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# “Those Who Have Had Trouble Can Sympathise with You”: Press Writing, Reader Responses and a Murder Trial in Interwar Britain

John Carter Wood, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK  
jcarterwood@yahoo.com/j.c.wood@open.ac.uk

Scholars have become increasingly interested in how *consumers* of culture (readers, listeners and viewers) play an active role in making sense of what they read, hear and see. Within the fields of cultural studies and communications theory, quite elaborate theorizations of precisely *how* the messages “encoded” in cultural productions are “decoded” by those who interact with them have been developed and debated.<sup>1</sup> Discussing trends in the ways the role of the “audience” is understood, David Morley has written that it is now “conceived of as actively decoding the messages they receive from systems of mass communications, and interpreting them in a range of ways, drawing on the particular cultural resources which their social position has made available to them.”<sup>2</sup> This turn toward understanding the role of “reception” is a positive one. As John Storey has put it recently, to understand how cultural transmission works—obviously an important topic for anyone interested in culture—a text’s social meaning, i.e., “how it is appropriated and used in the consumption practices of everyday life,” must be considered.<sup>3</sup> It makes sense that people *actively* interpret the texts that they consume—Michel de Certeau has gone so far as to describe consumption as a form of “secondary production”—and that they do so in ways that do not necessarily accord with the aims of the texts’ producers. We have reason to reject simplistic models of cultural imposition and question notions that texts (at least outside of more strictly regimented scientific contexts) have obvious, firmly fixed meanings. As Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa have put it, “The reader reworks and re-interprets what is read; his or her contribution cannot be subsumed within the author’s version of the meaning of the text.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, they argue, “Without the reader, a literary culture cannot be conceived.”<sup>5</sup>

That is a convincing viewpoint; however, at the same time, as David Paul Nord points out, the discovery of the “active reader” has not led to an unquestioned celebration of his or her freedom

to interpret texts. Quite the contrary: some scholars have emphasized how interpretation occurs within a discursive system that provides an “ideological constraint” upon the making of meaning:

For these theorists, the turn to interpretation did not reveal an autonomous and empowered reader but rather a reader wholly dependent upon (indeed, created by) the patterns of language and culture—or perhaps even a reader who is the creature of the multinational media conglomerate.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, the “social” meaning of texts does not float free of material and cognitive limitations. Texts is not *limitlessly* interpretable: not only do they contain a specific intended (in Hall’s terminology “preferred”) meanings, but there are also likely to be recognizable regularities in the ways that they are interpreted by a particular audience in a particular place and time.<sup>7</sup> It is, ultimately, people who interpret texts rather than any social structure itself, and they are not only located within society but also possess a particular psychological make-up that is both shared across their species (i.e., we each have a built-in capacity to perceive and understand cultural messages in particular ways) and individually idiosyncratic with regard to preferences and temperament. Moreover, we each have an accumulated store of experiences that is both individual and patterned in accordance with particular group identities. While readers are neither absolutely “free” nor “constrained,” this leaves a quite enormous middle ground, our *historical* understanding of which remains somewhat rudimentary.

In the last couple of decades, historians too have been increasingly interested in the topic of how forms of culture—books, newspapers, films, radio programs—have been interpreted by those who have read, viewed or listened to them. Historical sources for understanding how media consumers in the past interacted with what they read are relatively rare, even if some investigators have been creative and successful in making the most of what evidence is available.<sup>8</sup> David Paul Nord has argued that “the history of readers and reading” should attract more attention, and, as Jonathan Rose has pointed out (and vividly demonstrated), the questions of what “ordinary readers in history” read and “how they read it” are no longer as unanswerable as they once seemed.<sup>9</sup> For example, Lawrence W. Levine has provided a vivid history of both “folk” and “mass” cultures in the United States of America and has effectively confronted the assumption of the passively

consuming audience. Audiences, Levine convincingly argues, were not only very selective about which parts of mass culture they wished to partake (e.g. by choosing what to read, watch or listen to) but also very active in how they *used* them: “What people *can* do and *do* do,” Levine argues, “is to refashion the objects created for them to fit their own values, needs, and expectations.”<sup>10</sup> By their nature, expressive works are “incomplete,” “filled with interstices that need connecting, ambiguities that need resolution, imprecisions that need clarity, complexities that need simplifying.”<sup>11</sup>

Consumers of popular culture, he argues, invest imaginatively in their cultural consumption, even in dealing with seemingly simplistic or trite cultural products, such radio soap operas.

However, the “history of audiences” that Levine and others have done so much to develop is still a difficult field, since the fact remains that sources providing direct access to what audiences thought are rare. This is especially unfortunate for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the rise of “mass culture”—with its clearer distinction between cultural producers and consumers, greater homogeneity of message and increasing volume of cultural information—raised particularly pressing questions about how audiences interacted with the cultural products that surrounded them. This is not to say, of course, that historians have been reluctant to use media sources to reconstruct the past: the rise of a more specifically “cultural” history has even seen such sources examined more closely as purveyors of historical attitudes, ideologies and discourses. One area in which attention to media narratives has been very fruitful has been related to reporting of crime, which was a vital element in the development of the popular press in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>12</sup> However, this history has largely remained one-sided. Given the problems of understanding reader reception in the past, any evidence that provides insight into public *reactions* to news events is extremely valuable.

Combining issues of crime, press reporting and reader response brings us to the specific topic of this article, which will consider a British murder trial in 1928, when a woman named Beatrice Pace was tried for the arsenic murder of her husband. Pace, the wife of a quarryman and

sheep farmer in the Forest of Dean in the western county of Gloucestershire, was catapulted out of the obscurity of her rural, working-class life and onto the front pages of the British popular press, to the fascination of newspaper readers throughout England and even abroad. More than two hundred of the letters sent to Pace after her acquittal have survived, which will serve as my basis for examining the public reactions to her case. In doing so, I hope to shed some light on the processes by which readers interpret the media stories they are offered.<sup>13</sup> How “free” or “constrained” these newspaper readers were in doing so is difficult to evaluate; however, Nord has astutely suggested that much of the debate around this issue boils down to a question of scale and perspective.

Observed at the individual level, human beings appear diverse, idiosyncratic, free. Raise the observation to a higher level of abstraction, and they become more comparable, more predictable, more constrained. This apparent change in human nature is produced not by a change in reality or even philosophy but by a change in methodology, a change in perspective.<sup>14</sup>

It is possible, he has suggested, “to conceive of readers as *both* active and passive, both free and bound, both creative and constrained—not a little of each but a lot of both. It depends on how we look at them—or, more properly, where we look for them, in what social context.”<sup>15</sup> I think that this comment ably summarizes the key dynamics in understanding reader responses, which are both highly individualistic and distinctively patterned. In what follows, I explore both sides of that issue on the basis of the rare evidence provided to us by this remarkable collection of letters containing reactions to one of the most striking legal dramas in Britain in the twentieth century. As a technical note, I have aimed to let the writers speak for themselves, in their own voices and idioms. But in the interests of readability, I have changed or added punctuation and corrected spelling in the letters presented here. Underlined passages are presented in italics.

## The “Fetter Hill Mystery”

Harry Pace was a quarryman and shepherd in Fetter Hill, an isolated hamlet in the Forest of Dean, not far from the Welsh border. After a lengthy illness that began the previous summer, he

died on 10 January 1928 at his home, which he shared with his wife Beatrice and their five children. Within days, journalists from local and London-based papers were on the scene, after suspicions on the part of the dead man’s family had caused the coroner to delay the funeral and order a post-mortem.<sup>16</sup> When arsenic was identified as the cause of death, Scotland Yard detectives were called in on the case, and a lengthy inquest followed. The inquest revealed countless details about the Paces’ lives and the circumstances of Harry’s illness, but could not conclusively determine how so much arsenic (perhaps three times the lethal dose) had found its way into his body. Nonetheless, in a controversial decision, the inquest jury’s verdict charged Beatrice with her husband’s murder.

Suggestions emerged gradually that Beatrice had been viciously abused by Harry; when the full details were revealed, her marital “martyrdom” (as several papers referred to it) was one of the key reasons for her sympathetic treatment by the press, which also presented her in idealized terms as a caring wife and doting mother. (The fact that she had borne ten children by the age of 38—five of whom had died—also contributed both to an emphasis on Beatrice’s maternal qualities and the tragic nature of her biography.<sup>17</sup>) The popularity of “Mrs. Pace” helped to ensure that a legal defense fund established by her Member of Parliament rapidly filled up with donations from throughout Britain. The fund enabled her to retain the services of a highly skilled barrister, Norman Birkett, K.C., then a rising star in the legal profession (and later to become Lord Birkett).<sup>18</sup> Her trial in Gloucester was a sensation, both inside the courtroom and on the streets, where large and enthusiastic crowds gathered to vociferously express their support for the “tragic widow” on trial. Her decisive acquittal was universally acclaimed, and Beatrice immediately thereafter sold her story to the *Sunday Express* for a substantial sum, leading to a six-part serialized memoir that appeared July and August 1928. (A nearly identical memoir later appeared in *Peg’s Paper*, a popular weekly women’s magazine, between September 1928 and January 1929.) The case also led to a series of political debates regarding the actions of the coroner, Scotland Yard detectives and the plight of poor defendants.

