



2013

# 'How Very Wrong They Are, How Little They Know:' Diary-keeping, Private Anguish, Public Bodies, and Modern Female Subjectivity

Margaret A. Lowe

*Bridgewater State University*, [mlowe@bridgew.edu](mailto:mlowe@bridgew.edu)

---

## Virtual Commons Citation

Lowe, Margaret A. (2013). 'How Very Wrong They Are, How Little They Know:' Diary-keeping, Private Anguish, Public Bodies, and Modern Female Subjectivity. In *History Faculty Publications*. Paper 39.

Available at: [http://vc.bridgew.edu/history\\_fac/39](http://vc.bridgew.edu/history_fac/39)

# “How Very Wrong They Are, How Little They Know”: Diary-keeping, Private Anguish, Public Bodies, and Modern Female Subjectivity<sup>1</sup>

Margaret Lowe

AS SHE DID MOST JANUARYS, in 1892, Marian Peabody (née Lawrence), a seventeen-year-old, upper-class Bostonian, turned to her diary to set New Year’s resolutions, one of which was to improve her diary-keeping: “I begin this diary with the usual resolutions to be neat, truthful and explicit.” Having begun her diary at age twelve, Peabody kept true to her word—for a time. She crafted a mostly “neat,” strikingly “truthful,” and quite “explicit” diary for another twelve years. Then, despite her best intentions, Peabody’s diary went silent. Upon her marriage to Harold Peabody in May 1906, Peabody’s life, and her diary along with it, fell into deep disarray; rather than being neatly ordered, life turned messy and unpredictable. As she later reflected, life had taken such a serious turn that, where once a constant companion, her diary now “seemed ... like my ‘dolls’ & my pinafores—a thing of the past.”<sup>2</sup> Peabody’s life, or more precisely, her sense of herself within that life, had splintered. Just two months after her marriage, baffled and disoriented, Peabody di-

Margaret Lowe, “‘How Very Wrong They Are, How Little They Know’: Diary-keeping, Private Anguish, Public Bodies, and Modern Female Subjectivity,” *Journal of Historical Biography* 13 (Spring 2013): 58-92, [www.ufv.ca/jhb](http://www.ufv.ca/jhb). © Journal of Historical Biography 2013. This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/)

vulged, “I wish my head and insides would begin to get straight. I don’t recognize myself at all.”<sup>3</sup> When she resumed diary-keeping almost three years later, she had begun to restore order to her life, and to render once again her truth via explicit life-writing.<sup>4</sup>



*Marian Lawrence Peabody, c. 1905*  
*Image appears in To Be Young was Very Heaven*  
*(Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1967)*

The etiology and meaning of this rupture—a fracturing of Peabody’s very identity as well as her diary, and the subsequent reconstruction of both—can be understood from a variety of significant angles. For this essay, I use her diary as a lens through which to understand how an upper-class white woman coped with occasionally overwhelming health and sexual difficulties by carefully deciding when, where, and with whom to disclose or not disclose her bodily vulnerabilities. Though she tended to couch her decisions in the language of “having to”—whether it be following a doctor’s orders, protecting her reputation and that of her husband, or regaining her health—Peabody repeatedly took direct, considered, and at times confrontational action to preserve or restore her sense of self and what she perceived to be her rightful place in the world. Gender his-

torians have long explored the critical links between medical and social models of the “normal” or ideal female body and women’s political and cultural power, and this paper employs a similar approach. At the same time, if we consider Peabody’s dilemmas and decisions within the wide-ranging conversation about disability studies, we discover that, rather than the biological or medical, it was her social disability that caused her greatest suffering. Further, as Nancy Hirschmann’s highly instructive introduction to this special issue points out, Peabody, unlike many ill or disabled women, was consistently able to choose whether or not to reveal her distress. Thus, her detailed private writings allow us to investigate the ways in which at least one woman, highly aware of the social costs of appearing disabled, took constant, concerted, and often highly effective action to prevent such a fate.

Her diary, at the centre of her lived life, is also at the centre of this story. In its pages, she sorted through her bodily concerns, and crafted her private and public identities, with only the covers of the diary separating them. While serving as her chief outlet and confidante, the diary allowed Peabody a space marked “private” (both literally and in her consciousness) to house information and emotions she feared would undermine her public standing. For Peabody, this meant detailing and often raging at her bodily condition and the state of her marriage. Traversing an intricate private/public split, Peabody made a range of decisions about what to hide and what to make visible in order to remedy her situation, and ultimately save her marriage. As she slowly reconstituted herself, and concomitantly, the diary, Peabody enacted a sophisticated set of explicit public actions to win her private battles.

### **The Diary**

For all their richness, working with diaries is always tricky, and this one raises its own thorny issues. Though not writing a formal biography, I have spent countless hours puzzling through the confusing contents of Peabody’s diary. First, it seemed impossible to decode her dating system, and then, especially, to understand when, how,

and with what intent she crafted her entries after her long absence. Once she started the diary for a second time on 8 July 1908, Peabody did not just begin from that date forward, but instead returned to 15 October 1905, where she left off before the first break. She explicitly intended to recreate the missing years, even if, as she stated, they would have to be abridged. As Peabody reports at one point, she worked from letters and a “line journal,” in which she must have kept meticulous records, as the recreated years, similar to the entries for the years prior to October of 1905, contain an impressive amount of precise information, whether detailed guest lists, daily itineraries, or catalogues of Harold’s moods.<sup>5</sup> But not quite able to stick stringently to the past, Peabody also interwove several longer retrospective observations into her text. Prompted by periods of self-scrutiny and moral resolve (for example, on New Year’s Day), or memories triggered by her reconstruction of pivotal events (such as her wedding night), Peabody shifted to the past tense and appended lengthy passages that reconsidered and reinterpreted those events based upon the clarity or wisdom she had gained in the intervening years. Thus, she simultaneously worked from the past forward, vividly depicting her world for the missing years in the present tense as though she had no knowledge of what came next. But, at the same time, she occasionally worked from the present backward, inserting introspective entries written with hindsight. To traverse that ground with her, we have to keep close track of both the fractured state of the diary, and of the vulnerability and complex motives of the writer who created it.

Peabody seemed to have an audience of readers in mind as she wrote. Clearly, she expected no one to read the diary without her permission when she was alive, and never mentioned any sort of violation of that edict. And yet, from the ways that she constructed and reconstructed her diary, the fact that she published a memoir based on diary excerpts, and the fact that she donated the diary to a public archive, it is reasonable to surmise that some of what and how she wrote was dictated by an imagined, future audience. These are not new dilemmas. Most historians working with diaries understand that diarists juggle a multitude of hovering possible readers (family, crit-

ics, academics, even one's inner critic, or a personal deity) that shape and edit their writing. In the end, we cannot know why she included what she did, and even more tantalizingly what she left out. Nevertheless, what makes this diary historically significant is that it offers a rare window into the intimate workings of marriage, illness, and modern female subjectivity. Despite her imagined readers and her need to win public approbation, Peabody divulged personal information about her reproductive difficulties and her sexual relationship with her husband, often written in moments of sheer desperation. In such moments, she reveals much about how her society inscribed certain bodies as ill or healthy and in turn, how that conferred or denied social power.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, while it is a rich historical source, we must use care when moving from the particulars of this diary to more general conclusions. Further, since Peabody exerted tremendous effort to control this information during her lifetime, it seems only fair for historians to reveal it with some caution, especially since she has living grandchildren who have expressed their concerns while still encouraging me to move forward with the project. In this case, since Peabody voluntarily donated the diary, the questions are primarily scholarly, but still, my choice to explicate her diary, in the end, makes visible what in her life she did her best to hide.<sup>7</sup>

