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Social Change through Rhetorical Action: Case Studies of Two Tennessee Women in the

Archives

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Departmental Honors Thesis
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
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Chapter I

Introduction

In conversations about social change and activism, the American south is rarely represented as a place where such change occurs, regardless of the decade or social cause. However, this analysis will focus on two unlikely activists who used their writing and voices to advocate for change on a local scale in their individual communities: Emma Bell Miles and Mary Cunningham. These women lived and wrote in the Appalachian foothills of Tennessee during the early 20th century, and my analysis of them will span approximately, the years 1910-1930. Both women, despite their many differences (including class, religious beliefs, intentions, and goals) used similar rhetorical tools to persuade their respective audiences and share and accomplish their ideas and goals. I argue that Miles and Cunningham were both capable and intelligent rhetors who understood that their voices alone were not sufficiently persuasive within their patriarchal, religious communities. Therefore, they both chose to situate their voices as extensions of Christianity and the Christian God to validate their opinions and achieve their goals. This strategic rhetorical choice to use God as a form of ethos, or a persuasive tool, is a performance of *metis* (briefly defined as embodied rhetorical cunning) because both Cunningham and Miles realized that their own bodies made their rhetoric less credible. To overcome this challenge, they harnessed the power of the patriarchal God within their rhetoric to bring their marginalized voices and goals to the forefront of their communities.

Cunningham and Miles are representative of women throughout the American South and Appalachia who history has mostly forgotten, but whose stories and voices deserve to be analyzed and heard today. By bringing to light these two womens' rhetoric and stories, I expand our understanding of who can and has historically participated rhetorically in their communities

and I disrupt homogenous historical narratives that only elite white men can and have employed rhetoric and contributed to our understanding of rhetoric as a discipline. Instead, I propose that these two marginalized voices employed rhetoric to better their individual, local communities: Cunningham through the creation of a women's restroom and later public library, and Miles by advocating for working class women's rights and environmental preservation.

I approached the Cunningham and Miles archives equipped with a "dynamic framework" of feminist archival research practices which enabled me to attempt to ethically and responsibly tell the stories of these women in a way that reflected their lived experiences and truths, as well as their rhetorical skill and intelligence. According to Royster and Kirsch, the overall goal of feminist archival research is to "To document the extent to which feminist rhetorical studies is demonstrating a capacity to enhance our understanding of rhetoric as an embodied social experience in ways that facilitate rhetorical work more generally," and use feminist rhetorical studies as "a dynamic framework" for analysis (131 Royster & Kirsch). The recovery, telling, and retelling of women's stories from the past is crucial to reimagining our understanding of rhetorical scholarship and disrupting established ideas about who can create important and effective rhetorical arguments and strategies. The following scholars and methods guided me in ethically making space for the voices of these women from the archives.

To ethically engage in research I need to consider presences and absences in the archives, as well as use feminist based strategies to conduct research around and with these presences and absences. As I conducted the actual work within the archives, I referred to scholars who prioritized respecting the archive as a living extension of the women themselves, doing justice to their lives and stories. I used "digital surrogates and metadata visualizations" in my archival research and reconstruction of parts of Miles' and Cunningham's archives to facilitate indirect

reading of the texts, which is spotty in places (VanHaitsma 27). For this purpose, Royster and Kirsch's method of "critical imagination," which is "a tool to account for what we 'know' by gathering whatever evidence can be gathered and ordering it in a configuration that is reasonable and justifiable," and "strategic contemplation," in which "researchers might linger deliberately inside of their research tasks as they investigate their topics and sources – imagining the contexts for practices," were important as I conducted my research (Royster and Kirsch 171, 84). I also drew from *Working in the Archives* which argues that researchers in the archives are not simply researchers, but also storytellers (*Working in*, 28). As storytellers, it is crucial to respect the individual stories and lived experiences of Cunningham and Miles and to view their lives within the context of their own times, values, and norms, rather than inscribing modern values and expectations onto them (Royster and Kirsch 10). Therefore, it is crucial that I take into account my own personal positionality in relation to the research I am doing, and the women and archives I work with in this analysis and reflect on how my own identities influence how I interpret and view the lives of Miles and Cunningham (*Working in*, 28).

As stated above, to ethically engage in archival research it is also important to reflect on how my own positionality impacts my analysis, and the privilege that both Miles and Cunningham's archives have. It is important to reflect on the privilege that digitization (in the case of Miles) preservation of these archives for future researchers to study denotes. Graban, in *Working in the Archives*, states that as researchers and storytellers in the archives, we have to be conscious of which stories are recorded and preserved and why these stories, instead of others, were recorded and saved (*Working in*, 206). VanHaitsma expands on this idea, pushing researchers in the archives to "questions for who, and who is being left out of this digitization of data and stories" (VanHaitsma 28). These considerations were present in my mind as I

considered the works and archival materials of Cunningham and Miles. I as a white woman from a modern, relatively privileged background must be conscious of my own positionality, and how that may influence my perceptions of Miles and Cunningham, and the rhetorical moves they made and beliefs they held. Additionally, as advocated above, I attempt to avoid allowing my own ideas about Miles and Cunningham and their lives, such as my modern beliefs about their personal relationships, to greatly influence the analysis of them as rhetors.

The first chapter of this text will describe and review the scholarship and conversations surrounding feminist archival work, southern rural women's historical rhetoric, *metis*, and identity as ethos. The second chapter of this text will focus on the life and rhetoric of Emma Bell Miles through the analysis of her published articles in the *Chattanooga News*. Specifically, this chapter will discuss Miles as a working class white woman who lived and worked in mostly rural spaces, and who struggled with the expectations for mountain women, wives, and mothers in the 1910s in the foothills of the Appalachian mountains outside of Chattanooga, Tennessee. I will examine how Miles participated rhetorically in Chattanooga intellectual and upper class society to disrupt and challenge ideas about women, religion, and community as a working class rural woman through *metis*. The third chapter of this text will focus on Mary Cunningham's life and rhetoric while creating the McMinnville women's restroom and later Magness Public Library by analyzing Cunningham's self-compiled Scrapbook. She was a middle class white woman who participated rhetorically in the small town of McMinnville, Tennessee through the creation of a public library in the 1910s-1930s. Cunningham embraced stereotypically feminine means of persuasion and religious ethos to create a space for her community to flourish by manipulating patriarchal systems which discouraged the creation of a library. Overall, this text will tell the stories and analyze the rhetoric of Miles and Cunningham, as well as demonstrate that they were

capable rhetors whose voices were powerful and important. Their rhetoric and persuasive skills helped make their communities better places for people in their time, and created space for future generations of marginalized people, especially women, to speak out for their beliefs and continue that legacy of community change.

Chapter II

Literature Review: Feminist, Archival, & Southern Rhetorics for Social Change

As stated above, my analysis will focus on the rhetoric and writing of Mary Cunningham and Emma Bell Miles, rural southern women from the early 20th century, and their performance of *metis* as a means of community change. As I carried out my research, I used feminist research practices within the archives as described by Royster, Kirsch, VanHaitsma, and more. While there are several rhetoric scholars who are engaging *metis* as a framework of analysis within the field such as Hawhee, Dolmage, LeMesurier, and Carlson, *metis* is still an understudied concept in rhetorical studies. Additionally, there are many analyses of southern women's rhetorics, Appalachian rhetorics, and rural rhetorics which my analysis fits into, such as works by Glenn, Donehower, Hogg, Webb-Sunderhaus, Greer, Lunsford, and Wood. However, there are few analyses of southern women's rhetorics using *metis* as a framework of analysis of how southern women have or are currently using rhetoric as a vehicle of community change. I hope that this research will fill this gap and that my analysis demonstrates southern rural women's use of *metis* as a tool for community change. As I work to fill this research gap, the concepts and ideas from previous rhetoric and composition scholars, many of whom are women and do the important work of feminist archival research or story telling, form an interconnected web of information and ideology which directly influences and informs my thought process and understanding of my research subjects as I work to recover and give voice to the strong and determined women Emma Bell Miles and Mary Cunningham.

Historical Scholarly Narrative of Feminist, Archival, and Southern/Rural/Appalachian Rhetorics

There is a long legacy of feminist rhetoric, feminist archival rhetorical analysis, and feminist southern/rural/appalachian rhetorics and research which guide my analysis and understanding of feminist rhetorics as I work with the Cunningham and Miles archives. Many of the case studies listed below are similar to my own research in various ways. Some analyze women of the early 20th century, some are rural, southern rhetorical analyses, and others are examples of religious and temperance rhetorics. I hope that my analysis will help fill in what Glenn calls “our partially complete map” of women’s rhetoric in the rhetorical tradition and to continue in the vein of retelling and recovering women’s rhetoric in history. Similar to Glenn’s statement that feminist rhetorical scholars need to finish the partially complete map of women’s historical rhetoric, Lunsford et al. describe feminist archival scholarship as a discipline which “interrupt(s) the seamless narrative usually told about rhetorical tradition and opens up possibilities for multiple rhetors” which “incorporate other, often dangerous moves: breaking the silence; naming in personal terms; employing dialogistics; recognizing and using the power of conversation; moving centripetally toward connection; and valuing... collaboration” (6 Lunsford et. al). Lunsford, Ede, and Glenn examine how the intersection of feminisms and rhetoric impacts how we think of traditional rhetorical conventions, as well as how new feminist perspectives “challenge the unquestioned rhetorical canons of invention, memory, style, arrangement, and delivery and reconsider whose voices are included and prioritized through these traditional rhetorical tools” (Lunsford, et al). These thoughts are the guiding principles of feminist archival scholarship, and inform my own research as I attempt to disrupt the dominant rhetorical narrative by bringing to light the works of two women rhetors of the past.

Several scholars highlight women in the archives in different ways, and include not only elite women, but working class, everyday rhetors within their research and analysis. For

example, Wagner and Conway explored in their individual essays how women at elite women's colleges were rhetorically active and participated in suffrage movements during the early 20th century. Donehower et. al expand this rhetorical tradition to include rural, non-elite women throughout North America in their work *Reclaiming the Rural* in which they claim "reclaiming the rural" and rethinking rural spaces is crucial to asserting rural spaces and people as "deserving equal attention, access, and consideration" rather than as a "nowhere" place or people where nothing important happens (3). This is important to further rhetorical analysis of rural lives and rhetorics because it recenters the rural as a valid rhetorical space. Additionally, in her analysis of older rural women's use of rhetoric and literacy to influence their community and lives in her hometown of Paxton, Nebraska, Hogg asserts that "Local Knowledge is the grounding for global knowledge" (4), validating local, everyday rhetors and rhetorics as important and crucial to larger rhetorical movements and knowledge. My research attempts to continue this tradition of establishing everyday rhetors and rhetorics as valid and crucial to rhetorical movements overall.

Temperance rhetorics and performances of identity were also important to many prominent and local early 20th century rhetors. My analysis draws upon Nan Johnson's argument that prominent women rhetors of the early twentieth century embodied accepted identities which allowed them to gain purchase in the world rhetorically and to effectively domesticize the podium, which in turn validated their right to speak publicly. Johnson states "By characterizing women like Willard and Stanton as noble women always modest and gentle in their speaking roles and essentially maternal in their motives...prominent women speakers portray the public podium as an extension of the domestic site of white, middle class women's traditional cultural power" (112). Additionally, temperance, while important to women of the time period alone, was also closely tied to women's issues and the women's movements of the day for white women,

and, in a way, also gave them a moral reason to speak and write publicly, as Johnson suggests above. Mattingly provides detailed analysis of these activists and women rhetor's rhetorical engagement and strategies during this time period, and also the overall impact it had on advancing women's causes. They state "many women recognized that the temperance issue offered an ideal vehicle for speaking about women's concerns" (13). However, there is a gap in research about how local rhetors used the temperance movement as a means to enter public spheres and conversations.

While there is a gap in research pertaining to local rhetors and temperance, there are several more rhetorical studies that I draw on in my research that focus specifically on local, women's rhetorical agency in the early 20th century. Greer describes the teaching programs enacted in rural Kentucky for working class Appalachian women, and then explores how these women navigated literacy, and the information and skills they learned from this program to "gain purchase in the world" and expand their own domestic and neighborhood world. (218). Another archival case study by Wood focuses on the rhetorical moves of young midwestern girls of different races around the turn of the 19th century. She argues that they reclaimed epideictic rhetoric to serve their own purposes and recognizes that young girls are "historical agents whose experiences illuminate broader narratives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries", adding to the rhetorical study of early 20th century feminist rhetoricians (Wood xviii). Both studies focus on educational programs or subversive ways in which typically marginalized peoples, young girls and Appalachian women, use the available resources to make their voices heard.