The Pace case generated an enormous amount of press attention in 1928, and the rapid growth in her legal defense fund, the enthusiastic crowds that supported her and the press references to gifts and encouraging letters that strangers sent to Beatrice suggest that her sympathetic depiction in the press had had a profound effect on the way she was viewed and treated by the public. But is it possible to reach any more detailed conclusions about how readers *reacted* to the coverage of the case? If so, what might this tell us about the ways that readers interact with press reporting? Fortunately, over two hundred of the letters and postcards she was sent have been preserved in a collection of case-related materials kept by her solicitor, Trevor Wellington.<sup>19</sup> Their proportion of all the correspondence she received is unknown as is any selection process by which might have led to some letters being discarded. However, there is no obvious reason to think that this sample was fundamentally atypical. Like the letters to the editor that Nord used to reconstruct reader views of the journalism presented in two Chicago papers, the sample of letters sent to Pace is not perfect but nevertheless valuable. “The surviving letters,” Nord said of his sources,

are not a random sample of reader response; they cannot tell us what proportion of readers responded in what specific ways. But they can suggest to us how some readers read, across a broad range of response. They can give us what we now need most in our effort to construct a history of readership: a glimpse into the past of some actual readers reading their newspapers.<sup>20</sup>

I think that the Pace letters can do very much the same. After an initial overview of their contents, I will consider the ways that letters from women and men appear to have been written from different perspectives and—overall—for different purposes. Finally, I will examine a few general themes that emerged in these letters and consider what these public reactions to Beatrice Pace tell us about the ways that readers absorb and make use of media narratives.

### “I hope you will forgive me writing to you but I felt as if I must”<sup>21</sup>: Initial Impressions

In the collection kept by Beatrice’s solicitor there are 232 letters addressed to her. Given the information they contain, I am unfortunately unable to systematically group them according to the

class or income level of the writers. However, other distinctions are possible. Of the total number of letters, 145 (62.5%) had clearly been sent by women and 29 (12.5%) by men. In 46 cases (19.8%), the sender’s sex could not definitively be determined, and the remaining 12 (5.2%) were sent by couples, groups, children or families. Thus, over three-fifths of the letters had been sent by individual women. (The proportion would likely be increased by adding the letters where sex could not *clearly* be identified but which—by their similarity in terms of content and style—are *likely* to have been written by women). The correspondence sample was also overwhelmingly supportive: 220 (94.8%) of the 232 letters were explicitly congratulatory with regard to her acquittal (and one that seems to have been written shortly *before* the trial’s end was hopeful<sup>22</sup>). Only four (1.7%) were critical of her acquittal or accused her of having got away with murder, and eight (3.5%) were neutral on that topic. This distinct imbalance matches the biases in the press stories and confirms journalists’ reports of a groundswell of public support, indeed, “universal compassion,” for Beatrice.<sup>23</sup> Although caution is warranted with a sample of this kind, *some* hostile letters were kept in the file, and there is no indication that others were discarded. The fact that all four of the critical letters were anonymous adds some speculative weight to the notion that criticism of Beatrice would have been unpopular.

A further general characteristic of the correspondence is the frequency with which the Pace children were mentioned, reflecting the press’s emphasis on them. Of the 220 congratulatory letters sent to Beatrice, 150 (68.2%) refer to “the children” (frequently to “your dear children”) or to “your little ones” or “your dear ones.” They were often referred to by name, with Beatrice’s youngest daughter Jean—whose ill health was often commented upon in the press—receiving the most comments. Three quarters of female writers mentioned the children (either as a group or by name), as did half male correspondents and about three fifths of those whose sex could not be identified.

The *News of the World* reported that on the day after her acquittal Beatrice “was overwhelmed with letters and telegrams congratulating her on her triumphant acquittal”.<sup>24</sup> In the



sample of correspondence, nearly all of the letters were written within a few days of Beatrice’s acquittal on 6 July 1928, many that very evening, revealing not only of how *quickly* the news spread but also of the *immediacy* with which some people reacted. The early-afternoon verdict meant that her legal victory made the evening editions of some papers, as some letter-writers noted.<sup>25</sup> A few also made reference to hearing of the verdict via radio reports.<sup>26</sup> Over the next few weeks, letters continued to arrive, some commenting on or making reference to items in her post-trial memoirs.

The letters came from many places. Some had been written by people from Gloucester, where the trial took place, or the surrounding area. A Wesleyan minister wrote on 6 July from Cinderford, noting, “As one who was present at the Court this afternoon please receive my sincere congratulations at the result.”<sup>27</sup> A Mrs. Edwards, from Gloucester, stated that her daughter “has been down every day to catch sight of you; she saw you twice [and] also your little family.”<sup>28</sup> Most writers had not been so closely connected to events, and Beatrice received letters not only from every corner of the United Kingdom but also from abroad: the file contains letters from Ireland, Canada, Malta and South Africa.<sup>29</sup> Mrs. D. Bain wrote from Alberta: “I am thousands of miles away, but have followed your case right though on reading old country papers, & I would just like to say: here’s one who believes in you.”<sup>30</sup> From Johannesburg, Mrs. M. Marques sent a letter in which she stated, “Although so very far away, we have all been praying that your innocence would be proved.”<sup>31</sup> Overall, the sample of letters and cards that Beatrice received were predominantly from women, nearly exclusively congratulatory and highlighted Beatrice’s role as a mother, characteristics corresponding with the general narrative given in (and shaped by) the press. A more fine-grained and qualitative examination of the letters—dealt with in subsequent sections—will draw out other narrative currents.

### “My Dear Sister”: Identification and Sympathy

As the trial began, a *Daily Mail* reporter observed that many of the case’s features—from “its

intimate domestic features” and “stories of callous brutality” to “the references to the bitterness of child-bearing” and other factors—had made “a deep and wide appeal to women.”<sup>32</sup> The high proportion of letters sent by women suggests this was correct, reinforcing impressions that women predominated as courtroom observers and in the crowds that accompanied the trial. Beatrice was a figure with whom many women seem to have identified. “Identification” is a multifaceted notion: here, it refers to placing oneself into another’s position or, in a related sense, seeing one’s own experiences reflected in another’s. Both tendencies were apparent in the Pace letters. Of 140 congratulatory letters written by women, 51 (36.4%) explicitly referred to identification based on one of the following factors: as *women*, as *mothers*, as survivors of a *hard life* or as fellow *victims of a cruel or violent husband*. (It is likely that many other women who wrote to Beatrice did so for similar motives, but only *direct* references to them have been counted here.)

Some letters reveal a striking emotional intensity, as some women incorporated following Beatrice’s story into their daily lives. Emily Dunstone wrote from London: “I have followed your case with great interest & sympathy for you from the beginning and always knew you were innocent of any harm to your late husband.”<sup>33</sup> Another woman claimed, “I have read every word from beginning to end of your case, & I knew what the result would be.”<sup>34</sup> From Southend-on-Sea, Annie Hudson emphasized how her circumstances (“I am an invalid girl lying upon my back with spinal trouble”) had given her “every opportunity of following your case closely from the beginning until the end yesterday.”<sup>35</sup> Her interest was shared by the whole family (“Night & day you have been in our thoughts & I may say how we have grieved for you during your great trouble”) and even at least one neighbour: “A widow lady living in the flat below us have [sic] also followed your case,” she wrote, “& she like ourselves have believed in your innocence from first to last.” As Mrs. Nancy Griffiths made clear, the case had enthralled her and her friends:

On behalf of several women friends and myself, I [am] delighted to write you a short note of congratulation and goodwill. My friends and myself have watched your case with the greatest possible interest and deepest sympathy, and we all wish to congratulate you on the splendid bravery and fortitude with which you faced the terrible ordeal.<sup>36</sup>

Such greetings did not only originate among informal groups, as a postcard indicates:

We women of Berks[hire] Mothers Union feel we should like you to know how much we have felt for you in your great trial. You have often been in our thoughts & prayers. We hope the rest of your life will be peaceful & happy that your children will grow up to be a credit & comfort to you.<sup>37</sup>

Such interest spoke to an intense emotional investment. Mrs. J. J. Brooks wrote that she and a neighbor “have had many tears over you and we were overjoyed when we heard that you had won the day: we are so glad.”<sup>38</sup> Mrs. E. Ransome from Weymouth wrote, “I have read your case from the start in the *Daily Mail*, and the tears have rolled down my cheeks more than once for you I might tell you”; another woman told Beatrice, “we used to cry reading the touching things regarding your children while you were in prison.”<sup>39</sup> Dora Farrow observed, “Well, dear Mrs. Pace, although we have never met, to us your face is known as well as one of our own family.”<sup>40</sup> A woman who signed off “Mrs. Anonymous” had “prayed nightly, yea almost hourly” for her, and E. Gertrude Williams said “we have hardly had patience to wait for the paper every morning.”<sup>41</sup> Mrs. C. Whitford exclaimed, “I read your case from the first and said you never done it...and every day I had a good cry about you, and I used to say to my sons I only wish I could see dear Mrs. Pace, I would kiss her for all she is worth.”<sup>42</sup>

Whole families had taken an interest in the case. Cecily Coe had told her two girls about Beatrice, and “as young as they are they have hoped you would be alright & they have not forgotten you in their prayers.”<sup>43</sup> From Llanelly, Wales, Mrs. S. Howells wrote to express how much the trial, and particularly the courtroom testimony of Beatrice’s ten-year-old son Leslie, had affected her young son Emlyn. Emlyn had followed the case in the paper, and cried over it:

Yesterday, Sunday, when we were having our dinner he said quite suddenly to us, “Well, Mrs Pace is home with her children having dinner today & how nice,” he said. Only a boy of 10, [but] you won’t believe, Mrs. Pace, how Emlyn has taken to Leslie.<sup>44</sup>

Other readers’ children also seem to have “taken to” Beatrice. The daughter of a Mrs. Ealey “cried with joy” when told of Beatrice’s acquittal: “She said you have a nice face,” Ealey wrote, and “she

has cut your picture out of the paper and hung it up.”<sup>45</sup> Other correspondents had done the same: J. M. Kelly had clipped a newspaper photo of Beatrice and her children and put it in a frame.<sup>46</sup> Robert P. Powell wrote that his family had cut out and framed a photo of her from the *News of the World*, noting “We think so much of you.”<sup>47</sup> Mrs. C. Smith claimed she had “felt for” Beatrice “as though you were my own sister”:

I have taken every photo of you and your family, and not a day has passed without kissing your photo and blessing you. Only last Sunday, my husband and son spoke of you and told me to cheer up, that you would be with your friends this Sunday having dinner with them. And all have come true.<sup>48</sup>