### **Boston Brahmin, Barren Woman**

Peabody offers an especially rich life story in which to explore these subjects, as she was both the consummate, highly visible insider—a strikingly representative and very public Boston Brahmin—and after her marriage, a slightly alienated and increasingly private outsider. Both of her parents, Julia Cunningham (1853-1927) and William Lawrence (1850-1941), descended from a long line of established New England families. William Lawrence provided his children with both financial, and by dint of his position as Episcopal Bishop of Massachusetts, social capital. Once Marian Lawrence was married to Harold Peabody, his name only further enhanced her well-established position within Boston society.<sup>8</sup> To assume and maintain her place in

society, beginning in her girlhood, she enacted an elaborate set of class and gender-specific expectations. Taking part in all the typical upper-class social conventions, Lawrence came out as a debutante at eighteen, engaged in philanthropic activity, and developed her talents as an amateur painter.<sup>9</sup> Yet, her path contained potential pitfalls. Lawrence anxiously monitored her social standing, paying close attention to the minutia of popularity and class stratification within the upper reaches. She noted when she was and was not “the belle” within her own set, and where she stood in relation to the comings and goings of the “swells” and the “sporting set,” the entrepreneurial families who made their new money via the second industrial revolution. After the 1898 “unwintry winter,” which prevented much ice-skating, Peabody noted:

I only skated 9 times all winter. One of those times was at the chutes in town, a very swell skating rink that everybody belonged to. ... All the sporty set were there & most of them skated worse than I did & it gave you a most remarkable sensation to be in any way superior to them.<sup>10</sup>

Other days, she was less sure-footed. Lawrence continued to nervously appraise and scrutinize her social success well into the first decade of her marriage.

Having too much fun courting, Lawrence did not marry until just before her thirty-first birthday. Beginning in her early teen years, Lawrence thoroughly enjoyed and prized the company of men, and throughout her twenties never lacked for male company. Her entries suggest her courting years, though exciting, were tumultuous. While never admitting as much in public, her private writing suggests that, by 1904, she had lost the affection of her first love, Dyer Hubbard, due to what she called her “tempestuous” behaviour, and then, in 1904 and 1905, endured months of conflict over whether to marry Bob Walcott or Harold Peabody, finally choosing Harold. Pre-figuring a much more dramatic public/private split, she used her diary to express a wide-range of intense, and what she considered unacceptable, thoughts and emotions. At times, her courtship reads like

a modern romance novel. Bob continually disappointed her: according to all social markers, he was “perfect in every way,” but, in her mind, a boring, stultifying choice. Harold’s unwavering passion “thrilled her,” but he was five years younger, “foolish,” and not her intellectual equal. Born in Boston, he attended Groton School but had only graduated from Harvard College in 1904, the same year he began courting Marian. Bob proposed first. Lawrence, regretting, as she recorded, her borderline scandalous behaviour and the “havoc” her ambivalence created, knew she must choose or let them both go. In the spring of 1905, with some guilt, but mostly barely contained disdain, she rejected Bob Walcott. Moving to centre stage, Harold beckoned with his overwhelming ardour. Having secured a position with Lee, Higginson & Company, one of the most prestigious Boston investment firms, he felt emboldened.<sup>11</sup> Gossip swirled about them: “Twice our engagement or ‘the rumors’ of it, has been in *Town Topics*— Well!” she complained.<sup>12</sup> Feeling her public image slipping, on Christmas Eve 1905, Lawrence determined to end her courtship with Harold, telling him that, “he must give up all idea of me.” However, on Christmas morning, after “she had worried herself into a perfect state ... imagin[ing] him jumping off the Harvard Bridge,”<sup>13</sup> she changed her mind, rushed to church to meet him, “leaned toward him,” put her newly ringed left hand into his, and “said in a very distinct whisper ‘Here is another Christmas present for you.’”<sup>14</sup> Despite her doubts, despite their age difference, despite Harold’s impetuous nature, Marian and Harold were married in Episcopal Trinity Church on 8 May 1906.

After filling over twenty five-by-seven-inch hardback books with a mostly steady chronological account of her life that included both short, line-a-day entries, as well as more journalistic epistles, Peabody’s diary skips from June to October of 1905, and then abruptly ends.<sup>15</sup> Tellingly, this is also where she ended her published memoir.<sup>16</sup> Peabody had missed the odd month here and there, but this time, her absence from the page signalled a sharp break with her past—both in terms of her diary-keeping and her identity. When she returned to the diary, she explained, “My diary got stuck here but I



had to take it up again (August 8<sup>th</sup> 1907) because here I am at Bar Harbor again & it really is the most beautiful place in the world.”<sup>17</sup> For the next four pages Peabody extolled the magnificence of her beloved Bar Harbor, finishing wistfully, it “is so perfectly beautiful that it makes me truly unhappy. It is so perfect and so fleeting ... & I can’t paint it and nobody can.”<sup>18</sup> After a gap of twenty-two months, Peabody’s intensely physical, sensual response to Bar Harbor’s stunning vistas inspired her to return to her diary.<sup>19</sup> Just as Bar Harbor’s beauty was fleeting, so was Peabody’s return to diary-keeping. It was a full eleven months before she opened her diary once more and recounted, not the events of the moment, but instead the emotional turmoil that had engulfed her for the last two years. She began, “As it is now July 8<sup>th</sup> 1908 my diary will have to be written up very telegraphically & consicely [*sic*]—if at all.”<sup>20</sup> Why had she not written? In a critical two-page entry, with raw emotion but opaque language, she explains:

Most of the time during the last two years I have not thought much of my diary. Life has been a struggle, & has had to be planned & endured, in fact lived from day to day. My diary has been made up of little things—as my life was—a little work, a little joy, a little sorrow, & much pleasure. Then for a long time I didn’t have time to write in my diary. I was worried, wasn’t well, was preoccupied—then awfully busy—then the wedding trip. I had little enough strength even to keep up & travel with, not a bit extra for writing. In fact writing was the last thing I could do, as it made me sick immediately & gave me horrible pains. I had written myself out, with notes while I was engaged. Still all this time I fully meant to catch up some time—when I was able—& write it all down fully in my diary.

Gradually however I began to realize the very real trouble I had to deal with, & the really big thing came along, which knocked all the little things out of my head, & came near to unbalancing me completely, & getting me down & out. The big thing was so big that it couldn’t be exaggerated. I found some strange comfort in that. It was so big & so strange that it was enough to knock even the biggest & strongest out. In

fact, all I knew about it was that it did unbalance people—always: When I had really learned about it, & was able to think calmly about it. The best thing to do seemed to be to try to bear it, to go on bearing it better & better, & now I think I can say that I have begun to do that, & I can hope & do hope to down the big thing, perhaps banish it altogether. That would make life a complete success, & that is what makes it now worth living. At times I have wanted my diary to pour out my agony to—but it wasn't enough. It didn't do—for a big thing. So I didn't ever do it. Most of the time my diary seemed to me like my “dolls” & my pinafores—a thing of the past—but today I have felt the diary habit again—for the first time, & I take it as a good sign—perhaps it will help the cure.<sup>21</sup>

At this point in the diary, we still do not know the nature of the “big thing,” but we do know that it was so “big” that it “knocked out” essential core beliefs Peabody held about herself and her world. Peabody's sense of herself collapsed, fractured between her nostalgic but somewhat contemptuous view of her pre-marital self as confident and socially adept but also childlike and naïve (despite being well into adulthood), and her now almost liminal sense of herself as a woman unmoored. Peabody's marriage, in her words, “came near to unbalancing [her] completely.”<sup>22</sup> While the events prior to her wedding kept her “awfully busy,” it was her new marriage that shattered her sense of self and disrupted her nearly twenty-year, faithful affection for contemporaneous diary-keeping. Having suffered a tremendous blow, only after over two years had passed did she feel strong enough to “bear it,” to think “calmly about it,” and to return to setting her thoughts to paper. While maintaining her public persona, she had retreated into a private, somewhat invisible realm too charged with shame and disillusion for even the pages of her diary.

