to have Frank Thompson's desertion charge dismissed (Richard Hall 83). Edmonds related that in the twenty years since the war, she had "resumed my own proper dress, and have never worn any disguises since, except when sitting for pictures" (83). Before the Civil War, Fanny Fern's identity was revealed through male acrimony and was intended to humiliate her publicly and damage her economically. Decades after the Civil War, Edmonds revealed her identity herself, intending to gain necessary and valuable publicity in order to benefit economically. Edmonds's revelation resulted in interviews, articles, and testimonials concerning her past and current identities, as well as the

authenticity of her claims. The paper trail responding to her disclosure extended the dialogue on sex-gender identity begun in *Nurse and Spy*. During the war her sustained passing as Frank Thompson so violated sex-gender assumptions that she fled the hospital, deserted the Army, and wrote it out of her narrative rather than have it exposed. Twenty years later in the post-Reconstruction United States, when she revealed her former male identity, Edmonds subsequently corresponded with and met her soldier comrades, was awarded a pension, and was “formally inducted into the Grand Army of the Republic” (Young, *Disarming the Nation* 150).

The resulting publicity identified such sustained cross-gender impersonation as notable and unusual but, by the 1880s, no longer an unthinkable disruption of nineteenth-century U.S. sex-gender conventions. In the postwar decades, those conventions had been reconfigured to recognize gender possibilities outside rigid binaries of female and male. The sexological project to classify sex-gender categories recorded and legitimized gender ambiguity within the public imagination. In the 1860s for Frank Thompson to be revealed to be S. Emma E. Edmonds would have been, in Edmonds’s later words, “far worse than death,” that is, only transgressively representable in the public imagination (Fladeland 455). In the 1880s, by the time Edmonds chose to declare that she had been Frank Thompson, institutions of representation had expanded to recognize and contain cross-gender imposture. Edmonds’s disclosure was at once culturally allowable (it made the newspapers as well as the Congressional Record) and, given the years she subsequently spent repeatedly authenticating her identities for official purposes, disruptively uncommon.

II.

The reception of Edmonds’s revelation concerning her life as Frank Thompson (1883) and subsequent successful actions to grant her a pension (1884), to have desertion charges dismissed (1886), and to receive back pay (1889) can be aligned with Civil War reminiscences by Mary Livermore and Annie Turner Wittenmyer that appeared during this same cultural moment. Unlike Edmonds’s text, an account of her cross-dressing experiences written during the war, Livermore’s *My Story of the War* (1889) and Wittenmyer’s *Under the Guns* (1895) are dually distanced from their subject: they write decades after the war’s end from the distance of self-defined conventional women who had observed women

who appeared to violate gender boundaries.¹⁵ Their conflicted retrospective responses to cross-dressed women they encountered reflect the voyeuristic curiosity and limited acceptance of the cultural reaction to Emma Edmonds/Frank Thompson.

Mary Ashton Rice (1820–1905) was born and educated in Boston. From 1839 to 1842 she lived with a slave-owning family in Virginia, working as a schoolteacher for their children (Venet 146). After her marriage to Daniel Livermore, a minister and temperance activist, Livermore began to write on religion, temperance, and antislavery issues for the newspapers. She was the author of "seven books, more than forty magazine articles, countless newspaper articles and over ninety speeches" (Gayle and Griffin 59). During the Civil War, Livermore worked as a volunteer with the U.S. Sanitary Commission, collecting food and clothing for soldiers and very successfully fund-raising for the war effort. After the war Livermore devoted her considerable energies to regular lecturing and to suffrage and temperance organizations.¹⁶

