

TEXTUAL HEALING: FEMALE READERS, SELF-WRITING, AND THE GENRE OF SELF
IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH, 1840-1920

by
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(Under the Direction of Stephen Berry)

ABSTRACT

“Textual Healing: Female Readers, Self-Writing, and the Genre of Self in the American South, 1840-1920” argues that Southern women read constantly, wrote about what they read, and then used what they found in novels, histories, poetry, and scientific texts—among other things—to describe but also to inscribe their own lives. My project demonstrates how integral reading and self-writing were to the emotional lives of women and adds to the small chorus of southern scholars calling for a reevaluation of intellectual life in the South, with a particular emphasis on Southern “selfdom.” While scholars have analyzed and evaluated the “American” reading public at length, some tend to discount or completely ignore Southern readers. At times, they describe so-called “American” readers without ever considering Southern sources. Though middle-class and elite Southerners rarely expressed interest in educating poor whites, blacks and slaves in their region, they *did* value reading amongst themselves. My work reevaluates readers in the South and in doing so, offers a more complete picture of reading within the United States. In addition, it counters narratives of Southern backwardness and intellectual conservatism to see literary culture as thriving in its own unique manner in the South while also adding regular women as actors to the realm of intellectual history.

INDEX WORDS: Southern women, reading, culture, American Civil War, literature, diary, literary culture, nineteenth century

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DEDICATION
*For Andrew & Evie
& the beautiful life we're writing together*

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INTRODUCTION: *Writing Stories of Selves—The Human Condition*

“I’m nobody! Who are you? / Are you nobody, too?”—Emily Dickinson

We are all readers. Even if we are unlettered, we read facial expressions. We read signs of weather to come. We even read the body language revealing what words leave unsaid. And most can also read the written word as it graces the page as news, poetry, stories, crossword puzzles, and blog entries. Amid our reading, we are also writing, every one of us. We write our stories of ourselves in tweets and memos and love letters and songs and (a personal favorite) diaries. Reading and writing our worlds into being—whether orally or literally—is human, the critical process by which we narrate, and thereby understand and give meaning, to our collective and individual experience. This dissertation is about that process, and more specifically, how nineteenth-century Southern women participated in it.

Books, reading, and writing captivated Louisianan Sarah Lois Wadley from a young age. She read alone, with friends, for comfort, for information and learning, for entertainment, inspiration, imagination, and spiritual comfort. Wadley was the oldest of five children, and her father, who was northern born, served as a railroad executive before, during, and after the Civil War. On the first page of her diary in 1859, fifteen-year-old Wadley recorded her excitement about an impending trip “north” with family members. Her “book,” as she called it, offered few details about her life prior to the first entry and initially took the shape of a travel journal. She did provide a sense of her motivations as a diarist, however. The book had “for many years been [her] constant companion” until it had finally become “a cherished friend” who “seem[ed] to

[her] capable almost of human emotions.”¹ That companionship continued until December 3, 1920—the day she made her last entry—the day before she died.

Wadley seemed to have trouble making friends with some of her peers and found “little pleasure and much embarrassment [sic] in general society.”² She was serious, studious, and very religious—all things that she felt made her seem dull to those around her. Her diary, then, was a perfect companion. On the final page of her journal’s third volume, she wrote: “This is the last page of my journal book, a book which has been with me and been my faithful confidant in so many scenes and in so many moods, I don’t know what I should do without my journal, it is such a relief to me to write here.”³

Like many dedicated diarists, Wadley was also an avid reader throughout her life—something easily gleaned from the way she recorded the books she read and wrote about the authors she loved. For example, she so adored French author Lamartine that she “wish[ed] ardently that I had known him.” After finishing his *Voyage en Orient*, she wrote that she “closed the book with a feeling like that of parting from some old friend.” The book was to her “a glimpse into [a] new and unknown world, full of romantic life and beauty...It is not a description of travels that I have read, I seem to have lived with the traveler, sharing his thoughts, his emotions, and his beautiful and grand pictures.” She said of Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley* in 1864: “some parts of it spoke so to my heart that I seemed to breathe out myself in reading them.” After borrowing Thomas á Kempis’ *The Following of Christ* from a neighbor, Sarah reflected, “I have never read such a book, it is like rain upon a parched and thirsty soil...I could read it

¹ Sarah Lois Wadley Diary, “Sarah Lois Wadley Papers, 1844-1920,” Volume 1 Transcription, pg. 2, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

² Ibid, Volume IV, pg. 330.

³ Ibid, Volume III, pg. 164-5.

always.”⁴ Examples like these show that Wadley’s reading was a constituent part of her reality and a critical dimension of her emotional life.

Wadley was a writer as well. Beyond the hundreds of letters and eight large volumes of diaries, she wrote and published short biographies of both of her parents as well as a short essay on etiquette. She wrote her father’s biography “for the benefit of my father’s children and their descendants.”⁵ Wadley felt comfortable adopting an authorial voice later in her life—something that demonstrated a shift from wishing to be an artist to realizing that she deserved a voice regardless of whether or not she felt herself truly artistic enough.

Wadley spent the rest of her life living in Monroe County, Georgia; she never married, though her diaries paint an image of an endlessly curious woman who constantly read and scribbled, gardened with passion, and always put family first. On the final page of her diary in December of 1920, Wadley recorded making homemade candy for her niece’s birthday as well as a nephew’s return to Atlanta. The next day, she died of a heart attack at age 76. A family member lovingly recorded the following beneath her last entry: “Aunty died today...she died as she had lived fearless of the future.”⁶

Even this brief portrait of Wadley hints at the critical and complex roles reading and writing, self-construction and self-understanding, played among elite women in the nineteenth-century South. While not all diarists began their “books” with such poignant reflections on the value of self-writing, a significant number demonstrated a serious self-awareness about the fact that they were narrating a version of themselves into being; in their diaries they were not merely

⁴ Ibid, Volume II, pg. 135-5; Volume III, pg. 222; Volume II, pg. 34.

⁵ Sarah Lois Wadley Diary, “Sarah Lois Wadley Papers, 1856-1920,” Emory University, Box 2, Folder 8. Her father’s biography was published by a New York Press in 1906.

⁶ Ibid, Box 2, Folder 5.

the lives of a life but the protagonists of a story. At some point in every female diarist's life, she sat down, closed the door, or stole away for a moment with the intention of recording something about her life, experiences, and emotions. Sometimes our diarist needed a place for privacy and confession. Other times, she wrote a diary for a friend or family member. In some cases, the diarist realized she was in the midst of times of incredible change and simply wished to record what happened for later reading, or to put herself at ease in times of confusion and fear. Regardless of why a diarist put a pen—or quill—to the page, when she did so, she created a highly intertextual space—one that became its own sort of genre in the nineteenth century. A diary was—and still is—the narrative of a life, one that is often reread, shaped by the writer's contemporary literary conventions and by the author's interaction with other written material and genres. Simply put, a diary captures more completely than any other form the *genre of self*.

Diaries kept by Southern women from the mid-nineteenth into the early twentieth centuries demonstrate that the South was no “Sahara of the Bozart,” (as H.L. Mencken so famously put it) but was instead a place with strong ties—at least in terms of literature—to transatlantic flows of ideas, words, and emotions.⁷ However real their physical isolation in some circumstances, middle- and upper-class Southern women were not cut off from literature, poetry, and the latest periodicals. For many of the women referenced in this study, reading offered far more than mere escapism. Instead, what and how they read often influenced the vocabularies they had for self-expression and the tools they had or developed to better understand and cope with the realities of their lives. Ultimately, reading and writing helped these women (and many people beyond the scope of this project) to make sense of their uncertain world.

⁷ Henry Louis Mencken, “The Sahara of the Bozart,” *New York Evening Mail*, 1917.

This dissertation seeks to offer portraits of Southern female readers and self-writers who read constantly, wrote about what they read, and then used what they found in novels, histories, poetry, and scientific texts—among other things—to describe but also to inscribe their own lives. By offering intimate portraits of the women of letters in the South from the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries, I demonstrate how integral reading and self-writing were to the emotional lives of women. At the same time, I hope to add to the small chorus of southern scholars calling for a reevaluation of intellectual life in the South, with a particular emphasis on Southern “selfdom.”⁸

History of the book scholarship, literary criticism on reading, readers, and self-writing, and the rich historiography on nineteenth-century women will shape the pages of this dissertation. Reading, diary writing, and authorship afforded women opportunities to explore their real and imagined selves without the restrictions and expectations they navigated in everyday life. In the nineteenth century, men and women in Western society often saw their lives in terms of the literature they encountered.⁹ The women’s diaries included in this dissertation attest to Cathy Davidson’s assertion that nineteenth-century Americans “read themselves into their fictions and their fictions into their lives.”¹⁰ Or, as the Zborays claim, most “did not just

⁸ For example, see James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Public Library Society, 1748-1811* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002); Michael O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 2004; Jonathan Daniel Wells, *Women Writers and Journalists in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2011; Sarah Gardner, *Blood and Irony: Southern White Women’s Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1937* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2006 and *Reviewing the South: The Literary Marketplace and the Making of the Southern Renaissance* (2017); Beth Barton Schweiger, “The Literate South: Reading Before Emancipation,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, Vol. 3, Number 3, September 2013.

⁹ Ronald Zboray, *A Fictive People: antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press), 80-1; See also Richard Brodhead, “*Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), Cathy Davidson, Ed. *Reading in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

¹⁰ Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America, Expanded Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 142.

consume reading matter ... but, rather, reflected deeply about their literary experiences and applied the results of their thinking to their social world.”¹¹ Reader-response theory, which portrays reading as an interaction between a text and the reader’s “own beliefs and assumptions,” provides the foundation for this understanding of women’s reading in the nineteenth century.¹²

As Davidson and others have argued, books, and novels especially, provided women with “a means of entry into a larger literary and intellectual world” as well as “a means of access to social and political events” that they “would have been largely excluded” from otherwise.¹³ As the “paradigmatic democratic form,” the nineteenth-century novel had the “ability to address the widest possible demographic of readers.”¹⁴ For antebellum Americans, reading could “create order out of social chaos” and “help ... to address the personal challenges of rapid development and the diverse emotional experiences it brought.”¹⁵ As the Romantic Movement faded and Realism took the stage in the late-nineteenth century, writers and artists gained considerable authority by providing a “full and authentic report of human experience” in their fiction.¹⁶ The

¹¹ Ronald and Mary Saracino Zboray, *Everyday Ideas: Socioliterary Experience among Antebellum New Englanders* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2006), xvi-xvii.

¹² Stanley Fish, “Is There a Text in This Class?,” *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 319. Fish is known as the “founder” of reader-response theory though others like Lucien Febvre, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Harold Bloom all added to the theoretical framework for more contemporary study. Since the mid-to-late-1980s, scholars have examined the feminine perspective on reading in terms of agency, gender, and self. Important examples include: Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1977); Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1984); Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Ronald and Mary Zboray, *Everyday Ideas* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2006); Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

¹³ Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America, Expanded Edition*, 67. James L. Machor, *Reading Fiction in Antebellum America: Informed Response and Reception Histories, 1820-1865* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 2011. Jonathan Wells contends that periodicals were, in fact, far more democratic than novels given their low cost, easy access, and their encouragement of female authorship. See *Women Writers and Journalists in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹⁵ Ronald Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public*, xvii.

¹⁶ Roger B. Henkle and Robert M. Polhemus, ed., *Critical Reconstructions: The Relationship of Fiction and Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 4; Stephen Cushman, *Belligerent Muse: Five Northern Writers and How They Shaped Our Understanding of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 2014.

reading public often confirmed the novelist's position as truth-teller and firmly believed in the realities portrayed in fiction. Rather than trusting the words of politicians and sometimes even preachers, nineteenth-century Romantics believed that artists wielded truth in ways that other parts of society simply could not.

While scholars have analyzed and evaluated the "American" reading public at length, some scholars tend to discount or completely ignore Southern readers. At times, these scholars describe "American" readers without ever considering Southern sources. Zboray even argued that Southern "social conservatism discouraged literacy" and that southerners "also generally lacked the motives for literacy commonly found in the North."¹⁷ Though middle-class and elite Southerners rarely expressed interest in educating poor whites, blacks and slaves in their region, they *did* value reading amongst themselves—even for their wives and daughters—by the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁸ I, along with scholars such as Beth Schweiger and Sarah Gardner, hope to reevaluate readers in the South and in doing so, offer a more complete picture of reading within the United States.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the diary had long been its own evolving "literary genre." In fact, as "Romanticism transmuted the confessional into the psychological," journals became "intimate, presupposing a veil between the self and the world," and even "attempting to define and express a 'self.'"¹⁹ In other words, rather than being simply a repository for secrets, diaries became a place for deep reflection on who you were and in turn, the self you imagined or hoped to be. Sometimes the self-defining occurred for the sake of the writer, sometimes for the sake of

¹⁷ Ronald Zboray, *A Fictive People*, 197-8.

¹⁸ See Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 2006) and Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 2007.

¹⁹ Michael O'Brien, "Introduction," *An Evening When Alone*, 3.

other intimate readers and family members and intimate friends. Other women, however, used their diaries as purely private spaces—especially if they had no real or intellectual space considered their own, as was the case with Nannie Haskins Williams, a woman with ten children and little time or space for herself.²⁰ As Michael O’Brien notes, “A journal was simultaneously autobiography and memoir, and diarists themselves decided where the emphasis should lie.”²¹

Over the past fifteen years, historians have expanded the boundaries of scholarship on Southern women to include a number of new actors and angles.²² The women included in this dissertation were all white, fairly financially secure, and had at least some formal education. In other words, they benefitted from the privileges of their class and race, and yet, as numerous scholars have argued, they also faced the constraints of Southern patriarchy—something that had deep emotional and social consequences. However, they were different in many ways from the typical portraits drawn by some historians. Rather than being ladies on pedestals, meek and submissive belles, or isolated and wary mistresses, these women were intellectuals. They and their families clearly valued education, and their personalities and natures fostered in them an innate curiosity and desire for learning that encouraged their love of reading. Their reading and

²⁰ Ibid, 3. Also see Mary Jane Moffatt and Charlotte Painter, eds. *Revelations: Diaries of Women* (New York: 1974); Felicity A. Nussbaum, “Eighteenth-Century Women’s Autobiographical Commonplaces,” in Shari Benstock, ed. *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women’s Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “Between Individualism and Community: Autobiographies of Southern Women,” in *Located Lives: Place and Idea in Southern Autobiography*, ed. J. Bill Berry (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1990).

²¹ Michael O’Brien, “Introduction,” *An Evening When Alone*, 4.

²² For example, see Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, Eds. *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2008; Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2012; Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 2004; the *Southern Women: Their Lives and Times* Series from University of Georgia Press; Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South, 1800-1865* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 2009; Anya Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2009; Victoria E. Ott, *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age During the Civil War* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press), 2014.

writing provided them an opportunity to consider possible selves that didn't always fit with the constraints of their society without fully undermining it.

Recently, historians have countered the narrative Southern white women created through the Lost Cause and romanticism for the Old South. However, I hope to recover another story that needs telling—that of Scarlett's bookworm sister. For the literature-loving women of the South, reading went far beyond the expected and much deeper than pure entertainment. Their self-awareness reveals deep emotional literacy and a willingness to move outside their assigned boxes for the sake of exploring possible selves. I hope to analyze and explain how and why women—young and old—in the South turned to reading and diary writing to make sense of their lives as well as how their experiences as women made this penchant for the written word unique.

This dissertation promises to be in conversation with the promising and ever-growing historiography on emotions and, more recently, sensibilities. The field of “emotions history,” commonly considered a subfield of social and cultural history, has a long and complex history of its own, stemming primarily from the Annales School in France. Inspired and assisted by work in psychology, sociology, and ethnology, emotions historians and literary critics have created a complex and thriving field analyzing anything from performative emotional expression during the French Revolution, to love letter-writing rituals in the nineteenth-century, to how conceptions of anger have evolved over time in the United States.²³

Recently, several historians have called for a renewal of cultural and emotional history by reintroducing the concept of “sensibility” when analyzing human subjects.²⁴ Sensibility seeks to

²³ William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Chapters 5, 6, and 7; Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Carol Zisowitz Stearns and Peter N. Stearns, *Anger: The Struggle for Emotional Control in America's History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

²⁴ While Daniel Wickberg has probably written the most on the subject, Peter Carmichael recently applied

root emotional expression in “perceptual, emotive, and conceptual frameworks” and trace their relationship to more familiar social constructs such as race, class, gender, and sexuality.²⁵ Daniel Wickberg, Thomas Haskell, and more recently, Peter Carmichael describe sensibilities as “modes of perception and feelings, which are pictured as collective and historically variable.” In other words, “sensibilities, like cultures, belonged to collectives—nations, classes, ethnic groups, civilizations, religions,” and of course, regions, and could be affected by historical changes and events.²⁶

My project pushes sensibility history even further by establishing the relationship between historical sensibilities on the one hand and reading and self-writing on the other. Critical to my intervention is the notion that the “self” is itself a genre, which is to say a narrative form that can be historicized. If the self is a story told by the self to the self about the self—if it is essentially a narrative construct, a genre—and if we allow that the way stories are told changes over time, then ‘self-dom’ itself changed over time. Such a formulation allows us to ponder the question of whether the Civil War altered self-dom itself, whether macro-historical events, if cataclysmic enough, are felt in the very genre through which we write and read ourselves into being.

sensibility to the study of Civil War soldiers to better understand Southerners’ lack of irony. In addition, one could argue that Jason Phillips study of Civil War soldier motivation shifts into the realm of sensibility, as he examines modes of thinking and the psyche of “diehard rebels.” Peter S. Carmichael, “Soldier Speak,” in *Weirding the War: Stories from the Civil War’s Ragged Edges*, Ed. Stephen Berry (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), Jason Phillips, *Diehard Rebels* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2007).

²⁵ Countless theorists have suggested the use of concepts similar to sensibility, as Daniel Wickberg demonstrates in his article, “What is the History of Sensibilities?” He argues that historians should adopt Thomas Kuhn’s concept of the “paradigm,” the Annales School’s emphasis on mentalité, and Clifford Geertz’s understanding of “ideology” to arrive at a more complex and coherent understanding of history and history’s subjects. Daniel Wickberg, “What is the History of Sensibilities?: On Cultural Histories, Old and New,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 112, No. 3 (June 2007): 661-2, 683.