Mary A. Chapple wrote that she had kissed Beatrice’s “Dear Face” in the newspapers.<sup>49</sup>

News of the acquittal on Friday, 6 July, seems to have led to emotional scenes throughout Britain. “When the *Manchester Evening News* arrived at 5:30 p.m. on Friday”, wrote Mrs. S. Baker, “we ran from the house, crying with joy”.<sup>50</sup> Mrs. J. S. MacDonald, from Cardiff exclaimed, “O what joy I had today, when one of my married daughters, Mrs. Owen, came running in [the] house & said “O Mother, Mrs. Pace is discharged”; we both sat down and cried with over-joyment”.<sup>51</sup> Alice Price in Pontypore described a comparable scene: “My husband hurried home tea time with the paper & when he said Mrs Pace ‘Not guilty’ I had a good cry.”<sup>52</sup> Florence Wakefield emphasized how she had “followed your case with keen interest as though you were my own mother” and recounted that she “jumped for joy on reading the papers today, to find you are free.”<sup>53</sup> “I happened to be cleaning the grate when I had the news,” a Welsh woman wrote, adding “I jumped up and clapped my hands and laughed till they thought...I was gone mad.”<sup>54</sup> A woman wrote from Brixton Hill to let Beatrice know not only that her own “heart bled many times for you and your dear little children” but also that her happiness was shared by her household: “My maid has just told me that she has offered many prayers on your behalf—& is in tears—now—of joy—at the good news.”<sup>55</sup>

Clearly, women took a particular interest in Beatrice’s story. But what factors led to such intense emotional attachment? Many female correspondents saw themselves linked to Beatrice *as*

women and as mothers. Some addressed her as “sister.” This was sometimes in a religious context—“remember we are *sisters* in His sight”<sup>56</sup>—but it might also express a different kind of connection: one correspondent described herself as a “stranger but a sister in sympathy” and another wrote, “I have thought so much about you as if you were my own sister.”<sup>57</sup> The correspondence reflected the press’s idealization of Beatrice as a wife and mother, and of the 140 congratulatory letters sent by women, 40 (28.6%) explicitly noted identification as a woman or mother. “I am sure every woman’s heart in England goes out to you,” Mary Gibson assured Beatrice.<sup>58</sup> One woman described her letter as “a mere simple token of sympathy in your great ordeal and injustice as one of your own sex,”<sup>59</sup> while another said she had wanted “as a woman to woman” to send “just a little word of comfort.”<sup>60</sup> Having explained how she cried with happiness upon hearing of the acquittal, Alice Price commented, “We women can feel for each other, can’t we?”<sup>61</sup> Dora Annie Farrow, from Norfolk, hoped that her letter would demonstrate “how far & wide you are thought of today not only as a mother but as a devoted wife & very brave woman.”<sup>62</sup>

The three identities Farrow referenced—“mother,” “devoted wife” and “very brave woman”—were often mixed; however, maternal themes were particularly strong. Some writers focused on the suffering Beatrice must have felt when separated from her children while awaiting trial in prison. Hilda M. Vickery, from London, wrote to say, “I have a baby nearly two, & I realize how you must have felt leaving your dear baby behind.”<sup>63</sup> For some female readers, Beatrice’s forced separation from her family (which was emphasized in the press) was particularly painful. “It’s only a mother who can feel for you and understand the agony of another mother torn from her children,” wrote one, asserting “many of us mothers here have shared all along with you in your grief.” “There isn’t another woman in England who has borne the terrible ordeal you have,” she continued, “but you have had splendid courage [and] you deserve the greatest admiration.”<sup>64</sup> Mrs. D. Bain said, “I am a mother & have two daughters, so I understand how you must feel,” and two women from Chittlehampton, Devon, “being mothers of families,” sent Beatrice “all our love as

women to woman.”<sup>65</sup> Janet Meek, born in Gloucestershire but living in Leeds, sympathized “as a mother, and a grand-mother” and rejoiced “that you are back with your children.”<sup>66</sup>

Such underlying gendered sympathies were even stronger among women who saw some echo of their own experience in Beatrice’s struggles. One of the few published letters stated:

My mother and I are so sorry for you and your little ones. It must be a terrible ordeal for you, but we sincerely hope God will give you strength to pull through and reward you in the end. [...] There are plenty [who] believe in your innocence. Those who have had trouble can sympathise with you.<sup>67</sup>

This passage combines themes central to Beatrice’s press persona: the good wife and mother beset by injustice who would triumph through the strength of her character and (a few suggested) with divine assistance. It succinctly encapsulates the solidarity based upon common experiences that is a recurring motif in the Pace correspondence. Writing from Ontario, Canada, Maisie Cooper agreed: “It’s only those who have suffered that know what sympathy really means.”<sup>68</sup> She too had been “scorned” and suffered injustice after being accused of carelessly burning another woman. “I too am a farmer’s wife,” Cooper explained, “but such a happy one that I want everyone else to be happy too.” Not *everyone*: describing Harry Pace as “that brute of a man,” she wrote, “may God above deal with him & give him eternal suffering.” The head detective in the case—“that blessed officer who tried to make you condemn yourself”—she insisted, “will pay the penalty too, the brute.” “Though the sea divides [us],” she concluded, “I am with you in tenderness for your babes.”

Jessie Sturgeon, from Suffolk—like most correspondents—expressed her thankfulness that Beatrice was “free again to be with your children”.<sup>69</sup> She wrote, “I can feel for you in every way as I’ve been through so much during my married life,” concluding, “I don’t know why I should think so much of you,” she observed, but explained herself with a common refrain: “only those who have to bear so much can really have sympathy for others.” She used to “wake up in the middle of the night & think & pray for you,” and since the trial had ended “it has seemed as a load was lifted off me.” One woman had devotedly bought the *Liverpool Echo* even though she had difficulties affording it, explaining “I could not miss one word of Norman Birkett[’s] great fight for you.”<sup>70</sup>

“Like you,” she wrote, “I have had a hard life and great deal of trouble,” including a sick baby. Mrs. Evie Bull sent congratulations “from one suffering widow to another,” stating (without providing details) “my husband’s end was tragic like yours.”<sup>71</sup> A sense of common suffering could also lead to appeals of a different kind. A woman named Violet wrote from Southend-on-Sea, stating “like yourself, [I] have experienced much unhappiness & misery” due to a profligate (and subsequently deceased) husband who had run up extensive gambling and drinking debts. After explaining a long history of family crises, her letter culminated in a request: for £8 to cover her rates bill.<sup>72</sup>

Some women clearly felt linked to Beatrice by having also had unhappy or even abusive marriages, and a few even used their letters to recount their own experiences. How many correspondents had similar motives is unknown; nonetheless, experience with marital violence (whether as a victim or witness, whether within one’s own family or those of neighbors) would have likely been widespread, particularly among the working-class women to whom Beatrice seems to have had a particular appeal. Mrs. F. Steer said she and Pace had “something in common”, as both had been married to a “brute husband”: “How you could stand by such a man for 18 years,” she wrote, “beats me beyond all knowledge.” Steer had read Beatrice’s memoir, and her adamant devotion had clearly impressed her:

I was not so young as you when I married, yet after reading about you, I feel such a coward, for I lived only 2 years with my man & that two years is a nightmare to me.<sup>73</sup>

Steer’s letter is undated, but it recalls Beatrice’s words in the 29 July installment of her memoir.

There, she had compared abandoning a difficult marriage to running away “like a coward.”<sup>74</sup> A letter from Florrie Goodridge captures the tone of this sort of letter well:

When I read our *Echo* and saw you were found not guilty, I thought my heart was going to beat out of me with happiness.... I have read every part of your case as it have [sic] come out and in parts it used to make me break my heart, for I understand just how you must have felt, for God knows I have had a lot of it....<sup>75</sup>

Goodridge identified with Beatrice (“you have seemed one of myself all through”) and she had also had a “beast of a husband.” Having left him six years previously, she had a new relationship and

was awaiting her divorce. She drew attention to the hostile rumors that had circulated amongst Beatrice’s neighbors throughout the investigation. (These had involved suggestions that Beatrice had been having an affair or suspicious about how she had treated her sick husband. The local rumor-mongering had been highlighted in the press.) Florrie too, had faced gossip: “I am not a saint, I know,” she admitted, but insisted she was not as “people have painted me.” “[Y]et as you have known,” she wrote, “there are such wicked people on this Earth, that lives for nothing else but making other people unhappy.”<sup>76</sup> The most direct expression of identification with Beatrice’s experience was made by Mrs. M. Miller. “I have cried my heart sore for you,” she wrote, “for I knew what it is to have a brutal husband”:

I am only a poor woman with a family—8 alive & two dead—& a rotter of a man just the same as yours. I have had many a blow from him & he has threatened my family & myself with a knife & once tried to cut my eldest daughter[’s] throat; he has also asked me to drink Lysol & [said] he would buy it. He has tried to drive me & my family to the streets many times, but I have always stuck to my post for I may say I have a very respectful family.... [H]e has gone off now for some time now with another woman after a young girl having a baby six years ago to him. Many a wife got clear of such a man but I had no means.<sup>77</sup>

She had not entirely stopped hoping for justice: “God,” she wrote, “sits high & takes his own time to Punish.”

It was certainly not *necessary* to experience motherhood, poverty or spousal abuse for female readers to become absorbed in reading about the Beatrice’s case or to feel the urge to contact her afterwards: “So cheer up, God bless and keep you now and always,” wrote one woman, describing herself as someone “who is happy enjoying the love of one of the best of husbands.”<sup>78</sup> There were several letters like this. However, there are sufficient letters in the sample to show that perceived commonalities—based on gender, maternity, struggle or abusive marriages—were important in shaping the reactions of many female newspaper readers to press reporting on the case.

### “Dear Madam”: Respect, Desire and Money

There were comparatively fewer letters that can definitely be said to have been sent by men, but



although they wrote to Beatrice less often, some men clearly took a strong interest in her case.