But what had caused Peabody to stop writing in her diary? Though powerfully evocative of her anguish, Peabody had not named what it was that had so profoundly interrupted her diary-keeping and her life. For that we need to fast-forward to one of the last of what I

have termed her reflective entries—her rather modern literary style that blended various moments in time to order her narrative structure.<sup>23</sup>

Skipping forward, then, to one of the last of these entries, Peabody finally disclosed the exact nature of her dilemma. In an entry dated 28 February 1908, Peabody no longer couched her words. After an especially trying episode with Harold, she wailed, “I did lose all hope today and was convinced that *Harold was impotent* like Carlisle [*sic*] or Ruskin—his depressed grouchy state going to prove it.”<sup>24</sup> After hinting at the problem for years, Peabody stated it in frank terms. Just two days prior to this entry, “Dr. R” had given her “an examination” which she had “dreaded” but from which she concluded, “it was nothing, & I am all right. (So now I am sure it is no fault of mine.)”<sup>25</sup> When she penned these lines, Peabody had been married less than two years; it would be another seven before she gave birth to her one and only child, a daughter, Gertrude, in 1915. Peabody’s anguish and her absence from the page now begin to make sense—Harold’s impotence had destabilized every facet of her identity.<sup>26</sup>

It is not clear how Peabody defined impotence, but we do know that the couple was childless for nine years, much to her distress. Peabody never proffered a specific definition for impotence, and to my knowledge this is the only time she used the exact term in the diary. Most of her other references rely upon opaque but pointed phrases such as “the big thing,” or, “to be married but not married at all.” Peabody tends to focus on the effects of impotence, rather than its physical manifestation. In this sense, she views Harold’s mercurial emotions as symptomatic of impotence, conflating affect with physiology. This is not surprising, given the fact that contemporary medical definitions did the same. In addition, since it is only after dealing with the problem for over two years that she compared Harold’s impotence to that of Ruskin and Carlyle, she perhaps had hoped that Harold’s problem was temporary, or of another nature, and not the life-long, irreparable impotence associated with these literary figures.

It is not clear whether prior to this, Peabody's euphemisms connoted other sexual problems, such as infrequent intercourse, or lack of orgasm.<sup>27</sup>

It is perhaps wise to pause here and voice the question that tends to arise for twenty-first century readers: was Harold gay? If he was, this might offer an obvious, if still complex, explanation for the Peabodys' marital difficulties. Unfortunately, we just do not know. Adhering to the methodological principles practiced by the most provocative and thoughtful historians of gender and sexuality, our task is to follow the document trail: to work with the available extant evidence at hand, and to make a determination. At this point, the historical record, while suggestive, is opaque. With more research, a more complex and nuanced rendering of Harold's sexual orientation, as well as his sexual difficulties, might emerge, and even more important, a fuller view of Harold himself as a whole person, rather than as a somewhat objectified "husband" in Peabody's diary. Even in her most private, anguished writing, Marian did not consider the possibility that Harold was gay. Without specific references to inversion, perversion, dandies, and the like—the more probable terms of her day—we can only surmise that within Peabody's upper class, social, cultural, and even medical networks, homosexuality rarely entered the conversation. While Harold's sexuality remains an open and un-researched question, the existing evidence does allow us to investigate Peabody's "closeting" or exposure of their sexual difficulties—their shared disability—in the ways that she did.<sup>28</sup>

In the first weeks and months after her marriage, Peabody reeled in confusion. Before her wedding night, she suffered moments of self-doubt, frequently chastising herself for various shortcomings, but she had never encountered something that so unnerved her that it seriously undermined her well-established identity. A thirty-one-year-old adult, firmly rooted in a long-standing web of vibrant upper-class family and social relationships, Peabody understood and valued herself as a privileged member of Boston society, an amateur artist, a

philanthropic leader, and a lover of beauty, nature, cultural life, and physical activity. Buoyed by such personal and social surety, having even received a “large box of flowers” with “‘White House’ written all over it, & inside Pres. & Mrs. Roosevelt [sic] cards and good wishes,”<sup>29</sup> Peabody walked down the aisle of Trinity Church on 8 May 1906, as noted in the *Boston Daily Globe*, “handsomely gowned in white satin.”<sup>30</sup> As she noted in her diary, “I am afraid I was much pleased with my looks—my princess white satin made me look especially tall and slender.”<sup>31</sup> Peabody reported that she “felt only pleasantly excited & not in the least scared.” Suggesting the difficulties about to consume them, Harold, on the other hand, “seemed perfectly panicky.”<sup>32</sup>

In her recreated and reflective entries, Peabody described her honeymoon and first few months of marriage as a catalogue of emotional turmoil. Though Peabody described their wedding night as “thrilling,” her excitement had more to do with being “Mrs. Peabody”—as when she “telephoned to Mama, & she did not know who ‘Mrs. Peabody’ was & kept saying is that you Mattie?”—rather than the romantic delight of new intimacy.<sup>33</sup> Her account of their wedding night, spent at the Somerset Hotel in Boston before they left for Europe the next day, reveals the nature and inauguration of what would be years of difficulty. She asserted, “I was not a bit scared after the first, Harold was so sweet” but then continued, “I found he had bought ‘sleep medicine’ when he was out walking, evidently because he was scared and shy.”<sup>34</sup> Soon, both she and Harold were awash in emotions. A few days into their journey, she noted that, after he had hosted a lovely lunch for her birthday, she

found Harold lying on his bunk, his head in his arms, & body shaking with sobs. He was crying terribly and all I could get out of him was that it was because he loved me so & it was so hard for me to have him so much younger & stupider than my friends.<sup>35</sup>

In her summary of the trip, she admitted, “we both got very nervous occasionally. ... I got very blue too, & Harold went to pieces several times.”<sup>36</sup>

Given Peabody’s expectations, as well as those of her culture, it is not surprising that she felt at a complete loss. Once married, Peabody had anticipated an enlarged, *not* diminished, public self: moving from eldest socialite daughter to admired society wife, from courting debutante to married romantic partner and proud mother. Only her shift to married woman ensued; the rest appeared improbable. Because Peabody, in common with most middle and upper-class white women at the time, placed marriage and motherhood at the centre of her identity, her rocky union with Harold quickly began to chip away at her once robust public persona. In the first years of a volatile and barren marriage, she was not just hurt and disappointed, but felt completely stymied. Though the vast majority of white women still married and had children, in the era of the New Woman, a significant, highly visible cohort did not marry, delayed marriage, or attempted to limit or control reproduction in order to redefine, or at least question, traditional gender definitions. Peabody felt little alliance with such women. Though she devoted herself to charitable causes and enjoyed many New Woman freedoms (sports, travel, mixed-sex socializing and urban sophistication), Peabody did not attend college, support suffrage or attempt to expand or blur gender boundaries. She never seriously questioned the institution of marriage, and for her, as well as for most women, a successful marriage meant pregnancy and children.<sup>37</sup> Further, both she and Harold subscribed to emerging notions of modern marriage that raised the emotional stakes: “companionate marriage,” as its name implied, emphasized that modern couples should prefer each other’s company to that of all others, and should serve as each other’s most intimate confidante as well as fully compatible sexual partner.<sup>38</sup> Such high expectations only exacerbated Peabody’s bewildered disappointment.