²⁶ Daniel Wickberg, “What is the History of Sensibilities?”, 664, 668. Ibid, 664, 668. Thomas Haskell, “Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 2,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 90, No. 2 and 3 (April and June 1985), 339-361, 547-566; Peter S. Carmichael, “Soldier Speak;” Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

This dissertation is particularly attentive to the materials these women constructed their self-dom from—the antebellum antecedents, literary and cultural, from which they learned to inscribe and describe their emotional lives. “The present state of the world is most momentous,” noted one editorial in the 1850s, “and to one that can look back for the last thirty years, the changes they have brought with them are beyond the wildest imaginings. [N]ew and extended powers...together with the wonderful inventions of man, have added to his nature, have made him almost another being.” The writer needn’t have said almost. What was being born in America was a new being: a romantic self, and a self-dom that reacted dramatically to the war and, in the white South, to defeat. Though complex, I hope that using the concept of the self as a genre will help connect the literary, gendered, and emotional threads of these women’s lives to their political activities and circumstances. I hope also to show that the concept allows us to better understand the psychological elasticity of our subjects; how they can be so like us and so different at the same time; how selfdom itself changes over time while also appreciating the boundaries of that change.

Obviously, this is a heavy, complicated subject; trying to capture the intellectual lives and sensibilities of women is no small feat by itself; trying to recover their very notion of self-dom is more difficult still. Even so, methodologically and theoretically, this dissertation builds on a solid foundation. After 1800, due to the Enlightenment and other intellectual and cultural trends, ideas about universal truths disappeared and people felt that a search for individual truth and the self were valid endeavors.²⁷ Well-respected scholars John Paul Eakin and Dan McAdams agree that the “self and its experiences may somehow be represented in a text.”²⁸ Rather than seeing

²⁷ Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York: William Morrow, 1993), 82-3.

²⁸ John Paul Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 99.

autobiography or diary writing as the only time humans write a life story, scholars argue that it is part of the “lifelong process of identity formation” that orders our understanding of our lives and allows us to insert “self-determination” on events, experiences, and feelings we often have little control over.²⁹ In *Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative*, Dan McAdams, Ruthellen Josselson, and Amia Lieblich find that narrative identity helps people to “define who they are for themselves and for others.” While narrative identity works to make sense of experiences “that disrupt individuals’ assumptions about their place in the world,” it also helps them explain “their relations to others,” making it an internal and external endeavor.³⁰

Anthropologists frequently discuss the fact that cultural narratives available to us are key to how we express experiences, feelings, hopes, and dreams and that certain groups of people are more likely to have the opportunity to express themselves than others. For instance, literary critic John Paul Eakin argues that our self narratives are a “kind of genre...with rules and penalties that bear on our recognition by others as persons” because “culture’s fundamental values are at stake.” A person’s ability to express his or her narrative self—to make themselves legible—to the state, to others, and to themselves—depended largely on class, race, and gender—something that still remains true.³¹ This is not to say that non-elites cannot “write” their own lives, selves, and destinies. Far from it. But there is no question that the dominant culture makes it easier for some than others to push back against the conceptual roles society has allotted for them. I argue that as white intellectual women, the readers and self-writers examined in this book had far more power than is generally allowed because whatever the restraints on their outer lives, inner lives

²⁹ Ibid, ix, 43.

³⁰ *Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative*, ed. Dan McAdams, Ruthellen Josselson, and Amia Lieblich (American Psychological Association: 2006), 4, 111.

³¹ John Paul Eakin, *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 22, 26-7, 50.

are just as critical to understanding historical change. While some scholars argue, for instance, that nineteenth-century women often felt guilt for making themselves the center of their self-narratives in diaries and journals, or that they turned to diaries as the only place to vent their frustrations for the confinement of their lives, I argue that these women understood, intuitively and sometimes explicitly, that a more affective life was a more effective life, and to the extent that men had more difficulty processing private emotions, they were comparatively obtuse.³²

To achieve deep reads of deep readers, this dissertation follows a small cast of what I call “super writers,” women with decades-long written records. This allows me to study changes in personality over time, especially as the subject ages. Such close readings will be bolstered by evidence from other diaries and commonplace books to support claims to representativeness where appropriate.³³ While the scope of the project focuses mostly on the mid-to-late nineteenth century, some diarists take it into the twentieth century, allowing for consideration about how shifts in the predominant forms of fiction and even non-fiction impacted the shape of self-writing.

While this dissertation has a loose chronological structure, spanning a period that included the Civil War, I have largely approached the subject thematically. This is typical of cultural histories where the phenomena under scrutiny has a long time horizon. Certainly the “genre of self” can and should be historicized, but it is not like the events of a political campaign, which largely unfold in sequence. Instead I have embraced the architectural phrase, “form follows function,” and chosen to study these women from the moments they opened the cover on

³² Jill Ker Conway, *When Memory Speaks: Reflections on Autobiography* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 87-8. See also: Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988).

³³ Commonplace books are essentially scrapbooks for information, such as quotes, newspaper articles, and lists of books read. They were very popular in the nineteenth century, especially given that much formal education focused on rhetoric and memorization.

their first journals to the moment they closed them forever. This made a certain sense to me. All that we have of these women, in most cases, are the books they left behind, and so, of necessity, these diaries are as much the subject of this dissertation as the women who wrote them.

Chapter One, “Opening the Book,” describes how and why women began diaries in the nineteenth century. Finding paper, pen, and time proved a challenge for some women, so understanding why they dedicated themselves to starting a “book” is essential to grasping the process of shifting from reader to self-writer to—in some cases—published author. Dedicated diarists often needed multiple volumes in which to tell their stories. “Opening the Book” considers how journal keepers changed the openings to their volumes over time. This chapter also describes changes in literary culture and diary-writing practices that make diaries from this period particularly rich in terms of their detail, consistency, and intertextuality. Ultimately, the women discussed here seemed willing to put aside concerns about egotism and write their stories, as diarist Sarah Morgan so aptly put it: “I take refuge in writing all that is too preposterous to say aloud. Besides, ...there is no more fitting place for talking about the most inexhaustible subject in the world, the only one of which we never tire, namely—yourself.”³⁴

Relationships are essential to human happiness and sense of self, and, not surprisingly, women of the past had the same emotional need for connection that we have today. Diaries often recorded social connections and interactions. In fact, even the most terse diaries from the nineteenth century include visitations, marriages, births, and deaths. Chapter Two, “Seeking Kindred Spirits” considers how the diarists in this study built friendships based on their intellectual values and interests. Through reading groups, sharing books and other reading material, and seeking out like-minded bookworms, Southern intellectual women created

³⁴ Sarah Morgan, *The Civil War Diary of Sarah Morgan*, Ed. Charles East (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1991), 29.

networks among one another that helped provide them with community and intellectual stimulation, and assisted in creating flows of transatlantic information to even the most rural of places. And while these relationships helped sustain them in some cases, many of my subjects found themselves quite disillusioned with many of their peers—something that became more and more apparent in their need for fellowship with their books and their diary. In the end, their reading and writing dictated the course of many of their relationships.

Chapters Three and Four trace the process of how Southern intellectual women made the transition from readers to writers. As their relationships seemed to fail them, some Southern women turned to their familiar and much-beloved books for comfort. They were “Reading the Self”—searching for vocabularies and characters and possibilities that aided in their sense of self. Chapter Three argues that *how* diarists read matters as much as what they read—and what they read proved to be a wide range of the latest cheap fiction to old collectors’ volumes of Pliny. Reading offered women vocabularies for self-expression, and the most popular literature of the day encouraged them to deeply explore their emotions and to feel confident in trying to put them on the page—even when words ended up failing them. Whether they wrote directly about it or not, reading changed how women viewed themselves in both positive and negative ways. Ultimately their reading often influenced the way they wrote their “selves” into books of their own—both fiction and in their diaries.

Reading often spurred these women to take on “Writing the Self”—which is analyzed in Chapter Four. Reading provided the vocabularies, diaries the space, and to be frank, slavery the time, for these women to deeply consider their sense of self. Even after slavery’s end, the subjects analyzed here had spare money and time to buy and write in journals, demonstrating that privilege still shaped their worlds in undeniable ways. In their journals, they created a self that

could reflect who they truly were, or they could be something different altogether. Either way, they were in the process of creating a genre of self. This chapter will describe how women wrote about themselves in their journals and how that changed over time—in some cases, large swaths of time. Though dealing with the crisis of war is the focus of Chapter Five, I will still delve into wartime journals to discuss issues of self.

To truly know our identity, it has to be tested; encountering trauma often provides the opportunity for that. When crises occur, we often find ourselves floundering or finding new strengths and weaknesses we didn't know we had. Trauma such as loss, heartbreak, financial struggles and of course, war, shape who we are and by default, the way we view ourselves. Chapter Five, "Coping," explores how Southern women dealing with crises—for many, the Civil War—used their reading and writing habits to process the immense changes and losses they experienced. Death was a constant shadow in the homes of these women, and yet, they felt the loss of a parent or child no less than we do now. To lose both amid the incredible societal disruption caused by the Civil War forced women to reevaluate who they were and who they hoped to be as the Confederacy embarked on its experiment in building an undemocratic society. For some of these women, coping meant doubling down and using strategies that helped them face the next day for years; for others, it meant finding new outlets for anger, frustration, and loneliness—all things women weren't really supposed to feel at all at the time.

A number of my research subjects pushed beyond the boundaries of their diaries, publishing locally and sometimes even nationally. For some, their publishing activities were due to the financial pressures of war, while others did so because they needed to—not for any pecuniary issues, but more for their emotional health. Chapter Six, "Editing the Past, Writing a Future" deals with a handful of women's publication efforts and what they can tell us about their

journey from reader to writer and back again. Ultimately, while the war had taken from them many of the ways they used to define themselves, these female diarists found new ways to write their selves into existence and in the process, staked a claim to women's importance in writing the war.

In many cases, diaries are the only snapshots of their lives that these women leave behind, forcing us to reckon with them as sources that can sometimes obscure as much as they reveal. By choice or simply according to what has survived, these diaries end—abruptly, or sometimes with the flourish of a romance novel. The epilogue, “Closing the Cover,” describes the end of diaries. It argues that while some diaries ended without explanation or without a novelistic “ending,” some diarists—ever conscience of the intertextuality of their self writing—provided one for us. Because they sometimes kept diaries for decades, a number of the diarists discussed here give us multiple endings, which reveals that for themselves or their assumed readers, they needed an ending for their life's books.

In his book, *Hearts of Darkness*, Bertram Wyatt-Brown posited that the women who lived through the Civil War were the true wellsprings of the Southern Renaissance that occurred throughout the region decades later.³⁵ The women discussed here certainly found new ways to express themselves to deal with the trauma and loss brought on by the Civil War. And yet, while they did bring new types of narrative to their journals, the fiction, poetry, and other literature they wrote often reflected a deep need to uphold the status quo, or more accurately, to transport them to a world of their past that had died with Confederate surrender. In the end, then, the subtle critiques these Southern female diarists and authors offered of their society as they carved out their intellectual space on paper *did* make them the harbingers of Modernism in the South—

³⁵ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “The Impact of Female Writers,” *Hearts of Darkness: Wellsprings of a Southern Literary Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2003).

at least in a sense. Their Modernism was at once critical of their society and simultaneously nostalgic for their lost world and by default, the lost definitions they had had of their “selves.”

Beyond the historiographic arguments this dissertation makes, I also hope to explore questions about reading and emotional expression impacting the contemporary world. As human beings we must make order, even out of chaos, and throughout history, reading has played a distinct role in that process. The women I study prove all the more interesting when we consider their incredible resilience and ability to connect with and express their emotions. Today’s world limits our chances for self-expression to 140 characters, or to an image, or to something far more immediate than physically writing a diary entry—which often forces reflection on what one writes. Countless Op-Eds lambast Millennials, calling them self-centered and superficial (among many other things). And yet, as my generation appears to be less connected with those around them physically, we often seem to find community, meaning, and a sense of self in the virtual world: on Facebook, Twitter, SnapChat, and countless internet forums and gaming communities. All of this means that more than 150 years after the fact, we’re often still using *words* to define ourselves. My hope is that studying the connection among reading, writing, and emotions will prove useful far beyond the realm of history.

CHAPTER ONE: *Opening the Book*

“Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show.”—Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*

For my tenth birthday, I received a diary from my grandparents. For as long as I could remember, my grandmother had nurtured my love of books and I had decided that I should keep a diary since that’s what protagonists often seemed to do in some of my favorite books. The diary was a small square book with a basket of kittens on the front and a tiny lock on the side that had an even tinier key to go with it. On the side, I wrote, in ten-year-old dramatic fashion, “OPEN AND DIE!!!!!!” On the inside, however, I tried to keep a record of my days, beginning with an entry that introduced myself by writing, “Hi Journal, My name is Katie. I am ten years old and live in Georgia. I have too[sic] sisters. They are OK but I get mad at them sometimes.” The rest of the entry describes where I went to school, some of my favorite things (swimming, ice cream, and P.E.), and closes by saying, “Journal I hope we are going to be good freinds.”

Over the next few years, the contents of the diary entries changed, to be sure, but one thing stayed the same: I could not consistently write entries. And after each inevitable, fairly large gap in time, I struggled to figure out how to quickly write down what had happened to me in the intervening months (and in some cases, years) without leaving anything out. This effort to “catch up” some imagined reader—who was never really anyone concrete in my mind—often ended up getting in the way of the reasons for returning to my diary in the first place: the need for a space to vent and overflow—a place to put feelings on the page—to wrestle with complex ideas, difficult days, and overwhelming happiness.

Even into my adult life, and especially as I began to study diaries as a graduate student in history, I have made efforts to keep a diary, all of which have failed miserably. Keeping a diary takes dedication. Some days, it's easier to write than others. Some days, you need to write for different reasons than the day before. And in the end, you have to find a place to start.

Knowing how to begin a story of oneself is no easy task. Do you include a narrative of the past, or do you begin abruptly? How much detail do you include? What secrets do you divulge—or choose not to tell? Every diary has the starting place, the first page, some reason for being, either explicit or implied. Louisianan Kate Foster wrote her Civil War Era diary because “Such a journal in after years may be read by my nieces and nephews for two or even three generations.”³⁶ South Carolina resident Emma LeConte began a record of the changes occurring around her in 1861, noting, “How I wish I had kept a journal during the last three months of great political changes.”³⁷ Floridian Mary Bailey seemed particularly fond of keeping a chronicle of daily activities, and in particular, the weather. In 1895, eleven-year-old Virginian Sarah Baylor received her “third diary” as a gift from her “dear Father,” and mentioned her mother’s encouragement to record her day-to-day activities and new experiences.³⁸ These women—separated by age, space, and time—all decided to tell the story of their lives through text.

In the mid-nineteenth century, women began diaries for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, they wrote at the behest of a parent or friend. Sometimes, they desperately needed a place to confide fears, secrets, and dreams. Experiencing a crisis of faith, love, or patriotism encouraged

³⁶ Kate D. Foster, “Kate D. Foster Diary, 1863-1872,” June 25, 1863, Duke University, Rubenstein Library.

³⁷ Emma Holmes, *Diary of Miss Emma Holmes, 1861-1866*. Ed. John F. Marszalek (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 1994, 1.

³⁸ Mary E. Bailey, “Mary E. Bailey Diary and Memorandum Book, 1869, 1878-1882,” Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina; Sarah Baylor Blackford, “Sarah Evelyn Baylor Blackford Papers, 1883-1954,” Richmond, Virginia Historical Society.

many to process feelings, while others sought simply to remember the things that happened to them, to chronicle events. By the mid-nineteenth century, keeping a diary was not just acceptable for middle- and upper-class women—it was considered a marker of gentility and feminine refinement.³⁹ Though their motivations differed dramatically, the diarists included in this dissertation all had well-developed vocabularies and had been exposed to many nineteenth-century diary conventions in schools, writing manuals, and epistolary novels.

Diary writers nearly always began as readers, as keeping a diary required at least some level of literacy both in terms of reading and writing. Their ability to tell their life's stories stemmed from the stories they encountered in fiction and nonfiction, and as they continued reading and began their diaries, they were readers and writers simultaneously. Certainly there is a false division between reading and writing that women at the time would not have understood.

This chapter will describe how and why Southern women opened their “books,” and will also consider how diarists who kept long-term records matured not just as women but as diarists, especially evident in the ways they introduced new volumes of their journals. I will examine how their efforts at keeping a record of their lives varied by age and personality over time and how diary writing afforded them opportunities for self-exploration that were not lesser but simply different from those afforded by men in the public sphere. Regardless of their intentions, these women's ability to write a diary at all reflects their places of privilege in the racially-stratified South. Where the diaries make it possible, I try to explore the racial dimensions of the genre of selfhood these diaries helped to create and reveal.

³⁹ Margo Culley, ed., *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women Writers from 1764 to the Present* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1985), 4. Also see: Michael O'Brien, *An Evening When Alone: Four Journals of Single Women in the South, 1827-1867* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 2-3.

Nineteenth-Century Diary Writing

According to modern science, keeping a diary can make us happier and helps us reduce “activity in the part of the brain called the amygdala, which is responsible for controlling the intensity of our emotions.”⁴⁰ In other words, diaries and journals provide a place for self-reflection and processing experiences, emotions, and events around us. These findings only confirm what diary writers have known for centuries.

According to Steven Kagle, the “parents of the American diary tradition” were the “spiritual journal and the diary of travel and exploration.”⁴¹ In the eighteenth century, American men, especially, wrote out diaries, fretting about their sinful souls or describing their important adventures and travels through the “wilderness.” While diary writing began with American Protestants’ obsessions with their salvation, literary scholar Margo Culley has argued that women tended to keep their own type of diary in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.⁴² While they certainly wrote spiritual and travel narratives like their male counterparts, women often served as “family and community historians,” keeping track of marriages, births, christenings, and deaths for faraway family and for posterity.⁴³ These family chronicles were the starting place for what became the confessional diary—a private, reflective journal kept by and for an individual—which, according to Culley, only became more common by the end of the nineteenth century. In between the chronicle and the confessional, mid-nineteenth-century diaries tended to be “semi-public documents intended to be read by an audience.”⁴⁴ Although these

⁴⁰ Ian Sample, “Keeping a Diary Makes You Happier,” *The Guardian*, February 15, 2009. Accessed August 23, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2009/feb/15/psychology-usa>.

⁴¹ Steven Kagle, *American Diary Literature, 1620-1799* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), 27.

⁴² Kagle, *American Diary Literature*, 29.

⁴³ Culley, *A Day at a Time*, 4.

⁴⁴ Culley, *A Day at a Time*, 3.

chronological categories of diary-writing are useful for framing large-scale shifts and patterns, most of the diaries analyzed in this dissertation were chronicles at times, confessionals at others, and nearly all were intended for an audience—even if that audience was only the diarist herself.