While some topics and themes were similar to those in letters by women, there were also significant differences content and perspective. Male correspondents, of course, tended to find different ways of relating to Beatrice: identification based on some common experiences, obviously, was not possible. As the number of clearly male letter writers is relatively small, it is correspondingly more difficult to generalize about male reactions to the case. Nonetheless, two main themes can still be identified: respect and desire. A third topic—business—also motivated a few letters.

When men positively evaluated Beatrice, they tended to do so in terms of respect, praising, for example, Beatrice’s resilience during ordeal. A Congregationalist minister from Gloucester, Francis Price, had observed her while a spectator in the courtroom:

I am glad you have borne the ordeal so well, and so calmly, & would like to have seen on your table (with that bottle of smelling salts—I guessed it was this—and glass of water) a bunch of flowers. I would willingly have purchased the flowers, as I told a P.C., but was afraid I should in some way do wrong. One has to be so careful. I—and others—have prayed for you, and now, prayer has been answered.<sup>79</sup>

A similar tone is apparent in a letter from a soldier in the Grenadier Guards:

My Platoon Corporal came into the barrack room with an evening paper containing the glad news. It was these words that made us jump for joy: Mrs. Pace Acquitted. We knew that you would be acquitted because we have studied the case in each evening paper and have read through the lines. My chums and I wish you and your children the very best of luck in the future.<sup>80</sup>

An “80-year-old Yorkshireman” sent greetings, stating he had already contacted the editor of the *London Express* to suggest that it should start “a shilling subscription” for her benefit. “There are many thousands of English women and men would subscribe to such a fund who are in sympathy with your sad circumstances,” he said, claiming he had sent a cheque the same day to “commence” the subscription.<sup>81</sup> A Londoner wrote to congratulate her on having passed successfully through “the very gates of Hell”: “Happily, you have come through it all triumphantly, and are now in green pastures beside still waters.” He urged her to “try and keep up the brave heart”:

We all have a mission to fulfil in this vale of tears. Yours is to be the guardian and protectress of your little offsprings [sic]. In years to come, let them be able to say, “Fancy,

what mother should be, and she was that.”<sup>82</sup>

Another wrote, “I should like to receive from you one or two flowers plucked by your dear hands, (from your native home) as a souvenir of you, ‘such a brave & noble woman’”.<sup>83</sup>

The last letter hinted at an emotion somewhat beyond respect, and others more directly crossed that line. A Mr. Needham, married for ten years, wrote from Manchester to say that Harry Pace “was not worthy to have such a lovely young wife like you.” “May I say here,” he continued, “that had I been a (single) man I should have liked to have had an interview with you.” As things were, he had to content himself with offering his “fullest sympathy.”<sup>84</sup> Beatrice’s attractiveness was highlighted in press reporting—often accompanied by photographs—and both she and her daughter reported received marriage proposals from strangers. A few such letters are also preserved in the sample considered here. A widower from Llanely, Mr. T. Griffiths, expressed not only his “profoundest sympathy” but also his “truest & sincerest joy & pleasure in your very clear & definite victory”. Urging Beatrice to look after herself for her “dear children’s sake,” he wrote:

After reading what you have through during your married life, am tempted to offer myself to you, that is to say, should you at any time think of re-marrying. Naturally, of course, you cannot think of doing so at this juncture, as I am fully conscious of the terrible strain you have gone through (physically and mentally).<sup>85</sup>

Griffiths wanted to correspond with Beatrice—with a “view to matrimony”—and expressed his eagerness to “exchange letters (privately and confidentially of course)” through which they could “discuss matters secretly.” Offering to send “all particulars” if she would only write back, he signed off with the phrases “anticipating a reply” and “believe me.” An army corporal named Wilkinson got more quickly to the point, in a card consisting of only three sentences. Praising her “glorious acquittal” and “noble exhibition of motherhood,” he claimed to have always believed in her innocence: “to show my admiration I take the liberty of offering you & yours a happy home. Kindly favour an early reply.”<sup>86</sup> The most elaborate of the marriage proposals in the sample came from Arthur Williams, a gas-fitter from Desborough and a widower with three children. Though he was a stranger, he told Beatrice that he felt “as if I know you quite well”: “I shall feel satisfied that I have

offered to accept you into my life and your dear ones also.” Admitting that he was “not an angel by any means” (nor was he “a man of means,” having “nothing but what I work for”) he nevertheless asserted that he tried “to live out the principles of Christianity.” Desborough, he wrote “is quite a pretty little manufacturing town in Northamptonshire [with] fairly good prospects for children.”

Now my Dear Mrs Pace this may be all too much of a surprise for you. I do not want you to be too hasty in your decision, but pray about it and think it well over. All I am able to promise is that I shall do my best for your happiness as long as we are spared together; that is if you accept, and, if not, I wish your life may [be] full of joy the rest of your days.

Possibly in belated recognition that his offer might indeed have been abrupt, he added in a post-script, “Perhaps we might arrange to meet each other somewhere.”<sup>87</sup>

Marriage was not the only offer Beatrice received. The day after her acquittal, Hector Dinnie wrote to her from Notting Hill in London, offering to turn her case into a play. “For your permission to do this,” he wrote, “I am willing to pay you an agreed percentage on the royalty received by me in the event of a successful production.” Dinnie appealed to both personal and public interest:

You would no doubt find any money received in this way very useful in providing for the future of your children. And besides, the play, if passed by the Censor, would draw public attention to the danger of convicting an innocent person.<sup>88</sup>

Dinnie also wrote to Beatrice’s solicitor, stating he wished to “renew” his offer and adding only a request for “the complete records of the case together with any other helpful information.”<sup>89</sup>

Beatrice received another proposition from Charles McCoy, the “Amusement Caterer” at an unidentified “beautiful pleasure resort” on the northeast coast. “I am writing to make you an offer,” McCoy stated, “which will combine business with pleasure.”

I can offer you three or four weeks here just for you to exhibit your pet dog. You would not be required to exert [yourself] by making any speeches or referring to yourself in any way. The little exhibit would take place in a specially prepared drawing-room at the Amusement Park here, & you would only exhibit at intervals giving you plenty of time for recreation which would mean a very healthy holiday. I am willing to pay you £30 for the three weeks or £40 for the four weeks, & all expenses I can arrange for [a] private Hotel here, for yourself & family. I will also arrange for a Nurse to take care of younger children. Now this will be a splendid holiday for you all & [I] trust you will give this your consideration.<sup>90</sup>

If such an offer seems implausible, there were others. After her acquittal, she had reportedly been contacted by a theatre offering to pay “a substantial sum if she will appear for a few minutes each evening before the audience and say half-a-dozen words.”<sup>91</sup> The marketability of her story, of course, is best demonstrated by the sale of her story to the *Sunday Express*, for which she received more than £3,000. McCoy’s offer of £10 for “exhibiting” her dog must have been less than enticing.

## Vengeance, Salvation, Guilt and the Spirit World

There were some themes that were common to letters from men and women (and writers whose sex could not be identified). Several correspondents wrote about Harry Pace’s family, who had initiated the investigations and testified against her at the inquest and trial. Public opinion ran against them: at the trial, there had even been the targets of hostility and threats. There were rare compassionate gestures toward them. In a letter to the *Dean Forest Guardian*, Reverend W. Brownrigg observed the sympathy and “material help” being “lavished” on Harry’s widow and observed that Harry’s family—and particularly his mother—was “equally deserving of consideration”: “Let every mother in the country picture to herself”, he urged, “the poignant grief of that poor woman who was called upon to witness the agonising death throes of her beloved son.”<sup>92</sup> Such understanding was virtually absent in the letters Beatrice received. Some were critical in a general sense: a postcard from Crouch End, London wished her “peace from scandal mongers,”<sup>93</sup> and a letter spoke of “the people who were so bitter against you,” praying “may God forgive them for all the wrong they tried to do to you.”<sup>94</sup> Most, though, were not so magnanimous. One correspondent assured that “in time your enemies will suffer for their wickedness to a good honourable wife like you.”<sup>95</sup> Referring to the “cruel lies & accusations made by your late husband’s people,” Florence Gibbons sought to be encouraging: “remember there is always One above to see justice [done] & no doubt they will suffer as much some day: if not in this world, in the next.”<sup>96</sup> Mrs. Mary Gibbon wrote scornfully of “those that have tried to down you” but asserted, “God will certainly severely punish them in good time: so

cheer up, don't think any more of the past.”<sup>97</sup> Mrs. H. Coulton wrote “I think your late husband's friends are wicked, but God knows best how to punish them & he will do.”<sup>98</sup> A letter from T.A. Carpenter simply stated: “God moves in a mysterious way—God will avenge you of your enemies.”<sup>99</sup>

Some found divine punishment insufficient. “I feel,” wrote Emily Dunstone, “as doubtless many others do, that you have been a victim of the hate & jealousy of your husband's family, and I think there should be a law to punish people who would maliciously hound down an innocent woman as they have done.”<sup>100</sup> Eleanor Jones thought there was unfinished work for the courts: “I would give that brother-in-law of yours 5 years hard labour,” she wrote, hoping Beatrice would “have as little as possible to do with the family in the future.”<sup>101</sup> H. C. Gordon went so far as to insist that the “principals” in the case would “suffer,” and referred to “steps” being taken to punish various people who had been involved in the case, such as the coroner (“for abusing his position”), Harry's brother and mother (“for conspiracy & perjury”) and the foreman of the coroner's jury (“for failing to do his duty as a juryman”).<sup>102</sup> The “steps” in question were left unstated.<sup>103</sup>