However, while the texts and rhetors previously mentioned in this literature review are incredibly important to women's rhetoric, and feminist rhetorics, they are also almost all about

white women. Donehower et. al. argues it is also important to keep in mind “the act of reclaiming the rural involves an awareness of complicated histories that are inflected by relationships of class, race, gender, power, institutional authority, and the environment” (5).

Therefore, their rhetoric is often highly reliant on their identity as white women, which grants a certain ethos to the rhetor, as Johnson stated previously. However, there is a lack of research on how these women can use the ethos and privilege which the listed identity markers allow to make their rhetoric more persuasive as a way of bettering their local communities. Despite this, the previous rhetorics and associations which I mention above all intersect to create a dynamic web of knowledge surrounding rural women rhetors who are specifically interested in women’s rights. My study contributes to this web by focusing on rural women’s use of *metis*, specifically Tennessee women’s use of *metis* as a rhetorical device for participating rhetorically in their communities and enacting change in those same communities.

What is *Metis*? Metic Performance as Tool of Social Change

I use *metis*, simply defined by Dolmage as “the rhetorical art of cunning” (3), as a framework to analyze Cunningham and Miles, and I draw on previous scholarship from feminist rhetorics and disability rhetorics to inform my own understanding of *metis* as “embodied social experience”, which can be performed as a means of persuasion and social change (Royster Kirsch 131). I begin to draw my nuanced understanding of *metis* as a feminist rhetorical device from Hawhee’s definition of *metis* which is “a way of traversing the world that maximized movement” (Hawhee, *Bodily Arts*). Carlson complicates this definition by expanding *metis* as “requiring knowledge of one’s terrain, a desire to subvert dominant forces, and a keen understanding of one’s own connections to elements of the environment”, which is a crucial part of engaging *metis* (Carlson 25). The three things listed above are essential to *metis* as a feminist

rhetorical concept which prioritizes movement and acts as an embodied persuasive concept which subverts dominant forces. Similarly, Carlson's definition of *metis* as a "rhetorical concept linked intimately to physical bodies... most succinctly defined as cunning, embodied intelligence used to disrupt static structures and likely outcomes" expands on Hawhee's definition to include an understanding of power dynamics as connected to bodies (Carlson 1). Neither Emma Bell Miles or Mary Cunningham could be separated from their situations and bodies while maintaining their rhetorical effectiveness and meaning. Therefore, their rhetoric fits into the definition of *metis* as an embodied concept which is rooted in locally grounded knowledge.

LeMesurier and Dolmage more explicitly expand and define *metis* as inherently connected to vulnerable and marginalized physical bodies. LeMesurier discusses how, while *metis* is "usually defined in terms of bodily wisdom and knowledge" it is not "a neutral form of cunning but rather the broader set of ongoing, unseen processes of bodily labor that make vulnerable lives tenable within oppressive structures" (LeMesurier, "Searching"). Dolmage also argues that *metis* "is a way to recognize that all rhetoric is embodied", which aligns with LeMesurier's statement that *metis* is an "ongoing, unseen process of bodily labor", except it extends this definition to encompass all of rhetoric through a metic lens (Dolmage 2). Another important aspect of *metis*, and what makes it so powerful of a tool for women who are threatened, is that "If used effectively, *mētis* disappears into the background and can even give the appearance of maintaining existing social norms" (LeMesurier, "Searching"). Ironically, *metis* is often the way in which marginalized peoples employ rhetoric to be seen and have their voices heard, as in Carlson's and LeMesurier's analyses of women's political performance of *metis* and Dolmage's discussion of *metis* through a disability rhetorics lens. For example, Miles and Cunningham were often in positions where they were not in power, and the effective use of

metis allowed them to participate rhetorically in their communities while still maintaining their position and safety as women, as we will see in the following chapters. From the synthesis of the ideas and scholarship listed above, for my analysis I identify *metis* as an embodied framework, or a way of being, which allows marginalized peoples and bodies to reclaim power back for themselves through cunning rhetorical strategy to use the means available to the individual to achieve their goals or to subvert existing power structures. I came to this definition through a synthesis of many different scholars' understandings and use of *metis* as a tool for analysis.

An Exploration of Gender as Persuasive, Metic Performance

There are several rhetorical scholars and rhetors who discuss and employ indirect, or feminine, persuasion tactics to create persuasive arguments while still firmly residing within the domestic space which was dictated to women in the early 20th century. For example, similar to *metis* as “disappearing into the background” of space and social situations, Jessica Enoch argues that “gendered space” in 19th century America, specifically schools and classrooms as a space, were where the most important “female activity” took place outside of the home (2). Expanding on the original idea of gendered, domestic space as a place of women’s rhetorical activity, Bordelon argues that Clappe, a woman and rhetor from the early 20th century, “typically uses her “appropriate” domestic sphere and conventional assumptions related to such locales to indirectly critique masculine constructions of domestic space” (450), rather than entering into the masculine public sphere to engage rhetorically. While this analysis of the use of gendered “female” space to critique masculine creation of that space by a woman from the past is noteworthy, and in many ways extremely radical, this, and Enoch’s research does not fully encompass the idea of women deliberately creating what would be a masculine space into a feminine space in order to legitimize their existence and activity there.

As I try to understand the conception of spaces as gendered, I also question my understanding of gender as a rhetorical performance as described, primarily, by Nan Johnson. Johnson argues that “Rhetorical theories and rhetorical practices as cultural sites where we can observe the interdependence of codes of rhetorical performance and the construction of conventional identities, particularly but not exclusively gender identities” (1). If gender identities are rhetorical practices, then they can therefore be wielded as persuasive tools. Johnson later states, in reference to Frances Willard, that the public viewed her and “women speakers, and women in general, were eloquent not because they were skilled, but because they were moral and loving women who were naturally persuasive in their proper spheres” and “Women speakers could be successful only to the degree that they were able to perform an essentialist feminine identity in some recognizable way” (Johnson 114-115). By extension, Johnson states that these women she terms “Noble Maids”, can be viewed as acting rhetorically to take control of the opportunities to speak, or to gender the podium feminine through their own credibility as mothers and wives (a successful performance of gender), or rather, through the construction and proof of their ethos. While I have not identified any other similar discussions of gender performed rhetorically in history other than Johnson’s, and none that mention this performance as a performance of *metis*, it is possible that these works exist, and there is potential for a more thorough investigation of this line of analysis in future research.

Conclusion

Within this review of literature, I draw upon past scholarship of feminist rhetorical scholars and the ideas, methods, and methodologies they use in their work to analyze the rhetoric and tell the stories of Emma Bell Miles and Mary Cunningham. My research in the archives, digital and physical, was conducted using feminist archival research methods set out by Royster

and Kirsch, among others. I hope to continue the expansion of recovering historical women's rhetorics and rural rhetorics, which was started by Lunsfords et al., Cheryl Glenn, Charlotte Hogg, and many other groundbreaking rhetorical scholars. My understanding of *metis* as an embodied experience and tool comes from Hawhee, Carlson, and LeMesurier, and enables me to fully apply this concept to the lives of Miles and Cunningham. Finally, my reconception of gender as a rhetorical performance was heavily guided by the scholarship of Enoch, Johnson, and Bordelon. Overall, the works and scholarship of previous women and rhetorical scholars in the field who paved the way for the recovery and retelling of women's stories enable me to carry out the analysis and retelling of the women's stories you will read in the next section. My research on Emma Bell Miles and Mary Cunningham addresses a gap within rhetorical scholarship and analysis which the above listed works and authors do not cover: White Appalachian women's use of rhetoric, specifically *metis*, to improve their communities.

Chapter III

Case Study I: Emma Bell Miles

This chapter will focus on Emma Bell Miles, a preservationist, feminist, and active rhetor in Chattanooga in the 1910s. Her rhetoric and work demonstrate that, despite often harmful stereotypes and realities of living in the South in the early 20th century, there were people who spoke up for what they believed in to make positive social changes in their communities. Miles advocated for women's rights on a local level at a time when the national suffrage movement was very prominent across the country. She also fought against environmental and habitat destruction as Chattanooga became a polluted industrial city. Therefore, Miles's activism and rhetoric were kairotic then and now, as there is a resurgence of anti-feminist movements and anti-environmentalist rhetorics in the Southern United States, just as there were similarly pressing issues in her time. Overall, this rhetorical analysis will focus on Miles's opinion column "The Fountain Square Conversations" which she wrote for the Chattanooga News over the course of 3 months in 1915, and will illustrate how her rhetoric within the "Conversations" advocated for and enabled social change in Chattanooga. Throughout this essay, I will focus on the discussion of three primary themes within the "Conversations": 1. Natural Justification as a performance of *Metis*, 2. Feminism and Class, 3. Progress, Race, and Eugenics. I will examine the arguments she is making and how she is making them, both within the context of her own time, as well as from a modern perspective, and establish Emma Bell Miles as a prominent and important figure within the history of southern women's rhetoric. Therefore, in this paper I argue that Emma Bell Miles, an active feminist rhetor in early 20th century Chattanooga, is an example that everyday activism has long been a present and important part of the rhetoric of the Southern

United States. Miles facilitated community change through rhetoric as an instrument, leaving a legacy of activism for future generations of southern women activists and rhetors.

Miles's "Fountain Square Conversations," which I focus on in this analysis, is a newspaper opinion column in which she used nature as a framework to advocate for various arguments and topics. Miles wrote the articles while looking out on Fountain Square, which was located in the center of Chattanooga and features a fountain with a fireman atop it. Miles uses this fountain and location to center her conversations firmly within the Chattanooga community, as well as to convey her personal ideas to the reading public of Chattanooga. Additionally, Miles makes the fireman statue converse with the birds, many different kinds of birds, which not only grounds the conversations in the society and history of Chattanooga, but also enables Miles to connect with nature and the natural world, despite the conversation being set in the center of the city.

Miles's lived experiences and love of nature in her life influences what she writes in the "Conversations" as well as her rhetoric. Miles's choice to ground her own argument in nature as rhetorical justification to give her argument credibility is an act of *metis* which gives her argument the necessary backing and power to subvert traditional arguments and power structures in the South. This natural rhetorical framework, which is informed by her lived experience, serves as a way to make Miles's stories and opinions heard. Miles also argues for women's rights, and grounds her argument in nature for rhetorical justification because, according to Miles, nature is and always has been feminist. Additionally, Miles distinguishes in her rhetoric between upper and lower class women, and the different struggles rural, poor women face compared to upper class women. These issues were deeply personal for Miles, and her understanding of the issues she advocates for through her rhetoric are informed by her lived

experiences as a poor, rural white woman, which is seen in her use of embodied rhetoric to tell her stories to her audience. Additionally, Miles directly advocated for women in Chattanooga, and attempted to persuade the city of Chattanooga to open a women's restroom for country women who travel into the city to rest.

However, while Miles uses her rhetoric and skill as a writer to tell about her lived experiences and to do good things for white women, she is willing to oppress people of color and immigrants to advance her own cause, so her feminism is not inclusive. Additionally, Miles promoted eugenics and racism because of the progress narrative which she believed characterizes nature, and which also justifies her feminism. Overall, Emma Bell Miles's rhetoric and writing in "The Fountain Square Conversations" is the public expression of her most important lived experiences. The arguments for social change she makes within the articles are made through a variety of rhetorical strategies which use a higher power, such as nature, to justify her arguments as form of survival. Her rhetoric both calls attention to the issues she writes about and tells her, as well as the thousands of other rural women in Tennessee's stories, which, if she did not write, might never be told. Miles's performance of *metis*, which is demonstrated in her use of nature as a framework to support her arguments for social change and structure her personal experiences, ensures that her voice will be heard and listened to by her audience in Chattanooga by grounding her own activism as the voice of nature.