In the nineteenth century, inhabitants of the Western world wrote diaries, journals, and autobiographies more than ever before, as the explosion of Protestant ideas of self-reflection and the era of Romanticism took hold of the hearts and minds of many.⁴⁵ The “self” became an entity both separate and a part of every person, and so-called “regular” people felt that perhaps even they had a valuable story to tell.⁴⁶ Because of this change to the Romantic self, the Romantic diary was different: while in earlier diaries, the diarist simply served as a witness who recorded events and changes, in the new reflective diary, the self was the subject.⁴⁷ Diary writing allowed for self-assessment—which was already common due to religious introspection—but also for self-realization, an idea profoundly influenced by the rise of Romanticism.⁴⁸ Additionally, diaries had become “an accepted genre with a history and well-established conventions and expectations.” Pre-made diaries became common, and instruction in letter-writing also helped would-be diarists mimic those conventions in their journals. As Rebecca Steinitz has argued, “the genre was characterized by three totalizing imperatives:”

⁴⁵ Culley, *A Day at a Time*, 3-4. Scholars disagree about when Romanticism truly began and ended, but conventional narratives locate the “era” roughly between 1820 and 1860.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Ann Fabian, *The Unvarnished Truth: Personal Narratives in Nineteenth-Century America*.

⁴⁷ Culley, *A Day at a Time*, 7.

⁴⁸ Robert Fothergill, *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 30-1. Fothergill sees nineteenth-century British diaries demonstrating a shift from self-assessment to self-realization. Rebecca Steinitz challenges his narrative, arguing that these things were simultaneous, even if self-realization as a diurnal concept came about in the nineteenth century. Nineteenth-century American diaries tend to show these things occurring simultaneously as well. See Rebecca Steinitz, *Time, Space and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century British Diary* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 33-4.

1. The thorough representation of experience in time
2. The achievement of the fully improved self
3. The full and authentic representation of the self.⁴⁹

Dedicated diary writers also tended to be avid readers (just as writers were often diarists), which exposed them to the conventions of the novelistic form and writing for an implied audience.⁵⁰ By the middle of the nineteenth century, Americans were used to encountering the diary form as a literary genre because of the Western habit of publishing the diaries of notable persons, but also because of the rise of novels written in epistolary form. In the late-eighteenth century, epistolary novels, such as *Pamela*, gained prominence and popularity, which helped potential diary writers (and letter writers) to know conventions for portraying feelings and experiences on the page.⁵¹ By the nineteenth century, the epistolary form, or even portraying characters keeping diaries, had grown more and more common, appearing in popular literature such as *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *The Woman in White*, *A Life for a Life*, and later, *Dracula*.⁵²

Though many Westerners believed in the notion of “the existence of an inner world unknowable to the conscious self” and considered a search for individual truth and the self to be

⁴⁹ Rebecca Steinitz, *Time, Space and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century British Diary*, 17. Here, Steinitz cites Felicity Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). See also Paul C. Rosenblatt, *Bitter, Bitter Tears: Nineteenth-Century Diarists and Twentieth-Century Grief Theories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 7-8.

⁵⁰ In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, instruction in letter writing was not uncommon in schools and among tutors. Additionally, a literature devoted to describing how to write letters developed. All of these trends gave Americans a fairly uniform understanding of how to structure diary entries and letters. See Steven E. Kagle and Lorenza Gramegna, “Rewriting Her Life: Fictionalization and the Use of Fictional Models in Early American Women’s Diaries,” in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries*, ed. Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 48-9.

⁵¹ H. Porter Abbott, *Diary Fiction: Writing as Action* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 18-37; See also, Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 32-34.

⁵² Novels written by Anne Bronte, Wilkie Collins, Dinah Craik Mulock, and Bram Stoker, respectively. All of these novels were popular, especially with women.

valid endeavors, things were initially different for the “fairer sex.”⁵³ Southern society—and Western society more broadly—during this time did not tolerate women’s “morbid” desire to explore who they were or to reflect on their sense of being too deeply. To spend time thinking about who you were or who you wanted to be was considered selfish and a waste of time. The only occasion when deep self-reflection seemed appropriate related to religious beliefs. Instead, women were to devote their time to serving their husbands and families.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, diary writing increased dramatically among women, though they were often still uncomfortable with making “themselves subjects and objects of their own stories” rather than privileging those around them—particularly men.⁵⁴ Additionally, in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, diary-writing customs shifted to make journals “less for education, more as a private occasion where matters unsayable in open parlor were licensed to be set down, where the woman might write her truths alone.”⁵⁵

In constructing their diaries, women confronted their selves in a literal way, as they had to consider who they were, how they would translate that to the page, and how they would interact with their diaries. In other words, writing a diary required a “dislocation from the self, or a turning of subject into object.”⁵⁶ Likewise, as Steven Kagle has argued, “a diary is both a work and a fictional person to whom that work is directed.”⁵⁷ Thus, constructing a diary also meant considering the audience for the story of self, including the journal itself. Women who wrote their personal narratives of self in diaries held up a mirror to themselves, interpreted what they

⁵³ Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York: William Morrow, 1993), 82-3, 120-2.

⁵⁴ Jill Ker Conway, *When Memory Speaks: Reflections on Autobiography* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 87-8.

⁵⁵ Michael O’Brien, *An Evening When Alone*, 3.

⁵⁶ Margo Culley, *A Day at a Time*, 10.

⁵⁷ Steven Kagle, *American Diary Literature: 1620-1799* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), 17.

saw, then attempted to translate that image in whatever way they chose. Thus, when writing a diary—a genre in the minds of many nineteenth-century Westerners—they also made the self a genre—something to be edited and analyzed and shaped by changes in culture or circumstances.

As a result of these changes (among other things), women in the antebellum South wrote more diaries than ever before, leaving behind rich narratives of their daily lives and struggles. On the surface, the nineteenth-century South was not a place where historians would expect women to scribble with passion and purpose about their lives. As numerous scholars have argued, the South was (and often still is) a place where hierarchy reigned supreme.⁵⁸ Much like Victorians in burgeoning cities attempted to order their chaotic worlds with manners and performativity, Southerners—at least the ones with power—built a society dedicated to upholding inequality—all in the service of maintaining the status quo and the hegemony of slavery.⁵⁹ Women's place in Southern society depended largely on their socioeconomic status, their family ties, and their race. Without money, blood, and white skin, a woman typically found herself relegated to a lower position, although having one of these traits kept anyone from being on the “bottom rail,” which was occupied by slaves. And while scholars nearly always categorize these efforts as ideals, or models, that sometimes didn't translate to reality, the expectations certainly shaped the ways and means through which women responded to the world around them.

Beyond the appearances of a strictly ordered society, the realities were often much more complicated, as women found ways to assert their value beyond the supposed-pedestal provided

⁵⁸ Just a few of the many examples of books on hierarchy in the Old South are: Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, Eugene D. Genovese, *The Slaveholders' Dilemma*, Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*.

⁵⁹ For a Northern and Southern example, respectively, see Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982) and Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

by patriarchal relations. Even when they didn't challenge the gendered order of things overtly, by choosing to tell their stories, women called into question their supposed inferiority and the morays that demanded they be seen and not heard. In other words, to privilege their cares, joys, and worries undermined the patriarchal order, and doing so potentially threatened the overarching ordering device of the entire South: race. Of course, women of the past faced many of the same issues and self-doubt that exist today, so it was only natural that some challenged convention and took time to consider their futures and the meaning of their lives in a space where it was acceptable: in their diaries. While the start of such diaries could be threatening to the order of things, frustrations found in their pages rarely translated to action beyond them. Thus, diaries offered women a place to question their status and people and things around them without truly challenging them. And yet, these questions were the start of something of significance. Diaries did not start revolutions or directly displace male authority, but writing out feelings did more than help them from boiling over. Writing could help them figure out complex emotions, thereby encouraging women to become something different or to do something different. In essence, diaries promoted self-awareness of power structures—something that has the power to alter how people think about their situations and in some cases, how they react to them. Writing diaries, then, didn't make a women's movement, but it did place seeds of doubt in important places and ways.

Women who started diaries undoubtedly began in a place of privilege—privilege in terms of literacy, access to reading and writing materials, and also to the notion that their lives were important enough to record—all things most of the slaves who served them didn't have. Diaries reflected this privilege; they were a space inaccessible to those who were not literate, who couldn't afford paper or writing utensils, and especially those whose ownership of space was

limited by race. And while scholars have questioned the notion that Southern white elites had absolute control over space in their region, diaries remained a predominantly white and well-to-do space (with notable exceptions).⁶⁰ This racial and social segregation had real ramifications for how Southern women's diaries changed over time—especially when the end of slavery challenged these hierarchies—a topic for Chapters Five and Six.

At the same time, Southern women lived in a culture that simultaneously celebrated and constrained them. Even though they expressed significant doubt about their place in the world, elite Southern women's efforts to record daily habits and deep thoughts shows that they believed in their intrinsic self-worth. As to be expected, women began diaries with a variety of intentions and needs. However, as Margo Culley has argued, every one of them stemmed from an “urge to give shape and meaning to life with words, and to endow this meaning-making with a permanence that transcends time.”⁶¹

Analyzing the “beginning” of diaries can be a difficult task. Sometimes it isn't clear whether the diarist kept earlier volumes, wrote in another genre or genres before commencing, or handed down an edited version of an original diary. Despite the difficulties, diarists often give us structural and literary clues that what we are reading is a maiden effort, and it is worth examining how women chose to start their stories of self, in part because they reveal the roots of self-writing.

⁶⁰ For recent discussion on how slaves actively pressed into space whites sought to control, see Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009). For a book dedicated to those notable exceptions, see Christopher Hager, *Word by Word: Emancipation and the Art of Writing* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁶¹ Margo Culley, *A Day at a Time*, xi.

Reasons to Write

The genre of the diary had subgenres of its own—all of which reflect the many reasons women had to write. Just as nineteenth-century Americans had complex taxonomies for their stories of self, I will try to describe a sampling of “types” of diaries—borrowing from the categories created by Thomas Mallon in *A Book of One’s Own*.⁶² As stated previously, most diaries fit within more than one category, although there are some exceptions. Still, diarists typically wrote with a recognizable style, rhythm, and pattern—something that tells us about the purposes of their journal as well as their ideas about what a journal was meant to be.

The Chronicle

Sometimes, women treated their diaries almost like a chronicle of everyday events, recording visitors, the weather, and what they did that day. This chronicle-style of diary writing reflects how letter writing was taught in the nineteenth century. As with most parts of Victorian society, plenty of advice literature was published to guide potential letter writers about the proper form and content of letters. Brevity was “literally ‘the soul of wit’” according to one letter writing guide, and staying on topic proved an even more important element of successful letters.⁶³ Qualifications such as brevity, staying on topic, and maintaining propriety and emotional restraint found their way into the beginnings of some diaries. Sometimes women kept

⁶² Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One’s Own: People and Their Diaries* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1985). Mallon comes up with a taxonomy for categorizing diaries and their authors, some of which include, “Chroniclers,” “Travelers,” “Creators,” etc.

⁶³ *Chesterfield’s Art of Letter-Writing Simplified: being a friendly, affectionate, polite and business correspondence: containing a large collection of the most valuable information relative to the art of letter-writing, with clear and complete instructions how to begin and end correspondence, rules for punctuation and spelling, &c. : to which is appended the complete rules of etiquette and the usages of society : containing the most approved rules for correct deportment in fashionable life, together with hints to gentlemen and ladies on irregular and vulgar habits, also, the etiquette of love and courtship, marriage etiquette, &c* (Garrett, Dick & Fitzgerald: New York, 1857), 4, accessed through the 19th Century Schoolbooks Collection at the University of Pittsburgh.

records this way for decades; in other cases, their style of diary-writing shifted with changing needs.

Athens, Georgia resident Mary Elizabeth Harden kept a sporadic diary between 1853 and 1883. The diary itself is complicated to interpret, in part because Mary wrote it out of chronological order and within a specialty book meant to serve as an alphabetical commonplace journal. Harden's entries, however, tended to follow a pattern despite the huge swath of time they cover. The majority of her entries concern money—money earned, spent, and owed. Interspersed with her account-keeping are references to visitors, the weather, and some mentions of marriages. Even in the midst of the Civil War, Harden's entries focus mostly on financial issues. Harden started her surviving diary at the age of forty-two and remained unmarried throughout her life. Both of these things likely shaped the diary's contents, as single women in the South faced liminal economic existences without support from family members.⁶⁴

Amanda Edmonds was eighteen when she started a diary in June of 1857 that she subsequently kept for about ten years. Edmonds, who lived at Belle Grove plantation in Fauquier County, Virginia, found herself in the midst of guerrilla and conventional conflict during the Civil War. Amanda was a social young woman and kept an entertaining record of her many beaux, her interactions with troops, and neighborhood goings-ons. However, the early part of her diary reads mostly as a daily accounting of a teenaged, well-to-do Southerner's life. It isn't clear why Amanda began her diary—she herself writes: “nothing of interest has occurred today” as the opening line—but what *is* clear is her familiarity with a standard format for the almanac-style diary. She recounts what she did each day very briefly, recounted who visited, and sometimes

⁶⁴ Mary Elizabeth Harden, Diary, 1853-1883, Harden Family Papers, Volume S: 1649, Rubenstein Special Collections Library, Duke University. In the Harden Family Papers are several proposals to Mary, all of which were declined, meaning that she remained single at least partly by choice (although her father definitely disapproved of at least one suitor).

describes the weather. Beyond these three elements, sometimes she extends her entries. Even the death of her father in on August 27, 1857 inspired very little change to her normal writing. For three days, she wrote short entries, although she does include more emotion reflection than in previous entries.⁶⁵ Later in her diary, however, the war had clearly taken a toll and provided a need for an emotional outlet, leading to a change in her writing style.

Forty-three-year-old Sarah Morgan McKown lived in Gerrardstown, West Virginia (Virginia at the time) when she began her nearly thirty-year chronicle of her life. McKown's entries almost always started with a description of the weather, followed by a short description of her day. Even when she got word of the start of the Civil War, she merely added, "the war commenced last Friday the 12th, of April Fort Sumter was taken last Saturday by the South."⁶⁶ Year after year, Sarah diligently recorded these basic events, often using the same phrases to start her diary entries. In most cases, new volumes didn't even warrant comment, and when she did take note of a new year or diary, it was often by writing something along these lines: "Here we are at the commencement of another New Year with its crosses and trials before us to contend with." Sarah sometimes wrote "Daily Journal," or "A Chronicle of passing events" at the beginning of a journal volume, something that accurately captures the scope of her diary: it is an almanac of a woman's life.⁶⁷ She never reveals what spurs her to write every day, and the writing itself has a rhythm and regularity that becomes utterly predictable. The starts to McKown's diaries reveal that not all diarists had a changing relationship with their writing; her's remained fairly constant despite changes in time and circumstances.

⁶⁵ Amanda Virginia Edmonds Chappelle, Papers, 1857–1960, Typescript copy of Journal. Mss1C3684a. Virginia Historical Society.

⁶⁶ Sarah Morgan McKown, Diary, Sarah Morgan Groff Gordon Papers, 1798-1954; Section 3, Folder 1. Mss1G658a 37, Virginia Historical Society, 51.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 41.

The Family Digest

Some diarists wrote explicitly for family members and friends who they hoped might read their life's record. Writing a diary for family consumption or trading with friends was quite common in early Western diary traditions. As previously discussed, the notion of a purely "private" diary only became popular in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.⁶⁸ Some women who kept diaries began their writing for a specific family member and with that goal in mind, while others considered it after they had begun their journal-writing. Regardless, when a diary was meant for other readers, it likely shaped how the diarist made their points and the content they chose to include or not to include.

In 1863, twenty-year-old Ellen Renshaw House began her diary of life in Knoxville, Tennessee during the Civil War. Ellen had kept a diary before, but she had had trouble writing in it consistently—something that was still the case in the beginning of her Civil War diary. After Knoxville became occupied by Federal soldiers, however, House wrote in her book fairly consistently. Perhaps enemy occupation and the continued stresses of war encouraged a more dedicated relationship with her writing. Not until the last page of her diary does Ellen reveal her true purpose of writing. On December 31, 1865, she mourned the loss of her beloved brother, Johnnie, who had survived war service and twenty-two months of imprisonment only to be shot to death by a highwayman. She wrote: "Today finishes my journal. I do not think I will keep another. I have no reason for keeping one" because "This I commenced for Johnnie. I thought he would like to know what was passing while he was far away from me in Prison. I have no

⁶⁸ *A Day at a Time*, Ed. Margo Culley, pg 3-4. Also see Kimberly Harrison, *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 15-19.

brother Johnnie to keep one for now.”⁶⁹ Despite this explicit statement of purpose, one has to wonder whether this was a post-mortem pronouncement or if it was her true intention all along. Given the nature of many of her entries, it does seem plausible that she intended the diary for her brother’s perusal and enjoyment.

Julia LeGrand was thirty-two and living in occupied New Orleans with her invalid sister when she began her oft-quoted diary at the end of 1861. When two female editors published the diary in 1911, they placed letters alongside diary entries in the beginning of the text, attempting to flesh out the stop-and-go nature of the first several months of her journal. Intentionally or not, their editing changes the shape of the LeGrand diary’s opening, making it difficult to discern diary entry from copied letter. Julia was an educated and well-connected woman who showed interest before the war and later in life in becoming a published author—something that I’ll explore in a later chapter. According to her diary (and her diary’s editors), she kept her diary largely for “little niece, Edith,” whom she feared would “think her Auntie has a sorry, sorry sort of mind and style” despite her best efforts to keep a “good and interesting journal.”⁷⁰ Julia does not reveal her intentions to keep the diary for Edith until she refers to her in the text. Though LeGrand herself wrote that she was keeping the journal for her niece, her diary also served a personal purpose. She tended to write very intimate, revealing entries—especially later in the war—that make it seem like simply relaying events during the Civil War was not her true focus.

⁶⁹ Ellen Renshaw House, *A Very Violent Rebel: The Civil War Diary of Ellen Renshaw House*, Ed. Daniel E. Sutherland (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 199-200.

⁷⁰ Julia LeGrand Waitz, *The Journal of Julia LeGrand: New Orleans, 1862-1863*, Ed. Kate Mason Rowland and Agnes Croxall (Richmond: Everett Waddey Co, 1911), 130-1. LeGrand’s journal is a complex source, pulling “diary entries” from letters found in a collection at Rice University—something I only discovered upon doing research there. The original of the diary has disappeared, making questions about the editing choices of Rowland and Croxall problematic—especially given the publication date and Rowland’s involvement in the national chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. What does seem clear, however, was that LeGrand kept the diary for her niece, Edith Pye Weeden, the daughter of her sister Matilda.