In an early section of *My Story of the War*, Livermore recalls visiting a Union regiment as part of her war work, and she begins to construct a narrative that subordinates cross-gender impersonation by privileging instead the motivation for such transgressions: "One of the captains came to me . . . and begged to know if I noticed anything peculiar in the appearance of one of the men, whom he indicated. It was evident at a glance that the 'man' was a young woman in male attire, and I said so" (113). As in the "Publisher's Notice" to Edmonds's text, this scene suggests that for women, male clothing is no more than a costume, and in this case an ineffective one. First, the soldier's "peculiar appearance" is easily ("evident at a glance") read correctly by another woman (seemingly by virtue of her own sex an authority on female sex-gender identity) who, without hesitation—as though this is a decision no one would need to weigh—promptly reports the impersonation to authorities. Next, the soldier, confronted by the captain, responds in conventionally female fashion: "speaking in tones of passionate entreaty, she begged him not to expose her, but to allow her to retain her disguise" (114) so that she may remain in the regiment with her enlisted husband. Her emotional "plead[ing]" (114) and the reason for her impersonation are conventionally female. She is not a woman who wishes to pass as a man in order to access male power or liberty; rather, she is an emotional, needy woman, so dependent on her husband that, she says, "it would kill her if he marched without her" (114). Unlike Sarah Kemble Knight, this woman desires to travel only to be with her husband; she desires neither to travel alone nor to be alone.

This female voice may or may not be fully or even partially authentic. The woman's speech is recollected by Livermore (not the unnamed woman herself). Additionally, the speech was recorded in 1889, decades after it was ostensibly spoken. However, what remains more reliable is what this scene reveals about Mary Livermore. As with many supporters of women's rights in the late nineteenth century, Livermore advocated relational feminism, a view of sex roles that promoted "women's distinctive contributions to society as mothers and wives and located these contributions within a system of education, legal rights, and increased social responsibilities that promoted a better society" (Gayle and Griffin 56). In private, Livermore disparaged "cloying portrayals" of women as "pious blarney" (56). Livermore's public speeches "supported feminine ideals of motherhood, the nurturing of children and family, and the duties of wives while simultaneously arguing for women's increased participation in public life" (57). Long after the war had ended, this unidentified female voice had retained enough significance for Livermore to include it in her text and carefully align it with normative female rhetoric. Further, Livermore—a well-known women's rights activist and orator—publicly established her own conventional womanhood as she proceeded to detail her response to this woman whom she had encountered a quarter of a century earlier.¹⁷

Livermore makes clear that such a woman must be responded to authoritatively (she must accept that her role is to remain behind), but kindly (she is presented as misguided in her implicit challenge of gender divisions, but misguided in a recognizably female way). She is "quietly conducted outside the camp" where Livermore "[takes] her in charge. . . . wish[ing] to take her to my home" (114). That is, she is escorted from the male wartime location and committed to the domestic care of another white woman. Livermore implicitly assumes that this woman shares her class status—that she will be easily contained by pressures that ostensibly control all white middle-class women (in this case, being "taken charge of" by another woman). However, Livermore has overread her own gendered authority and underread the woman, who "leap[ed] suddenly from the carriage . . . and in a moment was lost amid the crowds" (114). Though the extent of her desperation is unexpected, the woman's reasons for behaving as she does are still within conventionally female boundaries. The woman's despair and desire to remain with her husband dominate Livermore's narration in this section:

That night she leaped into the Chicago river, but was rescued by a policeman. . . . It was impossible to turn her from her purpose to follow

her husband. "I have only my husband in all the world," she said, "and when he enlisted he promised that I should go with him; and that was why I put on his clothes and enlisted in the same regiment. And go with him I will, in spite of everybody." The regiment was ordered to Cairo, and the poor woman disappeared . . . the same night. None of us doubted but she left to carry out her purpose. (114)

"Leaping" both from the carriage and later into the river, she is physically and emotionally resolute—she will be with her husband or die. The script in which Livermore incorporates the woman suggests agoraphobic dependence on her husband; the woman cross-dresses not to access masculine agency but to remain close to it. In Livermore's reconstruction the woman is desperately determined, a "poor woman" whose crossing of gender boundaries is a pathetic female attempt to cling to the only coherent subject position she can imagine. Further, Livermore's descriptions of the woman's desire to be with her husband serve to register her heterosexuality and fidelity, writing less conventional sexual implications of women's cross-gender imposture out of the text.