A Brief Summary of Emma Bell Miles's Life and Works

Emma Bell Miles was born in 1879 in Evansville, Indiana to father Benjamin Franklin Bell and mother Martha Ann Merick Bell. The family lived in Rabbit Hash, Kentucky until Emma's parents made the decision to move south to Tennessee in 1890 in the hope that the gentler climate would be beneficial for Emma's delicate health (Cox xxv). The Bell family

settled in Walden Ridge (near modern day Signal Mountain), a small mountain settlement that overlooked the city of Chattanooga in the valley below (Cox xxv). Both of Emma's parents found work at schools teaching the children of the mountain people, however, Emma did not enjoy school and rarely attended, preferring to spend her time reading Thoreau, wandering the mountainside, and taking art lessons in Chattanooga. Her childhood instilled in her a deep love for nature and the foothills of the Appalachian mountains, a tendency toward introspection, and a fond respect for the culture and ways of the people who lived on Walden's Ridge. At the age of 20, Emma enrolled in the St. Louis school of art and lived in St. Louis for 2 years, until out of homesickness and a desire to be near Frank Miles, a young mountaineer who had no formal education or financial prospects whom she was in a relationship with, she moved back to Walden's Ridge. Not long after, Emma's mother passed away in October of 1901, despite the disapproval of her father and late mother, Emma and Frank married.

Together, Emma and Frank had 5 children, and lived in near poverty for the rest of Emma's life due to Frank's inability to find and keep steady work. Throughout their marriage, between keeping house and caring for her children and Frank, Emma found time to create art, write stories, keep extensive and detailed diaries (ranging from 1908 until 1918, a year before her death), keep up correspondences with various family members and friends, write an opinion column in the Chattanooga News, and occasionally advocate for social programs. Many of her creative projects served to generate enough income to feed and house her family, on top of allowing her creative outlets. Therefore, Emma was mother, wife, and often the sole breadwinner to her large family. Her creative works include a number of poems and short stories which have been lost because they were created on commission, a book *Spirit of the Mountains*, several works

of art portraying the nature and life of Walden's Ridge, as well as her children, "The Fountain Square Conversations" for the Chattanooga News, and other miscellaneous works.



Fig. 1 "Undated Photograph of Emma Bell Miles", Tennessee Encyclopedia, 8 October, 2017, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/emma-bell-miles/>



Fig. 2 “Chattanooga, Tenn., Fountain Square, undated”. *Raphael Tuck and Sons*, Chattanooga Area Historical Association collection of postcards and photographs, University of Tennessee Chattanooga Library Special Collections: Digital Collection. 11 Mar. 2022.



Fig. 3 Brent Moore. “Photograph of Fireman’s Memorial Fountain-Chattanooga, TN”, 7
 September, 2013, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/94502827@N00/38521440200>

In her works, as well as in her life, Emma grappled with class, naturalist, and suffragist issues. As previously stated, she was not born on the mountain, but as a married woman, she experienced the same hardships that many native mountain women experienced, which heavily influenced her understanding of women’s issues. However, it is important to note that Emma often had the privilege of reprieve from the struggles of her daily life through wealthy friends, or patrons, and that Emma was not conscious of the hardships that other marginalized peoples faces, like the black community in Chattanooga, or the forced removal of Native Americans from the lands she claimed as her home. It is safe to say that she was thoroughly racist, possibly even more so than an average white southern woman. She often used her column in the Chattanooga News to promote extremely harmful ideas about race and even promoted eugenics explicitly in a couple of her articles.

Despite having incredibly unethical, harmful and misinformed views of race, Emma was, for her time, an avid suffragist and white women’s rights activist. She wrote of her beliefs privately in her diaries, as well as expressed them in her Chattanooga News column. Additionally, her non-traditional religious beliefs contributed to how she saw the role of women in the world. She believed that organized religion was used to subjugate women, and therefore chose to have a more spiritual relationship with the divine through nature. Emma not only was an active suffragist, but also advocated for the preservation of nature, the benefits of nature to human beings, and the overall preservation of the Appalachian way of life on Walden’s Ridge, which was closely interconnected to nature.

Emma faced hard times toward the end of her life. One of her children, Mark, passed away at a young age, and she struggled with guilt and grief over his death for many years, because she blamed herself for not providing good food, a stable place to live, and high quality health care or medication for him. After this tragedy, she also experienced several miscarriages, which Cox speculates could have been self-induced because she felt she could not provide for any more children (Cox 31:50). She also contracted tuberculosis and spent a year in the Pine Breeze Sanitarium. After years of maintaining her family in near poverty and struggling with her choice to marry Frank, Emma succumbed to tuberculosis on March 19, 1919 in a rented house in modern day North Shore with Frank after a stay at the Pine Breeze Sanitarium. She is buried alone in Red Bank, in a cemetery with a view of Walden's Ridge.

Miles's Rhetoric of the Natural World

Emma Bell Miles is best known within the Chattanooga community for her work as a naturalist and creative writer, however, what is less known about Miles is how her writing and rhetoric advocated for preservation and environmental protection. Within her work in the "Fountain Square Conversations," Miles uses nature as a rhetorical device by giving a voice and personality to the birds of Chattanooga. This choice to center her own voice as the voice of nature is a performance of *metis* because she is using her lived experiences to form this argument, and by envisioning her voice as nature it enables Miles to speak with an authority which she would otherwise not be capable of because of her gender. Not only did Miles admire nature, but she also actively advocated for the preservation of the natural world and environment in Chattanooga and on Walden's Ridge. She heavily encouraged those who were able to live a natural lifestyle outside of the city for their health and the wellbeing of their children. She also advocated for the protection and care of the river area within Chattanooga so that the natural

world would thrive and that the people of Chattanooga will have access to natural and outdoor spaces. Overall, Miles's love of nature grounds her rhetoric in the "Conversations". We can see how, for Miles, nature acts as a source of joy, an object of reverence, and a way of grounding and justifying the moral and social arguments which she presents publicly in her writing. Nature and the natural world define Emma Bell Miles as a rhetor, which she takes advantage of and uses to create persuasive arguments for social change that are grounded in the authority of nature.

Miles references the "Good Gray Mother" within her writing when she is specifically talking about nature or feminism, because this concept acts for Miles similarly to God or the divine and therefore serves as a strong rhetorical justification of her arguments. The Good Gray Mother is a concept which is believed to be original to Emma Bell Miles (Cox). However, very little is known about this concept, except for the references she makes to it within her diaries. According to Cox, The Good Gray Mother is also the title of a lost manuscript of Miles's writing. Similarly, very little is known about this manuscript or what it contains. However, it is instrumental to Emma Bell Miles writing and rhetoric within the "Conversations" because of her references to the concept of the Good Gray Mother, and her use of the concept as a rhetorical tool to justify and support her arguments. Within the "Conversations", the Good Gray Mother acts similar to the concept of the divine, and therefore serves as the ultimate support and justification for any argument or statement that is made in the articles. Miles's use of the Good Gray Mother is an extension of her use of nature as an embodied rhetorical device such as *metis*, and as well as demonstrates her personal connection to nature, and her need to have a defining figure at the head of nature to justify her arguments and personal ideas about nature.

Emma Bell Miles used the "Conversations" to share her love of nature and its beauty, as well as to inform the Chattanooga community about the danger the natural world faces from the

developing world and over-exploitation. One key example of her advocacy for nature preservation both generally and specifically to Walden's Ridge is her article written as a history of the passenger pigeons and their demise. Miles centers the conversation around the lone survivor of the passenger pigeon race, who lives in a zoo all alone. She makes her audience sympathize with the survivor, who she describes as "still beautiful, this wonderful survivor of a race that has gone down with the cherokee and the buffalo into the gloom of time" (Miles 023). After this description which allows the reader to clearly visualize and empathize with the bird, she frames the history of the passenger pigeons, from before the colonists came, when the Cherokee people hunted them, but there were many. She then tells the story of how white people joined the Cherokee camps which hunted the pigeon, but brought with them their technology and greed. Miles is very clear about what happened to the pigeons. She declares "And yes, they have gone down into the gloom of time, but they were taken down. Systematically hunted and killed all of them" (Miles 023). Further down in the same article she states "'But the real cause of their extinction was simply the wasteful greed of man" (Miles 023). These statements directly implicated the people of Chattanooga for the extinction of a species which used to be plentiful in the woods of Tennessee. This rhetorical choice to take the passenger pigeon's plight from a sad story to a story of violence and active involvement forces her readers to think about their own impact on the natural world.

Miles proceeds, after framing the extinction of the passenger pigeon more as a massacre than a tragic accident and humanizing the species through her description of the lone survivor, to point out that similar things are happening to other species near Chattanooga at the very moment she is writing the article. She observes "Now I can see the flocks of curlew and plover rapidly dwindling from the same cause, and the ruffed grouse, or pheasant, the drummer of the Southern

woods, is also menaced with extinction” (Miles 023). She gives her reader specific species of birds that exist in the Chattanooga area which are experiencing the same fate as the passenger pigeons. In doing so, she not only gives a clear example of her preservationist ideology, but also forces her reader to think about specific examples, and they do not have an excuse as to not taking action for lack of information.

Her last appeal is to the Good Gray Mother: “will men awake in time to save any of these birds? Will they never close their mar-kets to the sale of native wild game?” (Miles 023). This call to the divine acts as a last resort rhetorical device which, rather than actually asking the Good Gray mother to save the birds, she is specifically implicating her readers in her call to action, before it is too late. This is also an example of Miles’s use of *metis* as a literal tool of survival for these species. She employs the narrative of extinction to indirectly move readers to action to preserve the species in Chattanooga who are in danger, and her final appeal to the Good Gray Mother cements her use of *metis* in that Miles is effectively imploring her audience here, not the Good Gray Mother, to save the birds. Overall, Miles is advocating for the protection of her mountain and the species which are being hunted to extinction there, and employs the use of the passenger pigeon narrative as an example and to draw sympathy and outrage from her audience.

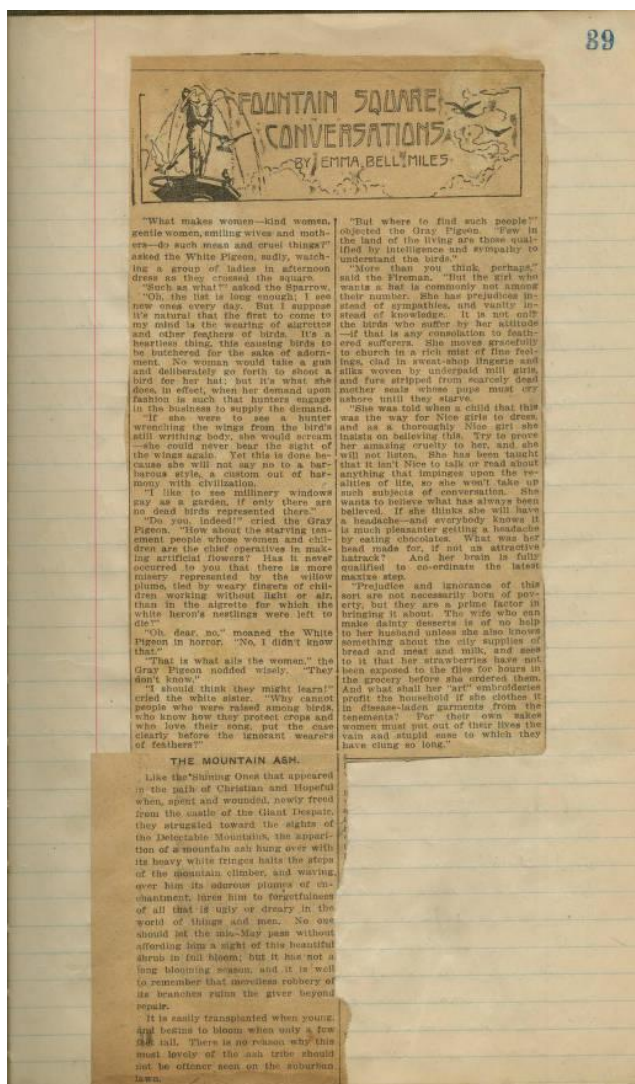


Fig. 4 “Image of Fountain Square Conversation 039: Miles”. Emma Bell Miles Journal, 1915.

Emma Bell Miles Southern Appalachia art, correspondence, and journals. University of Tennessee Chattanooga Library Special Collections: Digital Collection. 11 March. 2022.