All the same, LeGrand writes directly to Edith at least three times, even saying, “I hope you will...my little niece...not make poor Auntie the excuse and example of a journal of your own some day.”⁷¹

Virginian Lucy Breckinridge was only nineteen years old when she began a diary in August of 1862. Lucy made it seem in her diary’s opening paragraph that boredom encouraged her to begin writing. She wrote, “I am going to keep an Acta Diurna...telling all the events of the day, my thoughts, feelings, etc.” She wanted to start this daily diary because it would “be good employment these war times, when we have no visitors to receive and no visits to pay, no materials to work upon and no inclination to read anything but the Bible and the newspapers.” Though boredom might have inspired her to start scribbling, she clearly had larger plans for the diary. In December of 1862, she wrote, “Some of these days my ‘little daughter’ will be reading this charming work, sitting in her little arm chair beside me...Then looking at another portion she will see something else she wants explained.” Lucy envisioned an entire scene in which a future daughter reads her journal and asks questions about the people and things it recorded. She then chided herself for her imagination, writing, “I ought to be ashamed to write such nonsense.”⁷² Ultimately, while Lucy constantly called her diary “boring,” she continued keeping it—perhaps with the notion that her future children would care to read it. Sadly, fate prevented this, as she died only a few months after she was married in 1865.

Like Julia LeGrand and Lucy Breckinridge, Mississippian Kate Foster began her diary with the hopes of sharing it with her family and loved ones in the future. In 1863, she wrote, “Rather late am I beginning a journal or rather record of the facts of 1863 or of our war with the

⁷¹ Waitz, *The Journal of Julia LeGrand*, 215, 255.

⁷² Lucy Breckinridge, *Lucy Breckenridge of Grove Hill: The Journal of a Virginia Girl, 1862-1864*, Ed. Mary D. Robertson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 25, 93.

North. Such a journal in after years may be read by my nieces and nephews for two or even three generations.” She added, “Now is a most exciting time; daily we hear rumors that are the next day contradicted.”⁷³ While Kate’s journal did record details of the war—including the loss of two of her brothers in the fighting—she also ended up relying on the journal for comfort and self-expression—especially after the end of the war.

Gertrude Clanton Thomas of Augusta, Georgia kept a remarkable diary spanning forty-one years, and because of their detail and engaging prose, her “books” live on in the books of many a historian. An aspiring writer, Thomas may have been pleased to see her diary be so useful to other would-be writers of today. At the time she began her journal, however, she did not indicate that acclaim and publication were the end goals. The first page of her first (surviving) volume shows that she intended to keep a journal, as she wrote in 1848: “Well I have written an account of yesterdays proceedings and as I sent for this paper to form a journal I will write what happened Monday Tuesday & Wednesday.”⁷⁴ Later, though, Gertrude’s intentions seemed more clear. What began as a travel diary when she was a teenager became a chronicle for her children to read. On a number of occasions, she referenced her hopes that her children would read her journals someday and that she was keeping the records for them. As early as 1855, she wrote, “I have not been keeping a journal since I have been housekeeping but intend endeavoring to persevere in this undertaking. I am writing for my dear little boy and for my children should I have others and in this book they will read, hurriedly recorded a statement of events unimportant in themselves yet they make up the sum of my life as ‘Trifles make up the sum of human ills.’”⁷⁵

⁷³ Kate Foster Diary, Typescript, Sec. A, Box 47, pg 1, June 25, 1863, Rubenstein Special Collections Library, Duke University.

⁷⁴ Gertrude Clanton Thomas Diary, Box 2, Folder 1, Rubenstein Special Collections Library, Duke University.

⁷⁵ Ibid, Box 2, Folder 6, Part 1.

Again and again, Thomas writes that she was keeping her journal for her children, and yet, many of her entries reflect a need to express her frustrations, happiness, sadness, and desperation to someone or something.

The Voyage of Self Discovery

While Gertrude Clanton's diary only became a repository for her feelings with time, some diarists began to write precisely because they needed an outlet for their thoughts and emotions. A diary could be a place for reflection, complaint, or sharing confidences without worrying about how another person might react. Many diaries became the "friends" of their writers—something I'll explore more in a later chapter. Women who opened their diaries with declarations of an emotional need often wrote detailed, reflective entries and demonstrate that diary-keeping was likely something they had considered for quite some time.

For instance, twenty-two-year old Amanda Jane Cooley wrote on the first page of her 1842 diary, "I am now about to commence a journal of some few particulars of my life in order that I may be able to compare one day with another and see the difference in my feelings." Cooley—a schoolteacher in southwest Virginia—found herself quite lonely when she took up her pen, and she expressed her desperation in journals over the next twelve years. Cooley's need for an emotional outlet is obvious from the very beginning, as she writes, "I am sick and am almost tired of the world...I am now quite desolate forsaken and almost without hope."⁷⁶ Several entries later, she confided, "sometimes I appear cheerful & even happy to some but could they read my inmost soul what would they think?"⁷⁷ Amanda knew her feelings of despondency and depression weren't things she could share with those around her—something that made her feel

⁷⁶ Amanda Jane Cooley Roberts, Diary, 1842-54, Mss5:1F412:1, Virginia Historical Society, 1.

⁷⁷ Ibid, pg 5. The first entry is on February 20th and the later entry mentioned here is from May 1st.

deeply lonely. And yet, she expressed some hope that writing in a diary and faith could help see her through her struggles.

Nashville resident Nannie Haskins Williams likely meant for the diary she began in February 1863 to remain private, and from the very beginning, she saw her diary as “an old friend” available for her to whom she could “lay [her] heart *open*.” Nannie was a detailed diarist who was also an avid reader who wrote fiction later in life. According to her diary’s first entry, she had kept journals in the past, as she noted: “Again I have commenced a journal. I used to keep one but two years ago when the war broke out, I ceased to write in it just when I ought to have continued.”⁷⁸ After struggling to “get a book,” Nannie was happy to start the diary she had “been wishing to for so long.” While her entries in her Civil War diary definitely indicate she was interested in describing and accounting for her experiences living in occupied Nashville, she is very reflective in many entries and hints at her diary’s privacy on several occasions. For instance, on March 23, 1863, she wrote, “It is a blessed thing that no one will see this book but myself.”⁷⁹

Sarah Morgan began her diary after her half-brother gifted her a book, and she used her diary quite frequently to meet her emotional needs. While Morgan’s first entries are largely retrospective and focused on her father’s and brother’s traumatic, sudden deaths, the next entries shift to more contemporary concerns. On March 8, 1862, Sarah lamented her boredom and compared herself with her sister, Miriam, whom she considered more talented at playing music,

⁷⁸ Nannie Haskins Williams, *The Diary of Nannie Haskins Williams: A Southern Woman’s Story of Rebellion and Reconstruction, 1863-1890*, Ed. Minoa D. Uffelman et al. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2014), 4, 1. I first discovered Nannie Haskins Williams’ diaries in the Southern Historical Collection at UNC and knew immediately she would be a tremendous asset to my dissertation. I was thrilled to see her diaries united (they had been housed at separate archives) in print, and while I have consulted both the manuscript collection and the edited version, I will quote the edited version whenever applicable.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 13.

dancing, and “society.”⁸⁰ For page after page, Morgan wondered if “strangers did not like me,” if “pretty people feel perfectly satisfied with themselves,” and how much she had changed since the beginning of the Civil War and the losses of her family members.⁸¹ Though these entries are scattered with news of the day, comings and goings, and a few references to current events, the vast majority of the space in these entries is introspective in nature—questions about self-worth and who she was versus how she is. Only later do consistent references to the war appear, making Sarah’s diary read opposite the trend in most diaries, which tend to start with general introductions and events and only shift into deep and thoughtful personal reflections later on. Morgan’s early entries demonstrate that she not only read broadly in fiction, as she adopts many narrative strategies found in the popular fiction of the day, but also that she likely needed a diary to use as a repository for the thoughts that whirled through her brain on a daily basis. Her earliest entries show self-awareness and deep reflection on the self that sometimes only comes after significant introspection. In the end, then, while Morgan began her diary at the encouragement of her half-brother, the diary’s true purpose seemed to be providing a place for her to reflect.

Writing for Posterity & Publication

Many Southern women started their records when they felt that they were a part of something worth recording for posterity—either for their own later perusal or for the benefit of others. Times of war or transformative change often prove catalysts for diary keeping, and not surprisingly, the sectional crisis and the Civil War inspired countless women to take up the pen. Sometimes these diarists intended to publish their diaries; other times, they simply wanted a narrative of their lives and current events to read later.

⁸⁰ Sarah Morgan, *The Civil War Diary of Sarah Morgan*, Ed. Charles East (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1991), 25.

⁸¹ Ibid, 25-35.

Perhaps the most famous Southern diarist of them all—South Carolinian Mary Boykin Chesnut—kept her “diary” between February of 1861 and June of 1865. As C. Vann Woodward’s meticulous research has shown, Mary fully intended to publish her journal in some capacity when she started it. Chesnut, who kept hundreds of pages of notes and diary entries, spent years organizing her journal into what Woodward called her “book.” He differentiated between the surreptitious writing she did during the war and the significant editing she did between 1881 and 1884 prior to publication in 1905 (though Chesnut herself did not live to see it in print). Chesnut also ensured that her true journal remained private—something that kept some of her less savory qualities from public consumption.⁸²

Despite the complicated aspects of Chesnut’s diary, it still has significant value for historians because it tells us so much about the experience of diary writing and the way nineteenth-century people thought about the process. She chose to open her “book” much like other women inspired by the Civil War to write a diary: by starting with the past. She quickly recounted all the major events that had occurred up to that point so that her diary, her story, would make sense. Always one to favor a neat storyline, Chesnut wrote, “I shall always regret that I had not kept a journal during the two past delightful and eventful years... I daresay I might have recorded with some distinctness the daily shocks—‘Earthquakes as usual’ (Lady Sale).”⁸³ In the end, though she hadn’t kept a diary during 1859 and 1860, Mary managed to curate a story from her memories, making her diary’s trajectory as complete as possible.

North Carolinian Catherine Edmondston was thirty-seven years old when she started what she hoped would be a regular record of the “stirring events through which we are now

⁸² C. Vann Woodward, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), xv-xx).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 3.

passing so as to ensure my pleasure in their perusal in future years.” Edmondston had apparently tried to keep diaries “many times” in her life but had stopped for one reason or another. The sectional crisis made her sense of urgency heightened, and she admitted that “the rapidity with which we pass from event to event—the last more startling than the first—the past is obliterated by the deeper impression made by the present & like writing on sand swept by the passing breeze its character is lost so soon as received!” Edmondston decided that events of 1860 warranted dedicated diary-writing, and so she threw “together one or two little Diaries, skeletons as it were that I have kept at intervals for the past three years, & connected the lapses with narative[sic].”⁸⁴

This introduction-of-sorts to the year 1860 show that Edmondston recognized the unusual circumstances of living during the Civil War and wished to keep a record of her experiences. The sheer volume of her writings shows an overwhelming sense of dedication to her efforts to record her experiences for posterity. While it’s unclear whether or not she intended to publish her diary, the introductory material she includes indicates that she had curated her diary for consumption by others.⁸⁵ She did use material from her diary at length in a pamphlet she published anonymously in 1872 entitled, *The Morte d’Arthur; Its Influence on the Spirit and Manners of the Nineteenth Century*. The piece “bitterly denounced the ‘barbaric conduct’ of the Union army and generals during the Civil War” and—not surprisingly—contrasted their behavior with that of Confederate men of “Chivalry and Good Manners.”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Catherine Devereux Edmondston, *Journal of a Secesh Lady: The Diary of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston*, ed. Beth G. Crabtree and James W. Patton (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resources, 1979), 1.

⁸⁵ Even though the introductory material and narrative summaries to fill gaps in the diary seem like obvious indications of Edmondston’s intentions to publish the journal, she sometimes writes things that contradict this. For instance, on June 26, 1862, she writes: “I have no fear of any one ever reading this, so that cannot be the reason...” *The Journal of a Secesh Lady*, 201.

⁸⁶ Mary Moulton Barden, Epilogue to *The Journal of a Secesh Lady*, 733.

Scotland-native- and Mobile, Alabama-resident Kate Cumming kept a diary describing her experiences while serving as a nurse at a Confederate hospital in Corinth, Mississippi. Kate's work as a nurse and matron in several hospitals was unusual in part because she worked the entirety of the war. Between 1862 and 1865, Kate kept a detailed and lengthy diary of her experiences in the hospitals and covered both personal and more public matters. Although it's unclear what her original intentions in keeping a diary were, Cumming chose to publish her diary very soon after the war, getting the "manuscript of her journal" to the "printer in the fall of 1865, too soon for a full rewriting after the close of the war." In 1895, Cumming did publish a "reworking" of the journal that eliminated a number of passages. These two choices indicate that Kate likely intended to publish her diary in some capacity from the beginning (or that she was desperate for money in the 1890s).⁸⁷

In 1900, Louisianan Kate Stone published the diary she had kept during the Civil War. She wrote in the preface to her diary—which she called "In Retrospect"—that she began her diary one month into the Civil War because to wished to "record the many woeful changes before the four years of agony and strife were over."⁸⁸ It's hard to guess whether or not the "Brokenburn" diary was her first attempt at keeping a record of her life, but like many women, she recognized the importance of what was occurring around her and kept a diary at least for the Civil War period. Her efforts to organize and rewrite the diary after the war indicate that for the volume available to historians, Kate was consciously creating something for outside consumption. There is no way to know what type of changes—if any—she made to her diary

⁸⁷ Kate Cumming, *The Journal of Kate Cumming, A Confederate Nurse, 1862-1865* (Savannah: The Beehive Press, 1975), xv-xvi.

⁸⁸ Kate Stone, *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861-1868*, Ed. John Q. Anderson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 12.

when she recopied it.⁸⁹ Still, in the final published version, she included information of interest to a broader audience, but also things that would not interest many readers, indicating that she didn't remove all the diary's personal touches. In fact, her first entries focus on mundane local news with a short break for a discussion about what's happening in the papers.

Twenty-two-year-old Emma Holmes was frustrated with herself when she began her diary in February of 1861. A well-connected and wealthy Charlestonian, Holmes was an eyewitness to the start of the Civil War and wrote, "How I wish I had kept a journal during the last three months of great political changes." Holmes seemed thrilled by the "revolution" that was "convulsing the whole" of the United States and expressed pride in being a South Carolinian after it became the "first to arise and shake off the hated chain which linked us with Black Republicans and Abolitionists."⁹⁰ Her diary's first entry, recounts the "most important events of the last two months," indicating that she hoped to catalogue events of the war.⁹¹ Despite this generalized opening, Holmes' diary quickly became a record of daily details, thoughts and reflections, and not surprisingly, fears about the future. As a member of one of the oldest families in Charleston, Emma was well aware that her records of an event like the Civil War would be of interest to others—even if she was a woman. Her diary eventually became a treasured confidante for her, but in the beginning, it was probably just a place for her to record the incredible change around her for posterity.

Journals like these are complex to analyze because of the questions about how and why they were created. Some historians raise questions about the authenticity found in diaries that

⁸⁹ The original of Kate's diary no longer exists or is lost, meaning that the only version available to historians is the one she created explicitly for publication.

⁹⁰ Emma Holmes, *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes, 1861-1866*, Ed. John F. Marszalek (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 1.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 6.

were written explicitly for publication or that were published very soon after the date they were written. These issues relate to larger questions of self-writing in diaries and how diaries and/or journals as a medium can or cannot convey truth. In the end, even if these diaries were meant solely for publication, they tell us a tremendous amount about what diary-keeping women expected would be interesting for potential readers, and the conventions expected of diarists at the time.

Even when women began their diaries with one purpose in mind, many found that eventually, diary writing became an integral part of their emotional lives and sense of self. Their diary became a habit, a solace, a room of their own to dwell in—something I’ll describe in detail in Chapter Five. Some women who started their diaries during a time of need or in an effort to capture something on the page for later found that diary writing provided a much-needed outlet. Some decided it was something they didn’t care to continue. Others kept diaries for decades after their initial foray into self-writing. While many of the diaries that have survived the passage of time only offer a snapshot of a woman’s life, some diarists (and likely, their family members and descendants) managed to keep multiple volumes intact when applicable.

Beginning Again: Multi-Volume Diaries and Change Over Time

Women who kept diaries for long periods of time offer us numerous beginnings, or openings, to their journals. The differences between the first and last surviving volumes often show a change in the diarist’s writing process and a sense of regularity not seen in their first attempt at keeping a record of their lives. Over time, the diary itself became a familiar friend, and whether the “book” itself had a given name or typical address, it became a repository for feelings, thoughts, and seemingly trivial day-to-day descriptions.

Many diary writers acknowledged their past of diary writing in the first pages of their new “books.” For instance, Martha Moss started her fifth diary volume on November 28, 1853 with the sentence: “Have kept a journal since 1849 and this is my fifth volume I shall not probably finish in a long time as the book is so thick.” After this brief introduction, she quickly jumps back in to what was likely a routine in other diaries—the weather, visits, what she was reading, and descriptions of her work for the day.⁹² Never one for the mundane, Virginian Lizzie Alsop started the fourth volume of her diary with the following: “Should Death unexpectedly take me away, no one must read this book.” She followed up this warning with “Here I begin another volume of the record of my life, sitting by my favourite window in our own room...”⁹³

Like Lizzie Alsop, Catherine—or Kate—Edmondston marked some of her new year entries with artistic flair and recognition of her past of diary writing. In January of 1862, she wrote, “I am sorry that I intermitted the practice of keeping a Diary! This year of all the years of my past life I ought to have been most faithful in keeping my Record.” She added, “all my life [I have] been sighing for something to write about and...have burnt up so many Diaries, because on perusal I found them hopelessly inane & insipid.”⁹⁴ Being “sorry” for not writing in her diary regularly enough was something that came up in many of Kate’s entries. As the war went on, writing became more and more difficult for a variety of reasons. In her opening entry for 1865, she confessed, “‘Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,’ but the hand writeth not. Never were we more absorbed in outward matters, never have we looked on them so anxiously as now, & yet it is days since I have written aught of them.”⁹⁵

⁹² Martha Moss, Diary, November 28, 1853-February 19, 1856, Mss.5067, Box J:20, Special Collections Division of Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, 1.

⁹³ Lizzie Alsop Wynne, Diary, Wynne Family Papers, Mss1W9927a35, Volume 5, Virginia Historical Society, 1.

⁹⁴ Catherine Devereux Edmondston *Journal of a Secesh Lady*, ed. Beth G. Crabtree and James W. Patton, 103.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 652.