Livermore extends her discourse on motivations of women soldiers by next invoking "half-soldier heroines" (119), women who "followed the army as nurses, and divided their services between the battle-field and hospital" (116). By providing named examples of such women—making them known and potentially knowable—she attempts rhetorically to dismantle the cultural disruption of women successfully passing as men. However, Livermore's "half-soldier heroines" are not women who impersonated male soldiers, though they may have performed some of the same wartime duties. Her examples are women whose motivations (to be near one's husband, to nurse the wounded), as she constructs them, significantly partake of prevailing gender assumptions. While Livermore's representations of women do extend female behaviors, they also simultaneously limit gender possibilities by evading the motivation that lies at the heart of women's cross-gender impersonation—that is, that a woman may choose to pass as a man in order to access autonomy and authority that the dominant culture would otherwise deny her due to her sex-gender identity.

Alcott certainly would have recognized the limitations Livermore rhetorically imposes on female representations in *My Story of the War*. Indeed, they are the very limitations that Alcott had ultimately imposed on Tribulation Periwinkle decades earlier in *Hospital Sketches*. Additionally, Alcott herself acceded to these same restrictions in later editions

of *Hospital Sketches* that progressively modify and conventionalize her wartime nursing experience. However, Livermore's later text significantly exceeds Alcott's earlier one in imagining possibilities of women's cross-gender imposture. Livermore's conclusion to this section of her text reflects her uneasy knowledge that some women did use the occasion of war to successfully—and perhaps permanently—impersonate men for reasons she can barely imagine:

Some one has stated the number of women soldiers known to the service as little less than four hundred. I cannot vouch for the correctness of this estimate, but I am convinced that a larger number of women disguised themselves and enlisted in the service, for one cause or other, than was dreamed of. Entrenched in secrecy, and regarded as men, they were sometimes revealed as women, by accident or casualty. Some startling histories of these military women were current in the gossip of army life; and extravagant and unreal as were many of the narrations, one always felt that they had a foundation in fact. (119–20)

Livermore's equivocation ("for one cause or other") suggests a multiplicity of motivations on the part of these unknown women that would have ranged from wishing to nurse the wounded and following one's male partner to seeking opportunity for sexual acts then viewed as transgressive. Her estimation expands the number of cross-dressing women soldiers; indeed, she implies (more women enlisted "than was dreamed of") an army rich with disguised women. The titillating descriptions—"entrenched in secrecy," "startling," "extravagant," "unreal"—that mark her interest in these female narratives also reveal that for her these women are so exotic as to be nearly unrepresentable. In her desire to believe in some reality of these rumors ("one always felt that they had a foundation in fact"), she constructs an army of unknown, unknowable women (not seeking their husbands, not wishing to nurse) secretly disguised as male soldiers.

Having rhetorically discovered her desire, Livermore ends this section by rejecting her curiosity as well as these alternative female scripts:¹⁸ "Such service was not the noblest that women rendered the country during its four years' struggle for life, and no one can regret that these soldier women were exceptional and rare. It is better to heal a wound than to make one" (120). Her remarks subordinate the sacrifices of women's battlefield combat ("making wounds") in favor of maintaining female gender boundaries ("healing wounds"). Though the final sentence may seem to preach wartime pacifism, its piety is located not in peace but in gender: men's province is to make wounds, women's to

heal them. Not unlike S. Emma E. Edmonds, while Livermore considers cross-gender impersonations in her text, she also reinforces cultural constructions of gender that allow her to maintain a coherent female subject position, one distant from the "exceptional and rare" soldier women she has imagined for the past twenty years. *My Story of the War* inscribes in print the existence of such women, and while Livermore does not (cannot, will not) write the "startling histories of these military women" (120), she does record wartime private gender flexibility beneath dominant gender constructions.

The inclusion of these sections in Livermore's text resonates with the expanded national dialogue on nineteenth-century U.S. sex-gender conventions. In its ambiguous and contradictory negotiation of cross-gender imposture, *My Story of the War* reflects a great deal of late-nineteenth-century confusion. The text explains women's cross-dressing (to follow one's husband), promotes it ("a larger number of women . . . than was dreamed of"), and denies it ("exceptional and rare"). Indeed, *My Story of the War* reveals as much about Reconstruction sex-gender assumptions as it does about Civil War sex-gender assumptions. Decades after the surrender at Appomattox, Livermore's narrative engages in its own civil war over gendered issues of identity and authority.