Another example of Miles’ preservation activism is her discussion of feathers as a fashion statement. Miles begins the article with the pigeon asking what makes women “do such cruel things?” (Miles 039). They say that “It’s a heartless thing, this causing birds to be butchered for the sake of adornment. No woman would take a gun and deliberately go forth to shoot a bird for her hat” (Miles 039). However, by wanting to adorn herself with feathers, that is essentially

what the woman is doing. Miles then gives a vivid description of the process that happens for women to get the feathers for their hats, inducing the readers' emotions and causing them to think about their own consumption of feathers and the impact it may have on nature and birds. Finally, Miles states that only intelligent women will rethink their view of feathers and that "Few in the land of the living are those qualified by intelligence and sympathy to understand the birds." (Miles 039). Through this statement, Miles makes not wearing or buying feathers the best thing to do, and therefore anyone who wears feathers is not intelligent or sympathetic, traits which would have been valued in her audience.

Miles uses a similar rhetorical appeal in her article about Henry Ford's preservationist tendencies versus his contribution to industrialization. Miles uses education to implicate her reader in the extinction of species of birds, and then uses that implication as a call to action. The birds discuss how people who are preservationists are the most valuable to society and the world. Again, Miles gives the birds personalities to make them seem sympathetic and make people want to protect them, and her detailed and descriptively beautiful prose within this article also romanticizes nature in an attempt to make people care. Finally, the fireman states "Man has not yet realized the scope and importance of his influence on the animal kingdom." and "Untold damage may result before he fully awakens to the responsibility conferred by this power and state of earth lord, air lord and sea lord, which is the birthright of his superior intelligence." These statements are similar to her statements regarding man's impact on the passenger pigeon. Through these statements, she reminds her audience that they are in power and they have the power to change the state of the world, by being nature lovers and preservationists. Lastly, Miles states "What the world needs, more than anything else, is a sufficient number of the right kind of people." This call to be the "right kind of people" or in the in-group, is a persuasive strategy to

convince her readers to do what they can for natural preservation. Ultimately, Miles uses a variety of rhetorical devices, such as narrative, personification, imagery, and persuasive strategies, to educate and convince her readers that over consumption of natural resources is harmful to all. The multiple different techniques and strategies Miles employs all demonstrate her artful performance of *metis* to persuade her reader of important issues to Miles.

Throughout Chattanooga history and within other scholarly conversations, many have noted Miles's obvious love of nature and the importance of her nature writing. However, by digging into Miles's rhetoric deeply and through *metis* as a theoretical framework, we can see that Miles skillfully crafted arguments which encouraged people to enjoy, appreciate, and sustain the natural world. For example, her discussions of her love of Walden's Ridge and how she raised her children in the country could be seen as simple musings by a mother, but she is advocating for others to follow this path that she claims is better for raising children because it lends to good health, and positive social and family interaction. Furthermore, Miles describes cities as "ramshackle , helter-skelter civilization" (Miles 051) where people live unhealthy lives in unclean air. She argues "That Man is capable of planning well enough of his own individual needs, but has never learnt to think collectively, for the good of all.", which causes cities to be miserable places. Miles urges those who can to live in the country in a natural way, while simultaneously advocating for the use of rooftops in cities as green and outdoor spaces. Through this encouragement, Miles directly persuades via her rhetoric for Chattanooga to improve the city and the living conditions of its residents. Overall, Emma Bell Miles is an informed and active naturalist and advocate for preservation who uses her public rhetoric to educate and persuade her audience to do what they can to preserve nature and bring it into their own lives. She uses nature

to justify her arguments as well as to present her arguments to her audience as an embodied form of *metis* as persuasion.

Miles's Rhetoric of Suffrage, Feminism, and Class

Emma Bell Miles also used the "Fountain Square Conversations" as a space to write about her strong feminist and suffragist beliefs which influenced and inspired other women in Chattanooga to stand up against patriarchal ideology and gender roles. Additionally, the platform of the "Conversations" enabled Miles to advocate for women of different backgrounds and social classes to band together in solidarity for actions which would benefit women in the community. In the first recorded article of Miles's 1915 diary from the "Conversations", Miles introduces the scene, then almost immediately springs into a discussion of suffrage through the birds of Fountain Square. This choice of topic demonstrates how important women's issues were to Miles at the time, and her need to write about them and share her ideas about them with her audience and the Chattanooga community. Miles's urgent need to share her experiences and the experiences of rural women, as well as advocate for women's rights stemmed from a need to survive, and to tell these stories, which otherwise would not have been told. Miles's understanding of suffrage, feminism, and women's issues are complex and multifaceted, while still remaining exclusive and harmful in many ways. Her personal experiences as a working class woman from a rural background inform her understanding of suffrage and feminism, lending her a point of view which most educated white women from that time period who were suffragists were unfamiliar with and did not care about. However, this perspective also limited her view of women's issues and caused her to purposefully exclude and even advocate for harmful practices against people of color.

Miles's rhetorical choices within the "Conversations", such as the figure "Mrs. Grundy", personal narrative, reliance on pathos and her grounding of her arguments in nature all serve to create a bold and persuasive narrative within the column which create and enhance Miles's performance of *metis* through her rhetoric. Additionally, Miles also advocates for active change within the Chattanooga community by encouraging her readers to rethink their understanding of gender roles in the home, and the different issues poor versus wealthy women faced. She even goes as far as to suggest tangible measures which Chattanooga can take to improve the lives of women in the Chattanooga area. This suggestion and advocacy acts as a survival informed by Miles's lived experience and promoted through embodied cunning. Emma Bell Miles's nuanced views on suffrage and feminism as well as her lived experiences influenced her rhetorical choices within the "Conversations," and created her performance of *metis* to persuade and educate her audience about women's issues in the Chattanooga area.

Miles uses nature and her beliefs about the natural role of women to inform her views of suffrage and feminism, as well as to justify her beliefs and act as a rhetorical tool to educate and persuade the audience of the "Conversations" to support women's issues through the engagement of *metis*. Miles argues that nature has always been feminist. The birds, which Miles brings to life and uses to discuss issues in the "Conversations" say that it makes the most sense for them to be feminists. An example Miles gives to support this argument is "It is true," said the White Pigeon, "that many of our immemorial customs are similar to those for which the feminist movement stands. For instance, even among us who mate for life instead of for a season, a mother bird ill-used by her mate is entitled to break off relations" (Miles 003). Miles both uses nature as a rhetorical tool to justify her beliefs about divorce and women's rights here, as well as to persuade the audience that women's rights are closer to natural law than new movement. Miles's

experience living close to nature gave her insight into the differences between human society and nature, and allowed her to use the understanding she gained from that experience to persuade her audience of vital issues to Miles, therefore performing *metis* through her rhetoric. Overall, Miles's understanding of nature both informs her own understanding of feminism, and influences her rhetorical writing and acts as a persuasive tool to convince her audience that feminism is natural and valid.

Within those ideas about nature, Miles finds herself examining gender roles, as ascribed by nature, society and religion. One primary example of her public analysis of gender roles through the lens of nature is the conversation between the cat and the birds about women's proper place. One day, the neighbourhood cat visits the birds and fireman in Fountain Square and overhears a conversation between the birds about feminist movements around the country. The cat then chimes in that "'Ah! but there is less and less room for the cat in these modern home," purred the Cat mournfully", then the narrator states "like most true things, this was terribly hard to answer" (Miles 007). By making the cat, an outsider and predator to the birds, join the conversation, Miles demonstrates her understanding of and experience with men who disagree with and want to belittle the suffrage movement, and make it about themselves. The article ends when the cat lashes out and attacks low flying birds, upsetting them horribly. The cat, however, goes about his day like nothing ever happened. Miles uses the cat as a metaphor for man's attack on women. When women protest and do their best to gain equal rights, men complain that they will become obsolete in the household. To get back at women for this, men use their power to literally threaten the lives of the women who dare speak out against them and barely disturb their own daily lives. This metaphor illustrates the power differences between men and women in this time period, and how women risk their lives to better the future of other women through

feminism and suffrage, while men complain that they will not be relevant anymore, similar to the character of Mrs. Grundy. It also motivates women to change this power dynamic and to take action so that future generations will not suffer from the power imbalance that women in this period did, which is an act of survival for women of this time period, as well as for future generations.

Miles creates and uses the fictional character Mrs. Grundy, who represents traditional gender roles and beliefs, and employs Mrs. Grundy as a rhetorical device to demonstrate the outdated and limiting traditional ideas of femininity and women's roles in society, religion and the home. Mrs. Grundy is the promoter of gender roles that are harmful to women. The birds state about one of the social conventions Mrs. Grundy's teaches: "She is taught to look at the comfort of the nest provided, at the something known as social position, at everything but those personal qualities which, inherent in her mate, determine the character of her future children. In fact, though I can scarcely believe it. I have heard that Mrs. Grundy will not allow girls to speak or even think of their future children" (Miles 003). This is a particularly personal issue for Miles, who resents her choice of a husband, and it is also a common issue for the suffrage and women's rights movement at the time. This is another example of how Miles's rhetoric and ideas are informed by her lived experiences. The birds then discuss how, while Mrs. Grundy has an extreme amount of generational power, no one has ever seen or heard her, but somehow still knows what she says. This discussion of unstated gender roles forces Miles's audience to think about those gender roles in more tangible terms, as coming from a real woman. If they come from a real person, then they are questionable and debatable, because they are human. Miles ultimately ends the article with "Don't let them find her in your house!" (Miles 003), referring to Mrs. Grundy and her outdated and harmful gender roles, encouraging the reader to shed the

harmful gender roles that Mrs. Grundy represents. This exclamation shocks the reader into paying attention to gender roles and Mrs. Grundy as a character, as well as creates an idea that if Mrs. Grundy and her gender roles are in your house, you are not an informed, intelligent, and up to date woman and reader.

In a later article, Miles reintroduces the character of Mrs. Grundy into the conversation. The birds and fireman reflect on the fact that, despite looking in the windows of homes and shops, no one can find any trace of the existence of Mrs. Grundy. Miles then argues, through the birds, that Grundy could possibly be a man, which on reflection is interesting in that it would directly implicate men, rather than society at large, for the gender roles imposed upon women. However, Miles does not comment further on this beyond the discussion of gossip. This reflection starts off a conversation about who gossips more, women or men, and who does the most harm, a common topic within the gender roles debate. However, Miles then adds another element by talking about how it is often men or rich women who “are starving for reality” that do most of the harmful gossip. Miles states that “No woman whose hands are full with real work in home and garden and barn and club, who maintains a high standard of home and civic house-keeping, who can set a hen or graft an apple seeding or nurse a fever or bake a prime loaf, or dress a new baby, or lay out the dead, is going to gossip” (Miles 033). Miles, while privileged in many ways, provides a unique perspective to 1st wave feminism and suffrage seeing as she is an educated poor rural woman. Her lived experience allows Miles to see issues that many richer women at the time would not even be aware of, and Miles does not hesitate to call attention to these issues.

While most of Emma Bell Miles’s writing comes from a personal place, her writings about women’s issues and suffrage are deeply informed by her own hardships and experiences as

a poor rural woman with many children and limited opportunities. Miles's choice, if it is a choice more than a survival, to share her experience with her audience in the "Conversations" is a powerful rhetorical tool that is extremely persuasive because of the pathos and lived experiences inherent in the telling and rhetoric of the arguments, and an example of Miles's performance of *metis* in her rhetoric as a tool of survival in the patriarchal society she lived in. The most prominent example of her personal experiences directly influencing her rhetoric and writing within the "Conversations" is found in her story about brown thrasher birds who build a nest and have babies and become tame and nurse the babies until they are almost well (Miles 019). Then, despite the girl's best efforts who lives near the nest, her cat attacks and kills all of the babies. After this, the parent birds leave, and then the girl is left alone and cries. Miles writes "She cried herself into a relapse; and she sent the kitten away, for the shadow of the nest's tragedy was over all her world" (Miles 019). This statement shows Miles's grief about losing her son, Mark, which Miles blames on her and Frank's inability to pay for proper medical care and nourishment for him. Miles writes in her personal diary entries that she blames Frank and herself for marrying Frank, for Mark's death. The girl in the article, who tries very hard to protect her family of birds is left with "the nest's tragedy over all her world" (Miles 019), much as Miles was left with her grief after the passing of her son. The hardships and grief which Miles endured shaped her understanding of women's issues and made her a vocal advocate for the women of Walden's Ridge in particular.