Edmondston also offered a greeting to her new “book” when she began writing in it, something that other diarists often did as well. In October of 1862, she said farewell to one diary and welcomed another, telling her diary, “Journal, I brought you a present from Raleigh—a new blank book where in to extend yourself—so we will presently adjourn & I will give you the war news...” She continued the war news for October 11th in the new book, but only after writing, “I told you, my dear Journal, that I had a new book for you...but tho not gifted with personal pulchritude, you Journal, must add value to it by the sincerity & delicacy of your record.”⁹⁶ In February of 1863, she noted the beginning of her new book by celebrating a Confederate victory, writing, “Thank God! I can begin my new book with a signal & glorious success to our arms!”⁹⁷

Like Edmondston, Sarah Morgan typically offered a goodbye and opening greeting to each subsequent journal. In June of 1862, Morgan expressed dismay at the close of her diary’s first volume, writing, “My poor diary comes to a very abrupt end, to my great distress. The hardest thing in the world is to break off journalizing when you are once accustomed to it...” Fortunately, she had another book on hand and immediately continued her writing. She noted, “There is no use in trying to break off journalizing, particularly in ‘these trying times.’ It has become a necessity to me.”⁹⁸ In August of the same year, she began a third volume of her diary, writing, “A fresh volume! Where shall I be at the end of it?”⁹⁹ Early in 1863, Morgan began another volume under even more difficult circumstances. After dealing with the hardships and losses of war for two years, Sarah found herself “lying here a cripple” for nearly two months. Thankfully, she had managed to find something to write in, as she noted, “Am I not glad to get

⁹⁶ Ibid, 174.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 353.

⁹⁸ Sarah Morgan, *The Civil War Diary of Sarah Morgan*, Ed. Charles East, 116, 121.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 189.

another blank book! On Sunday my old one gave out to my unspeakable distress, and I would have been desolée if I had not had three or four letters to answer, as writing is my chief occupation during my tedious illness.”¹⁰⁰

Sarah Lois Wadley also felt a need to offer a sort-of christening for one of her new journal volumes. She had begun her diary at least as early as 1856, and continued to keep diaries throughout her life until she died in 1920. Her earliest “book” served as a journal, a commonplace book and as a repository for copies of letters she sent. The earliest entries offer no opening or introduction, meaning that Sarah—or “Sadie”—only did this for later volumes.¹⁰¹ At the start of a volume in 1861, she wrote, “This is my first entry in my new journal book, the leaves are all fresh and fair, let me try to keep them unsullied by evil thoughts and the record of evil actions, yet do this and keep a faithful record of my life must be pure.”¹⁰²

Some diarists seemed to like to start a new volume with each year. Combining starting a new diary with the new year helped to open a new book with hope, promise, and wishes for the future—something that nineteenth-century women often needed. It also helped them shape their diaries into something resembling a novel—a story with a beginning and an end. Given that most of the women studied here were privileged, this wasn’t really an unrealistic expense for them, although circumstances of war often changed that.

Lizzie Alsop was one of these diarists who liked to ring in the New Year with a written reflection on the past, present, and future. On January 4, 1865 at age sixteen, she wrote, “The old year has gone with his joys & sorrows, and the new year has begun, but we do not know whether

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 397.

¹⁰¹ Sarah Lois Wadley Diary, 1857, Box 1, Folder 1, Raoul Family Papers, Emory University.

¹⁰² Sarah Lois Wadley, Diary, Volume II, pg 1, Documenting the American South, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

it will be marked by grief or pleasure.” She also noted, “Journal I scarcely ever remember having made a worse beginning than this year.”¹⁰³ In her sixth volume from 1867, she confessed, “My Journal! I am glad to write in you again, for though this book is new, yet I do not feel as if it was a strange thing to me. No, all the volumes of my Journal seem but links in the chain of life not distinct & separate episodes.”¹⁰⁴ Sadly, not all of Lizzie’s yearly greetings to her new “book” were happy. In 1871, she was thrilled to get a new book to write in, writing, “A new year, a new Journal: but no new hopes except a strong desire & prayer to be more holy in thought & word & deed.”¹⁰⁵

These openings or introductions of sorts demonstrate that some diarists thought of their journals as “books” in more than one sense. On the one hand, they were literally blank or repurposed books meant to be filled with their stories. On the other, by marking their first and sometimes their successive diaries with a beginning, they showed that they were thinking of their lives’ stories as a book itself—something that deserved an explanatory beginning rather than simply jumping into the telling. These introductions served a purpose for the diary writer, but they could also serve a purpose for an audience. The greetings found in subsequent diary volumes show how the diarists’ relationship with their written record evolved over time. Even when beginning the first volume seemed awkward, overwhelming, or forced, many times, women expressed more comfort with beginning another volume. Writing their life story had become a part of their routine, so opening and closing a book provided a sense of “arc” in their lives in some cases.

¹⁰³Lizzie Alsop Wynne, *Diary, Wynne Family Papers, Volume 3*, pg. 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, Volume 6, pg 3.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, Volume 7, pg 4.

Though the specific starting point or spur to action differed for women, the common denominator was a need or desire to tell their personal story. For some, a diary was the only place available for true self-expression; for others, it was a place to keep secrets or to deal with questions a woman had about her own morality, values, or self. The only language available to these women was what they had encountered in reading and usage, but despite these limits, the diary offered a place where they could truly explore alternate selves. The beginnings of diaries tell us about the starting place of stories of the self. The first page was only the beginning, though, and women turned to networks of friends and reading material to help make sense of their lives' narratives. Understanding how women continued their self-writing requires us to understand their social and intellectual networks, which I'll discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: *Seeking Kindred Spirits*

“Love is like the wild rose-briar, / Friendship like the holly-tree— / The holly is dark when the rose-briar blooms / But which will bloom most constantly?”—Emily Brontë, “Love and Friendship”

In February of 1863, Emma Holmes was living as a refugee in Camden, South Carolina and struggling to adjust to a more rural existence. Holmes was twenty-four years old and lived in Charleston before coming to Camden, which was sleepy and stale compared to the bustling city. Holmes made the best of things, however, for she was grateful to have a place to live after the devastating Charleston fire left her and her mother “homeless & without either furniture or carpets in midwinter.”¹⁰⁶ Even so, Emma couldn’t help but compare her prewar life with what she was now living. In Charleston, she enjoyed living near “our beautiful Ashley [River],” “surrounded by articles endeared by childhood’s associations,” and with constant entertainment from friends and family. In Camden, she wrote, there were “no views, but leaf-less trees with the wind sighing through them and all those friends widely scattered by the events of war.”¹⁰⁷ Several days later, she compared the past and present again, and this time she confessed, “Here...I feel as if entirely secluded, shut out from the world, the trees so close around the house form, as it were, a cage barring me in.” Holmes felt that Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “Sea Man’s yearning for his boundless ocean home finds a strong echo in my heart.” The twilight

¹⁰⁶ Emma Holmes, *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes, 1861-1866*, Ed. John F. Marszalek (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 219.

¹⁰⁷ Emma Holmes, 228.

song of frogs inspired “sad musings of friends separated or passed away forever and brought vivid memories of the family gatherings at our old homestead.”¹⁰⁸

In addition to missing her home, Emma felt intellectual isolation. In March of 1863, she wrote, “I try to bear it patiently and not make myself discontented but there is absolutely nothing up here to interest me. I read & knit all day, but it does not satisfy me.”¹⁰⁹ In Charleston, Emma had participated in Ladies’ Clubs, reading groups, and other activities, and she longed for intellectual companionship. Fortunately, she found in Fanny Brownfield “a kindred spirit” whom I would thoroughly enjoy having as a companion in my studies.” The women “talked far into the small hours” one evening and Emma wrote about her afterwards: “She has a fine, well cultivated mind” and they shared many of the same “tastes and pursuits”—something that appealed to her. Furthermore, she wrote, Fanny had a “warm, tender affectionate heart.” She was a “humble, earnest, devoted Christian” and Emma confessed, “How earnestly I trust that I may become like her, a meek and child-like disciple of Christ.”¹¹⁰

Unfortunately, Emma’s newfound intellectual and spiritual connection with Fanny was not enough to sustain her all the time, and by May she was expressing sadness and loneliness again. She complained to her diary, “I am so homesick & heartsick all the time that many a night I go to bed early just to indulge and relieve myself with a quiet cry, unknown to the others.” She added, “Here everything is so utterly stagnant & monotonous that I have absolutely nothing to interest me. I read & sew & knit, till my brain & arm are weary.” Feeling intellectually isolated hurt Emma’s spirits the most, as she wrote, “I have no one who sympathizes with my tastes or pursuits, who can enter into my feelings, or enjoy what I do—no one to discuss the books I

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 230.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 236.

¹¹⁰ Holmes, 240.

read.” A friend from Charleston wrote to her, admonishing her for complaining about her “imprisonment” in Camden while so many around her had no place to go, but Emma responded by saying, “all the intellectual treasures of the world did I possess, [but] even one talent cannot fill and satisfy the heart yearning for love and sympathy.” Holmes was determined to make “life worth[while,] for this aimless useless existence is dreadful to me.”¹¹¹

Emma eventually made friends that fulfilled her desire for intellectual companionship. She met some neighborhood women who formed a reading group with her, and when she began teaching, several female colleagues became close friends, even introducing her to “Thackery[sic] and Dickens.”¹¹² When she dreamed of ideal friendship, Emma thought of someone who shared the same intellectual interests and values. Her reading proved especially important to the connections she built with other women and men, and when she didn’t feel those connections she turned to her diary for support.

This chapter will explore the intellectual spaces women created to support their need to read and write. Friendships blossomed around ideas, too, as many women developed peer relationships tied to literary material. Using a handful of case studies, I will also describe the complex intellectual networks created by book trading, borrowing, and buying. In doing so, this chapter will show that despite the challenges, women found ways to read, write and reflect, and also remained connected with popular literary currents, sometimes reading the latest fiction, and other times rereading books read dozens of times before. The intimate, intellectual relationships they developed with their peers and the access they gained to information through book trading gave women a space of their own—a space to explore ideas and to consider their place in the

¹¹¹ Holmes, 251.

¹¹² Holmes, 396.

world—something which, again, allowed for them to question the strictures of their society without challenging the hierarchies that simultaneously empowered and restricted them outright. It is also worth noting that such spaces—actual and virtual—reflected racial and economic privilege—a fact not missed by the slaves who gave these women the opportunity to spend their time visiting and writing in their diaries.

Intimate Friendships, Intellectual Bonds

Historians have long recognized the power and purpose of female friendship in the nineteenth century, and these relationships sometimes transcended marriage as the most important relationship in women's lives.¹¹³ These close-knit friendships were not simply emotional in nature, however. For some women, real intimacy was intellectual, and this female world of love and ritual was really about ideas. Though common interests are an obvious foundation for friendship throughout history, female intellectual friendship in the nineteenth century—especially somewhere like the South—carved out new intellectual spaces for women in several ways. First, women were engaged in intellectual pursuits and intellectual life more generally despite some expectations that they limit their activities to the family and home.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Carole Smith-Rosenberg's "The Female World of Love and Ritual" has spurred lively discussions about female heterosocial friendship. The vast majority of her evidence comes from Northern sources, but her arguments about the intimacy of female friendships ring true for Southern women. What doesn't translate as well, however, is her assertions that women did not criticize one another or have hostile relationships with their mothers, sisters, and female friends. There is plenty of evidence of all of these things in the diaries included in this dissertation. Carole Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in 19th Century America," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol I, No I (Autumn 1975), 1-29. See also: Pippa Holloway, "Searching for Southern Lesbian History," in *Women of the American South: A Multicultural Reader*, Ed. Christie Anne Farnham (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 263; Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, & Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Marilyn Yalom and Theresa Donovan Brown, *The Social Sex: A History of Female Friendship* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015).

¹¹⁴ Education of a certain kind was an essential aspect of ladyhood in the North and South alike, so these women were expected to be informed and refined on a number of subjects. But, to shape their relationships around intellectual values and interests moves beyond simple "refinement." Christie Anne Farnham, Anya Jabour, and Michael O'Brien have all shown that intellectual development (to a certain extent) were key aspects of Southern womanhood. See Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student*

Additionally, these intellectual pursuits were important parts of these women's lives—important enough to shape who they considered and did not consider close friends. Finally, the intellectual fellowship that came from these relationships seems to have inspired women to explore ideas beyond their own and to experiment with their own intellectual contributions. In other words, having intellectual friendships could encourage women to be more open-minded and more willing to become creators of art and intellectual property themselves.

Book sharing and lending were important parts of developing these intellectual friendships in the nineteenth-century South. These women lived in an age when the ripples of millennialist impulses for self-improvement found their way into secular parts of life. Established networks for sharing written material proved increasingly important during turbulent times—especially throughout the Civil War. However, some women described their book lending and borrowing with some detail prior to the Civil War.

Throughout her life, Gertrude Clanton Thomas relied on the people around her to share texts with her. Between 1848 and 1889, Thomas borrowed at least 170 titles from peers and recorded the transactions in her many journals. Gertrude also lent books to many of these acquaintances, who ranged her friend Mildred's father, Dr. Eve, to classmates at the Wesleyan Female College in Macon. Through her book-sharing activities, she created a web of connections that often led to intellectual friendships, or, friendships based around the sharing of intellectual interests.

One such friendship was the relationship she developed with “Mrs. Harris,” an Augusta neighbor who constantly traded books with Thomas, shared neighborhood gossip with her, and

Socialization in the Antebellum South (New York: New York University Press, 1994), Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

sometimes discussed ideas found in the books they loved. For instance, in January of 1856, Mrs. Harris “spent the afternoon” with Gertrude, who “love[d] to have her come.” Thomas wrote of Mrs. Harris, “Her conversational powers are so very fine while her keen sense of ludicrous combined with her equally fine sence [sic] of the romantic in life renders her remarkably pleasant.”¹¹⁵ Mrs. Harris’ constant flow of books also helped keep her occupied and distracted following the death of her three-week-old son, Joseph.¹¹⁶ Her relationship with Mrs. Harris was just one of scores that she had throughout her life. Her book-sharing compatriots included family members, family friends and acquaintances and, of course, her schoolmates at Wesleyan Female College.

Twenty-two-year-old Fannie Page Hume dealt with serious chronic pain and the loss of her father in the years before the Civil War. Like Gertrude Thomas, reading became her solace, and she frequently recorded what she read and how she reacted to it. As a religious young woman, she found herself moved by some of the characters she encountered in fiction and often wondered if she could model their “lovely Christian graces.”¹¹⁷ In February of 1860, she took an extended visit to Washington, D.C., where she spent a good bit of her time visiting libraries (both public and those of friends), seeing plays and operas, and reading with her peers. Fannie and her friend, Carrie Walker, developed a close friendship that often included reading together and later, sending each other articles from periodicals. On February 29, 1860, the two went to hear William Seward give a speech, then “had a splendid time reading ‘Beulah’” together. Ten days later,

¹¹⁵ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, “Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Journals, 1848-1878,” Box 2, Part 2, Pg. 99, Duke University, Rubenstein Library.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, Pg. 97. Thomas records her grief and anguish at watching the child, who had appeared perfectly healthy, die slowly. She does comment, however, on how much her husband’s love was helping her face the loss, saying, “I never felt how much I loved my husband as in the last few days. He has shown the greatest possible kindness and sympathy and done everything in his power to alleviate my grief.” (1-1-1856).

¹¹⁷ Fannie Page Hume Braxton, “Fannie Page Hume Diary, 1860-1862,” 1-16-1860, Folder 1, #1156-z, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Fannie surprised Carrie with a “copy of Hannah Moore [sic]” since she “was much pleased with my copy.” The women “had a nice cozy time” that evening, reading pieces from the book together “till late.”¹¹⁸

This habit of swapping books became a regular occurrence for Fannie and Carrie, and after Fannie left Washington for home, the two often sent one another letters that included clippings from newspapers and other periodicals. In fact, Carrie helped Fannie publish an excerpt from one of her letters in *The States* and sent her a copy in May of 1860.¹¹⁹ The intellectual friendship Fannie Hume developed with Carrie Walker was just one of many relationships built around a shared love of reading material, as I’ll describe later in this chapter.

During the Civil War, Southern elite women faced challenges that tested their emotional, physical, and intellectual resilience. More than ever, women counted on their intellectual friendships to help secure day-to-day necessities, but also books, newspapers, pamphlets, and other forms of written material, all of which helped them cope with the unprecedented scale of war and destruction that surrounded them. At the same time, women sometimes felt more intellectually isolated than ever, lamenting about their feelings of misunderstanding, their lack of access to reading material, and divides that developed in their communities as the war challenged what neighbors believed they knew about each other.

Lizzie Alsop, a Fredericksburg resident who attended the Southern Female Institute in Richmond, Virginia during part of the Civil War, developed strong female friendships while at school. Her closest friend, Hannah Graves, often read, went to church, studied, and sat with her. According to Lizzie, “Old Hannah” was the “best girl in the school” and she “wish[ed she] was

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 2-29-1860, 3-10-1860, pg 17, 21.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 5-3-1860, 36.

more like her.”¹²⁰ On April 10, 1863, she and Hannah were “the only girls in the study...and both of us are busily engaged writing, she a letter & I in my journal.”¹²¹ The pair “studied the Introduction & 1st Chapter of Butler”—Joseph Butler’s *Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed to the Constitution and Course of Nature*—in late May of 1863.¹²² The girls at the SFI worked in Butler’s theological text quite frequently, and Lizzie found herself needing to talk through the more difficult concepts with Hannah and other peers. In fact, after taking an exam on Butler in July of 1863, Lizzie wrote that she was “for weeks & weeks on the verge of brain fever.”

Lizzie recovered from her illness, but sadly, her friend Hannah was not so lucky, and died of brain fever shortly afterward, though Lizzie did not hear of her death until early September. Lizzie blamed intellectual stress, writing, “Hannah died of brain fever & I have barely escaped. Five pages of questions on Butler (152 I think) was too much for our strength I wrote 2 ½ days when I could think.”¹²³ Lizzie wrote of her death: “She is constantly before me. I long to tell her my thoughts & feelings, as I used to do...” and “Oh, if I could see Hannah, if only for one minute I could ‘look into the eyes of her whom I love.’ I can scarcely bear the thought of never seeing her again.”¹²⁴ On several occasions, Lizzie wrote imagined scenes where she and Hannah

¹²⁰ Ibid, 1-11-1863.

¹²¹ Elizabeth Maxwell Alsop Wynne, Journal of Elizabeth Maxwell Alsop Wynne, 1862-1926. Wynne Family Papers, 1809-1967. Mss1W9927a31. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA, 4-10-1863.

¹²² Ibid, 5-30-1863.