III.

Reformer, editor, journalist, author, and temperance advocate Annie Turner (1827–1900) was born in Ohio. At age twenty-three she married William Wittenmyer and moved to Iowa, where her subsequent Civil War relief work and reform activities would be largely based. William Wittenmyer's death before the war left her a rich woman, able to advance reformist projects with her substantial wealth. Wittenmyer spent the rest of her life engaged in work to improve lives of children, men, and women disenfranchised by war and its devastating effects. Among her many accomplishments were the founding of homes for children orphaned by the war, the organizing of an aid system to collect hospital supplies, and later the development of special hospital kitchens and the training of women in their organization and use. Like Livermore, Wittenmyer later in the century became active and influential in temperance organizations and was elected the first president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU).¹⁹

Annie Turner Wittenmyer's *Under the Guns* (1895), a late-century history of the Civil War, includes the chapter "A Woman Wounded in Battle," concerning a Union soldier wounded behind enemy lines and

hospitalized there, “her sex . . . [un]discovered till she was under a surgeon’s care” (17). The woman is sent back to the Union army with a message:

“As the Confederates do not use women in war, this woman, wounded in battle, is returned to you.” There was great indignation in the regiment to which this woman belonged; and officers and men hastened to protest, that, although she had been with them for more than a year, not one in the regiment suspicioned that she was a woman. She stood the long, hard marches, did full duty on the picket-line and in camp, and had fought well in all the battles in which the regiment took part. (18)

The men’s “great indignation” emerges from their own sex-gender identity—that is, they are implicitly being identified as men so unmanly (so fearful of death or defeat) that they would (ab)use a woman in combat. Beneath their indignation is the disruptive awareness that a woman may pass successfully, perhaps permanently, as a man. Their hasty protests mark the evidence assumed to constitute sex-gender identity: a person who serves successfully as a soldier, whose clothes and hair conceal outward female gender signs, is assumed to be male. That only an examination of her unclothed body proves her to be female challenges social insistence on female gender confines.

Wittenmyer questions the woman concerning her motivations for enlisting, asking if she had a husband, lover, or friend in the regiment—conventional heterosexual motivations for her unconventional behavior. After being told, “No, I didn’t know any of them,” Wittenmyer, unwilling or unable to imagine other reasons for a woman to disguise herself as a male soldier, plaintively asks why the woman enlisted. She is told, “I thought I’d like camp-life, and I did” (18). Wittenmyer’s assumption that romance and dependence drove the woman to cross-gender impersonation is displaced by the woman’s straightforward confession that autonomous personal preference led her to disguise herself. Her choice to enlist proves so appropriate that, even wounded as she now is, the wartime fear she names is detection and subsequent banishment—“I was awfully afraid they would find me out, and then I’d have to go” (18). Expanded possibilities allowed by wartime cross-gender impersonation will now be denied her, and the confinement of her former circumscribed gender conduct will reemerge.

First, the woman is wounded; then, when her sex is discovered, she is commodified (“this woman . . . is returned to you”). Next she is institutionalized in the hospital, and finally, as Wittenmyer relates, she

is ordered by the male surgeon—here the cultural agent of gendered assumptions—to dress in women's clothes:

We women from the North, by gift and by purchase, provided the necessary outfit for a woman's wardrobe. To raise some funds for her we had her photograph taken, first in the uniform of a private soldier, and then dressed as a woman. She sold them to soldiers and visitors for twenty-five cents each, and raised considerable money. I have the two I purchased, which I have treasured in my war album all these years. She was stout and muscular, with heavy features, high cheek bones, and her black abundant hair was cut very close. She was perhaps twenty-six or twenty-eight years old, but when in her military rig looked like a beardless boy. (19)

Just as the Confederate army arranged the woman's return over the line that was crossed in combat, so the women in camp arrange her return over the gender boundary that was crossed when she successfully disguised herself as a male soldier. The threatening liminality resulting from discovery of the woman's cross-gender identification motivates the camp women to unite to assist her. Combining their resources to donate and buy female clothing for her, they re-cover her in outward female gender signs and also (by use of their own clothing) incorporate her into their social class.