Harold’s impotence had such a destabilizing power because, though physically invisible, in its immediate aftermath, it pervaded all areas of their lives, including Marian’s health, and in turn, her

sense of belonging and connection. Visiting Scotland in early June 1906, the third week of their honeymoon, Marian fell suddenly and powerfully ill. She was “dead tired ... thought [she] was sinking away, [and] had never felt so sick in her life.”<sup>39</sup> Hoping a quick return to London would restore her, the hotel’s doctor permitted her to travel if she promised to “take a special compartment,” which, though it “cost H[arold] \$60.00 was worth it.”<sup>40</sup> Once in London, a Dr. Evelyn Rich (whom she noted was “gorgeous in his frock coat and high hat”<sup>41</sup>) diagnosed her as having “acute anemia & nervous prostration.” When the “foods, & quantities of milk & wine & tonics and complete rest,”<sup>42</sup> he prescribed failed, Dr. Rich ordered her to “a rest cure place called Crowborough [*sic*]” for three months, where, as she put it, “worn out politicians go to get a rest.”<sup>43</sup> She hated leaving London, most significantly because it meant missing out on “splendid invitations” and “a lot of sprees” they had planned for themselves.<sup>44</sup> Upon arrival at Crowborough, she continued to fade, lamenting that the slightest activity exhausted her, even reading: “I can’t follow even the simplest child’s story & it frightens me to have my head go back on me & feel so queer.”<sup>45</sup> But within a week, she recovered enough to depart for London and begin their hastened voyage home.<sup>46</sup>

Though additional doctor’s visits, treatments, and bed rest in Boston restored her health, Peabody’s public footing continued to falter. While her shaken identity and patchy health were difficult enough in and of themselves, her intense feelings of loneliness and social isolation exacerbated her fragile state. Prior to her marriage, Peabody had delineated notions of a private self, but even before her honeymoon ended, she began to document a sense that she was leading a double life—one for appearances, and one dominated by her devastating secret. Just a few days after they embarked for America, for example, another illness felled her: “overitis,” according to the ship’s doctor. Not having consummated their marriage, Peabody knew that this was impossible. Unfortunately, when pronouncing the diagnosis, the doctor read her “blank expression” as incomprehension, and proceeded to explain her condition “at length to Harold out-

side the door.” In what would be a long-standing pattern, Harold’s behaviour embarrassed her, as she recounted in her description of his bumbling response:

H. half took in what he said because I had good reason for believing that he told everybody he met all about it. ... Everybody of that ships [*sic*] company has worn a curious smile on each occasion that I have seen them since, & all have ... spoken feelingly of my sudden illness on that trip—so that I am embarrassed still to meet any of them knowing the horrid suspicions that they had & if it weren’t absurd [it would] be tragic when I knew all along how wrong they all were from doctor on down.<sup>47</sup>

The illness set her back a few days, the social shame and alienation much longer. Her private world in turmoil, Peabody feared that unless she could somehow contain the damage, her social standing would plummet.

Within the first few months of her marriage, then, Peabody’s world had come undone: the diary stopped, her self-concept wavered, her health suffered, and her social bonds deteriorated. After absorbing such an unexpected blow, Peabody had to regroup, to somehow right herself; or perhaps more accurately, to craft a new sense of herself that would better reflect her new realities, one that might allow her to survive the marriage and continue on in Boston society. And indeed, over time, she did. When she resumed diary-keeping two years later, while not content with her childlessness and still difficult marriage, she had emerged—humbled and transformed—with a workable, efficacious sense of self. Due to her determined effort to fill in the missing years and to “patch together the hole in ... the diary,” we can track the broad arc of just how she did so.

Keeping in mind that the material artefact of the diary closely mirrors and illuminates both the nature of the fracture and the way she mended it, a close reading of Peabody’s reconstructive and reflective entries reveals that she turned to several distinct but overlapping strategies to cope with her situation. First, she enlisted outside help. Carefully negotiating between her secret anguish and dire need



for relief, she selectively and manipulatively disclosed the nature of her troubles; second, she set out to discover and expunge the root causes of Harold's impotence; and third, she made an array of more subtle decisions about when and where to display her own body. Eventually, she allowed herself to return to everyday diary-keeping. While this may seem a highly particular life story, in fact, Peabody's diary illuminates critical developments in modern, twentieth-century notions of marital happiness and female subjectivity. In each of her strategies, Peabody's choices reflect the more individualistic, malleable, and uncertain modern definitions of identity that surfaced in early-twentieth-century notions of upper-class, female selfhood. In contrast to nineteenth-century theories that emphasized fixed, usually God-given character traits, this modern ethos, in combination with the fact that Peabody could at least partially control the public, corporeal visibility of her troubles, gave her just enough room to recreate and then save herself.<sup>48</sup> In line with Daniel Singal's view that "modernist thought ... represents an attempt to restore order to human experience under the often chaotic existence of twentieth-century existence," Peabody embarked on an almost Arthurian quest to do so.<sup>49</sup>

### **A New Sense of Self**

Once Peabody recovered from the immediate shock of Harold's impotence, she set in motion a slow but steady process of facing, and then disclosing, the "truth" about her marriage. In the midst of "catching up" the diary for September 1906, the month the Peabodys moved into their "own home at last"—a large house that they rented and remodelled in Milton, a suburb of Boston—Marian became distracted by her memories of Harold's "horrid" behaviour and "the awful hopeless disappointment that my life had become" and declared, "while I am on this sad subject I may as well finish it up."<sup>50</sup> After recounting the beauty of their new home and her joy in redecorating it, she composed a six-page entry that detailed her path out of silence.

Peabody first confided to a select, trusted friend, then told her physician and a Mrs. Newman (a leader in the Boston mind-cure movement), and finally, most audaciously, Harold's parents. No one

really knew the depths of Marian and Harold's problems until Peabody "had a sort of collapse" at her parents' home in December of 1906 (seven months after her wedding). Her doctor ordered two weeks bed rest, but still she did not improve. In response, he cajoled her into telling him what was really the matter: "Now I can't make you any better unless you tell me what it is. ... Don't be afraid, people tell me all sorts of things & I am used to any thing." But since, in Peabody's words, "he was apparently struck dumb! He seemed perfectly floored, & I didn't know but what he was going to cry, [*sic*]" he apparently had not heard this particular tale before, or perhaps, more ominously, feared the potential fallout from labelling a prominent man "sick." Demonstrating her trust in experts over even her mother, she wrote, "Mamma came in on his excitement & agitation so I naturally changed the subject." Peabody did not reproduce her dialogue with her doctor or even closely paraphrase it so we do not know exactly what she told him, particularly whether she used the word impotence or how she might have described what she labelled their "unnatural" or "abnormal" situation. Nevertheless, she claimed, "it was such a relief to tell somebody who might help that I became happy & light hearted & got well right away."<sup>51</sup>

Without providing much detail, Peabody acknowledged that this was the second person she had told, and also that Harold had followed a similar path, telling a close friend first and then a doctor: "This was the 2<sup>nd</sup> time I had found relief in letting someone into my confidence. The first being A. Morris [Alice Morris, a childhood friend] who had been also a great help with her sympathy & suggestions. Harold had talked with Jim and Dr. Phippen of Salem who had both relieved him "immensely" but, she cautioned, only "temporarily." Following their confessions, Peabody continued, "things went along much better until Washington's Birthday."<sup>52</sup> In the spirit of the newly popular "long weekend," Harold and Marian planned a little get-away to Pomfret, Connecticut, in February 1907, a place neither had been before. Unfortunately, "Pomfret proved forlorn." Peabody recounted,

Something about my choice of the rooms upset H. ... As we have had our most disastrous scenes, the few nights we have been obliged to sleep in a double bed, & they have always resulted in rage, swearing, walking the floor, ripping the room to pieces, ... I naturally decided to take on the upstairs rooms (two adjoining rooms versus one with a double-bed downstairs).<sup>53</sup>

At this point in their marriage, the get-a-way only magnified their difficulties. Hoping to stave off Harold's wrath, Peabody catered to what she perceived as his preference—separate rooms—only to find out that this too provoked his rage. Was Harold embarrassed that his wife's selection exposed him to ridicule or gossip by making their difficulties “public” to the hotel staff or other guests? Did he resent the fact that her choice accurately reflected the harsh reality of their circumstances? Or was it another issue altogether? We can only speculate, but Peabody clearly attributed it to their sexual difficulties.