¹²³ Ibid, 7-12-1863. These notes are actually penciled in, likely at a later date. Interestingly, nineteenth-century Americans—“both physicians and laymen”—“believed that emotional shock or excessive intellectual activity could produce” brain fever, whose symptoms included “phrensy,” headache, intolerance of light and noise, and delirium, among other things. Though in reality, the symptoms described often sound like meningitis or encephalitis, people in the nineteenth century were convinced the causes were emotional. Brain fever is also a common in novels—especially in female characters. Several examples include *Wuthering Heights*, *Madame Bovary*, and *Great Expectations*. See Audrey Peterson, “Brain Fever in Nineteenth-Century Literature: Fact and Fiction,” *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (June 1976), 448-50.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 9-6-1863. I was not able to identify this quotation.

were together at school, and frequently recorded memories the two shared.¹²⁵ Though Lizzie Alsop proved quite the social butterfly, her other friendships couldn't replace her sisterhood with Hannah. She wrote in late October of 1863, "Much as I love to get letters from my friends...I do long for communion with my Angel-friend. No body knows how I miss her sweet comments & wholesome advice." Lizzie felt lonely, as she had lost her closest confidante during a time of tribulation. She wondered, "How can I live on and on, perhaps for years, without seeing her. Oh! I did love you, Hannah, if ever one heart loved another. My friendship for you was deep & lasting as eternity."¹²⁶

Over the next few years, Lizzie thought often of her friendship with Hannah, and even used her to endeavor toward being more dutiful in her faith. Even two years later, Lizzie still mourned Hannah's loss, writing, "Once, years ago, there were two of us,...and we were friends; but since then I have never loved any one in the same way, for she still lives in my heart and I do not care about ever having another in her place."¹²⁷ In 1868, she reminisced about the intellectual endeavors they shared: "How we used to laugh over 'Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme,' & puzzle our brains with the 'false systems' of Jourfroy's Ethics, patiently working over formulas in Trigonometry, translating 'Vicar of Wakefield' into French." She remembered "sweet long walks" and lying "awake till one & two o'clock, talking."¹²⁸ Long entries concerning memories with Hannah continued for years and showed Lizzie's dedication to their intellectual and spiritual friendship.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 9-6-1863; 9-22-1863; 10-4-1863

¹²⁶ Ibid, 10-27-1863.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 11-27-1863; 8-13-1864—anniversary of her death; 8-14-1865; 1-5-1866; 3-2-1868

¹²⁸ 3-2-1868; Diary Volume V. She references Theodore Simon Jouffroy's *Introduction to Ethics: Including a Critical Survey of Moral Systems*, and *The Vicar of Wakefield*, a novel by Oliver Goldsmith.

Tennessean Nannie Haskins was seventeen years old when she began her wartime diary in 1863.¹²⁹ Nannie lived in Clarkesville, Tennessee during the war, which had been occupied since February of 1862 after being captured by federal troops. The Haskins were well-off, and Nannie was fortunate to attend the Clarkesville Female Academy for her education, which was “one of the best girls’ schools in the South.”¹³⁰ During the Civil War, Nannie felt a stark sense of isolation, despite living in a fairly vibrant city. When she began her diary in February of 1863, she wrote, “Well I am glad I have at last commenced my diary for I have been wishing to for so long.” Over the course of the war, and in fact for the next twenty-seven years, her diary became her confidante. Though Nannie was often surrounded by peers, acquaintances, friends, and newcomers to the city (including Union soldiers), she sometimes felt completely alone. In May of 1863, she wrote to a friend, “I have no companion now at all, and you cannot imagine how lonely I am sometimes.”¹³¹

Fortunately, by January of 1864, her loneliness abated somewhat due to intellectual fellowship she experienced with a group of women calling themselves the “Mullen Stalks.” The Mullen Stalks was a group of young women in Clarkesville who studied under Dr. R. B. McMullen, the president of Stewart College after Clarkesville Female Academy was repurposed as a hospital. The women studied with Dr. McMullen, read together, and performed plays and tableaux for their peers. Members of their community also gave lectures—including Nannie’s father, who lectured on “Ambition.”¹³² Sadly, Dr. McMullen died in late January of 1865 of

¹²⁹ Nannie Haskins Williams, *The Diary of Nannie Haskins Williams: A Southern Woman’s Story of Rebellion and Reconstruction, 1863-1890*, ed. Minoa Uffelman, Ellen Kanervo, Phyllis Smith, and Eleanor Williams (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2014), 1.

¹³⁰ Ibid, “Introduction,” xxiii.

¹³¹ Ibid, 23-4. While this “letter” appears in her diary written to a friend, it’s unlikely that Nannie ever sent the letter, partly because it was difficult to get mail through due to occupation.

¹³² Ibid. 56.

smallpox after volunteering to nurse smallpox patients during a terrible outbreak in town.¹³³ Still, Nannie and her friends managed to find intellectual engagement throughout the rest of the war.

In addition to the Mullen Stalks, Nannie and her friends enjoyed entertainment from a group of their peers who called themselves “The Thespians.” The group performed plays such as Johann Friedrich von Schillers’ “The Robbers” and Thomas Wilks’ “The Seven Clerks.”¹³⁴

Nannie attended neighborhood plays at least five times during the Civil War. Even though her diary remained her primary confidante, Nannie still found some semblance of purpose and intellectual growth with her peers. The war years inspired incredible doubts in her mind about her abilities, her personality, and her place in the world—questions that she attempted to reckon with in her diary and through her reading. Still, personal relationships played an important role with helping her cope with the constant occupation, death, and loss in the Civil War South.

Emma Holmes was a twenty-three-year-old Charlestonian when the Civil War began, and over the course of the war, she expressed considerable loneliness of spirit and also loneliness in an intellectual sense. Holmes and her family became refugees after their home burned in the Charleston fire of 1861 (as previously mentioned) and they spent much of the war in Camden, South Carolina—moving from place to place and relying on family friends for most of their needs. In May 1863, Emma was at her wit’s end in Camden, and hoped to secure a teaching “position in some school in Charleston” to escape the drudgery of rural life and concerns about family finances. She confessed, “Bodily weariness as well as mental often indispose me for exertion of any kind, and the future presents such a blank that everything becomes distasteful to me.”¹³⁵ By the time she found and started a position, though, Emma admitted, “I feel the want of

¹³³ Ibid. 105.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 64, 71.

¹³⁵ Emma Holmes, *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes*, 251.

companionship & sympathy more than ever, and, though [teaching] may fail as a preventative to home & heartsickness, still it gives me regular employment and I feel as if I am not longer entirely wasting my one talent.”¹³⁶

Though she reiterated feelings of loneliness and fears of wasting talents on several occasions, Holmes also developed a friendship that brought her happiness and fulfillment despite the struggles of war. Callie Perkins provided companionship to Holmes that had been missing for quite some time. She called her friendship with Perkins “delightful” and wrote of her: “Seldom does a day or two pass without an exchange of note, messages, or books & papers, or we walk or ride together.” Callie was “the only person who has broken up the monotony of our lives & ideas,” and showed Emma parts of Camden that she could connect with. Not surprisingly, Perkins and Holmes shared a friendship based in large part on common interests—particularly reading habits. In November of 1864, Holmes wrote of Perkins, “I spent a charming literary evening with her a short time ago, & we laid many pleasant plans for reading & walking together. I have never had a friend whose tastes agreed so perfectly with mine.”¹³⁷

In addition to her friendship with Callie Perkins, Emma Holmes also attended a reading club made up of peers in Charleston. Her club “met for the first time” at Hattie White’s house on January 2, 1862. They “commenced Reed’s lectures on English History, as illustrated by Shakespeare’s Plays.” Over the next six months, the club met at one another’s homes and read works such as *Paradise Lost* and “Macaulay’s Essay on Warren Hastings.”¹³⁸ All of the club participants mentioned in Holmes’ diary were women who were her peers in terms of class and age. When she moved to Camden, South Carolina, Emma joined another women’s reading

¹³⁶ Ibid, 316-7.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 254, 380.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 117, 118, 119, 122, 126.

group. Although she did “not think this club will be near as pleasant as any of our former ones,” it would still “serve as a source of interest to the girls of the neighborhood.” In September of 1862, the Camden club was “all anxious to read the *Partisan Ranger* by Judge Beverly Tucker of Va.,” but because of issues securing copies, the women began “*Border War*” instead.¹³⁹ This reading club helped Holmes form connections with women in Camden while she worked as a governess and dealt with terrible homesickness and financial worries.

No diarist more frequently lamented her loneliness than Julia LeGrand of New Orleans, who filled pages and pages in her remarkable diary with existential questions about the war, her identity as a Confederate, and the incredible isolation she felt due to pacifist leanings. Earlier in her life, LeGrand had been engaged to Charles Harlan, a Northern-born clerk who went West in 1848, seeking what he hoped would be a fortune in California like thousands of other Americans. Harlan and LeGrand staked the hopes of their future on his success there, as LeGrand’s family did not think he was a suitable match for their well-born daughter. Though only Harlan’s letters to LeGrand survive, the pair obviously shared a love for literature and reading, which the letters document over the next five years. Harlan sent Julia countless poems with his letters and described previous places they read together as “sacred” spots. On October 6, 1848, Harlan wrote to LeGrand, describing the “glad and dear home” of her past, including a “pleasant hearthstone and open door, ... a glad view of nature and of life,” and a “spot where together [they] read.”¹⁴⁰ Additionally, books and other intellectual property held significant value for the pair before their separation and distance merely increased Harlan’s attachment to their most

¹³⁹ Ibid, 201. Holmes records the title as *The Partisan Ranger* several times, but she actually references *The Partisan Leader*, a book by Beverly Tucker that was published in 1836 and reissued after the war began. As for *Border War*, I have been unable to identify which work she is referring to.

¹⁴⁰ Letter, Charles T. Harlan to Julia LeGrand, October 6, 1848, Box 2D270, Folder 1, “Charles T. Harlan Papers, 1848-1853,” Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin (hereinafter “Charles T. Harlan Papers”).

prized possessions. Harlan asked LeGrand to “take good care of [their] books,” especially their “old Volumes.”¹⁴¹ Despite efforts to maintain a long-distance engagement, Harlan disappeared for good in 1853, likely influencing LeGrand’s interest in Spiritualism because of the mystery surrounding his disappearance and the questions that remained about his true intentions in California. Throughout her life, she maintained a belief in reading’s and writing’s power to provide relief and answers to life’s great questions, though at different stages of her life she used each in a distinctive manner.

During the Civil War, Julia LeGrand struggled to cope with ever-present financial issues, the stresses and fears of occupation in New Orleans, and more so than ever, a sense that she was a stranger in her own home and city. She complained, “How painful it is never to be comprehended,” and wrote after an argument with friends over church sectarianism:

My ideas meet nobody’s, whether they are stirred by patriotism, ... by religion, or by any of the high or low possibilities which range our daily pathway. My ideas meet no one’s, I say again, and I often feel an isolation of heart even when meeting with general kindness.¹⁴²

LeGrand acknowledged that she had “known the bliss of *meeting of thought*,” but expressed fears that she might not experience it again, continuing, “but it is gone, and never on this side of eternity can it be mine again.” Despite these fatalistic sentiments, LeGrand *did* develop an intellectual friendship during the Civil War that proved extremely important to her.

To LeGrand, Mary Waugh was different from her peers. While “most people show[ed] so little sign of having thought at all except in commonplace, everyday matters,” LeGrand found it “a relief to be entertained with a beautiful fancy logically sustained as Mrs. Waugh sustains

¹⁴¹ Letter, Charles T. Harlan to Julia LeGrand, December 24, 1849, transcribed by Eugene Barker, “Charles Harlan Papers,” 227-8.

¹⁴² Julia Ellen LeGrand Waitz, *The Journal of Julia LeGrand, New Orleans, 1862-3*, ed. Agnes E. Croxall and Kate Mason Rowland (Richmond: Everett Waddey Company, 1911), 87, 161.

hers.” Mrs. Waugh was “well taught in the sciences,” she had “a profound sagacity,” was “thoroughly practical,” and “a good linguist.”¹⁴³ Her companionship distracted LeGrand from “memories of the jarring world when with her,” and “inspire[d] confidence that we can live above” the day to day worries. Much of LeGrand’s admiration for Mrs. Waugh stemmed from her intellectualism. Julia wrote of her:

How purely intellectual she is! How free from vanity, egotism and pedantry, which men have pleased to associate with a learned woman. Her conversations are sometimes beautiful lectures that fall from her lips without effort and with simple elegance. Indeed her heart speaks in everything, and there is a sincerity and earnestness, a childlike sweetness, that spiritualizes her most didactic discourses.¹⁴⁴

Most of Mrs. Waugh’s and Julia’s discussions centered on their shared interest in Spiritualism and Spiritualist texts. Spiritualism, best known for its séances, communication with the dead, and female mediums, is actually a complex set of beliefs about the meaning of life and death that one scholar has called “magical metaphysics.” The religion defied linear history and allowed practitioners to collapse time by reexamining and re-experiencing the past. Spiritualism provided LeGrand and others the opportunity to worship as she pleased despite the occupation because it encouraged small, intimate gatherings for its followers. Though many Southerners expressed hostility toward Spiritualism because of its connections with abolitionism and other radical social measures, it thrived in New Orleans because of relative religious toleration.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Ibid, 98.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 135-6, 147.

¹⁴⁵ Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 3, 6; Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*, 47. According to historians of Spiritualism, most Spiritualists came from more “liberal religions” like Universalism, Quakerism, and Transcendentalism. Carroll, 4; Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 29. The strongest centers of Spiritualist activities were in the Northeast, but Louisiana also had a fair number (See Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 181), though the scholarship has focused on Afro-Creole and African-American Spiritualism in New Orleans. For example, see Emily S. Clark, *A Luminous Brotherhood: Afro-Creole Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Melissa Daggett, *Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans: The Life and Times of Henry Louis Rey* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016);

Andrew Jackson Davis' six-volume *The Great Harmonia* proved to be one of the most important texts for Julia LeGrand, both in her life more broadly and within her friendship with Mrs. Waugh. Of the text she wrote, "It has met and convinced my reason, soothed my anxieties, unraveled my perplexities, pleased my imagination, [and] lifted my aspirations."¹⁴⁶ As a woman with definite pacifist leanings, she felt awkwardly unexcited about the war—victories and losses alike. As scores of scholars have shown, the Civil War challenged traditional systems of power and hierarchy and created new and more intense types of conflict.¹⁴⁷

On several occasions, LeGrand and Mrs. Waugh read Jackson's texts and had deep, intellectual "talk[s] about spiritualism" full of "beautiful abstractions" that "move[d] her."¹⁴⁸ She admired Mrs. Waugh's faith, and found it "comforting to meet with one who trusts and fears as she does." Conversations with Mrs. Waugh and reading Spiritualist work encouraged LeGrand to explore her own ideas about the interconnectedness of the human spirit, science, and faith. After one such discussion, she wrote, "Familiarity disarms, awes, and, it seems, silences thought, but to lonely-hearted people who have little personal hope, but all for the ages, the great revelations of science are but steps on the pathway of progress[,] links in the chain which binds us to the future as well as to the past."¹⁴⁹ In the end, Mrs. Waugh offered Julia LeGrand an intellectual friendship that provided solace and comfort during war times. Mrs. Waugh saw LeGrand "au

Claude F. Jacobs with Andrew J. Kaslow, *The Spiritual Churches of New Orleans: Origins, Beliefs, and Rituals of an African-American Religion* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001).

¹⁴⁶ Julia LeGrand Waitz, *The Journal of Julia LeGrand, 1862-1863*, 162.

¹⁴⁷ Much of the historiography points out the immense changes to social, political, and racial hierarchies due to the war. The following are just a few examples: Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention*; George Rable, *Civil Wars*; Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*; Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*; LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*.

¹⁴⁸ Julia LeGrand Waitz, *The Journal of Julia LeGrand, 1862-1863*, 98-9.

¹⁴⁹ Julia LeGrand Waitz, *The Journal of Julia LeGrand, 1862-1863*, 99.

naturelle”—beyond any of the performative parts of her personality typical during the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁰

Following the immense changes wrought by war, Southern women relied on friendships and coping mechanisms they had developed before and during the Civil War to get through the rest of their lives in a world that seemed starkly unfamiliar at first. After losing husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons, as well as other family members, women struggled to “realize”—as they would write—the terrible human toll of war, and also to adjust to the new economic realities the war created for many of them. For some women, intellectual relationships remained critically important for processing these changes and carving out new lives for themselves in the ever-evolving post-war South. While diaries and reading proved most essential for these women, reaching out to one another provided a lifeline of value as well—all of which I’ll describe in later chapters.

Sharing Books and Friendships

In June of 1861 Clara Solomon was frustrated with her friend Susie. Susie had failed to return Clara’s book *Nemesis* even though her other friend Belle managed to return *Rutledge*—one of Clara’s favorites. Solomon wrote, “I think it so mean—I borrow books and don’t return them, but I don’t like persons to do so to me!!!”¹⁵¹ In the end, her “stray sheep” of a book found its way home, when Susie returned it several months later. Clara’s predicament was quite common, as before and during the Civil War, Southern women relied on their peers—both male and female—for all types of reading material. They mailed each other newspapers and clippings,

¹⁵⁰ Julia LeGrand Waitz, *The Journal of Julia LeGrand, 1862-1863*, 176.

¹⁵¹ Clara Solomon, *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon*, Ed. Elliot Ashkenazi (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 43.

brought books by one another's homes on a weekly and sometimes daily basis, and purchased books and periodicals as gifts for one another. In creating these networks of shared written material, women participated in intellectual culture beyond the confines of their home, expanding their knowledge of the world around them and encountering narratives that offered new opportunities for exploring the self. In essence, by building these networks of shared written material, these women—sometimes isolated, and certainly precluded from most “public” intellectual life in the nineteenth-century South—participated in intellectual culture and should therefore be seen as movers of intellectual history.

Fortunately for many Southern bibliophiles, the cost of books, magazines, and other literary material decreased significantly during the nineteenth century. Even so, prior to the Civil War, the South had far fewer public and private libraries, as well as fewer publishing firms, which encouraged women to share written material they got their hands on. Additionally, booksellers tended to congregate in cities and towns, meaning that women relied on others to purchase books for them (especially male relatives and friends), or had to wait and purchase books they wanted when they travelled to those areas themselves.¹⁵²

Although understanding book-borrowing networks can be complicated for historians, some diarists kept meticulous records of literary material they borrowed, lent, and received from

¹⁵² For information on changes in the publishing industry and mass-market book-selling, see the following: Robert Darnton, “What is the History of Books?” in *Books and Society in History*, ed. Kenneth E. Carpenter (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1983); John William Tebbel, *Between Covers: The Rise and Transformation of Book Publishing in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Rosalind Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital: Philadelphia Book Publishers in the New Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Meredith L. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Joan Shelley Rubin, “What is the History of the History of Books?” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (September 2003), 555-575; Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, *Literary Dollars and Social Sense: A People's History of the Mass Market Book* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Laura J. Miller, *Reluctant Capitalists: Bookselling and the Culture of Consumption* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Scott E. Caspar et al, ed. *A History of the Book in America: The Industrial Book, 1840-1880, Volume 3* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Paul David Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Aileen Fyfe, *Steam-Powered Knowledge: William Chambers and the Business of Publishing, 1820-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

others; other diarists simply mention their lending and borrowing habits in passing. Either way, these records help us to understand how local relationships helped maintain women's connections with the broader intellectual world.