This association is further reinforced by the women's devising the dual photographic cross-dressing exhibit. The success ("She . . . raised considerable money") of arranging for the woman to capitalize on her cross-gender impersonation by posing in a soldier's uniform and then in women's clothing suggests the camp women's accurate gendered assessment that such performance would be viewed as a sex-gender curiosity—titillating enough to turn a profit but not sufficiently shocking, now that the woman's sex has been revealed, to repel buyers. Wittenmyer's scrutiny decades later of these now-treasured visual artifacts which she helped to contrive shows her, like Edmonds and like Livermore, still negotiating alternative gender possibilities (she muses that the woman "was stout and muscular, with heavy features") and cultural disruptions resulting from women's wartime cross-gender impersonation.

Ultimately, the woman is compelled to divulge her name to Wittenmyer ("I was commissioned by the officers to find out all I could about her, and where she lived, as she had been more friendly to me than to the others" [19]), in order to obtain a pass and transportation. (The woman's location in Nashville, within military lines, is metaphorically

appropriate: in the liminal region of the war, she needs an identifying pass to cross its boundaries.) Wittenmyer withholds particulars of the conversation (“The interview was a long one. I can give only the main points” [19]), recording her own persistence and the woman’s final reluctant question: “If I tell you my name, and the place I wish to go to, will you keep it a secret?” Accustomed to closely guarding her identity, the woman is loath to disclose information that, were it to become known, would make her return to regular dressing in women’s clothing scandalously public. Were Wittenmyer to reveal this information, the woman (who cannot resume her soldier identity) would be unable to reappear quietly in her former identity; trapped in a liminal cross-dressing location, she would no longer be a man (her soldier identity exposed), but would also no longer be a culturally acceptable woman.

It is an act of faith—risking her remaining possibilities for a coherent female subject position—when, after Wittenmyer agrees to honor her confidence, the woman tells her, “I will trust you’ . . . and she whispered her name and residence. Two days after that she was on her way to her home in the Northwest. I never knew what became of her” (20). As with Edmonds and the disguised, dying soldier (and in strikingly similar language: “I can trust you, and will tell you a secret” [271]), trust between women results in information revealed, secrecy maintained, and practical dilemmas (burial, returning home) arising from cross-dressing resolved. The woman’s disappearance from Wittenmyer’s sight and experience corresponds with her unconventional behavior. Given significant cultural penalties for disruptive female behavior, such women do not publish narratives about these experiences. Three decades later, however, this woman who chose to pass as a man because it suited her is seen and heard in Wittenmyer’s text. The lingering curiosity of Wittenmyer’s last sentence (“I never knew what became of her”) leaves open the prospect that the woman, like Edmonds, may have resumed conventional female existence or—tantalizingly—that she may have returned to cross-gender impersonation, ending this section with the possibility that women passing as men could be living undetected among late-nineteenth-century U.S. readers.

Wittenmyer’s recognition of the arbitrary nature of gender construction links the cultural moment of her post-Reconstruction text with that of the Civil War. The sex-gender identity of the woman Wittenmyer describes was discovered, at least temporarily, because of her involvement in the war. Without the battlefield and its attendant possibilities for discovery due to wounds, death, or scrutiny, such women will perhaps continue to pass as men. In *Under the Guns*, the postwar period permits

the possibility of (more) successful female cross-dressing. Wittenmyer's representation of this woman makes available an alternative sex-gender identity for readers. Such a model would not otherwise be readily available from the cross-dressing women themselves who concealed their autobiographic experiences as well as their class status and sex. As with the multiplicity of female representations and voices recorded by Knight and Fern, portions of these women's lives survive only because more conventional women felt compelled to record them.

IV.

The high sales of Edmonds's *Nurse and Spy*, Livermore's *My Story of the War*, and Wittenmyer's *Under the Guns*, along with publicity that resulted from Edmonds's revealing herself to be Frank Thompson, can be read as examples of "capitalism allow[ing] marginalized or stigmatized forms of sexual behavior and identity to filter into consumer culture packaged in disguised forms which take away the edge of political threat posed by those sexualities" (Epstein and Straub 10). Through the various rhetorical alignments, impersonations, and (self-) representations in these three war narratives, female cross-dressing and constructions of alternative sex-gender identity are allowed to enter (and to produce profit in) more normative public realms. Such "recuperative, appropriative modes of capitalism" (10) can also be seen at work in postwar national stage performances by (in)famous female U.S. Civil War spies.