The desire for divine vengeance did not exhaust the religious topics among the letters. Of the 220 “congratulatory” letters, 52 (23.6%) had some form of religious content (i.e., they went beyond colloquial expressions such as “God bless” or passing references to having “prayed for” Beatrice). Beatrice's own public persona was not significantly shaped by religious themes. There are no indications, for instance, in all the coverage of her life's story, that she and her family attended church, and she made relatively few references to God or to prayer amid all of the dramatic scenes recounted in the newspapers.<sup>104</sup> Women were somewhat more likely to have written religious letters: one quarter did so compared to approximately one-fifth of men. However, due to the large disparity in the numbers of the letters in question (35 out of 140 from women and 5 out of 24 from men) it is difficult to know what weight to give this factor.<sup>105</sup> And the religious messages themselves were also quite diverse. James Kearney, for instance, identified himself as a

Catholic priest “who will never meet you on Earth—but hopes to join you with the good in heaven.”<sup>106</sup> Others saw divine intervention in Beatrice’s acquittal. Writing from Chesterfield, Charles Martin did not deny the importance of public generosity, a good barrister and a sympathetic jury; however,

I want you to feel at the back of it all is God; there has [sic] been thousands of prayers gone up on your behalf, and God has answered them. I have watched the case and prayed for you, so God moved the public to sympathy, God moved the hearts to give, God suggested the Counsel, God gave him wisdom, God ordered the Jury.<sup>107</sup>

He urged Beatrice to devote her life to God, concluding, “My dear girl we may never meet here but we may meet in Heaven.” T. A. Carpenter, referred to Beatrice’s comment after her acquittal:

“Thank God it’s over.” The phrase was “a common one” he observed:

In your case, I feel it must have been a genuine expression of heartfelt gratitude to the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God. During the month of May, whilst reading proceedings in [the] Coroner’s Court on the day of your arrest, I felt such an *over-powering conviction in my mind that you were not guilty*—“to me this was from God”—that ever since I have declared to friends that you were innocent.<sup>108</sup>

A similar, if somewhat more esoteric, message was expressed by M. F. Bovenizer. There are two letters from him or her among those collected in Wellington’s papers, one referring to an earlier letter sent to Beatrice “some weeks ago” while she awaited trial in prison. “In that letter,” Bovenizer recalls, “I told you that we as members of a Christian Spiritualist circle in Liverpool, had been told by the Spirits who come and speak to us, that you were innocent of the crime of poisoning your husband.”<sup>109</sup> The circle’s “chief Spirit Guide”—who went by the name “Bluebell”—had told the group that Beatrice was innocent and that the “spirit world” was working for her acquittal. (“Bluebell” revealed that Harry had *not* poisoned himself—Beatrice’s defense had rested on Harry having committed suicide—but she did not name the true culprit.) The group, as directed, prayed for Beatrice’s release, rejoicing when their prayers “had been answered.”

At our first meeting following your discharge, Bluebell told us that she had influenced the Judge’s mind to discharge you, and explained that our prayers for you had done more to bring about the result, than we could possibly understand.

Three days later, another letter from the same source informed Beatrice of further news from the

spirit world. A different spirit spoke to the group at length about the “false charges” brought against her, said many kind things about her and assured circle that “the spirit world rejoices with her.”

Bovenizer concluded: “you have been very highly privileged in the way the spirit world have [sic] followed and worked for yourself and your children, when you were in the power of your enemies.”<sup>110</sup> The *Sunday News* also reprinted passages from a “Christian spiritualist” periodical claiming that a “spirit message” had been given by Harry Pace himself to an American “medium.” In it, the deceased man exonerated his wife, claimed that he had committed suicide and urged people to do what they could to save Beatrice.<sup>111</sup>

Another correspondent, Gertrude Smart, saw an even more fundamental religious significance in Beatrice’s experiences. A twenty-nine-year-old “invalid” from Dorset, Smart had avidly been reading Beatrice’s *Sunday Express* memoir. “After reading this week’s instalment,” she wrote, “I have tried to put myself in your place, although I am single and inexperienced to the ways of the world & its people....” Still, she made a striking comparison:

You have indeed walked side by side with the “Lord Jesus Christ himself” & have experienced a share in His own sufferings, agony of the mind, body, soul & spirit. Did He not say “Whom the Lord love, He chasteneth”? You have been one of own chosen people to suffer for Him.<sup>112</sup>

God had not only chosen Beatrice to suffer, Smart said, but had also given her the strength to endure, and “in great suffering we learn it is not the things of the world which counts [sic] the highest, but the things hidden & unseen by us.” As for Harry,

The one you loved is now in His care, though he will always be with you in Spirit, loving him as you did with such a deep, self-sacrificing devotion.<sup>113</sup>

Another writer from south Wales praised God for bringing Beatrice back to her children and hoped they would “remember the Lord, for his kindness in bringing you back to them once more....”<sup>114</sup>

Some correspondents urged Beatrice to save her soul. Ernest Jeffrey, “while sympathising much with you,” wished to draw her “kind attention” to

an error in the *Daily Express* about you. It says you were “unsaved by *religion*”. Of course *everybody* is in that boat. I am. Religion never yet saved anybody. It is Christ alone that

saves, not religion.<sup>115</sup>

Mrs. J. E. Bynon had clearly had been following the case intently and had been praying for her. She urged Beatrice to accept God as her own “personal saviour.”<sup>116</sup> A rather long letter from Mrs. Mabel Jackson from Louth, Lincolnshire, urged Beatrice to save her soul by being born again. Its tone becomes clear through even a brief excerpt:

Now, dear Friend, *will you come to God? Do. The Precious Blood Shed on Calvary’s Cross 2000 years back has wiped away all sins, all mistakes, everything you [or] I ever did amiss, for in God’s word, the Bible, it says, All have Sinned & it says “You must be born again.” We all must: There is no respect of Persons with our Creator. The richest & the highest in the Land need “Saving” & all (praise His name!) can come, or plunge them[selves] in Calvary’s stream (it’s free): “Still it flows, still it flows, still it flows as fresh as ever” (Praise Him!) from the “Saviour’s wounded Side”: Oh—Just get to know Jesus.*<sup>117</sup>

There were similar letters.<sup>118</sup> Other writers sent religious objects, such as Christian booklets<sup>119</sup> and a rosary.<sup>120</sup>

Although the overwhelming majority of the available correspondence sent to Beatrice was congratulatory, there were a few more negative views. In her memoir, Beatrice referred to—but did not quote from—letters from some women who questioned her decision to remain in her abusive marriage. A letter from Jane Goldsmith made a similar point. Supportive of Beatrice’s acquittal, Goldsmith nevertheless made no bones about her opinion that she had been “a great fool to stick to a man who treated you worse than a dog.” “If you had been a wise woman, you would have given him in charge for threatening to murder you,” she argued, stating “you could have had police protection and put a stop to it”: “I should think a week would be long enough for that you should have run away and have taken your chance to get a living and left him.” Wishing Beatrice luck, she could not resist a postscript: “I can’t understand any woman being beaten and knocked about by any man; if it had been my case I should have him put where I could find him.”<sup>121</sup>

Criticism of any kind is rare in the letters considered here. However, four letters—all of them anonymous—are notable exceptions. One, signed merely “Woman,” cryptically states: “You have stolen a march on your husband, but he will grab you yet. His name indicates it.”<sup>122</sup> The others



more clearly condemned Beatrice. One letter accused, “You have played the part of the hypocrite very well for your own preservation,” and referred to Beatrice’s newspaper memoir:

Whilst professing to have “respect and love” for your poor husband you sat down and wrote the blackest record against his character, that it was possible for anyone to write. Had it been any other country the verdict would have been different, as we are humbugged here with a few sentimental old foggy judges.

Warning Beatrice she would face “righteous judgement,” it concludes on a note reminiscent of the (by then discredited) theory of the “born criminal” popularized by Cesare Lombroso: “That twist upon your face, from a point of physiognomy is a very bad indication and counts for a good deal of wickedness.”<sup>123</sup> Another anonymous letter simply stated:

Don’t imagine that you are a heroine to everyone. If you did not poison your husband, who did? As no one would really be such a fool as to think he killed himself. Anyway your life will be fairly a miserable one for the future, with the awful weight you must have on your evil mind.<sup>124</sup>

The author of a final letter accusing Beatrice of having killed Harry claimed to be a woman who had been “ill-treated” herself by her husband until she had left him five years previously. In her case, a common experience of suffering did not generate sympathy or identification: she was convinced of Beatrice’s guilt and criticized her memoir, which tarnished her husband’s name. “You are what I should term a Brazen Hussey,” she wrote, agreeing with a suggestion one of Harry’s brothers had made in court that Beatrice was an accomplished “play actress.” There must have been good reason for Harry’s violence, she said, referring to one of the more sensational incidents that Beatrice had recounted in her series in the *Sunday Express*: “He would not tie a woman to the bed if she was not in the habit of going out while he was at work”:

I am sure he [would have been] just the man that would suit me: a steady, ambitious husband anxious to get a farm so that he might be his own master, which he would have done had he had a suitable partner. Ill-mated marriages generally turn out bad. You are what I should term the modern woman, neither good to *God* or man.

“You will understand by this letter,” she added—somewhat unnecessarily—“that I am not your admirer.”<sup>125</sup> It is impossible to know how many other people shared this view, though there must have been others who thought Beatrice had unfairly been acquitted and sided with Harry’s kin.

However, that there were so few letters asserting her guilt supports the press claims that she was the beneficiary of an extraordinary degree of popular support.