Upon return from Pomfret, Peabody confided to a third person and her second expert, Mrs. Newman, who was “horror struck,” but then “poured forth ejaculations & questions and then grew very sympathetic & gave me some fine & helpful advice.”<sup>54</sup> Mrs. Newman and the nature of her treatments remain elusive, but from the diary and other scattered references, we can surmise that she was a local, respected lay physician/healer in the Boston Mind Cure Movement who blended the new psychology with Christianity as she treated Peabody for her physical and psychological ailments. Once more, “things went along ... much better.”<sup>55</sup> Peabody raved about Mrs. Newman, ardently believing in her curative powers. She was not alone. Her mother, her best friend Carrie, and also the likes of Louisa May Alcott and Frances Hodgson Burnett all sought relief in Mrs. Newman's office. According to Alcott's biographer, Madeline B. Stearn, Mrs. Newman's treatments included relaxation and visualization techniques, challenging her patients' beliefs about themselves and their illnesses, and closing with “cheerful conversation with the patient.”<sup>56</sup> After confiding her troubles, Peabody gratefully avowed: “In fact, I give her [Mrs. Newman] the credit of pulling me out of the

‘horrible pit’ as she calls it & in that way helping H. out. After this things went along again much better.” From that point forward, Mrs. Newman became one of Peabody’s most stalwart sources of direction and support. Unfortunately, Peabody’s troubles were not over. In May of that year, after “their last and worst bad time,” since Mrs. Newman was away, and since she “couldn’t tell Mamma ... as she [her mother] was nervously broken-down that spring,” Peabody went to “Dr. R. [once again] and said [she] couldn’t stand it.” His advice? “He said, ‘Of course I couldn’t, that nobody had ever been able to, that I must tell some one in his family & say that my doctor thought I ought to have a separation.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, it was with “Dr. R’s” advice and the authority of his profession that, with much difficulty but a determined boldness, she told Harold’s mother, desperately hoping that she would tell Mr. Peabody, who would speak to Harold. Again, Peabody primarily records the reaction of her confidante, and not the content of their conversation. Whatever was said, it was not enough to provoke Mrs. Peabody to action. In fact, “Mrs. P. ... kept changing the subject to dress & fashion plates.”<sup>58</sup>

At the end of the month, after “Maria had a fine boy” [it is not clear if Maria was a friend, relative or servant], which was “the last straw” for Peabody, who was “in bed, sick,” she upped the ante. In her boldest move, despite years of yeomen effort to maintain her “double-life,” Peabody threatened to go public. Though portraying herself as only taking this action due to her fear of another collapse and upon doctor’s orders, she nevertheless once more and even more forcefully confronted “Mrs. P. and told her I couldn’t stand it & that my doctor advised me to get a separation. This stirred her & Mr. P.” Evidently the threat of his son’s marriage failing and their very private dilemma spilling into public forced Mr. Peabody’s hand. Mr. P, “being afraid ... to tackle H. himself went to Jim,” Harold’s best friend. This, along with a detailed travel plan, seemed to do the trick. “Angelic Jim talked to Harold & changed him again from a brute to a contrite, happy, loving husband.”<sup>59</sup> That summer they spent July in Islesboro, Maine, August in Bar Harbor, and then in the fall, as

planned by Mr. P, Harold travelled out west on his own, “ostensibly to study Lee, Higs. business interests.”<sup>60</sup>

Much was gained from Peabody’s intrepid tête-à-tête with Harold’s parents. Though the conversation was rocky-going, having specified and then revealed Harold’s impotence, Peabody seemed better able to manage their strained marriage. Ironically, it seemed her blurring of the public/private lines saved her. Through her decisive action, she had regrouped and begun to feel more capable of managing both Harold and her sense of self. Via her resolute actions, Peabody implemented a check on the worst of Harold’s behaviour, and through self-scrutiny, she gained some perspective and stability. Though Harold still grouched, she had forced him, as well as his family, to face the potentially dire consequences of his behaviour. The threat of divorce sobered them all. Peabody made it abundantly clear that she refused to accept her situation idly, insisting on her right to marital happiness, including some sort of sexual relationship. In the telling of her secret, she also created a small support system. She no longer had to face it all alone. Though Peabody sometimes hovered near the edge of despair, “the big thing” never again completely bowled her over.

Some of her relief stemmed from the fact that Harold was no longer completely impotent. Though the diary is opaque, by the following fall (1908), Peabody began to diligently mark her diary with x’s, carefully tracking either the dates or the expected dates of her menses, a system she had used only sporadically in the past. In earlier entries, she occasionally penned neutral descriptors, such as “in bed,” or “sick” next to such dates, but now she accompanied those marks with intense expressions of grief or anger. She was discouraged, sad, or bitter. On 28 March 1909, for example, after about six months of such watching and waiting, Peabody marked her diary with x’s and then reported, “In bed with my windows open & a fire. Read thro’ *Little Women* with many tears & it cheered me up a lot & made me forget my disappointments.”<sup>61</sup> She never used the specific term menstruation, but, as we can gather from the spacing of the entries and her beleaguered commentary, each set of x’s meant that once more

she had to face the harsh reality that she was not pregnant. Thus, it seems that she and Harold had consummated their marriage; they now had intercourse at least occasionally—otherwise she would not have felt the acute despair of repeated disappointment. Prior to the Peabodys' and Jim's intervention, Marian had no hope; perhaps now she had only too much. Whether because of her body, Harold, or the fates, Peabody would watch and wait for another six years before she finally became pregnant.

In a second strategy, Peabody found solace by pointing toward the biological or physical elements of their relationship—the “objective,” corporeal properties that they faced. As noted above, Peabody stated that she blamed Harold's initial failings on medication: “I accuse that sleep medicine of making a difference in our whole life.”<sup>62</sup> She surmised that the sleep medicine, Trional, a commonly used, over-the-counter remedy, compromised Harold's body. This line of thinking would adhere to newly developing, early-twentieth-century modern medical conceptualizations of male impotence, sexuality, and the body. In the words of prominent early-twentieth-century doctor Victor Vecki, “the sexual nervous system is closely related to all the rest of the nervous mechanism, including the parts essential to its physiological operations.”<sup>63</sup> According to this theory, by using Trional to calm his nerves, Harold had depressed his sexual capacity. If the Peabodys did not know this literature themselves, the physicians who cared for them did, and it was to those physicians that they repeatedly turned. Influenced, or in conjunction with Freud, most medical professionals advised that, if not remedied, sexual dissatisfaction would undermine happiness in all other areas of life.<sup>64</sup>

Peabody also had a complex relationship with her own body, and here we find a third avenue of relief. On the one hand, she was full of physical vigour, forceful in body as well as spirit, but on the other, she endured a steady stream of illnesses. Like many middle- and upper-class white women, Peabody spent regular portions of her days fighting some sort of physical malady, and was often sequestered from ordinary daily life due to fatigue, headaches, colds, fevers, rashes, stomach aches and sprained limbs, as well as more serious

ailments, such as anaemia, appendicitis, and various unexplained illnesses. While there is no doubt she suffered, illness also created a semi-private retreat, a liminal but officially sanctioned space, where she could recuperate from the stress and strain of her marriage. And though he still might prove irritable, Harold was much more likely to express concern and affection. As Peabody recorded in 1908, Harold usually sent flowers and was “thoughtful and generous” when she was sick.<sup>65</sup> Even if her illness did not curb Harold’s sullen behaviour, it gave her a reprieve from having to put on her social face, as well as permission to convalesce—to take time away to read, write, reflect and strategize—returning to daily life renewed in her commitment to her marriage and society.

