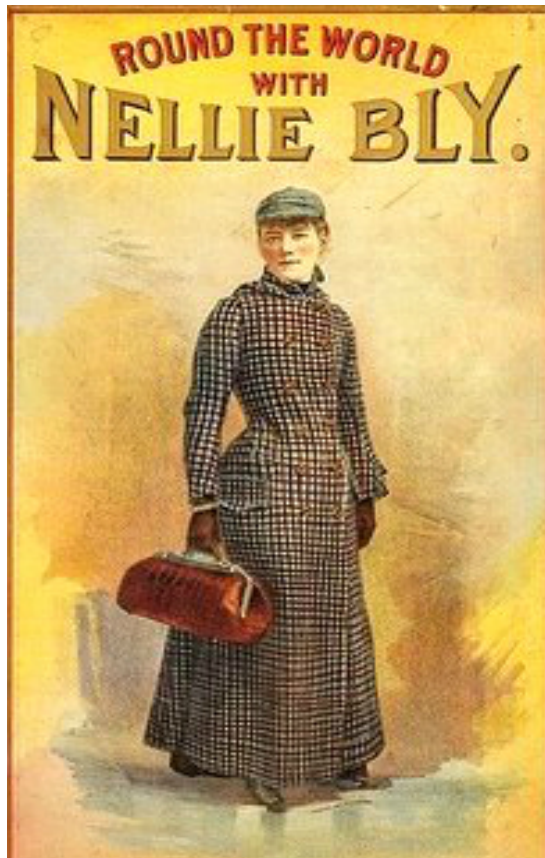


Spassky At A Safe Distance, Issue 4

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1

Nellie Bly (1864–1922) – or Elizabeth Cochran (1864–1922) if you're allergic to pen-names – should be a name as famous as Mary Shelley, Charles Dickens, or Ronald McDonald. But she isn't. You don't know who she is, I didn't know who she was half a year ago, and if you were to interrogate anyone in your immediate vicinity on the occupation, accomplishments, and overwhelming awesomeness of Nellie Bly, you would undoubtedly get a "Huh?", or at best, an "Uhh....huh?".

This issue aims to – however minutely – reduce this ignorance surrounding the 19th century's greatest female madman, by telling her story, and sharing her works, and to, if I do my job right, revive our collective consciousness of this legend that has for over 100 years been dead.

And I've linked a Chekhov-story here, too. It doesn't have anything to do with anything. I liked it.

2

Nellie Bly was an American journalist, author, inventor of "stunt journalism", as well as an augmented milk-can.

How she started her career is rather a legend in itself: Nellie had read a *Pittsburgh Dispatch* column, titled "What Girls Are Good For" – which the author concluded wasn't much. Nellie didn't really agree with this, and sent a response to the paper, a response that so impressed

the *Dispatch*'s editor that he sent for advertisements, people with loud voices, and, surely, one or two carrier pigeons, all asking to find the writer of the thing, and to get her to work for him.

(This editor intended to pen-name her Nelly Bly, but was a bad speller)

Nellie would work for the *Dispatch* until 1887, during which time she wrote [Six Months In Mexico](#), and a lot of fashion and gardening-articles – subjects she didn't care for but was forced to write about, the gender-dice having rolled against her favour.

She left for New York, and the *New York World* to pursue a more adventurous side of journalism, and this is where the madness begins.

There had been reports of patients being mistreated at Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum. To investigate this, Nellie's editor thought it a perfectly reasonable idea for her to fake insanity, get prosecuted for being crazy, get sent to this insane-asylum – and the possible torture that had been reported –, and then, in some way that hadn't really been thought through, get her out of there, and make her write a report about it. Nellie thought it a perfectly sensible plan, too, and agreed.

[Ten Days In a Mad-House](#), her report of this adventure, was published in 1887; it's thrilling and horrifying; it was my first experience with Nellie Bly, and the guilty party for my continuous obsession with her works. It's novel-length, but she does chapter it – you don't miss much if you skip to the Asylum bit. I will never stop writing about it if I get started, so I'll stop now. Read it.

She got pretty famous after TDIMH, and did some cool stuff my word-limit won't allow me to detail, so we'll move right along to 1888, the next chapter in Bly's Book of Weirdness:

[Around the World In 72 Days](#).

You know about Jules Verne's *Around the World In 80 days*, of Phileas Fogg's mission to do what the title suggests; it was popular during Bly's time, and I'm sure she read it, put it down dismissively, and thought to herself "80 days? I could beat that...Alright let's beat that."

She beat that.

It's another great read; not only did she beat Phileas Fogg, but she found the time to interview Jules Verne and get a pet monkey while doing it.

It's fascinating! The ending made ol' stone-hearted Spassky tear up, and it's probably the book that made her famous-famous. (Reading newspapers from when she returned, victorious, is a great deal of fun, too)

I don't have many words left, unfortunately! Having written about her greatest achievements, it might be time to wrap things up.

Nellie retired from journalism shortly after her return; she wrote children's-books and oversaw a steel-barrel-factory in the later stages of her life.

Nellie had married in 1885, but had no children.

She died of pneumonia in 1922, 58 years old, but ought to live far longer in ink and spirit!