## Conclusion

Michelle Arrow has recently looked at the imaginative investment of listeners of a popular Australian radio series that ran between 1949 and 1976. Former listeners’ memories of the show, she observes,

suggest some of the ways in which audiences have used popular culture to understand their own history, underlining how popular culture, far from being ephemeral or disposable, is integral to our understanding of the past, both individual and collective.<sup>126</sup>

Her words echo those of Nord, who points out that historicizing journalism is difficult, since it

is so ephemeral and the reading of it so commonplace and unremarkable and therefore so commonly unremarked upon in the historical record. Yet it is precisely this commonness that makes the history of journalism readership central to the broader social history of reading in everyday life.<sup>127</sup>

Nord’s examination of reader reactions to two Chicago newspapers reveals a complicated set of reading strategies and impressions. Although the responses were “enormously diverse and often quite idiosyncratic,” there were also “discernable patterns of response.”<sup>128</sup> In the context of Nord’s study, the patterns revealed were to a large extent political and influenced by readers’ expectations regarding the functions of journalism. Readers’ responses to the Pace case were not predominantly political in nature, even though some reporting on the case did focus on issues related to the functioning of the criminal justice system and relations between the public and the police. Instead, The letters to Beatrice Pace reveal to a more personal set of responses, which reflect, perhaps, the emotional and melodramatic qualities of much of the reporting on the case. Lyons and Taksa have emphasized how readers’ interpretations of texts depend partly on what “each reader brings to his or her reading.”<sup>129</sup> As Levine suggests, people tend to view popular culture “through the filters of their lives”: listeners to a Depression-era radio soap opera, for example, identified with particular characters or even evaluating the meaning of certain plot twists with regard to what they themselves

had experienced. They could, he notes, “see themselves in them.”<sup>130</sup> While the events in the Pace case were not fictional, they were certainly presented to newspaper readers in the form of a dramatic—if episodic—narrative, and many of the letters sent to Beatrice Pace reveal a similar kind of intense emotional and imaginative investment as that Levine has identified in fictional contexts.

In his study of popular publishing in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century, Joseph McAleer suggests that “escapism” was “the principal motive in reading during this period, particularly among the working classes.”<sup>131</sup> While probably true, such escapism was accompanied by a significant emphasis in popular culture on real-life dramas. Adrian Bingham, for example, has innovatively explored the way that the interwar press functioned as a means through which women could communicate with one another about their lives.<sup>132</sup> McAleer is talking about fiction, thus it is quite possible that different motives coexisted with regard to different classes of reading material. Additionally, many popular newspapers and periodicals in the early twentieth century contained a mixture of light, possibly “escapist” fiction and reportage focusing on women’s *real* suffering. Both types of content allowed readers to invest a great deal of emotion in responding to what they read. The real-life drama of the Pace case, it is clear, had a particularly strong impact on readers.

The intensity of the public response to the Pace case also allowed Beatrice’s admirers to feel themselves a part of a broader community. Correspondents of *both* sexes were eager to suggest that their support of and identification with her was part of a general public phenomenon. Some referred to the support that they saw among their neighbors and in their locality. Mrs. S. Baker noted, “There was joy in Gloucester, there was joy all round our country side, & towns”<sup>133</sup> and Bessie Yeo stated, “I am sure all Bristol are rejoicing in your liberty,” highlighting “the respect there is for you and your dear children in Bristol.”<sup>134</sup> Mrs. Blanche Cluitt wrote from the Isle of Wight “on behalf of dozens of sympathizers”.<sup>135</sup> A woman from Slough wrote that “even in this small town you had ‘crowds’ of sympathizers,”<sup>136</sup> and three married couples in Devon assured that “if this letter could only be shown in this little town, there would be heaps of signatures.”<sup>137</sup> Another group of couples

from Taunton stated “it is only just a little country village & I think every one has prayed for you,” a suggestion reinforced by another, this time anonymous, letter: “We can assure you that you are loved & honoured by us people in Taunton.”<sup>138</sup> J. Nicholson wrote from London, “where public opinion almost rules that prevailing in the country”: “The feeling here was exceedingly strong in your favour, and when the result of the trial became known, there was a great relief evinced, and sympathetic hearts went out to you by thousands.”<sup>139</sup> Other writers saw public support for Beatrice as universal, an observation fed by the press’s emphasis on the widespread nature of her popularity. Mrs. W. Williams, in South Wales, said that she “and all the country at large” had thought Beatrice was innocent.<sup>140</sup> Mrs. E. Ransome, who claimed that “the tears have rolled down my cheeks more than once for you,” told Beatrice, “you can rest assured that you had the whole country’s sympathy.”<sup>141</sup> H. C. Gordon was exuberant: “The whole nation was with you,” he wrote, “even before the conclusion of the unjust inquest, because it was evident they intended to do what they did”:

The whole proceedings have been very closely and anxiously watched, not only in your own immediate locality, but in every town throughout the country, and there would have been great demonstrations of anger from all classes of society, had there been a different verdict. We would not have stood by silently or helpless and seen you suffer further injustice, neither would the defence have suffered by lack of funds.<sup>142</sup>

Thus, along with whatever personal motivations that letter writers had, many—perhaps most—saw themselves as participating in a national outpouring of sympathy and support for an otherwise obscure figure transformed overnight into a national celebrity.

The letters examined here provide only a glimpse of popular reactions to a single legal case, but they do suggest several things about the importance of understanding reader response in the past. Readers were neither entirely autonomous nor fully confined in making sense of the Pace case. Their responses were clearly influenced by the manner in which journalists wrote about the case, such as Beatrice’s idealization as a wife and mother. The prominent role that the children played in the reporting on the case and the ways that particular elements in Beatrice’s “tragic” life were

highlighted—such as Harry’s abuse, her separation from her children while awaiting trial, and the virulence of local gossip—are also apparent. Obviously, readers’ interpretations of texts are fundamentally limited by the kind of information those texts contain. Had journalists adopted a less uniformly positive and sympathetic way of depicting Beatrice Pace, there would, no doubt, have been a greater degree of ambiguity in reader responses to her trial and acquittal. It seems clear that at least one “structural” factor—sex—also patterned readers’ response to press coverage of Beatrice Pace. Many women not only apparently more fascinated by Beatrice but also in many cases identified with her.

However, at a lower level of generality, readers interpreted the story according to their own idiosyncrasies and accumulated individual experiences. A series of misfortunes, an abusive marriage, a religious conversion: any of these events—as we have seen—might have influenced a newspaper reader’s perspective on the Pace case. Although revealing reactions that were strongly patterned by gender, the letters examined here have also emphasized the contingency and individuality of readers’ responses. Readers also readjusted its meanings to suit their own experiences, needs and desires. In some cases, these might have been rather trivial, such as seeking an autograph<sup>143</sup> or a brush with celebrity (for instance, through invitations to strike up a correspondence or to visit). Many letter writers, however, invested their imagined connection with Pace with more significance. We have also caught glimpses of how press stories had an impact beyond the printed page, entering into the social lives of their readers. Not only read in private, articles on the Pace case was discussed (particularly by women) in families and among groups of friends (particularly by women). The intense emotionality of many readers’ interest in the Pace case—and the way that the legal drama appears to have become a part of people’s daily lives—is quite remarkable, and a testimony to the powers of imaginary identification and sympathy that we all possess.

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- <sup>1</sup> The literature on reader reception is vast and the following represent merely a selection of influential works. Hans Robert Jauss, “The Change in the Paradigm of Literary Scholarship,” (originally published in 1969) in Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982); Stuart Hall, “Encoding/decoding,” in S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, & P. Willis (Eds.), *Culture, media, language* (London: Hutchinson, 1980): pp. 128-138. For subsequent commentary, see Poonam Pillai, “Rereading Stuart Hall’s Encoding/Decoding Model,” *Communication Theory* 2, no. 3 (1992): 221-33. Wolfgang Iser, “Interaction Between Text and Reader,” in Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman, eds., *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation* (Princeton, N.J., 1980): 106-119. Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).
- <sup>2</sup> David Morley, “Audience” in *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, in Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris (eds) (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 9.
- <sup>3</sup> John Storey, “Culture and Power,” in Andrea Gerbig and Anja Müller-Wood (eds) *How Globalisation Affects the Teaching of English* (Lampeter, Wales: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 36.
- <sup>4</sup> Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa, *Australian Readers Remember: An Oral History of Reading* (Melbourne and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3.
- <sup>5</sup> Lyons and Taksa, *Australian Readers Remember*, 2.
- <sup>6</sup> David Paul Nord, *Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and Their Readers* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 267.
- <sup>7</sup> E.g., David Morley, *The “Nationwide” Audience* (London: BFI, 1980); Sujeong Kim, “Rereading David Morley’s *The ‘Nationwide’ Audience*”, *Cultural Studies* 18, no. 1 (2004): 84-108.
- <sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain 1914-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).
- <sup>9</sup> Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 1.
- <sup>10</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, “The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences,” *American Historical Review*, 1992: 1373
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1384.
- <sup>12</sup> Richard D. Altick, *Victorian Studies in Scarlet* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1970); Simon Devereaux, “From

Sessions to Newspaper? Criminal Trial Reporting, the Nature of Crime, and the London Press, 1770-1800,” *The London Journal* 32, no. 1 (2007): 1-27; Rob Sindall, *Street Violence in the Nineteenth Century: Media Panic or Real Danger?* (New York: Leicester University Press, 1990); Peter King, “Moral Panics and Violent Street Crime 1750-2000: A Comparative Perspective,” in *Comparative Histories of Crime* ed. Barry Godfrey, Clive Emsley and Graeme Dunstall (Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 2003), 53-71; Jessie Ramey, “The Bloody Blonde and the Marble Woman: Gender and Power in the Case of Ruth Snyder,” *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 3 (2004): 626-650; Daniel M. Vyleta, *Crime, Jews and News: Vienna 1895-1914* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007); Paul Mason, ed., *Criminal Visions: Media Representations of Crime and Justice* (Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> For some further detail on the case’s coverage see, J. Carter Wood, “‘Mrs. Pace’ and the Ambiguous Language of Victimization,” in *(Re)Interpretations: The Shapes of Justice in Women's Experience*, ed. Lisa Dresdner and Laurel Peterson (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, forthcoming). I have written a book-length analysis of the Pace case—including the facts of the case itself, its press coverage and the political debates it engendered—that will be published separately. A brief summary of the case is also available in Linda Stratmann, *Gloucestershire Murders* (Stroud: Sutton, 2005), 104-19.