We find a similar pattern in Peabody’s choices about when and where to participate, and thus, make herself, her marriage, and her body visible within prevailing societal dictates. As an upper-class white woman, Peabody knew the potential pitfalls. When she seamlessly embodied the part of a confident, happily married woman who enjoyed a constant round of plays, concerts, ceremonies, and lectures, eagerly hosted numerous private dances and parties, attained membership in prestigious social organizations, and donated her time, artistic talent, and monies to a range of benevolent associations, she gained social power. Harold’s shift to full-time philanthropic work during these years complemented her efforts. (He devoted substantial personal and financial resources to the Robert Gould Shaw House and later the Boy Scouts of America as well as other Boston and Bar Harbor charities.) But when she and Harold argued, when he refused to dance with her or pouted in the corner, she could lose such status. Though Peabody cast herself as terribly isolated, reading between the lines, we see that she actually managed a quite successful social life during the early years of her marriage, even if she found little solace among her peers, as she revealed in an entry from 1908:

Though my sorrow is one of the greatest & harder than any other to bear, because of its being contrary to all natural laws, I must never expect, or seek for sympathy, & of course

I never get any, because everyone tells me how fortunate I am, & how successful, & how impossible it is that I should understand other people's sorrows, which seem usually to be lack of money, for something they want—or the care of children! This pretending that everything is all right, when everything seems desperately, hellishly wrong, is the hardest thing of all to bear. I often want to scream my misery from the house-top & let everyone know it, & I often picture their surprise & excitement. The only thing that keeps me from doing it is the pleasure that some of them would get out of such an unusual & spicy morsel for gossip.<sup>66</sup>

Without children, she had little room for error. Barren, she lived contrary to “all natural laws,” and thus could not easily perform the daily, gendered rituals—sharing stories about babies, hosting a christening, hiring a nurse, etc.—that would allow her to feel on par with her social set and a sense of belonging within her culture. In her upper-class milieu, to confide was to risk further gossip. To complain was to deny her tremendous social privilege. It was not so much the famed New England stoicism that silenced her, but the need to project an image of herself and Harold as enjoying a modern, companionate marriage. To place Harold in the camp of Ruskin and Carlyle, to define him as impotent, posed great risk. It meant that even though she had waited until almost age thirty-one, she had not made the best choice of a husband, and her marriage tottered on the edge of failure: “to be married & yet not married at all.”

From the first few days of her marriage, then, shadowed by the reality of her unhappy marriage and without the social balm of shared motherhood, Peabody did find it painful to enact a “happily married” public persona. Nevertheless, much of her social isolation, while deeply painful, was interior and self-imposed. Unlike other types of physical vulnerabilities, Peabody could exert at least some control over how others viewed her circumstance. Though she raged against it, her ability to carry on—to attend church services, balls, and concerts, to redecorate her house and manage the servants, to still summer in Bar Harbor and travel to Washington and New York—all while maintaining her secret, allowed her to project, and thus hold



onto her sense of herself as a successful, respectable, upper-class woman. By August 1914, after she went to “a Suffrage meeting” in Bar Harbor where “Jane Addams spoke & everybody was there,” she reported: “I had a fine time & for the first time in my life realize that I am considered a leader of society if not the leader. ... Dave said he understood I was the leader of society this year.”<sup>67</sup> Even though, like most upper-class, white women, Peabody was anti-suffrage, she often attended suffrage events for their entertainment value. After years of devoted philanthropic activity—whether serving dinners to her “boys” at the Sailor’s Haven, painting studio-quality posters for charitable events, or fund-raising for the Sewing Club and the Red Cross—Peabody wielded considerable social capital. Rather than letting her childlessness and its attendant alienation deter her, her voluntary, well-performed “pretending” might have saved her.

Through all of these actions and explanations, Peabody’s rendering suggests that she had found a way to reconstitute herself, to make sense of, and derive meaning from her, at times, still overwhelming predicament. In addition, the recuperative value of Peabody’s diary-keeping should not be underestimated. In what was perhaps her greatest solace—her private writing, her “catching-up,” and reflecting—Peabody slowly but steadily constructed a new identity, one reflecting modern understandings of her mind, her experiences, and her place in the world. By the time Peabody re-committed herself to diary-keeping in July 1908, she had taken direct, concerted action, and by the time she had almost “caught the diary up” about a year and a half later, she had undergone a deliberative personal and philosophical analysis. As she recreated the crucial lost years in her diary (1905-1908), as well as when she returned to contemporaneous writing from 1908 onwards, Peabody sifted and sorted through her own, Harold’s, and their shared history to find clues to their marital difficulties, and to soften somehow the harsh reality that she might never have children.

Though she did not do much writing during the worst of the crisis, her reconstructions suggest that she was keeping detailed notes, and also that her long history of finding catharsis in private

writing sustained her. Peabody found tremendous solace by writing in her diary, but she also used it to create a meaningful narrative to her life in the midst of what she described as a chaotic pattern of ordinary, day-to-day activities interspersed with “episodes” of deep grief, anger, and conflict. In a typical week, she might record several “perfect” days filled with lots of family and social activity, followed by an entry or two where she and Harold might have had “a sad scene in which he wept again,” or where he had “been so contrary,” or “awfully grouchy.”<sup>68</sup> In the act of writing it all out, she could express much of what she otherwise kept secret, and could also attempt to interpret causes and meanings, and to assign blame. Even after she switched to smaller sized diaries after 1908, she ignored the page/date limits and continued to scribble frantically her most resentful, violent thoughts, preventing them from slipping into public view.<sup>69</sup> Her unabated longing for children, her bouts of self-pity, and Harold’s corrosive jealousy remained (mostly) safely contained within the covers of her diary. Peabody’s diary-keeping provided an emotional safety-valve: a means to mediate and moderate her often baffling daily life. Though a harsh critic of the quality and content of her own writing, and while fearful that diary-keeping would exacerbate her self-centered tendencies, she returned again and again to the comfort of its pages. In contrast to her unpredictable relationship with Harold, and the constant promise and disappointment of her body, in the diary, Peabody took charge. Without her diary, she almost went mad; once she returned to it, she relied on its restorative powers.

In the end, it turned out that it was not just impotence but infertility that plagued the Peabodys. Peabody had episodes of severe stomach pains, then difficult menses, and surgery for a lump between her breast and shoulder, and when she finally gave birth by means of a very painful Caesarean-section, her doctor informed her that he found her “‘a perfect labyrinth of adhesions’ ... there were so many everywhere that he did not attempt to do anything about them.”<sup>70</sup> It had been in November of 1914 that Peabody’s doctor had confirmed that at last, she was pregnant:

Dr. C has really decided that I am pregnant & congratulated H. & me at some length wasting several of his precious minutes on H. & telling him it was the blindest and most difficult case he ever had to find out. Certainly it was very hard for us to understand.<sup>71</sup>

She had undergone several “uncomfortable” examinations by Dr. Craigin before he could state for sure that she was pregnant. Why, after all these years, did she believe they had conceived? Overjoyed, she penned:

This like a miracle to me as I know just when it happened (Aug 14th see diary). It was the first time I ever felt a real & perfect satisfaction & that is why I wrote what I did that night in my diary. It is all thanks to Bar Harbor & its wonderful life-giving air & H. doesn't remember that. I can't wait to find out if I can have another. That wd prove it, & I should love to have 2 boys near of age!<sup>72</sup>

Flipping back to 14 August, we find that after attending a Cabaret, “We came home in a very bad thunder shower & there was another terrific one in the middle of the night. I got into bed w/ H. I was so scared & it was so scary & again I only got 3 or 4 hours sleep.”<sup>73</sup> The thunderstorm sent Marian to Harold's bed, and we can surmise that they had a sexual encounter which included intercourse and orgasm. Peabody, like most of her contemporaries, including many physicians and scientists, still erroneously believed the long-held supposition that female orgasm led to pregnancy. To twenty-first medical professionals though, once Harold's impotence was solved, it would make sense that Marian's “cysts,” which may have been fibroids, endometriosis, or any number of other reproductive maladies, may have prevented pregnancy. Though she barely survived childbirth, Peabody did finally claim what she called her “birth right,” delivering a full-term baby girl in May of 1916.