Emma Bell Miles uses her experience as a poor woman as a gateway to talk about the general issues that poor women face compared to upper class women in Chattanooga and to advocate for a better understanding and improvement of their condition and issues they face. Miles tells of the everyday hardships mountain women in particular face through the eyes of the

birds and fireman. They tell the story of a woman from the mountain who took a trip to town to sell quilts and buy groceries. The country woman is late to town because of her husband, which delays when they will be able to return home and do chores. Once the woman is in town, she has to care for her children while also running her errands throughout the city. She sells her quilts, but is made to wait to do so, and then paid a third of what she was promised and should be paid, and she does all of this alone while her husband is out spending money and having fun, according to Miles. A key issue which is touched on within this story is the wage gap. Miles states “she received for the work one-third of what would be given to a man for a task requiring the same amount of time and skill,” (Miles 029). This demonstrates that Miles was very aware of the unfair treatment of women’s work and labor, and that she did not think it was fair or right.

Another topic which Miles uses the story of the country woman as a rhetorical device to introduce is the idea of women having no say or right to their own money or laws, specifically how it relates to the upbringing and wellbeing of a woman’s family. Miles uses the white pigeon to reflect “I won-der what privileges this woman enjoys that she would not gladly barter for a 'say' concerning her children's education and the sale of liquour to her man?" (Miles 029). This directly connects to suffrage and demonstrates why Miles thinks women should have the right to vote, since these decisions are directly related to the women’s everyday life and well being of her and her children. This question makes the reader question what could be as important to a mother and wife as the well being of her family. This is an effective rhetorical move for both female readers who have families, as well as a larger audience, since the ideals of the period prioritized the duties of a wife and mother. Therefore, by framing the right to vote as an issue of being a good mother and wife, Miles makes it very difficult to disagree or argue against her rhetoric. Miles also discusses the struggle many working class women and girls experience while working

outside the home. Miles cites the need to make what money can be made as a woman, but at the same time also having to worry about defending one's honor and staying safe. This is an issue that is distinctly a working class issue for women which the larger women's movement, which is primarily by and for rich white women, does not take into account. This is another example of how Miles's lived experience as a working class woman brings different aspects informed by class struggle to the women's issues movement, and her rhetoric within the "Conversation".

Miles was also very aware that upper class women had privileges that most women did not, and that the privileges that most people at the time attributed to women as justification for not having the right to vote were "privilege is not one of womanhood, but of prosperity" (Miles 029). Miles states "there are millions of farm women toil-ing and suffering silently in lonely shacks all over these United States. They do not get into the papers; they live unseen and unknown. When con-ditions become unendurable even to their patience and fortitude, they silently drop into their graves or are carried to the madhouse" (Miles 029). Here, Miles speaks for the women she knows and has known throughout the years, the women who do not have the opportunity or education or time to write publicly in a newspaper of a city. Through making this statement, Miles, in a way, is ensuring that the public is aware of all of these women and injustices, if not by name, then by association and knowledge of them as a whole. Miles's rhetoric is important and powerful because she dares to write these truths, which make most people, especially her upper or middle class audience, uncomfortable. She believes that the stories, experiences, and rights of these women, who are just like her, are important and deserve to be heard, and so she tells them and makes people listen with her skill as a writer and rhetor through her performance of *metis* through nature and narrative as lived experience.

Miles specifically advocates for poor rural women in Chattanooga by requesting the creation of a women's restroom and country women's club in downtown Chattanooga. Miles's belief that women should band together is seen in this advocacy, in that she is encouraging the city to not only create spaces where women can rest, but also where they can meet, socialize, and share knowledge and information. This belief informs Miles's rhetoric through her lived experiences and culminates in Miles's performance of embodied rhetoric through nature as justification. By actively advocating for the creation of a women's restroom through the voices of the birds, Miles is directly performing *metis* to help better the lives of real women in the Chattanooga area. Miles frames her argument for a restroom by having the birds discuss how Chattanooga is known for its hospitality and that we are better than Pulaski, Tennessee, whose women's clubs the birds have just seen at the train station. This rhetorical strategy encourages the Chattanooga community to come together over a commonly held value, hospitality. Then Miles writes explaining how much the mountain people do for Chattanooga, leading the audience to be grateful to the mountaineers and country folks surrounding Chattanooga. After this, the fireman introduces the idea of a country woman's club, and mentions that there was an informal club, but it is now dissolved, which makes country women's lives more difficult. Miles then threatens the community's shared value of hospitality by proposing that Pulaski is ahead of and more hospitable than Chattanooga because they have a women's restroom and Chattanooga does not.

After weaving this intricate rhetorical web, Miles proposes that Chattanooga create a women's restroom, and gives examples of places and reasons and who it might be funded by. Miles argues wherever women are active through "concerted action" "wornout conventions have broken down; class distinctions fallen; false standards of values have been replaced by true one's

and the value of life born of woman, as contrasted with that of property gathered by man, has gone up" (Miles 005). This quote is referencing a large suffrage protest which happened in Chicago and served to create a lot of unity within the suffrage movement, and started a lot of change making. Therefore, indirectly, this is what Miles believes and hopes might happen with the creation of the women's restroom in Chattanooga and is the overall justification of her use of *metis* as a rhetorical tool to create change in her community for women like her, who do not have a voice or space to advocate for that change themselves.

Overall, Emma Bell Miles encourages women of different social classes to band together to get more rights for women, and does so through a variety of rhetorical devices which culminate in *metis* as a survival and over a range of different topics and issues facing Miles herself, and women she knows and cares about. Miles's lived experiences and deep understanding of the converging identities of the mountain women as white, working class, and rural women demonstrate Miles's complex understanding of and commitment to addressing many aspects of white women's rights. Miles's multifaceted rhetoric and nature driven arguments place her as a unique rhetor within the women's suffrage and feminist movement at large as well as as a local rhetor and writer in Chattanooga advocating for local change for women in the community.

Progress Narrative, Racism, and Eugenics in the Rhetoric of Emma Bell Miles

While Emma Bell Miles's rhetoric represents how average women in rural southern communities created positive community change through their rhetoric, Miles was extremely flawed and also used her writing in the "Conversations" to perpetuate racist ideas and racial discrimination which was commonplace in the South. She was openly racist, possibly more so than an average white southern woman of her time, and promoted eugenics actively within and

through her rhetoric. Additionally, Miles viewed feminism and eugenics as inherently linked and promoted by nature. Her feminism is not inclusive, and she willingly puts down the African American and immigrant community in Chattanooga to further her own goals of gaining equal rights for white women and better economic prospects for poor white mountaineers. Miles is also willing to step on the rights of people of color to further her arguments and advocacy for women's rights. Overall, Miles's view of progress informs, or justifies, her explicit racism and promotion of eugenics which she promotes through her rhetoric and writing in the "Conversations". Additionally, by writing off African Americans, or people of color at large, as being less than white people intellectually, she creates a framework that allows her to dehumanize people of color and justifies her eugenicist beliefs.

As stated in the previous paragraph, Miles understands the world through a lens of progress and evolution, and demonstrates this in her rhetoric. In an article discussing the struggles of life, Miles states "To one organism only out of the millions of species was it given to keep on the straight and narrow path of progress to the end, and so fulfill the final purpose that makes him ruler of the world" (Miles 045). This is an extremely interesting rhetorical statement, despite the controversial and problematic ideology it promotes. Miles calls humans "organisms" in the beginning of the statement, and by the end of the sentence, man is "ruler of the world". The structure of this sentence reflects the ideology of linear progress that Miles endorses within the statement, demonstrating Miles's skill as a writer and rhetor. It also creates a reflection of the path she envisions the white race will take, which allows her audience to visualize that future.

Additionally, the ideology here is a bold rhetorical statement in and of itself, because of the promotion of evolution in the conservative city of Chattanooga. Christianity dictates that man was created by God to serve God, but Miles's rhetoric promotes the idea that man himself will

rule the world without a god. Miles reiterates this ideology through the narrative of the meaning of the life of bugs. The fireman in Miles's article states "Bees serve the hive, as man serves the future" (Miles 013). This idea and comparison of bees and men illustrates that Miles thinks of humans as animals, but ones who are set to succeed and master the world and the future. Overall, this rhetorical device of comparing humanity to animals, while still maintaining that human beings are special illustrates Miles's belief that some beings are more or less evolved than others, and that she is capable of promoting and justifying her harmful beliefs and rhetoric through the lens of progress.

Miles's harmful beliefs manifest themselves through consciously racist rhetoric as well as through more subtle, more socially acceptable rhetorical statements. She uses African Americans, specifically an older blind African American man, as a rhetorical and literary device to begin many of her "Conversations". He is used as a joke, or an example of what a happy but clueless African American person looks like, she acts as if he is a representation of his race. Additionally, Miles often writes offhandedly racist comments such as "The matchless laughter of negroes and children-the expression of perfectly simple delight echoing from the golden remote youth of the world-is oftenest heard" (Miles 015) and "Maybe if he could not laugh he would still be a creature of the jungle" (Miles 015). This rhetoric allows Miles to justify the more inherently violent and harmful beliefs which she writes of in other articles. Finally, as Miles is describing the atmosphere of a night on the Tennessee River, Miles notes an African American man in a fishing boat, and describes him and his thoughts as "all the fan-tastic drowsy ideas that pass through his exotic and half-barbaric mind," (Miles 037). Overall, this statement sums up Miles's attitude and understanding of people of color which is present in her public rhetoric and writing.

Miles's racism is directly related to her understanding of feminism and nature as well. The birds state in one of the first articles published as the "Conversations", "We have always been eugenist and come to think of it, we have always been feminist, too" (Miles 003). Miles's overall understanding of nature, eugenics and racism, and feminism are all inherently connected in her rhetoric and presumably in her mind as well. This rhetorical statement serves to naturalize the extremely harmful practice and ideology of eugenics by stating that the birds use eugenics to survive. As previously stated in the paragraph above, Miles believes that people of color are inherently less intellectually capable and more childlike than white people. While Miles does not explicitly state anywhere in the "Conversations" that it is survival of the fittest, and that people of color are less fit, she implies this through her rhetoric. This encourages Miles's audience to adopt similar beliefs and to connect the goals of feminism with the goals of eugenics.

Miles also directly uses people of color as a reason that Chattanooga should be thankful to white farmers and mountain people, and why they should assist rural women. This argument is made when Miles is advocating for the creation of a women's restroom in Chattanooga. Miles states "The high birthrate of the native mountaineer should be even more than it is at present a valuable offset to the influx of foreign blood by immigration" (Miles 035). According to Miles, because poor white women have a lot of children, Chattanooga is indebted to them because these white children ensure that the country will not become too dominated by "foreign blood". Through this rhetoric of hate and fear, Miles advocates for a creation of an institution which would greatly benefit women in the Chattanooga area. This rhetoric, while abhorrent, would most likely have been an effective argument considering the time period and racism present in the South. Miles capitalizes on her audience's fear of people of color and immigrants as a capable rhetor, but this does not make her rhetoric excusable just because it is effective and

benefits white women. Unfortunately, despite being a skillful rhetor, and intelligent and progressive woman, Miles ultimately falls into the accepted and harmful racial beliefs of her time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Emma Bell Miles was a talented writer and rhetor who used her public platform “The Fountain Square Conversations” to share with the Chattanooga community her love for nature and preservationist beliefs, promote suffrage and women’s rights, and endorse harmful ideologies such as eugenics. Miles’s lived experiences directly impact her rhetorical actions in the “Conversations,” as demonstrated by her advocacy for women on Walden’s Ridge and naturalist advocacy. Miles performs *metis* as an embodied cunning and rhetorical tool in her arguments to persuade her audience in a way that, without the justification of nature behind her arguments, would not be possible. She uses something that everyone respects and considers “natural” or right (nature), to fight for things that many people do not think is right (suffrage). She uses the most fundamental framework (nature) to back up all of her arguments as a way to ensure her survival and the survival of the women she cared about. Miles’s writing and rhetoric in the articles are a survival, both for her and for the rural white women all over Tennessee who are fighting to survive and thrive in a harsh, difficult and patriarchal world which does not value them or care about their voices. Miles is privileged enough to have a platform to write about her lived experiences and argue for the things she cares about because of her experiences as a woman. However, her rhetoric and opinions are also harmful to certain groups of people, such as the African American community in Chattanooga. It is important to remember that Miles is an exceptionally talented rhetor and important local figure in Chattanooga who advocated for many

positive changes, but she is also a deeply flawed figure who used her platform for harm, as well as for good.