<sup>14</sup> Nord, *Communities of Journalism*, 267.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>16</sup> “Forest of Dean Mystery”, *The Times*, 17 Jan 1928, 11; “Stopped Funeral Mystery,” *World’s Pictorial News*, 22 January 1928, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Beatrice was reported by all papers—and subsequent histories—as being 36 years old. She was, however, according to her birth and death certificates, in fact, two years older.

<sup>18</sup> The case is described in H. Montgomery Hyde, *Norman Birkett: The Life of Lord Birkett of Ulverston* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964), 246-54.

<sup>19</sup> The Mrs. Pace Papers. NCCL Galleries of Justice, Nottingham, U.K. All references to letters are from this collection.

<sup>20</sup> Nord, *Communities of Journalism*, 247.

<sup>21</sup> #129, handwritten letter on lined paper, 7 July 1928, from H. Buckby, Burton Latimer.

<sup>22</sup> #3, handwritten (anonymous) letter on plain paper, n.d.

<sup>23</sup> “Today,” *Sunday Express*, 8 July 1928, 12.

<sup>24</sup> “Acquittal of Mrs. Pace,” *The News of the World*, 8 July 1928, 9.

<sup>25</sup> E.g., the following letters written on the evening of 6 July: Nellie Heinsen, “Words cannot express the great delight

with which I read the verdict of your most painful trial in this evening’s paper.” #42, handwritten letter on plain paper, 6 July 1928, from Nellie Heinsen, London. Alice B. Price noted “I feel I must send you these few lines,” stating: “My husband hurried home tea time with the paper & when he said Mrs Pace ‘Not guilty’ I had a good cry.” #41, handwritten letter on lined paper, 6 July 1928, from Alice B. Price, Pontypore.

<sup>26</sup>“I have watched you case with interest and I was delighted to hear on the wireless this evening the verdict, and I trust you will be spared to have a happy life with your family...”#8, handwritten letter on plain paper, 6 July 1928, from D. Jackman, Teignmouth. See also, #262, plain post card, 6 July 1928, from ‘A native of Monmouth’, London. Other references to the news being spread by radio: #107, handwritten letter on lined paper, [6 July 1928], from Mrs. E. Oke, Holsworthy; #141, handwritten letter on printed addressed plain paper, 8 July 1928, from Olive Gundry, Bridport.

<sup>27</sup> #251, handwritten on printed addressed card, 6 July 1928, from Walter Floyd, Cinderford, Gloucestershire.

<sup>28</sup> #10, handwritten letter on printed addressed plain paper, n.d., from Mrs. Edwards, Gloucester.

<sup>29</sup> #247, handwritten letter on plain paper, 28 July 1928, from Maisie Cooper, Ontario Canada; #229, handwritten letter on lined paper, 23 July 1928, from N. B., Malta.

<sup>30</sup> #250, handwritten letter on plain paper, 20 July 1928, from Mrs. D. Bain, Alberta, Canada.

<sup>31</sup> #228, handwritten letter on lined paper, 10 July 1928, from Mrs. M. Marques, Johannesburg, South Africa.

<sup>32</sup> “Two Women on the Rack,” *Daily Mail*, 3 July 1928, 11.

<sup>33</sup> #78, handwritten letter on printed addressed plain paper, 7 July 1928, from Emily Dunstone, London.

<sup>34</sup> #115, handwritten letter on plain paper, n.d., from Wisher M. Cottrell, London.

<sup>35</sup> #77, handwritten letter on lined paper, 7 July 1928, from Annie Hudson, St. Leonards on Sea.

<sup>36</sup> # 81, handwritten letter on plain paper, 7 July 1928, from Nancy D. Griffiths, London.

<sup>37</sup> #261, plain post card, 7 July 1928, from Berkshire Women’s Union. Another letter, from a woman in Norwich, mentioned that she was a member of the M.U., presumably the Mothers Union: #112, handwritten (anonymous) letter on lined paper, 7 July 1928.

<sup>38</sup> #171, handwritten letter on lined paper, n.d., from Mrs. J. J. Brooks, Lower Cillington.

<sup>39</sup> #48, handwritten letter on lined paper, 6 July 1928, from Mrs. E. Ransome, Weymouth; #109, handwritten on plain postcard, 7 July 1928, from Mrs. Skinner, Epsom.

<sup>40</sup> #181, handwritten letter on lined paper, 7 July 1928, from Dora Annie Farrow, Aldeby.

<sup>41</sup> #196, handwritten letter on lined paper, 8 July 1928, from “Mrs. Anonymous”; #188, handwritten letter on lined (grey) paper, 9 July 1928, from Mrs. E. Gertrude Williams, Whitchurch.



- <sup>42</sup> #172, handwritten letter on plain paper, 8 July 1928, from Mrs. C. Whitford, St. Truro.
- <sup>43</sup> #158, handwritten letter (in pencil) on plain paper, 10 July 1928, from Cecily Coe, Foston.
- <sup>44</sup> #121, handwritten letter on plain paper, 9 July 1928, from S. Howells, Llanelly.
- <sup>45</sup> #113, handwritten letter (in pencil) on lined (grey) paper, 7 July 1928, from Edith M. Stile, Pinhoe.
- <sup>46</sup> #136, handwritten letter on plain paper, 8 July 1928, from J. W. Kelly, Gt Leighs.
- <sup>47</sup> #201, handwritten letter on lined paper, 9 July 1928, from Robert P. Powell, Narbeth.
- <sup>48</sup> #194, handwritten letter on plain paper, 8 July 1928, from Mrs. C. Smith, Ross on Wye.
- <sup>49</sup> #197, handwritten letter on lined (pale green) paper, 10 July 1928, from Mary A. Chapple, Reading.
- <sup>50</sup> #161, handwritten letter on plain paper, 8 July 1928, from Mrs. S. Baker, Bowden, Cheshire.
- <sup>51</sup> #176, handwritten letter on printed addressed (pink) paper, 6 July 1928, from Mrs. J. S. MacDonald, Cardiff.
- <sup>52</sup> #41, handwritten letter on lined paper, 6 July 1928, from Alice B. Price, Pontypore.
- <sup>53</sup> #45, handwritten letter on plain paper, 6 July 1928, from Florence Wakefield, Farnham, Surrey.
- <sup>54</sup> #59, handwritten letter (in pencil) on plain paper, n.d. [probably 9 July 1928], from Mrs. A. Coles, Pontypool.
- <sup>55</sup> #22, handwritten letter on plain paper, 6 July 1928, from “an Irish Catholic,” London.
- <sup>56</sup> #3, handwritten (anonymous) letter on plain paper, n.d. Emphasis in original. See also #9, handwritten letter on lined paper, 6 July 1928, from Mrs. J. E. Bynon, Bristol; #95, handwritten letter on plain paper, n.d., from Mrs. Griggs, Woodside; #176, handwritten letter on printed addressed (pink) paper, 6 July 1928, from Mrs. J. S. MacDonald, Cardiff.
- <sup>57</sup> #38, handwritten letter on lined paper, 6 July 1928, from A. E. Woodcock, Rusholme; #156, handwritten letter on lined paper, n.d., from Mrs. Williams, Gellyyear.
- <sup>58</sup> #116, handwritten on lined paper, n.d., from Mrs. Mary Gibbon, St. Helens.
- <sup>59</sup> #46, handwritten letter on plain paper, 6 July 1928, from Mrs. Wootton, near Merthyr, S. Wales.
- <sup>60</sup> #34, handwritten letter on plain (pale blue) paper, 7 July 1928, from Mrs. W. Williams, Aberdare.
- <sup>61</sup> #41, handwritten letter on lined paper, 6 July 1928, from Alice B. Price, Pontypore.
- <sup>62</sup> #181, handwritten letter on lined paper, 7 July 1928, from Dora Annie Farrow, Aldeby.
- <sup>63</sup> ‘If you will let me know if you got this letter I will let you have some clothes & a few shillings.’ #1, handwritten letter on lined paper, 6 July 1928, from Hilda M. Vickery, London.
- <sup>64</sup> #222, handwritten letter on plain paper, 5 July 1928, from E. Lawrence, Bexleyheath, Kent.
- <sup>65</sup> #250, handwritten letter on plain paper, 20 July 1928, from Mrs. D. Bain, Alberta, Canada; #225, handwritten letter on plain paper, n.d., from Mrs. Olver and Mrs. Tucker, Chittlehampton.