This close analysis of Peabody's diary suggests that, for white, upper-class, modern women, a difficult marriage, and the inability to

bear children, made them socially disabled, undermining their sense of self and place in the world. In the brightly defined cultural prescriptions that governed her specific historical context, Peabody and those in her circle expected to create intimate, romantic, and peaceful marriages that included sexual passion, pregnancy, and children. This was a tall order, then or now. For all their difficulties, the Peabodys did fulfill it in part. They maintained an amicable, if distant marriage until Harold died in 1961. But in the years when her secret almost killed her, Peabody deftly manoeuvred between a private and public self, selectively combining visibility and invisibility, silence and disclosure, and muted and prolific diary-keeping to mark out some semblance of resolution, and to negotiate her disabled state within the newly developing modern sensibilities of upper-class twentieth-century life.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the Bridgewater State University Center for Advancement of Research and Scholarship, the Massachusetts Historical Society Friedlander Fellowship, and New England Fellowship Consortium for the critical research and travel funds that sustained this project. In addition, I am grateful to the many generous readers who read various versions of this paper, including the anonymous reviewers at the *Journal of Historical Biography*, Nancy Hirschman, who first offered her astute introduction and comments at the 2011 Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, and Naomi Rogers, who further refined my argument with her comments at the 2012 Society for Disability Studies Conference. Both Nancy Cott and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz provided detailed and provocative readings, as did Simone Caron and other members of the Wake Forrest University History Department Seminar. I would also like to thank my co-authors of this special issue, and especially the members of my Bridgewater State University writing group (Ann Brunjes, Leora Lev, Laurie Stuhlberg and Lee Torda), who came to know Marian Lawrence Peabody only too well. Both undergraduate and graduate students at Bridgewater State University also furthered my thinking with their own creative research projects related to the diary. Lastly, I am grateful to the many dedicated archivists and reference librarians who guided my efforts, particularly Ondine LeBlanc at the Massachusetts Historical Society, who first introduced me to the diary and offered constant insights and encouragement.
- <sup>2</sup> “The Diary of Marian Lawrence Peabody,” 9 July 1906 written c. 1908, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA. [hereafter MLP]
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup> For the purposes of clarity, though she was a Lawrence until 1906, I mostly refer to Marian Lawrence Peabody as Peabody. For some of the early years I use Lawrence, and when including material about her husband, Harold, I switch to first names to delineate them.
- <sup>5</sup> MLP, 8 August 1907. Peabody offers a somewhat ad hoc and opaque mapping system for her dual-track dating system. She sometimes includes both dates within the diary for particular entries (the date of her writing and the date she is describing) and/or provides enough context to allow us to know roughly when she is writing.
- <sup>6</sup> After Peabody’s death, the diary was donated upon her direction to the Massachusetts Historical Society. The exact provenance of the diary is unclear, except for the fact that it was Peabody herself who made the decision to have it deposited in a public library. Peabody collated and selected entries from the diary, which was published as the memoir, *To be Young was Very Heaven* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967). Since she came from a family of memoirists and diary-keepers, including her father, William Lawrence, this is not sur-

prising. See for example, William Lawrence, *Memories of a Happy Life* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1926).

- 7 Among the wide-ranging literature on the methods and historiography of diary-keeping, the most pertinent works for this paper include Heather Beattie, "Where Narratives Meet: Archival Description, Provenance, and Women's Diaries," *Libraries & the Cultural Record* 44, no.1 (2009): 82-100; Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia Huffs, eds., *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1996); Margo Culley, ed. *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1764 to the Present* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1995); Jochen Hellbeck, "The Diary between Literature and History: A Historian's Critical Response," *Russian Review* 63, no. 4 (October 2004): 621-6129; Louis Menand, "Woke Up this Morning," *New Yorker*, 10 December 2007, 7; Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998); Laurel Ulrich, "Martha Ballard's Diary and Mine," *Journal of Women's History* 4, no.2 (Fall 1992): 157-160.
- 8 Historians tend to overlook upper-class women's economic status, rather than closely analyze its complex social, cultural, racial, and gender meanings. Some of the more relevant scholarship on upper-class women includes Elise Chenier, "Class, Gender and the Social Standard: The Montreal Junior League: 1912-1939," *The Canadian Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (December 2009): 671-710; Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000); T.J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization" in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, ed. T.J. Jackson Lears and Richard Wrightman Fox (New York: Pantheon, 1983): 1-38; Susan Ostrander, *Women of the Upper-class* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); Amira Proweller, *Constructing Female Identities: Meaning Making in an Upper Middle Class Youth Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); and Martha H. Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
- 9 Though an amateur artist, Peabody created an impressive body of work which she exhibited several times.
- 10 MLP, c. February 1898. This month is summarized in one big block without separate dates.
- 11 See Edward Weeks, *Men, Money and Responsibility: A History of Lee, Higginson Corporation, 1848-1962* (Boston: Berkeley Press, 1962). The firm began as a stock brokerage house in 1848. By 1918, it had offices in New York

and Chicago, employed twelve partners, and had expanded into western mineral investment and international banking.

<sup>12</sup> MLP, 14 June 1905.

<sup>13</sup> MLP, 24 Dec 1905.

<sup>14</sup> MLP, 25 Dec 1905. For new notions of courtship and dating, see Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); Sherrie Inness, *Debutantes and Delinquents: Twentieth Century American Girls' Cultures* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Margaret Lowe, "'I am Going to Tell the Truth in This Diary Though It May Sound Rather Conceited': Truth, Courtship, and Female Identity in the Diary of Marian Lawrence Peabody," in *In Our Own Words: New England Diaries, 1600 to the Present*, vol. 2, ed. Peter Benes (Boston: Boston University Scholarly Press, 2009): 27-38; Maureen Montgomery, "'The Fruit that Hangs Highest': Courtship and Chaperonage in New York High Society, 1880-1920," *Journal of Family History* 21, no.2 (April 1996): 172-192; and Ellen Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

<sup>15</sup> Lawrence Peabody explained in the early years of her diary-keeping: "I generally have a big blank book for my Diary so need not be limited in the amount I write." MLP, 4 January 1889.

<sup>16</sup> *To Be Young was Very Heaven*. As part a fund-raising campaign started by her father to provide pensions for retired ministers, Peabody also published, *Polly's Pension Plans* in 1917 (Reprint: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> MLP, 8 August 1907. This falls right after the entry for 15 October 1905, the first gap in the diary.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> We know this much: her dating system included a centered "1907" on the second page of the entry, with "Bar Harbor—Looking Backward" at the top of the third page, and her opening admission that "my diary got stuck here." This suggests that she wanted to document a considerable gap in the diary, one she was keenly aware of, and that she is "looking back" when writing.

<sup>20</sup> MLP, 8 August 1907.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Walter Kalaidjian, introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 1-11.

<sup>24</sup> MLP, c. February 1909, written sometime after August 1909.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) and John Ruskin (1819-1900) were two well-known British authors, widely-rumoured to have been impotent, or at least unable to consummate their marriages. As a voracious reader of both serious literature and the popular press, Peabody would have been well aware of the debates surrounding each writer's manhood.

<sup>27</sup> See William A. Hammond, *Sexual Impotence in the Male* (New York: Bermingham & Co., 1883); William J. Robinson, *A Practical Treatise on the Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment of Sexual Impotence and Other Sexual Disorders in Men and Women*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Critic and Guide Company, 1915); Bernard S. Talmey, M.D., *Neurasthenia Sexualis: A Treatise of Sexual Impotence in Men and Women: For Physicians and Students of Medicine* (New York: The Practitioners' Publishing Co., 1912); and Victor G. Vecki, *The Pathology and Treatment of Sexual Impotence*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders & Company, 1901).

Although not widely studied, a few historians of gender and manhood offer some intriguing possibilities. See Angus McLaren, *Impotence: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Kevin Mumford, "'Lost Manhood' Found: Male Sexual Impotence and Victorian Culture in the United States," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3, no. 1 (1992): 33-57; and Charles Rosenberg, "Sexuality, Class and Role in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century America," *American Quarterly*, 25, no. 2 (1973): 131-153.