After the war, Pauline Cushman and Belle Boyd, who had both worked as spies during the war, separately recast their life-threatening exploits as popular dramas. Dressed as a soldier, Cushman "regaled audiences in large cities throughout the country with tales of her days as a Union spy" (Dannett 242). Likewise, beginning in 1886 and continuing until her death in 1900, former Confederate spy Boyd performed in popularly acclaimed recitals "usually billed as a thrilling war narrative entitled 'North and South; or The Perils of a Spy'" (Sigaud 196). Onstage, Cushman and Boyd (re)presented themselves as dramatic players in public entertainment for which viewers were required to purchase tickets. Their performances obscured what had been the reality of successful female wartime cross-dressing. In exchange for the ticket price, audiences were captivated and titillated rather than directly confronted with alternative sex-gender possibilities. Presentations of Boyd and Cushman as flag-waving U.S. women diverted audiences from the disruptive realization that any "man"—sitting in the theater, passing by on the street,

living in one's home—could, in fact, be a woman in disguise. Such stage acts were simulacra where boundaries of North and South were subsumed under the commonality of war and where battle was sanitized as theater. The same institutions of representation that modified slavery into sharecropping and then praised it as racial equality repackaged cross-gender identification as womanly and patriotic.

In all cases nineteenth-century gender flexibility was significantly underwritten. Its representations were compromised and marketed as works of loyalty and piety. These modifications did, however, allow woman's wartime gender reconfigurations to appear more visibly in nineteenth-century U.S. culture. Amended and revised as such texts were, they nonetheless marked, however obliquely, alternative sex-gender configurations. As a result, possibilities were suggested for women and men restricted by current sex-gender scripts.

The mid-nineteenth-century national space divided by the Civil War provided a location for reconfiguration of the sex-gender system. In their liminality, the cross-dressed women who appeared in Civil War narratives replicated to some degree the national experience as they endeavored to position themselves within dominant social and cultural arrangements. Such women investigated gender identities separate from restrictive notions of proper female behavior and from conventional sex-gender ideas of the world outside the possibilities of the war. Their reconfigurations, incorporated accurately and inaccurately in war narratives written by themselves or by others, in engravings, photographs, newspaper articles, testimonials, military gossip, and postwar legend, resonated over the decades with other war women like Mary Livermore and Annie Wittenmyer and with Civil War and Reconstruction culture more broadly. The mixed cultural responses that allowed representations of women's wartime cross-gender impersonation to appear without full censure highlight a false rigidity of conventional sex-gender roles for women and men both for that culture and for our own present-day one. During a moment when sexological studies strove to classify sex-gender identities more inflexibly and minutely, audiences voyeuristically considered possibilities of women who had crossed gender boundaries when they passed as men. Civil War narratives of Emma Edmonds, Mary Livermore, and Annie Wittenmyer participated in central cultural discussions of women's writing on normative ordering systems, signaling a wartime investigation of sex-gender restrictions that emerged as prevailing assumptions regarding statehood, gender, and race appeared open to revision.

In the next chapter, the Conclusion, I turn from the white middle-class women's autobiographic works that up until this point have been under consideration to African American Harriet Jacobs's compelling record of life in and after slavery in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. In her text Jacobs, like the white women discussed in earlier chapters, positions herself as a conventional woman despite and within her circumstances—circumstances immeasurably more complicated and dangerous than those confronted by Knight, Fern, Alcott, and Edmonds. A reading of Jacobs's narrative in the context of this study underscores the amplified struggle for women like Jacobs to write the autobiographic—women whose race, class, or sexuality marked them as deviant from white middle-class standards. This final chapter's movement from white women's autobiographic writing to a foundational Black woman's autobiographic text tests the ways in which conclusions in previous chapters operate across ethnic/racial lines, and it further expands this book's discussion and analysis of women, writing, and representation.