I hope that this analysis shed light on some of Miles's lesser known work and reconsidered her as an activist and rhetorical figure who was important in the history of southern women's rhetoric, rather than only as a creative writer and naturalist. Miles's rhetoric paved the way for future generations of women and people in the Chattanooga community to have a healthy living environment as well as equal rights for white women. It also enabled future generations to continue her activism and everyday rhetoric for change, while leaving behind a legacy of social change and rhetoric. Ultimately, Miles is important as a woman and rhetor because her writing and activism demonstrate that women in the South used the means available to them to create the change they wanted to see in their communities to improve their lives, the lives of their peers, and the lives of future generations to come.

Chapter IV

Case Study II: Mary Cunningham, McMinnville's Women's Restroom, and Magness Library

Mary Cunningham, a conservative and religious woman from rural Appalachia created change within her community by establishing a women's restroom and public library in McMinnville, Tennessee from approximately 1910-1930. This chapter demonstrates that Cunningham's persuasion tactics and arguments for creating the library were a performance of *metis* in which she used the means available to her in early 20th century McMinnville to achieve her goals and disrupt existing power structures. This analysis will focus on approximately the first 25 years of a scrapbook which Cunningham compiled in order to document the process of building the McMinnville women's restrooms and the Magness Library and Community House. This "scrapbook" contains fragments Cunningham considered important and recorded for future generations. These artifacts include a collection of miscellaneous items which mostly pertain to the library, or the motivation for her building the library such as diary entries, newspaper clippings about community events, personal and professional correspondences, Bible verses, government documents pertaining to the building of the library, and documents from committee and board meetings from when the library was established. This chapter will focus on three aspects of Cunningham's performance of *metis* through the written texts of the scrapbook which include: 1. The paradoxical power and vulnerability which Cunningham's body held because of her gender, age, race, and class, and how Cunningham harnessed the ethos which comes with being an older white woman to garner support for the library, 2. Cunningham's religious beliefs, and how she used those beliefs to legitimize and support her own goals in the eyes of her community, and 3. How Cunningham negotiated the paradoxical ideologies which she embodied

as a feminist leaning, conservative religious figure within her community and with herself. Through analysis of this collection, I will demonstrate that in the creation of the Library, Cunningham's persuasion tactics and rhetorical engagement deployed *metis* in a variety of ways to create a space that fostered knowledge, community interaction and solidarity for some of the town's most vulnerable residents: rural women and children. The Library still exists to this day, and stands within the McMinnville community as a resource and gathering place for community members, acting as the living legacy of Cunningham's rhetorical skill and action in the creation of the library 100 years ago.

Mary Cunningham is understudied and unknown beyond the library she created and local historical circle in McMinnville, therefore her story is important to tell in and of itself, as well as for the rhetorical value her story holds. Cunningham's story is rhetorically important in that her use of rhetoric to create positive community change clearly demonstrates that historically, rural Appalachian women have been capable of effective persuasion through whatever means were available to them. Cunningham's persuasion tactics, which stem from her reliance on her personal ethos and religion as a form of persuasion through writing, such as newspaper articles about the library and personal letters to donors, enable her to navigate power differences between herself, her community, and the donors and government officials she relied on to facilitate the creation of the Library. Cunningham overcame patriarchal power structures in an often indirect but effective way by using ideologies and gender roles which were approved of by patriarchy to imbue herself with powerful persuasion tools which enabled her to achieve her goal of creating the library. Her actions ultimately created a space for women to expand their worlds locally through access to downtown and businesses, community, and knowledge. While Cunningham is a complex and at times paradoxical figure who embodied conservative religious ideals, her

actions and rhetoric were conscious of male power structures and took the roles and ideologies legitimized in the eyes of patriarchy and molded them to conform to her own needs and desire to create the women's restroom and the library, which she believed were important for women and the community, despite the resistance she faced from people in power.

Two Narratives: A Brief Description of Cunningham, the Restroom, and Library

Mary Cunningham was a prominent resident of McMinnville, Tennessee in Warren County during the early 20th century. She was a passionate reader, education advocate, and proponent for children's wellbeing. According to Brad Walker, the current director of Magness Library and a local historian, Cunningham was born in White county to an upper middle class family in approximately 1869, and moved to McMinnville as a young child (44:26). She was well educated for a woman of her time and geographical location, as she attended primary school and a women's college in McMinnville, and was from what would be considered a respectable family by her peers and the surrounding community (Cunningham 15)¹. Cunningham was deeply religious, which influenced how she viewed herself and the world around her, and was an active member of the Presbyterian Church in McMinnville throughout her life (Walker 8:20).

The family she married into was also upper middle class, and her husband, James Monroe Cunningham, owned the majority of what is now Rock Island State Park outside of McMinnville, as well as owned his own mercantile business (Walker 2:06). In her early life and marriage, the social and financial privilege Cunningham experienced enabled her to participate in civic clubs and charitable work, on top of being a housewife and mother to 3 children (Walker 4:10). However, in approximately 1911 the Cunningham family lost the majority of their wealth, including the home which Mary Cunningham lived in and the store her husband owned (Walker

¹ Page numbers in Cunningham's Scrapbook vary depending on which copy is referenced

4:05). Cunningham was forced to seek employment outside of the home to support her family when her husband could not mentally and emotionally recover from the loss of property the family had experienced. When the Women's Civic League offered Cunningham the role of establishing a new women's restroom for downtown McMinnville, Cunningham saw an opportunity to support her family financially while also maintaining her social position as a middle class woman, and as an opportunity to help others in the community as well. The Civic League initially paid Cunningham to run the restroom out of her own home in her parlor, and continued to pay her until she secured funding from the local government for the library. When the final building was completed, Cunningham and her husband lived there (Walker 4:30). This, at least, is the story as told by Walker, according to personal interviews with people who knew Cunningham before her death.



Fig. 5 “Image #870 of Mary Cunningham” Retrieved from Special Collections, Magness Memorial Library and Community House, McMinnville, TN.

Cunningham herself tells a different story about the initial inspiration for and process of establishing the women’s restroom and library in her scrapbook. According to Cunningham, she first had the idea to create a public library when she saw a young boy waiting impatiently and causing trouble while his family finished their business in downtown McMinnville. Cunningham decided to temporarily loan him a book from her personal collection to amuse the boy until his family was ready to depart. This worked very well, according to Cunningham, and from this occurrence the idea for the creation of a public library was born (Cunningham 4). Shortly after this incident, a local group called the Women’s Civic League addressed the issue of creating a rest room for women and Cunningham quickly volunteered to oversee the creation and running of the Rest Room. Cunningham took this offer, which did not have anything to do with the creation of a library, as an opportunity to further her goal of one day founding a public library, as well as an opportunity to provide for herself and her family (Walker 7:00). This Restroom, unlike a modern restroom, did not operate merely as a place to relieve oneself, but as a gathering and resting place. Within the Women’s Restroom there were beds to rest upon, toiletries, a warm fire in the wintertime, water to drink, books to read, and most importantly, a friendly and welcoming face there to greet and support whoever entered (Cunningham 32). When she opened the restroom in July of 1913, Cunningham placed 6 books from her own private collection onto the restroom shelves (Cunningham 4). From this small collection, her dreams of creating a public library and giving the community access to reading material blossomed. Cunningham also took the goals of the restroom, such as creating a space for people to gather and rest, and applied those to the library as well, creating a space that facilitated learning and community. Through hard

work and dedication, Cunningham eventually secured funding and a permanent home for the library.

Cunningham dedicated the majority of her later life to seeing out her vision of a public library for McMinnville, and continued to be involved in some capacity until she died in 1954 (Walker 10:36). She was the librarian and director there for many years, and even lived in one of the rooms in the official library building beginning in 1932 until her death. The existence of this Rest Room can be nearly entirely attributed to Cunningham's creativity, ingenuity, dedication, and hard work. Through these things, the humble Rest Rooms grew into an established library with over 41,000 items and several educational and outreach programs in the current day (Walker 40:07).



Fig. 6 Gavin Townsend. "Photograph of Magness Library and Community House", *SAH Archipedia*, Society of Architectural Historians, <https://sah-archipedia.org/buildings/TN-01-177-0058>

While these two accounts are different, they are not necessarily conflicting because Walker's account often fills in the missing details from Cunningham's own narrative recorded in the scrapbook. It is possible that Cunningham consciously chose to craft a story which cast herself in a light that did not show her own financial hardship. This would attempt to ensure she was remembered as a charitable, middle class mother and wife, rather than as a desperate but resourceful woman who took an opportunity to help others by creating a restroom and library to also help herself and her family stay afloat financially. She most likely did not want to implicate her own family and husband by clearly stating their situation. Instead, she crafted a narrative which is compelling and memorable that also casts her in a positive and generous light in which she is in control of her own circumstances. If this is truly the case, Cunningham's rhetorical skills go beyond her direct persuasion in the early 1900s, and extend into modern day through her own legacy which she helped shape. However, Cunningham's story, as Walker tells it, complicates Cunningham's own creation of her legacy since she has not been remembered exactly as she portrays herself in the scrapbook. Despite this compilation, the double narrative shows Cunningham's rhetorical skill and cunning in which she took her own hardship and turned it into an opportunity for herself, her family, and for the community.

Southern Woman's Ethos as a Form of Persuasion and Performance of *Metis*

Cunningham's rhetoric embodies the persuasive strategy of *metis* through her use of her own position in McMinnville society as a respectable, Christian middle class white woman and the ethos which is attached to that identity. Cunningham appears to be aware of the power her particular position held in society, and of the religious justification she had from being a devoted Christian. She used this identity and power to her advantage in her interactions with public figures, donors, and the McMinnville community when she was asked for funds, permits, and

donated materials for the library. However, Cunningham occupied an interestingly precarious position because her voice and existence were marginalized because of her gender and age, which forced her to seek cunning and non-normative forms of persuasion. However, she was also empowered by those same identities, as well as her race and class, because she capitalized on the ethos society often lends to older christian white women, and used that ethos as a tool of persuasion, which demonstrates her performance of *metis*.

Cunningham's class and financial status enabled her connections with more prominent and wealthy people who had the resources to facilitate the creation of a library, and even when she was financially unstable, her past financial status and social position gave her the power she needed to navigate McMinnville society. As previously stated, Cunningham came from a middle class background and family from McMinnville. This means that she most likely grew up as a "respectable" woman who had the approved of manners and social ties that are important in small towns. She married into a well off family as well, so in her earlier life she never had to work outside the home to provide for her family. Initially, Cunningham had all of the leisure time that came with being a middle to upper class woman during the time period, which enabled her to focus on charity work through her church and form ties to several different charitable organizations, one of which was the Women's Civic League. When Cunningham was forced to look for work outside of the home to provide a living for her or her family, the ties and reputation she formed as a middle class woman assisted her in her search. The Women's Civic League asked her to manage the creation and running of the Women's restroom, which was a stepping stone to the creation of the library and also gave her a source of income, which was desperately needed (Walker 4:10). However, Cunningham's goals centered around education and community, and required more funds and resources than she had access to personally or through

family. Therefore, she was forced to look for external support and assistance in the creation of the library. Ultimately, Cunningham's class and financial privilege in her early life put her in a position to socialize with and be considered respectable by the people in power who did have access to the financial resources Cunningham needed to care for her family and establish the library.

Another important aspect of Cunningham's ethos, which stems from her class and financial status, is Cunningham's educational attainments and communication skills, which she relied on to convince donors to support the library, as well as to establish her ethos.

Cunningham attended primary school, as well as a women's college also in McMinnville, Tennessee. She possessed the excellent management and leadership skills needed to successfully build an institution from the ground up. Her writing is eloquent and clear, and she does not hesitate to use rhetorical appeals such as pathos and storytelling to influence her audience. Cunningham's education, which stems from her class, gave her the skills she required to accomplish her task. The literacy skills she gained from her education were important later on as she was trying to firmly establish the library. Additionally, the restroom/newly founded library served as a place where women would come during WW1 to have the letters from their family in the military read to them by Cunningham and also to understand the compensation they were allotted if they had a family member die in service (Cunningham 50). Therefore, Cunningham used her education, literacy, and writing to establish her ethos and to help others in the community, reaffirming the ethos she relied on so heavily.