As previously mentioned, Gertrude Clanton Thomas recorded book exchanges with significant detail and breadth. Her book lenders were family friends and acquaintances, peers—especially from school, and relatives. Some people who offered up their reading material to her were of the same age, but many were adults, who lent parts of their library to fifteen-year-old Gertrude in the late 1840s. Between 1848 and the 1870s, she borrowed, traded, or purchased novels, histories, plays, periodicals, and religious reading from at least twenty individuals.

One frequent book-swapping friend in the late 1840s was Isabella Morrison (often called Isabel), a neighbor and friend from Macon Female College. While Gertrude recorded the names of books Isabel lent to her more frequently than the other way around, the pair definitely read and swapped books with regularity. For instance, in Fall and Winter of 1848, Gertrude and Isabel swapped reading material around every four days.¹⁵³ Typically, the two teenagers shared historical fiction and romances—titles such as *One in a Thousand* by George P. R. James and *The Fortune Hunter* by Anna Cora Mowatt. George P. R. James was a well-known, popular British author of historical fiction who emulated the style of Sir Walter Scott, who was wildly popular among Southerners, especially during the antebellum period. Anna Cora Mowatt, on the other hand, was an actress who also wrote novels that were quite popular in the United States. The books the girls shared with one another were all popular fiction by American and British authors, and many of the books were new or nearly new when they were reading them. For instance, both girls were reading British author Catherine Gore's novel *Castles in the Air*,

¹⁵³ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, 10-14-1848, 10-17-1848, 11-29-1848, 12-3-1848, 12-5-1848, 12-14-1848, 12-18-1848, 12-22-1848, 12-22-1848, 12-24-1848, 12-26-1848, 12-30-1848.

published in 1847, in late 1848.¹⁵⁴ Likewise, they read *The Wanderers, or the Haunted Nobleman* by Charles E. Averill in December 1848, just months after it was published the same year. The young women's efforts to share current popular literature with one another demonstrates their connectedness with a larger world of letters well beyond their lives in Georgia. They were aware of recent publications within the United States and abroad, and both made efforts to keep the other abreast of reading material.

Most frequently, she shared books with the aforementioned Mrs. Harris.¹⁵⁵ Between 1855 and 1863, Mrs. Harris sent twenty-one-year-old Gertrude Thomas at least thirty-five books, most of which were historical and romantic novels—which isn't surprising given Gertrude's established affinity for reading this type of literature. Visualizing the intricate web of book swapping between these two women yields an impressive array of reading material changing hands between individuals ostensibly on the fringes of intellectual history. The women swapped a greater variety of books than Gertrude had with Isabel Morrison. Thomas borrowed books from Harris that were brand new, such as *Our Cousin Veronica* by American author Elizabeth Latimer, and books that were older, such as British author and playwright Samuel Beazley's *The Oxonians*.¹⁵⁶ Overwhelmingly, the novels these women took turns reading were written by British and American authors—something that, again, isn't surprising since that's what Gertrude preferred to read in earlier life as well. Ultimately, their love of popular historical novels and

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 12-?-1848-pg 32, Vol. I; 12-3-1848-pg 33, Vol. I.

¹⁵⁵ I haven't been able to figure out who this woman is yet, but based on context clues, she does seem to be a bit older than Gertrude and kind of like a motherly figure to her as she settled in to married life and the challenges of early motherhood.

¹⁵⁶ She read *Our Cousin Veronica* on 3-4-1856—the same year the novel was published (pg 118, Vol VI, P2). *The Oxonians: A Glance at Society* was published in 1830, and she read it in August of 1855 (pg.69, Vol VI, P1).

romances bound these two women together and formed the basis of their friendship, which seems more based on exchanging reading material than on commonality in any other sense.

In the pages of her diaries that span forty-one years, I have counted Gertrude Clanton Thomas sharing books with at least twenty individuals, most of whom were family, friends, and neighbors. The variety among these people in terms of age is impressive, and she borrowed from men and women. Overall, Thomas's active participation in this informal exchange of intellectual material shows us that Southern women were not disconnected from larger literary trends, nor were they merely reading material that reaffirmed their position in society—such as novels by Sir Walter Scott. Instead, Gertrude Thomas demonstrates that elite women living even in rural and more isolated regions found ways to remain connected with the latest literary trends and built informal intellectual networks of their own despite being largely excluded from formal intellectual exchange in the traditional and conservative South.

During the Civil War, scarcity and expense encouraged Southern women to rely on informal book trading and borrowing more than ever before. As Drew Gilpin Faust has argued, the war disrupted the literary market and “southern society and economy more generally.”¹⁵⁷ In spite of the difficulties, changes wrought by war also encouraged women to read with more frequency and urgency—something I'll cover in detail in Chapter Five. The diarists I study read during the Civil War for a variety of reasons, but one thing ties their habits: even the wealthiest women with the most prolific libraries were forced to borrow reading material—including newspapers—from friends and family due to circumstances of war.

Immediately prior to the beginning of the Civil War, Orange, Virginia resident Fannie Page Hume often shared reading material with her friends and family. For example, she bought

¹⁵⁷ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 157-8.

and gifted a copy of Hannah More's poetry for her friend Carrie in March of 1860 and sent her friend Bert Williams *The Mill on the Floss* and *The Marble Faun* after Bert wrote her a note, "begging the loan" of the two novels.¹⁵⁸ One borrowed book in particular made a profound impact on Fannie. In February of 1860, she borrowed Harriet Burn McKeever's *Sunshine; or, Kate Vinton* from a "Miss Davis." Fannie felt that it was "a sweet & instructive book," but it also made her hyperaware of her religious failings, writing, "...but, ah! The characters are too perfect, some of them. I almost begin to doubt the existence of any true religion in my heart when I read of such, & compare my own actions & motives. Oh, Father! Help me to love Thee more."¹⁵⁹ Hume was thrilled to borrow books, but also to lend them to her friends, although she noted how glad she was when Nellie Cave returned her "long absent volumes of Tennyson," noting that she "was glad to behold them once more," and that it "felt as if dear friends had returned."¹⁶⁰

Fannie's church's library proved essential to keeping her mind busy prior to the Civil War. She borrowed books from the church, swapped these books with friends at times, and even helped put the church library in order. In April of 1860, she "proffered [her] services to write down a catalogue of books" and she and several friends spent the day "covering, numbering, writing down, [and] arranging books generally" for her minister.¹⁶¹ Fannie's church seems to have offered an array of religious fiction, history, and theology based on the titles she borrowed from it. For instance, she read Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's *Judah's Lion* in April of 1860, and Dudley Atkins Tyng's *Children of the Kingdom* in October of the same year. To Fannie,

¹⁵⁸ Fannie Page Hume Braxton, "Fannie Page Hume Diary, 1860-1862," 3-10-1860, 8-23-1860 (pg 66), Folder 1, #1156-z, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The first and second volume of Braxton's diaries are at the Wilson Library, while the third volume is at the Virginia Historical Society.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, Vol I, pg 11, 2-6-1860.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 10-29-1860, pg 82.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 4-27-1860.

Children of the Kingdom offered some interesting insight into gender roles in marriage. She felt that Dr. Tyng spoke “so beautifully of the duties of husband & wife,” and crystallized for her some fundamental differences between men and women, writing, “It is well to draw comparisons between the sexes, their minds as well as bodies were framed for variety, not for competition.”¹⁶² She also spent months reading James Whites’ *Eighteen Christian Centuries*, a religious history covering—not surprisingly—eighteen centuries of the church and Christian religion. Hume generally read one “century” at a time, taking detailed notes and noting that the book was “highly interesting & instructive.”¹⁶³ Between September and December of 1860, she mentioned reading the text on at least seven separate occasions, and typically describes the type of notes she attempted to take of her reading.

The most important relationship built around sharing reading material turned out to be the one she shared with her cousin, Carter Braxton, whom she eventually married in February of 1865. Carter was born in Newport News, Virginia, but lived in Fredericksburg after the death of his father in 1847.¹⁶⁴ The pair had frequent contact in person and also through letters and exchanging books, tracts, and newspaper clippings sent by mail. Between June and November of 1860, Carter sent Fannie at least twenty-four items for reading, including novels, newspapers, periodicals, and poetry. For instance, he brought her Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun* in June 1860, along with a chess set, and *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot in July.¹⁶⁵ On a number

¹⁶² Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, known as “Charlotte Elizabeth,” wrote popular religious fiction in the nineteenth century and several of the diarists used in this study actually read *Judah’s Lion*. Ibid, Vol. I, pg 32, 4-15-1860. Dudley Atkins Tyng—“Dr. Tyng”—wrote *Children of the Kingdom* as an exploration of gender roles in marriage. Ibid, Vol. I., pg 77, 10-7-1860.

¹⁶³ Ibid, Vol. I, pg 93, 12-17-1860. Hume started reading *Eighteen Christian Centuries* in September of 1860 and concluded it on December 19, 1860 according to her own records.

¹⁶⁴ Martin S. Lane, “Carter M. Braxton (1836–1898),” *Encyclopedia Virginia* (Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, 2015). Web. 21 Mar. 2017. Interestingly, after Fannie’s untimely death in June of 1865—months after their wedding, Carter Braxton married another Lizzie Alsop’s sister, Nannie, in 1868.

¹⁶⁵ Fannie Page Hume Diary, Vol I, pg 46, 6-8-1860; Ibid, 7-4-1860.

of occasions, he brought or sent her copies of periodicals such as *Harper's Weekly*, *Littell's Living Age*, and *Godey's Lady Book*.¹⁶⁶ Carter seemed to use his letters and text-sending habits to slowly court Fannie, who was involved with someone else for some of her earlier diary.¹⁶⁷ Over time, Carter's letters and visits became more frequent and the nature of their relationship changed around August or September of 1860, when Fannie began to comment on notes in his letters "which disturb[ed] me much" and "puzzled me considerably."¹⁶⁸ Carter even "showed [her] an enigmatical extract in his 'diary'" that she "tried in vain to understand."¹⁶⁹ Though she offers few details, context clues imply that Carter began to pursue Fannie romantically and that she was hesitant and even uncomfortable. Even so, Fannie continued their correspondence and even gifted her cousin a "Prayer Book" that she had wrapped and inscribed for him.¹⁷⁰ From friendship to courtship, reading material proved important to the relationship Fannie had and maintained with her cousin.

Once the war began, Fannie counted on her neighbors and friends to provide her with new reading material. Like many areas of Virginia during the Civil War, the town of Orange saw plenty of action in terms of troop movements and fighting. In fact, the area that served roughly as the Confederate border—the Rapidan River—was just north of town, which meant that residents faced occupation by friendly and unfriendly troops at various times and the war, and the town

¹⁶⁶ Braxton sent her copies of *Harper's* on six occasions: 6-17-1860, 6-19-1860, 7-26-1860, 8-21-1860, 9-21-1860, and 11-2-1860. She received *Littell's Living Age* from him eight times: 6-2-1860, 6-17-1860, 7-1-1860, 7-19-1860, 11-2-1860, and 11-13-1860; and *Godey's Lady Book* twice: 8-28-1860 and 11-13-1860.

¹⁶⁷ Fannie frequently mentions a "Mr. Rhind" in earlier entries of her diary. He was involved in the navy, it seems, and was stationed abroad for long periods of time. Though they maintained correspondence for some time, the two broke it off and Fannie spent a day burning all their letters to one another. She notes that Carter made fun of her relationship with Mr. Rhind as early as May 6, 1860.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 8-28-1860, 9-1-1860.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid 10-1-1860.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 9-6-1860.

itself remained homefront and battlefield simultaneously at least between 1862 and 1864.¹⁷¹

Despite the unrest, Fannie Page Hume and her friends found ways to indulge their love of literature, and shared periodicals and texts with one another.

Early in 1861, Hume still received some of the periodicals she read before the war; the war changed that soon enough, and Fannie found herself rereading books her family owned, visiting her church library and borrowing texts from friends, and looking to newspapers for entertainment and news of the war. On several occasions, Hume visited her church library to help organize the books and also to borrow books, including *Rills from the Fountain of Life* and *Leaders of the Reformation*, which she read in early 1862.¹⁷² Just days after the official start of the war, her Aunt Susan sent her *Rutledge*, which she “never put...down scarcely till I finished,” though she felt that it was “not near so well written as ‘Beulah.’”¹⁷³ Several months later, her friend Nannie Dade sent her *Henry St. John, Gentleman*, a novel by John Esten Cooke that she had “always desired to read.” She found herself “so absorbed in its descriptions of ‘old Virginia’s chivalry, hospitality, etc. that I did not put it down till dinner.”¹⁷⁴ In early 1862, her friend Jennie Ross visited and the two spent time looking over “Sydney Smith’s Writings,” which Fannie was “much interested in.”¹⁷⁵ One wartime favorite for Fannie was *The Prince of the House of David*, which a “Mrs. Scott” loaned to her in late March of 1862. She mentioned reading the novel three times and commented that though she “scarcely [knew] what to think of

¹⁷¹ Frank S. Walker, *Remembering: A History of Orange County, Virginia* (Orange County Historical Society, 2004).

¹⁷² Fannie Page Hume, Vol. III, 3-9-1862, pg 16, Mss5:1B7398:1, Virginia Historical Society. *Rills from the Fountain of Life* by Richard Newton. She first mentioned *Leaders of the Reformation* on September 26, 1861, so she must have borrowed this text on several occasions.

¹⁷³ Ibid, pg 25, 4-18-1861, UNC.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 7-16-1861, pg 46, UNC.

¹⁷⁵ Fannie Page Hume, Vol. III, 1-17-1862, pg 4, VHS.

it,” she found it “most beautifully written,” and “highly interesting.”¹⁷⁶ Like many of her peers in the United States and abroad, Fannie was thrilled to read Victor Hugo’s novel *Les Misérables*, which most Southerners seemed to read serially as a series of novels. Her friend, Nellie, insisted that she share *Fantine* with her for reading after a Captain Thomson brought them to the Humes. Fannie found herself “much interested in it” too and even “took several extracts from it” in December of 1862.¹⁷⁷

Like many Confederate readers, Hume also turned to old favorites to pass the time since they were easier to come by than new reading material. For instance, in September of 1861, she “picked up my old friend ‘Nicholas Nickleby’ after dinner & got much interested in it.” Dickens seemed to be a favorite for re-perusal, as she also reread *David Copperfield*. In early 1862, she “Read ‘[The] Wide Wide World’ all over again,” noting that while there were “some exquisite & truthful passages in it,” “most of it” was “overdrawn.”¹⁷⁸ Several days later, she “read old books we hunted from their hiding places”—books such as *Luther Conway* and *The Lamplighter*, which she called “a good old friend.”¹⁷⁹

Through periods of occupation and soldiers—friend and foe—camping on her family’s property, Fannie Page Hume used reading as a welcome distraction, to maintain friendships and other relationships, and to “improve [her]self” despite the circumstances of war. These efforts proved fruitful at certain times, and more difficult in others. She admonished herself in November of 1861, writing, “It has been an age since I chronicled any reading matter—‘tis a shame. I have not made any effort to improve myself, but—ah! When the heart is heavy—the

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 3-29-1862, 3-31-1862, 4-16-1862. Pg 25, 26, 32, VHS. *The Prince of the House of David* was an 1855 epistolary novel by writer and clergyman Joseph Holt Ingraham.

¹⁷⁷ Fannie Page Hume, Vol III, 12-27-1862, pg 108; 12-2-1862, pg 101, VHS.

¹⁷⁸ Fannie Page Hume, Vol. II, 9-4-1861, UNC; Fannie Page Hume, Vol III, 1-16-1862-4, VHS.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 1-28-1862, pg 7.

thoughts occupied with weighty matters—‘tis difficult to fix the attention.”¹⁸⁰ A year later, when the approaching federal army encouraged many Orange residents to flee, the Humes burned correspondence and hid their books in a closet, hoping to preserve them from being taken or burned.¹⁸¹ Her efforts to protect her family’s books further reveals how important they were to her.

In Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana, Sarah Lois Wadley, the seventeen-year-old daughter of a Confederate railroad manager, struggled to comprehend the start of the Civil War. She wrote in her diary, “Oh! How melancholy, how melancholy is the state of our country, never since the death of Cain was such an unnatural, uncalled for war...My heart shrinks and my bravery seems to fly when I think of what may come upon us.”¹⁸² Sarah—or Sadie, as her father called her—expressed support for the Confederate cause, but also showed considerable doubt about the future—unlike many of her peers. As early as April 26, 1861, she confessed her fears to her journal, writing, “the future looks threatening, the present is clouded with doubt, and uncertainty; our country is in turmoil and danger, and our family seems like a ship floating upon a troubled sea, with no particular destination, no particular interest in any thing, only to keep afloat.”¹⁸³

Sarah was a precocious and seemingly willful young woman, who appreciated nature, enjoyed reading a variety of things, and showed few qualms about deep self-reflection in her diary. During the Civil War, she frequently turned to reading for much-needed solace from the family’s overcrowded home and the constant concerns about her father, who worked for the

¹⁸⁰ Fannie Page Hume, Vol. II, UNC, 11-5-1861, pg 72.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, Vol III, VHS, 11-10-1862.

¹⁸² Sarah Lois Wadley, Diary, August 1859-May 1865, pg 127, 4-18-1861. Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This section of the diary is digitized as a part of Documenting the American South. Additional diaries (from before and after the Civil War) are located in manuscript form at Emory University.

¹⁸³ Sarah Lois Wadley, Diary,, pg 130, 4-26-1861.