<sup>28</sup> Some of the most formative texts in the field include Alan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire* (New York: Free Press, 2000); George Chauncey Jr., *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey Jr., eds., *Hidden from History* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); John and Estelle D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985); Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Penguin, 1992); and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002). Two model examples from historians who deftly handle their subject's murky sexual identity are Blanche Weisen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt*, vol. 1 (New York: Penguin, 1993) and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *The Passion and Power of M. Carey Thomas* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> MLP, 8 May 1906, written c. after August 1909.

<sup>30</sup> "Peabody-Lawrence, Large Company of Guests in Emmanuel Church," *Boston Daily Globe*, 9 May 1906: 3.

<sup>31</sup> MLP, 8 May 1906, written after August 1909.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



- <sup>33</sup> MLP, 9 May and 10 May 1906, written c. 9 August 1909. Here we see a blend of a present tense, recreated entry, and insights gleaned later.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> MLP, 16 May 1906, written c. 9 August 1909.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> Like most upper-class women, Peabody did not fit easily within the New Woman mold. Historians have explicated a variety of New Woman categories, but we still have little research, particularly little social history, about upper-class women. Historians have produced a stellar body of work on the New Woman. See for example, Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987); Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- <sup>38</sup> For the history of modern marriage, see Dorothy Brown, *Setting a Course: American Women in the 1920s* (Boston: Twayne, 1987); Kristin Celello, *Making Marriage Work: A History of Marriage and Divorce in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage: A History* (New York: Viking, 2005) and *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Elaine Tyler May, *Great Expectations: Marriage and Divorce in Post-Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Christina Simmons, “Companionate Marriage and the Lesbian Threat,” *Frontiers*, 4 (Fall 1979): 54-59.
- <sup>39</sup> MLP, 4 June 1906, written c. 1908.
- <sup>40</sup> MLP, 7 June 1906, written c. 1908.
- <sup>41</sup> MLP, 11 June 1906, written c. 1908.
- <sup>42</sup> MLP, 8 June 1906, written c. 1908.
- <sup>43</sup> MLP, 11 June 1906, written c. 1908.
- <sup>44</sup> MLP, 16 June 1906, written c. 1908.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>46</sup> MLP, 22 June 1906, written c. 1908.
- <sup>47</sup> MLP, c. late June, 1906, written c. 1908.
- <sup>48</sup> The term “modernity” has numerous meanings that vary depending on time period, geographic region, theoretical orientation, and academic discipline. For the purposes of this essay, I am using “modernity” and “modernism” in a focused way to describe early twentieth-century American developments, particularly in regard to systems of thought, personal identity, and the history of

emotion. My thinking has been most directly influenced by Daniel Joseph Singal's argument that in late nineteenth-century America, a "modernist world view" developed, which began with a "premise of an unpredictable universe where nothing is ever stable, and where human beings must be satisfied with knowledge that is partial and transient at best. ... Modernism ... eschews innocence and demands to know 'reality' in all its depth and complexity no matter how incomplete and paradoxical that knowledge might be, and no matter how painful." Thus, in regard to personal identity, "one must constantly create and recreate an identity based on one's ongoing experience of the world." In "Towards a Definition of American Modernism," *American Quarterly*, 39, no.1 (Spring 1987): 15-16. I have also drawn heavily from several essays in, as well as the introduction to, *Inventing the Psychological: Toward a Cultural History of Emotional Life in America*, ed. Joel Pfister and Nancy Schnog (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997). In particular see, David M. Lubin, "Modern Psychological Selfhood in the Art of Thomas Eakins," (133-166), and Joel Pfister, "On Conceptualizing the Cultural History of Emotional and Psychological Life in America," (17-59). See also Diane Bjorklund, *Interpreting the Self: Two Hundred Years of American Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), and Warren I. Sussman, "Personality and the Making of Twentieth-Century Culture," in *Culture as History* (New York: Pantheon, 1985): 271-285.

<sup>49</sup> Singal, "Towards a Definition of American Modernism," 8.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> MLP, c. February 1907, written c. March 1908.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> MLP, c. February 1907, written c. March 1908.

<sup>56</sup> Madeleine B. Stern, *Louisa May Alcott: A Biography* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999): 103. See also Gretchen Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett: The Unexpected Life of the Author of The Secret Garden* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004): 103-104. Gerzina reports that Hodgson Burnett travelled to Boston in the mid-1880s to find a cure for her "nervous prostration" (specifically, her writer's block) to see Mrs. Newman, who "specialized in the 'Boston Mind Cure.'" For general information see, Aaron Martin Crane, *Right and Wrong Thinking and Their Results & the Undreamed of Possibilities which Man May Achieve Through his Mental Control* (Boston: Lothrop, Lee & Shepherd Co., 1905); "The Boston Mind Cure: Dif-

fering Impressions of Two Popular Women Writers,” *New York Times*, 8 July 1885; and Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). The Emmanuel Movement, in which Peabody dabbled, overlapped with the mind cure movement, but emphasized group meetings. Many historians see it as a precursor to group therapy, psychotherapy, or Alcoholics Anonymous. See Eric Caplan, *Mind Games: American Culture and the Birth of Psychotherapy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Sanford Gifford, *The Emmanuel Movement (Boston 1904-1929): The Origins of Group Treatment and the Assault on Lay Psychotherapy* (Boston: Frances Countway Library of Medicine, 1997); C. Stein and Dr. Joseph Pratt, “Trailblazer in Group Psychotherapy: An Early Experiment in Groupnosis,” *The Journal of American Society of Psychosomatic Dentistry and Medicine*, 12 January 1965: 14-20. Boston-based, Dr. Pratt ran classes on “thought control” which offered meditation, visualization, and relaxation exercises.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

See Edward Weeks, *Men, Money and Responsibility*. Though not directly mentioned in company records, Harold Peabody would have found ready employment in the expansion west and the opening of the Chicago office. Weeks reported that “new outlets were needed and in 1905 Charles Hodgdon Schweppe was set to Chicago to open an office there. At that time the name ‘Lee Higginson’ was little known in the Midwest. On his first call Schweppe was embarrassed by frequent inquiries about the credit of his firm. Eight years later, when he became partner, his house had generally been accepted in Chicago as a first-rate authority on the credit of anyone else.” Charles is quite likely the “Charlie” Marian mentioned in her diary who travelled with Harold prior to their marriage. A Mr. George L. Peabody became a partner in 1891. (I believe this is one of Harold’s uncles.

<sup>61</sup> MLP, 28 March 1909.

<sup>62</sup> MLP, 8 May 1906, written c. 1908-1909. Initial research suggests it is still in use today and “produces lengthened sleep in functional nervous insomnia” but is considered “uncertain in action.” *Encyclopedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and General Literature*. vol. 26, ed. Hugh Chisholm (Encyclopedia Britannica Company, 1911): 60. Interestingly, Peabody used Trional herself to help with sleeping. See MLP, 17 June 1906.

<sup>63</sup> Victor G. Vecki, *The Pathology and Treatment of Sexual Impotence*, 21.

<sup>64</sup> See William A. Hammond, *Sexual Impotence in the Male*; William J. Robinson, *A Practical Treatise*; and Bernard S. Talmey, M.D. *Neurasthenia sexualis*. For secondary literature, see Angus McLaren, *Impotence*; Kevin

Mumford, "Lost Manhood," and Charles Rosenberg, "Sexuality, Class and Role."

<sup>65</sup> MLP, 13 April 1908.

<sup>66</sup> MLP, c. February 1908.

<sup>67</sup> MLP, 21 August 1914.

<sup>68</sup> MLP, September 1906.

<sup>69</sup> She switched from 5x7-inch diary books to 3x6s. It is unclear if this was a general trend at the time, if she made a specific decision, or what her motivation might have been. She does not refer to the size change within the text. She may have hoped to move away from emotive, journalistic entries to more practical, everyday matters. Her entries do become a bit shorter, but for the most part, she still included long, expressive entries that often went beyond the dated spaces.

<sup>70</sup> MLP, 20 May 1915, written 20 June 1915.

<sup>71</sup> MLP, 23 November 1914.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> MLP, 14 August 1914.