In addition to Cunningham's literacy and education, another key component of Cunningham's ethos is her body, or more specifically, her gender, age, and race, which both marginalize and privilege her. Cunningham was a woman in a patriarchal society who had less

and a traditionally smaller sphere of influence than men of that time period. This proved problematic when Cunningham set out to form the library without significant financial backing or support. To garner the support required as well as to validate her goals and involvement in the enactment of them, she chose to use her gender to her advantage by harnessing the expectation that women are only good for helping, caring, charity work in the home or the domestic sphere. Cunningham accomplishes this strategy by associating the library and restroom as a form of care for the community and even as a domestic space. As stated in the previous biographical section, the rest room was initially started in Cunningham's own home and focused on the physical needs of traveling women and children. Cunningham described the restroom as a domestic space in which "the rich and poor, high and low, good and bad, elegantly dressed, ragged and dirty, sick and well, big and little, old and young" were welcomed and given a safe space to rest and learn (Cunningham 37). Cunningham also established several "homemakers clubs" once the library was founded, giving valuable skills to young girls while also cementing the association of the library to domesticity (Cunningham 38). Cunningham situated the restrooms and later library as a domestic space to expand her sphere of influence and movement in society to rhetorically create a path to accomplish her goals.

Cunningham used the power and ethos granted to her through the associations and expectations placed upon her body in her persuasion and creation of the library, therefore she is directly using her ethos as a performance of *metis* which enacts community change. Elder Appalachian white women were typically associated with Christianity, and practical knowledge, respectability which grants a type of ethos to these women, so Cunningham undertook this project with the former associations on her and her body. She very heavily relied on her own Christian beliefs and the ethos they lent her as well as a frame for situating most of her

arguments in favor of the library. Cunningham embodied society's expectations as mentioned above to the fullest extent, which lent her power which she used as leverage and a persuasive tool. Importantly, Cunningham's position and ethos is highly reliant on the fact that she is white, because all the traits which are key to Cunningham's ethos previously mentioned are only attributable to older white women in a systemic and culturally racist age and society. All of these bodily attributes which lend Cunningham an undeniable ethos also contribute to Cunningham's performance of *metis* as an embodied form of persuasion

Metic Framework of Religion as Rhetorical Justification

Religion is the key component and tie of Mary Cunningham's performance of *metis* in which she exhibits rhetorical intelligence and craftiness by situating her own argument in Christianity and God as a way of legitimizing her voice and goal to create the library. Cunningham was deeply religious and aware her community was as well, so she used religion as a tool of persuasion by arguing that Christian people should donate, help, and contribute to good causes, in this case, the public library. In this section, I will demonstrate that Cunningham exhibits a deep connection to and derives motivation from her religious beliefs, and that her own personal beliefs make her persuasion tactics and performance of *metis* stronger within her community. Secondly, I will show that Cunningham, while truly believing in God and Christianity, also consciously used her beliefs as a means of persuasion when establishing the women's restrooms and library. And finally, demonstrate that through situating her voice as the voice of christianity, she was able to access spaces and accomplish goals that would otherwise most likely have been off limits because of her gender. All of these rhetorical moves are a reflection of Cunningham's determination in the face of resistance, as shown in this statement: "When I made known to a few friends the fact that I had "SET OUT" to establish a FREE

PUBLIC LIBRARY, they met the plan with derision, and said: "It Can't Be Done" (Cunningham

5). Cunningham's choice to use her ethos, which is built off of her belief in Christianity, to situate her voice as the voice of Christianity legitimizes her goal to create the restroom and library, and persuades the community to support that goal. This is a performance of *metis* in that Cunningham recognized that her voice alone was not enough to accomplish her goals, so she chose to use the available means, her deeply held belief in God and Christian duty, as a tool of persuasion in a world that did not value her voice, but only that of a man, or higher power.

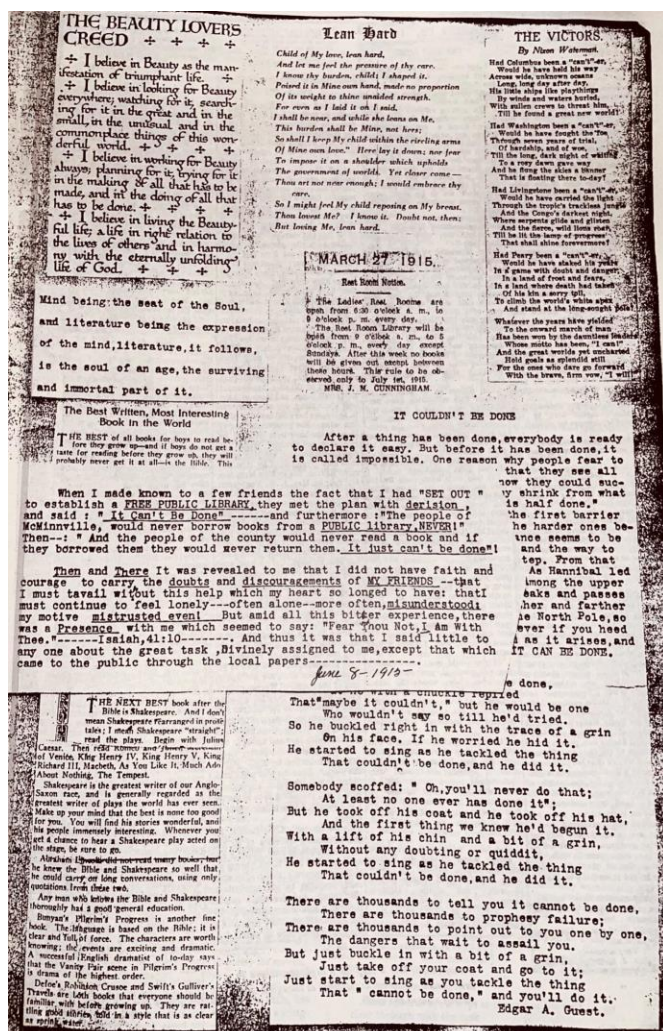


Fig. 7 “Photograph of Mary Cunningham’s Scrapbook” 11 March, 2022. Mary Cunningham Scrapbook. P. 58, Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from Special Collections, Magness Memorial Library and Community House, McMinnville, TN.

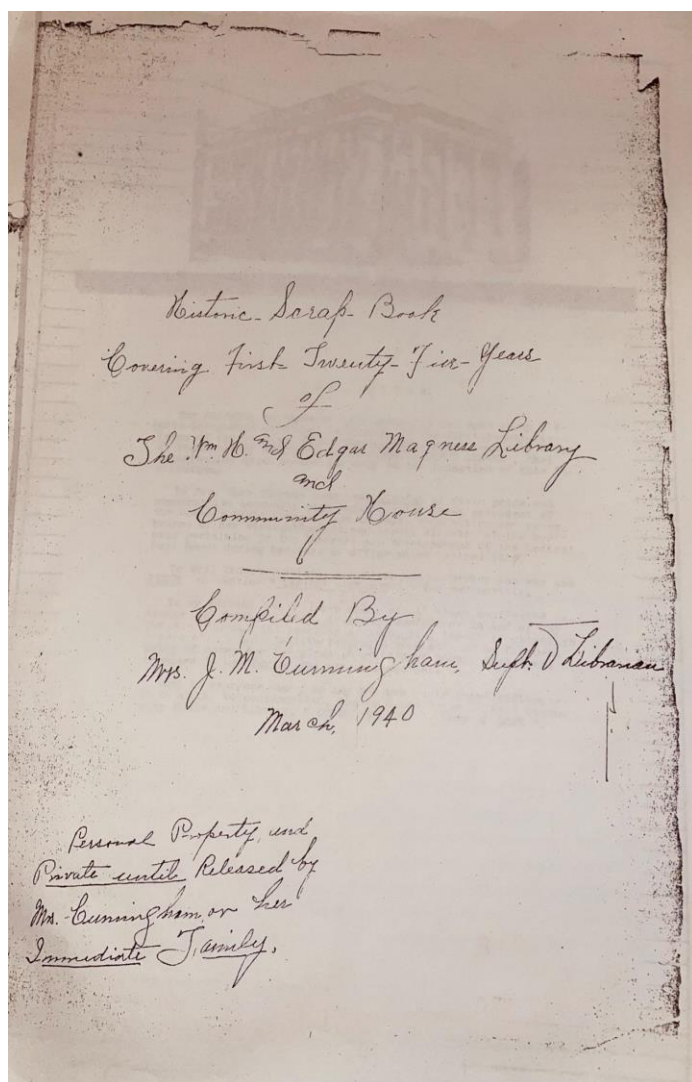


Fig. 8 “Photograph of Mary Cunningham’s Scrapbook” 11 March, 2022. Mary Cunningham Scrapbook. P. 1 Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from Special Collections, Magness Memorial Library and Community House, McMinnville, TN.

As previously stated, Cunningham expresses a deeply rooted belief in God and Christian duty to help others and improve their lives within the Scrapbook. Throughout the journey of

creating the library, Cunningham repeatedly turns to scripture for encouragement, motivation, and justification when she encounters troubles along the way, or needs to remind herself why she puts in the work it takes to establish the library. For example, when her friends and those in the community doubt her, she writes “The less faith they have in my ability, the greater will be THY GLORY when it is accomplished!” (Cunningham 42). This statement clearly demonstrates that Cunningham feels she is carrying out God’s work. She seeks comfort and motivation in the fact it will bring glory to God when she accomplished this task that so many think she is not capable of. Throughout the scrapbook she includes Bible verses, hymns, and religious stories which both justify her belief that she should be doing work that helps her community and offers her encouragement. She often writes in the personal notes and diary entries included in the scrapbook about how God wants her to do this, and how she thinks it is her Christian duty to establish the library. In the foreword summarizing the initial process of creating the library Cunningham, when faced with the possibility that there would be no monetary support for her if she created the library states

“my heart sank— anguish and fear almost overcame me —: so bewildered was I that my soul seemed wrapped in sackcloth and the immensity of the world roundabout me, appeared to have engulfed me----- then, in the sacred still-ness of the morning house, a soothing peace settled over my troubled, weary heart, as dew, the golden dew of sleep in which there came to me this command: “ BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD ; AND THAT I WILL NEVER LEAVE THEE NOR FORSAKE THEE ” (Cunningham 3).

This quote acts within the scrapbook to establish that God was on Cunningham's side, and would provide for her, so she chose "a task at once, hard and entirely without compensation² other than a consciousness that I was about to be permitted to exalt a very menial position into "SOMETHING" in the name of Christ" (Cunningham 3). As this quote demonstrates, Cunningham was genuinely religious and devoted to her religious beliefs as represented in the Scrapbook. I make this point to illustrate that while Cunningham did use her beliefs as a form of persuasion, she also genuinely believed in the ideas she was promoting, and they were even her motivation for the creation of the library as well as her persuasion and performance of *metis*. Therefore, Cunningham's deeply held religious beliefs acted as a motivation for, as well as the mode of, her performance of *metis*.

Cunningham did not hesitate to use her belief in God and active role in the Christian community of McMinnville as a tool to persuade and convince men in power and the McMinnville community to fund and donate to the rest room and library. This was one of her most powerful weapons because, within her community it is difficult to argue with someone who situates their goals as a goal of God or Christianity. We can see how Cunningham accomplishes this in her Scrapbook in the statement "If you knew the great number of hearts really hungry for books to read, I believe you would aid in bringing food to them, even as you would respond to the cry for bread!"... "children who have not been exposed to gospel" (Cunningham 38). Cunningham directly implicated her readers in this article by stating that there are children who have not been exposed to the gospel, therefore it is the public's Christian duty to help her financially support the library to promote literacy and knowledge in the name of Christianity.

² According to Walker, Cunningham did receive some compensation for her work at the library, however it is impossible to tell whether she did for a fact at first.

Additionally, she equates knowledge to hunger, effectively connecting the responsibility to feed the needy in the Bible to the idea of feeding eager and hungry minds.

Another key example of Cunningham's justification of her own goals as inherently Christian goals is seen in 1917 in a newspaper article Cunningham wrote when the restroom faced financial uncertainty, she states

“I set my life anew to a work that I believe was born of God. Somewhere, amid the deep, long weary yearnings of my soul there is hope that the Rest Rooms have friends who will come to their rescue and transplant them, not by might or by power, but in the spirit that will preserve their present usefulness and invite the blessings of our Lord and Master on their future life and work. I am still Yours for service, MRS. J. M. CUNNINGHAM” (Cunningham 36).

Cunningham again implicates the reader by stating that the work of the restrooms is God's work, and encourages the reader to aid the restrooms so that God may bless them in the future.