- <sup>66</sup> #210, handwritten letter on lined paper, 9 July 1928, from Janet Meek, Leeds.
- <sup>67</sup> Bernard O'Donnell, “More Secrets of Nightmare Life of Wife Under the Hypnotic Spell of Harry Pace,” *World's Pictorial News* 29 July 1928, 14. Emphasis added.
- <sup>68</sup> #247, handwritten letter on plain paper, 28 July 1928, from Maisie Cooper, Southampton, Canada.
- <sup>69</sup> #246, handwritten letter on lined paper, 30 July 1928, from Jessie Sturgeon, near Bury St. Edmunds.
- <sup>70</sup> #248, handwritten letter (in pencil) on lined paper, 26 July 1928, from Mrs. Cannon, West Derby.
- <sup>71</sup> #209, handwritten letter on lined (pale blue) paper, 7 July 1928, from Mrs. Evie Bull, Blandford, Dorset.
- <sup>72</sup> #224, handwritten letter on printed addressed paper, n.d., from “Violet,” Southend-on-Sea.
- <sup>73</sup> #233, handwritten letter on lined paper, n.d., from (Mrs.) F. Steer, Watford.
- <sup>74</sup> Beatrice Pace, “A Talk to Wives by Mrs. Pace,” *Sunday Express*, July 29, 1928, 14.
- <sup>75</sup> #203, handwritten letter lined paper, 8 July 1928, from Florrie Pace, Southampton.
- <sup>76</sup> #203, handwritten letter lined paper, 8 July 1928, from Florrie Pace, Southampton.
- <sup>77</sup> #139, handwritten letter on plain paper, 8 July 1928, from Mrs. M. Miller, Leith.
- <sup>78</sup> #67, handwritten letter on lined paper, n.d., from Mrs. Allen Price, Billesdon.
- <sup>79</sup> #4, handwritten letter on headed note paper, 6 July 1928, from Rev. Francis George Price, Gloucester.
- <sup>80</sup> #74, handwritten letter on lined paper, 7 July 1928, from Guardsman W. Short, Brookwood.
- <sup>81</sup> #207, handwritten (semi-anonymous) letter on plain paper, 10 July 1928, Bridlington.
- <sup>82</sup> #215, handwritten letter on lined paper, 8 July 1928, from Mr. Nicholson, London.
- <sup>83</sup> #198, handwritten letter on plain paper, 11 July 1928, from Charles Williams-Curgenven, Penzance.
- <sup>84</sup> #132, handwritten letter (in purple pencil) on lined paper, 8 July 1928, from C. A. Needham, Manchester.
- <sup>85</sup> #159, handwritten letter on lined paper, 8 July 1928, from T Griffiths, Llanelly.
- <sup>86</sup> #175, handwritten on (George V) three halfpence printed Letter Card, 8 July 1928, from A. Wilkinson, Bordon.
- <sup>87</sup> #241, handwritten letter on lined paper from Arthur Williams, 15 July 1928, Desborough, near Kettering.
- <sup>88</sup> #165, typed letter on plain paper, 7 July 1928, from Hector Dinnie, London.
- <sup>89</sup> #53, typed letter on plain paper, 7 July 1928, from Hector Dinnie, London. I have neither been able to find a record of a play based upon Pace's experiences nor any further information about Mr. Dinnie.
- <sup>90</sup> #166, handwritten letter on plain paper, 9 July 1928, from Charles McCoy, Cleethorpes .
- <sup>91</sup> “Acquittal of Mrs. Pace,” *The News of the World*, 8 July 1928, 9.
- <sup>92</sup> Letter from the Rev. W. Brownrigg, *Dean Forest Guardian*, 13 July 1928, p. 5. Brownrigg wrote from Ellwood,

where some of the Pace family lived.

<sup>93</sup> #256, plain post card [post marked Hornsey 6 July, 1928].

<sup>94</sup> #208, handwritten letter on lined paper, 11 July 1928, from M. Jenkins, Milford Haven, South Wales.

<sup>95</sup> #258, black & white post card of Mr. & Mrs. H. Westbrook’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Harvest Festival Display [post marked London 6 July, 1928].

<sup>96</sup> #231, handwritten letter on plain paper, postmarked 9 July 1928, Florence Gibbons, Warwick.

<sup>97</sup> #116, handwritten letter on lined paper, n.d., from Mrs. Mary Gibbon, St. Helens.

<sup>98</sup> #174, handwritten letter on lined paper, 6 July 1928, from Mrs. H. Colton, Blyth.

<sup>99</sup> #111, handwritten letter on lined paper, 7 July 1928, from T. A. Carpenter, Croydon; See also a letter from “A. M”:

“How very wrong of those unkind people to try & swear your life away. It will not bring them luck. But we must not think that the wrong they tried to do you will be unpunished. God is good he is a great friend & healer isn’t he dear.”

#204, handwritten (anonymous) letter on lined (grey) paper, n.d., from A. M., no address.

<sup>100</sup> #78, handwritten letter on printed addressed plain paper, 7 July 1928, from Emily Dunstone, London.

<sup>101</sup> #233, handwritten letter on plain paper, 11 July, from Eleanor Jones, Barton-on-Irwell.

<sup>102</sup> #205, handwritten letter on plain paper, 7 July 1928, from H. C. Gordon, Twickenham, Middlesex.

<sup>103</sup> In fact, neither the coroner nor the foreman—despite the criticism they received—could be reproached with not having done their jobs.

<sup>104</sup> There were references to God by Beatrice and her family, but they were occasional and used in a common colloquial sense rather than as an expression of any particularly strong faith. E.g., “thank God I have always been a good mother” or “if God gives me health and strength to pull through this.” “Harry Pace’s Rage after Funeral of Child,” *World’s Pictorial News*, 22 July 1928, 1.

<sup>105</sup> Of the 44 congratulatory letters whose writers’ sexes cannot be definitively identified, 11 (25%) had a strongly religious character. Additionally, one of the four “group” letters can be similarly classified. None of the five letters from couples, the two letters from children or one family letter could be categorized as strongly religious.

<sup>106</sup> #68, handwritten letter on plain paper, 7 July 1928, from James Kearney, P.P., Garvagh, Co. Derry, N. Ireland.

<sup>107</sup> #240, handwritten letter on plain paper, July 1928, from Charles John Martin, Chesterfield.

<sup>108</sup> #111, handwritten letter on lined paper, 7 July 1928, from T. A. Carpenter, Croydon.

<sup>109</sup> #75, typed letter on plain paper, 8 July 1928, from M. F. Bovinizer, Liverpool.

<sup>110</sup> #220, typed letter on plain paper, 11 July 1928, M. F. Bovenizer, Liverpool.

- <sup>111</sup> The “spirit message”: “I want to save my missis [sic]. Set this down for me. My name’s Pace—‘Arry Pace, you know. It’s my woman I want to save. They’ve got ‘er up for murder. Don’t let ‘er ‘ang! I done fer myself. ‘Urry! ‘Urry, or you’ll be too late. I was crazed with pain. I didn’t want to live. I thought death would end it all.” “Harry Pace ‘Comes Back’” *Sunday News*, 15 July 1928, in HO 144/10854/29b.
- <sup>112</sup> #244, handwritten letter on lined paper, 30 July 1928, from Gertrude Smart, Gillingham, Dorset.
- <sup>113</sup> #244, handwritten letter on lined paper, 30 July 1928, from Gertrude Smart, Gillingham, Dorset.
- <sup>114</sup> #208, handwritten letter on lined paper, 11 July 1928, from M. Jenkins, Milford Haven, South Wales.
- <sup>115</sup> #236, handwritten letter on printed addressed paper, Ernest Jeffrey, West Wimbledon, London, 14 July 1928. I have been unable to find such a direct statement in the *Express*.
- <sup>116</sup> #9, handwritten letter on lined paper, 6 July 1928, Mrs. J. E. Bynon, Bristol. Emphasis in original.
- <sup>117</sup> #227, handwritten letter on plain paper, n.d., from Mabel Jackson, Louth. Emphasis in original.
- <sup>118</sup> #119, handwritten letter on lined paper, n.d., from Maud Purslow, Manchester, and, more briefly, #23, handwritten letter on plain (blue) paper, 6 July 1928, from Annie Jones, London.
- <sup>119</sup> #118, handwritten letter on plain paper, n.d., from Mrs. H. Dawe, Plymouth.
- <sup>120</sup> #187, handwritten letter on lined paper, 9 July 1928, from Helena Bone, Cornwall.
- <sup>121</sup> #243, handwritten letter on plain paper, 31 July 1928, from Jane Goldsmith, no address.
- <sup>122</sup> #226, handwritten (anonymous) note on plain paper, 15 July 1928.
- <sup>123</sup> #237, handwritten (anonymous) letter (in pencil) on lined paper, n.d.
- <sup>124</sup> #234, handwritten (anonymous) letter (in pencil) on plain (light blue) paper, n.d.
- <sup>125</sup> #218, handwritten (anonymous) letter on lined paper, n.d.
- <sup>126</sup> Michelle Arrow, “‘Everything Stopped for *Blue Hills*’: Radio, Memory and Australian Women’s Domestic Lives, 1944-2001,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 20, no. 48, (2005): 305-18.
- <sup>127</sup> Nord, *Communities of Journalism*, 269.
- <sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>129</sup> Lyons and Taksa, *Australian Readers Remember*, 3.
- <sup>130</sup> Levine, “Folklore,” 1382.
- <sup>131</sup> McAleer, *Popular Reading*, 71, 99.
- <sup>132</sup> Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 10.

- <sup>133</sup> #161, handwritten letter on plain paper, 8 July 1928, from Mrs. S. Baker, Bowden.
- <sup>134</sup> #26, handwritten letter on plain paper, 6 July 1928, from Bessie Yeo, Bristol.
- <sup>135</sup> #65, handwritten letter on lined paper, 7 July 1928, from Mrs. Blanche Cuitt, Ryde.
- <sup>136</sup> #28, handwritten (anonymous) letter on lined paper, 6 July 1928, Slough.
- <sup>137</sup> #94, handwritten letter on lined paper, n.d., from Willis, Hole and Vinnicombe, Bradninch.
- <sup>138</sup> #163, handwritten letter on lined paper, n.d., from Howell, Webber and Clalwathy, Taunton; #184, handwritten (anonymous) letter on plain paper, n.d., Taunton. See also, #191, handwritten letter on lined (grey) paper, 8 July 1928, from Mrs. Emma Derry, Cannock Wood; #113, handwritten letter (in pencil) on lined (grey) paper, 7 July 1928, from Edith M. Stile, Pinhoe; #86, handwritten letter on lined paper, 7 July 1928, from Mrs. Trobe, London; #127, handwritten (anonymous) letter on plain paper, n.d., “Greater Brighten Hove.”
- <sup>139</sup> #215, handwritten letter on lined paper, 8 July 1928, from J. Nicholson, London.
- <sup>140</sup> #34, handwritten letter on plain (pale blue) paper, 7 July 1928, from Mrs. W. Williams, Aberdare.
- <sup>141</sup> #48, handwritten letter on lined paper, 6 July 1928, from Mrs. E. Ransome, Weymouth.
- <sup>142</sup> #205, handwritten letter on plain paper, 7 July 1928, from from H. C. Gordon, Twickenham.
- <sup>143</sup> “Would you be so kind as to sign your name on the little piece of Paper enclosed, for me to put into my Autograph Book...” #230, handwritten note (in pencil) on plain paper, n.d., from Gordon Stenning, Ditchling.