Cunningham uses a similar tactic in a letter to the Municipal Board and County Court which states that the library “will prove a monument to both of you, one more to be desired than cold marble or even of gold”, attempting to persuade her audience that establishing an institution which will help others and spread Christianity, even after they are gone (Cunningham 34). This rhetorical appeal also plays on the desires of her audience to be seen and remembered as men who were generous and Christian-like. Cunningham effectively played upon her audience's desires (to leave a legacy that will look good for them, or to be good Christians and fulfill their social duties) to craft persuasive arguments which enabled Cunningham to accomplish the creation of the library, when she otherwise would not have had the money or social influence to do so as a woman.

Cunningham's religious beliefs, wielded as a rhetorical device, allowed her to access and achieve goals within the patriarchal community that a woman most likely would not have been able to achieve without a legitimizing cause or power behind her, merely as a woman in a male space. The position Cunningham inhabited within her patriarchal Christian community gave her the opportunity to engage her persuasive powers and talent as a rhetorician through a performance of *metis*. This performance was facilitated by the deployment of her own and her community's belief in the male Christian God which legitimized her own most powerful arguments and actions. This persuasion tactic speaks to the ingenuity and wily cunning that she possessed to be able to recognize that she could harness the power of religion and to legitimize her own voices and to achieve their goals, even as she believed in the beliefs she was using as rhetorical tools of persuasion. Cunningham took the chances available to her, i.e. the offer to create the women's restrooms, and made it an opportunity for herself to possibly expand the restroom from there to be a fully functioning library on top of all the other functions the restroom had.

Feminist Action-Conservative Ideals: The Value of Cunningham's Rhetoric

Mary Cunningham's overcame challenges the patriarchy presented to her in a subversive and powerful way through her own rhetorical action and agency and improved the lives of women in the McMinnville community. However, many of Cunningham's beliefs and actions are feminist, but she also embodies conservative Christian and patriarchal ideologies which may complicate a reading of Cunningham as distinctly feminist. Despite this paradox, Cunningham's rhetoric harnesses the powers of patriarchy to achieve her own personal goal to provide for her family, and allows her to maintain the women's restroom and establish a public library for her community in the face of resistance from powerful men. Cunningham's experiences and rhetoric

are valuable as an example of how rural southern women employed rhetoric to create community change to improve their own lives, even if Cunningham does perfectly align with feminist ideals, in her own or modern times. Cunningham cunningly uses the ethos that she establishes for herself and is given in society due to her identity to justify the more progressive beliefs and actions she completes under the cloak of her ethos and religion, even if those beliefs do not necessarily fit into the stereotypical world view of conservative southern protestants of the time. This choice to situate her own voice and actions about women's rights within her own ethos as a respected Christian woman, therefore associating these beliefs with God, demonstrates Cunningham's performance of *metis*, and connects to her overall goal to create the library as an institution which fostered new ideas and people in need of a safe space to rest and to learn.

Cunningham helped, and directly impacted the lives of women in McMinnville, and allowed for more rhetorical movement and overall education through library and rest room. Cunningham believed in "reading and education for all" (Walker 40:10). She played an important role in educating the girls of McMinnville when she thought they were not receiving the education they needed and deserved. Cunningham was the founder of the "girl's homemaker club", which focused on domestic tasks, such as canning and sewing, as well as the general practical education of young girls. Through wily rhetorical moves, Cunningham successfully equated the rest room and library as a domestic space of care, which it was, because it was literally her home, but it also enabled women and the community to gather, learn, and access knowledge and the world with more ease. The rest room and library enabled women to access downtown in a way that they had not before, because they could go to the restrooms and clean themselves up so that they could conduct their business with dignity, rather than tired and mud and dirt splattered. Therefore, Cunningham's actions consciously and deliberately helped women

and vulnerable people in need, and allowed for them to gain knowledge in a safe and welcoming environment through the rest room and library.

Cunningham also ensured that the restroom, and by extension the library, acted as a safe space for women, or other vulnerable peoples, who needed help when they were physically in danger, as well as in need of education or other forms of support. For example, Cunningham writes in her Scrapbook that she allowed a woman who waited “under horse racks and along the shadows of certain corners until her husband was sober enough to be taken home” to stay in the rest room as a way to keep her out of harm's way (Cunningham 37). Cunningham was not afraid to call out those who did not want to help others, and states “They think they don’t exist if you don’t speak of them” (Cunningham 38), referring to those in need who she did not hesitate to help when she was able. Additionally, Cunningham was a temperance activist and supporter of Frances Willard, a prominent figure in the temperance and suffrage movement. Cunningham was against alcohol not only because of religion, but also because it hurt women and families when their husbands and fathers were alcoholic. This is a perfect example of how Cunningham indirectly supports feminist views, while still maintaining her own religious and conservative ideas.

More explicitly, Cunningham often complicates the understanding of her as a feminist figure within the scrapbook. One instance of this is when Cunningham explicitly states that she, as all women should, desires “THAT I NOT BE REQUIRED TO LEAVE MY HOME, MY HUSBAND AND CHILDREN, to permit me to be anchored to homelife” (Cunningham 2). This statement reflects a very traditional and conservative view of women’s roles. However, Cunningham herself often steps out of what would traditionally be called the home lift by traveling, visiting government meetings, etc. for the library. Cunningham, as stated earlier in the

section, effectively casts the restroom and library as a domestic space, effectively justifying her need, and later choice, of stepping outside of what is traditionally considered the domestic sphere.

Another instance of Cunningham's paradoxical and often unclear views on feminism are demonstrated through a story she tells in a newspaper article about a young girl (of undetermined age) shows up with a drunk man at the restrooms around midnight. Cunningham immediately steps in, keeps the girl from harm, and calls the girl's mother to pick her up, after which the mother drives to town by 2 a.m.. The following quote is a commentary on this situation: "Many of us oppose "Women's Rights", but who among us would dare oppose a mother's who would risk her life to protect her daughter? But oh, for the day when mothers are as concerned for the safety and purity of their sons!" (Cunningham 38). While Cunningham seems to include herself in those who would oppose women's rights, she complicates the statement by proposing a situation in which a mother's right to protect is questioned. She arguably advocated for women's rights by connecting them to traditionally held values that her conservative readership would identify with. However, it is still ambiguous because of her own assertion that she would oppose women's rights, whatever that meant to her at the time. Overall, Cunningham is a complex human being with many different biases and identities that influence her ideas and actions, that in turn influence her rhetoric and actions when establishing the restroom and library. While Cunningham does not perfectly fall into one definable category of feminist or suffragist, her rhetoric and the actions she achieved through her rhetoric benefitted women in the community at large, especially poor and vulnerable women, and stand as a reminder that important rhetorical figures from the past may not always align with modern perspectives and ideas, but that does not make them any less important rhetorically, or their stories less valid.

Conclusion

Mary Cunningham's performance of *metis* throughout the process of maintaining and creating the women's restrooms and public library was accomplished by relying on her ethos and situating her own arguments in religion which demonstrates Cunningham's rhetorical skill and value as an Appalachian woman rhetor. Cunningham dedicated a good portion of her life to the library and restrooms and used it to create a domestic and safe space, essentially a "home" for the community, which still exists to this day. She used her image of respectability, whiteness, and devoutness to make a domestic place for people to gather as a way to gain funding and support for something very radical, a place of learning and knowledge that welcomed all. Cunningham took a stand against anyone who went against her ideas to create the library and used the patriarchy's expectations of her to achieve and justify her goals, which ultimately improved the lives of McMinnville women and the McMinnville community at large through access to knowledge and a community space. Even as Mary Cunningham embodied paradoxical values, she often capitalized on her own paradoxes to persuade her audiences to comply with her ideas and suggestions. Cunningham, although embodying conservative ideology, accomplishes feminist goals and rhetoric which improves the lives of women and subverts patriarchal power structures to do so, even as she exists inside of and benefits from those structures. Ultimately, Cunningham's rhetoric and performance of *metis* are important to Appalachian feminist rhetorical scholarship and demonstrate that while complex and less than perfect, Cunningham was a powerful rhetor and agent of change within her community who improved the lives of people within her community through her rhetoric in the creation of the restrooms and Magness Library.

Chapter V

Discussion & Conclusion

Emma Bell Miles and Mary Cunningham exemplify how average women of the past used their rhetorical skills to create positive change within their communities. Through the archival and feminist methods listed in the review of literature, I attempt to expand the scholarship of women's rhetoric and shine light on Miles and Cunningham as women and rhetors who were capable and important rhetorical figures within their communities, but who have been forgotten through the passage of time. Despite their differences, Miles and Cunningham both employed surprisingly similar rhetorical tactics by situating their own voices within the authority of a greater cultural power, demonstrating their cunning and metic rhetorical performance. There is still much work to be done within the Emma Bell Miles archive, as my analysis primarily focused on Miles's published Chattanooga News articles, and rather than her hundreds of diary entries, letters, and paintings also kept within that archive. While Cunningham's archive is significantly smaller and more localized, an analysis of exactly how she fits into what Johnson calls the "Noble Maid" rhetorical identity would possibly be useful in more firmly connecting local rhetoricians with larger social movements in history.

As stated previously, the work of these women is inextricably tied to their lived experience and place. Similarly, this text was also facilitated and inspired by local knowledge and place. I personally only knew of Cunningham because I worked at Magness Library in highschool, and discovered Miles through a visit to the UTC archives and through a friend who grew up near Miles's homeplace. As I wrote this text, I frequented streets and places in which Miles and Cunningham had most likely walked during their lifetimes. Parts of this thesis were even written in a cafe next door to the old Frances Willard home building (where Miles lived for

a time), overlooking the same statue that Miles framed her articles around in the 1910s, while other parts were written as I sat in the library Cunningham herself created and in which she lived. My work is tied locally, over the span of a century, to Miles and Cunningham. They paved the way for me to write about the things I am passionate about. Emma Bell Miles and Mary Cunningham, not only improved and influenced their immediate communities within their lifetimes, but also, along with innumerable named and nameless women, enabled the creation of a reality in which I sit writing about their metic rhetoric performances in which they fought for a voice for themselves, their communities, and women of the future. I work to continue the legacy of social change through rhetoric that these women left behind by expanding our current understanding of who used rhetoric and how they did so to enable social change and growth for their and their communities' benefit.

There is significant opportunity for further study and analysis of both Cunningham and Miles. Specifically there is opportunity for further inquiry into how both of these women used gender as a rhetorical performance which enhanced their persuasive power and enabled them to more effectively advocate for their ideas and goals. There is also space to question how the creation of forms of white feminine identity is related to the effectiveness of Miles and Cunningham's rhetoric, and to question how that creation was and is a potentially harmful and exclusive act. Finally, there are further research opportunities in the analysis of if and how Miles and Cunningham fit solidly into the tradition of the Noble Maid, as outlined by Johnson, as well as a more thorough inspection of the literature surrounding gender as performance in relation to Miles' and Cunningham's rhetorical performances.

Additionally, Miles and Cunningham are merely two individuals among the potential multitude of individuals, groups, and communities who have created positive community change

through their use of rhetoric in the past that the rhetorical tradition and dominant historical narratives have ignored or forgotten. Future potential researchers and social activists who are interested can look to their own local ties and experiences to uncover and tell the stories of people who relate to their personal communities which have been overlooked or forgotten in today's society or throughout history. I hope that this work inspires others to continue Miles and Cunningham's legacy of social change in the South, and to look to their own communities to retell the stories of important feminist figures as an act of resistance and remembrance in the face of patriarchal violence and norms.

This work of remembrance and retelling is grounded in social justice activism in that social justice and activism seeks to raise current marginalized peoples voices to the forefront of conversations through various forms of rhetoric and activism through a variety of rhetorical methods and protests. Rhetorical scholars, researchers, and writers in the archives can bring forth these forgotten voices for their inherent value as individuals who lived and worked to make their lives and their communities lives better. Rhetoric and activism as practices can also learn from these rediscovered and retold rhetors' methods of resistance and from their struggle to better inform our own social activism and rhetoric in the modern day to be the most effective and aware as we continue the legacy of social change within the South. The mistakes, successes, and activism of Miles and Cunningham, along with any other potential rhetors who history has forgotten or ignored, can aid current research and activists in making our current communities more safe, inclusive, equal, and vibrant places for all to live and call home.

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