Confederate railroads and was frequently away from the family. Additionally, like many residents of eastern Louisiana, her family feared incursion by federal troops—something that eventually encouraged them to attempt to flee for Georgia.¹⁸⁴

Sarah's long and reflective diary entries reveal her love of reading with consistency. Based on the titles she read, I surmise that the Wadleys had a decent library of books before the beginning of the war.¹⁸⁵ She and her family often read books aloud together—a habit they continued throughout the war. Her father sometimes brought books back with him from work travels before and during the war. In November of 1862, William Wadley brought his daughter a “beautifully bound copy” of Alexander von Humboldt's *Cosmos*—a non-fiction, multi-volume text that captivated a number of diarists studied in this dissertation.¹⁸⁶ For nearly a year and a half, “Sadie” returned to *Cosmos* again and again, reading sections of the book until she finally finished it in March of 1864. After finishing the book, she wrote, “it has given me a great deal of pleasure and information though there are several parts which I cannot now understand...but there is one thing the book has done for me without doubt it has made me feel a sincere respect, admiration, and if I might so far presume, a love for its authour, the very name of Humboldt seem grand to me.”¹⁸⁷

Though she didn't record her book borrowing habits with quite as much detail as some of her peers, she did rely on these informal intellectual networks as the war wound on. For instance,

¹⁸⁴ Sarah Lois Wadley, Diary, pg 58-106, Vol III. In September of 1863, the family finally left Louisiana in a string of wagons. Sarah documented their journey, which unfortunately ended with the family was forced to turn back after they were “refused a passport” to cross a swollen river in early October. After enduring sickness, crossing numerous swamps and bayous, and spending considerable money, the family just turned around and went back to Oakland.

¹⁸⁵ Because she read frequently in books that had already been published for some time, I assume the Wadleys had a nice library. Additionally, when the family packs up to leave, she describes lovingly packing the family's books and being sad about the thought of being separated from them.

¹⁸⁶ Sarah Lois Wadley, Diary, pg 97, Vol III, 11-17-1862.

¹⁸⁷ Sarah Lois Wadley, Diary, pg 176, Vol V, 3-4-1864.

in 1862, her friend Mattie Newcombe (sometimes spelled Newcomb) loaned her books of poetry. While Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Evangeline" had "many beautiful passages in it" and made an obvious lasting impression (since she quoted lines from the poem fairly regularly), she was not impressed with Trelawny's "Last Days of Shelley & Byron," which was "hardly worth reading."¹⁸⁸ Two years later, she borrowed a novel from Mattie, whom she mentions with frequency. Of the novel—*Shirley* by Charlotte Bronte—she wrote, "some parts of it spoke so to my heart that I seemed to breathe out myself in reading them."¹⁸⁹ Another friend, Tabitha Scarborough, lent her *The Mill on the Floss*, Bayard Taylor's *Views Afoot*, and *Dr. Antonio* in August of 1863.¹⁹⁰ Sarah first mentioned Tabitha in 1862, and over the next several years, the two women frequently rode horses together, travelled to nearby towns, and even joined the D.D.D.s—a "young ladies' company in Monroe."¹⁹¹ And though the girls' friendship seems mostly based on their shared love of riding horses, Sarah expressed appreciation for the times when Tabitha lent her books and her company.

By 1864, Sarah and her family had experienced significant changes due to conditions of war. Federal and Confederate troops consistently moved in and out of their area of Louisiana, creating fear and disruption among plantation residents (although their slaves took the opportunity to slip away for federal lines more and more frequently). As families around them left for western Louisiana, Texas, and other places as refugees, the Wadleys stayed put after their ill-fated attempt to leave in 1863. Still, Sarah kept up her reading and borrowed books from several peers and neighbors. For instance, in March and April of 1864, she borrowed several

¹⁸⁸ Sarah Lois Wadley, Diary, pg 74, Vol III, 6-1-1862.

¹⁸⁹ Sarah Lois Wadley, Diary, pg 222, Vol V, 6-9-1864.

¹⁹⁰ Sarah Lois Wadley, Diary, pg 35, Vol VI, 8-13-1863.

¹⁹¹ Sarah Lois Wadley, Diary, 9-13-1862, pg 85; 3-23-1863, pg 113. The D.D.D.s read books together and performed several tableaux.

books from Maggie Calderwood, a local friend whose family frequently socialized with the Wadleys.¹⁹² Maggie lent her two books by popular fiction writer, Susan Warner. First, *Say and Seal*, about which Sarah wrote, “I like it and think it does me good,” although she felt it had “some faults in style and wording.”¹⁹³ When Sarah returned *Say and Seal* to Maggie, she borrowed *No Name*, the novel by Wilkie Collins, which her mother read to the family. Though she thought “some parts of it were very fine...as a whole [she did] not like it as well as ‘The Woman in White’”—a frequent comment by diarists.¹⁹⁴ In August of what year, she also borrowed *Agatha Beaufort; or, Family Pride*, which Maggie had “recommended very highly.” The women “had nothing better to do” so they read the book aloud together. They soon found themselves “into the interest of the story, which was not long” and were “not willing to stop,” choosing to pursue “Margaret Desmond’s mysterious adventures till dinner.”¹⁹⁵

Mrs. Leighton also proved an important source for reading material, although in her case, it was in terms of quality (in Sarah’s view) rather than quantity. In late July, Sarah borrowed Alphonse de Lamartine’s *Des Confidences* from Mrs. Leighton. Wadley adored Lamartine, and though she didn’t care for *Des Confidences* as much as *Voyage en Orient*, she still felt changed by reading the book. She wrote, “I don’t think I ever read anything which made a more enduring impression on my heart, or which became as much a part of my thoughts, of my soul ... sometimes his [the author’s] longings, his words, come to me like they were my own.”¹⁹⁶ When

¹⁹² Sarah’s diary mentions Maggie and her mother and father on a number of occasions spread fairly evenly across time. Dr. Calderwood owned a nursery in town and the Wadleys and Calderwoods socialized with some frequency.

¹⁹³ Sarah Lois Wadley, Diary, 3-22-1864, pg 183, Vol V.

¹⁹⁴ Sarah Lois Wadley, Diary, 4-12-1864, 4-20-1864; pg 201 and 205, Vol V. Kate Stone, Julia LeGrand, Gertrude Clanton Thomas and Emma Holmes all read *The Woman in White* and some also read *No Name*. Their verdict—although Julia LeGrand disagreed—was that *The Woman in White* was far superior.

¹⁹⁵ Sarah Lois Wadley, Diary, 8-11-1864, pg 249, Vol V.

¹⁹⁶ Sarah Lois Wadley, Diary, 7-30-1864, pg 245, Vol V.

Sarah returned *Des Confidences* to Mrs. Leighton, the two “chatted” about the book, Sarah thanked her “for the pleasure it had given me” and then “left with the great prize of the first volume of Lamartine’s ‘Histoire des Girondins.’”¹⁹⁷ Sarah felt that the book had “all the exciting interest of a novel” and that she “could scarcely tear myself away from it...and am thinking of it all the time.” She read the volume for over a month, after which she was “all impatience to get the next.”¹⁹⁸ Lamartine’s writing made a constant impression on Sarah, and she devoured many of his works with help from friends and family.

Kate Stone, who coincidentally was a friend of Sarah Lois Wadley’s, was twenty years old and living with her widowed mother near Milliken’s Bend, Louisiana at the start of the Civil War. Like many Southern women, Kate experienced how the war blurred lines between home front and battlefield firsthand. Three of her brothers fought in the Confederate Army, leaving her younger brother, her, and her mother to fend for themselves, manage slaves (who began to leave local plantations in increasing numbers), and deal with incursions by federal troops. Eventually, Kate and her family fled for Texas in the Spring of 1863, where they stayed until returning in late 1865. While in Louisiana, Kate actively participated in sewing circles and fundraising efforts orchestrated by neighborhood peers, though it isn’t clear whether or not she joined the “D.D.D.’s”—the group created by Sarah Lois Wadley and her friends.

During the war, Kate’s reading habits in Madison Parish demonstrate that she was well read and engaged in popular literature of the day. Titles from authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Sir Walter Scott, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, William Makepeace Thackeray, William

¹⁹⁷ Sarah Lois Wadley, Diary, 8-13-1864, pg 252, Vol V.

¹⁹⁸ Sarah Lois Wadley, Diary, 9-7-1864, pg 263, Vol V; 10-11-1864, pg 274, Vol V.

Shakespeare, and a number of periodicals appear throughout her entries.¹⁹⁹ Once Northern periodicals stopped coming South, friends and family members seemed to send the Stones reading material fairly regularly. Like Fannie Hume and Gertrude Thomas, Kate Stone also relied on her neighbors to lend her novels and poetry to keep her occupied because she had “nothing but the old standbys to read.”²⁰⁰ For instance, in January of 1862, she “sent to Mrs. Hardison for something to read and she could find only Mabel Vaughn and *The Belle of Washington*.” Sadly, Kate had read the first book and found the “other not worth reading,” so she was “stranded” without anything to keep her occupied.²⁰¹ In May of 1862, she did “much reading...in borrowed books”—books such as *The Huguenots*, *Caste*, *The Shady Side*, *The Widow Bidott Papers*, and *Rob Roy*—which she called “worth all the books ever written in Yankeedom.”²⁰²

Kate had reason to desire something to keep her mind distracted in 1862. That summer, she and other Madison Parish residents faced constant fears about federal troops in the area, concerns about slave uprisings, and concerns about loved ones fighting in Virginia. After hearing rumors of the Seven Days Battles, Kate and her family waited in “long, cruel suspense” to hear from her brother and uncle.²⁰³ The news that finally came after weeks of waiting was good, but her family wouldn’t always be so lucky. She dreaded the coming of winter, writing, “I shudder in

¹⁹⁹ Stone mentions on 5-23-1861 that her family receives *Harper’s Weekly*, *Harper’s Monthly*, *The New York Tribune*, *The Journal of Commerce*, *Littell’s Living Age*, *The Whig* and *Picayune* (both of New Orleans), and Vicksburg papers as well. She also muses about what her family will do when “Mr. Lincoln stops our mails.” Kate Stone, *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861-1868*, ed. John Q. Anderson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 14.

²⁰⁰ Kate Stone, pg 138, 5-23-1862.

²⁰¹ Kate Stone, pg 83, 1-20-1862.

²⁰² Kate Stone, pg 112, 5-23-1862. *The Huguenots* by George P.R. James, *Caste* by Sydney A. Story, *The Shady Side, or, Life in a Country Parsonage* by Martha Stone Hubbell, and *The Widow Bidott Papers* by Frances M. Witcher, and *Rob Roy* by Sir Walter Scott.

²⁰³ Kate Stone, pg 133, 7-21-1862.

anticipation: The long rains, the impassable roads, no books, no papers, few letters, our friends nearly all away, and most of our loved ones in the army. Awful prospect.”²⁰⁴ By January of 1863, conditions in Madison Parish had begun to deteriorate further as federal forces concentrated in the area, attempting to bypass Vicksburg. On January 26, Kate wrote, “Preparing to run from the Yankees, I commit my book to the bottom of a packing box with only a slight chance of seeing it again.”²⁰⁵ Though the family didn’t end up fleeing at that point, things were not the same again. By March 24th, Kate and her family had reached their breaking points. She wrote:

The life we are leading now is a miserable, frightened one—living in constant dread of great danger, not knowing what form it may take, and utterly helpless to protect ourselves. It is a painful present and a dark future with the wearing anxiety and suspense about our loved ones. We long for news from the outside world, and yet we shudder to think what evil tidings it may bring us... We beguile the time sewing and reading well-thumbed books, starting at every sound.²⁰⁶

The family fled to a neighboring plantation the next day, and coincidentally, lodged with Sarah Lois Wadley’s family—an experience that Kate called “an oasis in the desert.”²⁰⁷ After staying with the Wadleys until June, they subsequently left for Texas, where they remained until the end of the war.

Lamar County, Texas proved a welcome sojourn from the battlefield, but a boring and unfulfilling place to live for Kate and her family. She found the people quite provincial (at least initially), the lodging choices limited and uncomfortable, and the seeming lack of law and order curious and worrisome. In fact, by late August she wrote, “The more we see of the people, the less we like them, and every refugee we have seen feels the same way... The refugees are a nicer

²⁰⁴ Kate Stone, pg 143, 9-24-1862.

²⁰⁵ Kate Stone, pg 169, January 26, 1863.

²⁰⁶ Kate Stone, pg 185, March 24, 1863.

²⁰⁷ Kate Stone, 203, 5-2-1863.

and more refined people than most of those they meet.”²⁰⁸ Though Kate’s observations about Texas and Texans are likely colored by snobbery and elitism, her family certainly didn’t find the hospitality they had experienced in Louisiana.

Kate’s disappointment with Texas’ offerings extended to reading material. When searching for a house to rent, her mother instead found someone with “quite a library of books that she would hire out for fifty cents a week” to the Stones. Kate expressed disgust at the fact that Mrs. White “would not think of lending them.” She wrote about her: “Mrs. White is an educated woman, lives in a nice house, and is well to do, but a regular skin-flint. She is living from day to day on the verge of the grave...and is still very eager to make money, extorting the last cent.” Not surprisingly, Kate attributed her lack of generosity to the fact that “She is a Yankee. That explains all.”²⁰⁹ Even so, the Stones rented and bought books from Mrs. White until they heard a rumor she had leprosy.²¹⁰

Despite her frustrations with her new home, Kate did find solace in reading—when she could get her hands on reading material. She felt that “novels [were] a great boon in such desert places of life” and was thrilled to read at every opportunity.²¹¹ Most of the time, she borrowed books from neighbors or waited for relatives to send reading material such as books, newspapers, and magazines. For instance, Kate was elated to read “something I do not already know by heart” in September of 1863 when her “Uncle Johnny” gave her family “several new books, at least new to us, as we have had nothing recent since the war commenced.” Johnny brought the family

²⁰⁸ Kate Stone, pg 238, 8-30-1863.

²⁰⁹ Kate Stone, pg 233-4, 8-10-1863.

²¹⁰ Kate Stone, pg 239, 8-30-1863.

²¹¹ Kate Stone, pg 245, September 26, 1863.

A Strange Story, *No Name*, and *The Step-Sister* as well as “quite a number of magazines.”²¹²

That December, a neighbor named Mrs. Lawrence was “kind about lending us her books, but we have about finished her library.” Kate complained, “Have read history until I feel as dry as those old times. Have nearly memorized Tennyson and read and reread our favorite plays in Shakespeare. Fortunately he never grows old.”²¹³ By mid-1864, Kate’s frustration with the lack of reading material was obvious. She wrote, “Nearly a week of rain and I am ennuyée to death. No visitors, no books, no letters, *no anything*.”²¹⁴

By early 1865, Kate felt relieved to have “become acquainted with the *crème de la crème*” of Tyler, Texas and admitted that there were “many nice people when one finds them out.”²¹⁵ A friendship with Mollie E. Moore, a novelist and poet, seems to have been an intellectual bright spot for Kate’s time in Texas. Miss Moore was, not surprisingly, a lover of literature, and Kate and Mollie spent a good amount of time together, sharing books and talking about literature, and gossiping about the new “beau” in Kate’s life—Lieutenant Henry Bry Holmes—who would later become her husband. Mollie was “very kind, lending [the Stones] books, among others new novels by Miss Braddon.”²¹⁶ To Kate, Mollie was “charming,” and she found “such a pleasure to have a friend to chatter nonsense to who enjoys it as much as I and does her full share.”²¹⁷ Reading played an important part in their friendship when together, and on their parting, Mollie gave Kate “a pretty copy of *The Lady of the Lake* as a souvenir of our

²¹² Kate Stone, pg 243, 9-19-1863.

²¹³ Kate Stone, pg 270, 12-25-1863.

²¹⁴ Kate Stone, pg 288, 6-6-1864.

²¹⁵ Kate Stone, pg 321, 3-3-1865.

²¹⁶ Kate Stone, pg 323, 3-9-1865. She refers to Mary Elizabeth Braddon. On the next page, she is reading *Lady Audley’s Secret*, Braddon’s first novel. Kate and Lt. Holmes married on December 8, 1869.

²¹⁷ Kate Stone, pg 330, 4-16-1865.

happy friendship.”²¹⁸ Though the pair probably never saw each other again, they had made it through the war in what Kate described as “certainly not a reading community,” and both women lived active literary lives in the postwar period.²¹⁹

Even the wealthiest and most well-read Southerners sometimes needed help supplementing their libraries during times of war—including consummate reader and diarist, Mary Boykin Chesnut. Mrs. Chesnut documented her reading habits with detail in her tome of a diary, and as many historians have noted, the breadth and consistency of her reading is truly remarkable. Still, by 1863, Mary sometimes relied on others’ reading material to keep her entertained. While in the Confederate capitol that year, her friend John R. Thompson—“the sole literary fellow I know in Richmond,” as Chesnut wrote—provided a number of titles for her perusal. He lent her *Leisure Hours in Town* by Andrew Kennedy Hutchinson Boyd in November, brought her periodicals such as *Cornhill* and *Blackwood’s* on several occasions, and later sent her *Life of Savonarola* to “tune [her] up” for George Eliot’s *Romola*.²²⁰ In April of 1864, Dr. John Darby had been sent “across the water” on military business—namely, getting General John Bell Hood an artificial leg in Europe—and returned with the latest fiction for Mrs. Chesnut. He brought them *Rachel Roy*, *Eleanor’s Victory*, and *Vincenzo*. Mary commented that “Anything from Trollope is very welcome. And certainly anything from the author of *Dr. Antonio*”

²¹⁸ Kate Stone, pg 361, 9-11-1865.

²¹⁹ Kate Stone, pg 330, 4-16-1865. She says this in complaining about how few people were “acquainted with ‘The White Lady of Avenel,’” a character from Sir Walter Scott’s *The Monastery*. She laments that when she mentions the character, locals think she’s talking about a refugee she knows. The diary’s editor writes that “There is no record that they ever saw each other again or corresponded” (Footnote 36). Mollie Moore Davis had a successful career as an author, publishing thirteen books and experiencing national renown. Kate Stone lived with her husband in Talullah, Louisiana after the war, where she was active in literary clubs and very involved in the local United Daughters of the Confederacy chapter.

²²⁰ Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 493. He sent her *Blackwood’s Magazine* on 12-5-1863 and 4-11-1864 (pgs 500 and 595); he sent *Cornhill* for her to read Trollope’s “Framley Parsonage” on 12-3-1865, and a copy of the *New York Herald* on 3-12-1864 (pgs 498 and 585, respectively).

(Giovanni Ruffini).²²¹ Despite her family's vast library, Mary Chesnut too had to rely on friendships to continue providing reading material in some cases. No doubt, she also lent books of her own to friends and other family members throughout the war.

After the War

After hostilities ended in 1865, Southern women struggled to reckon with the many changes wrought to their society. As I will discuss in a later chapter, reading played a significant role in coping with these changes, and a number of avid readers tried their hands at authorship for the first time or on a larger scale. In terms of book sharing, evidence of it seems to drop off fairly significantly in the post-war period, although, no doubt, it did not end completely. This change likely occurred due to broader developments in American publishing and the types of material women could get in mailed periodicals. For example, books became markedly cheaper in the late nineteenth century, and even though most Southern female readers experienced at least some drop in economic status, they still managed to find money for reading material. Additionally, without the stresses of war, women once again had access to national and international markets, making book sharing less necessary than during the war. Ultimately, though, reading remained an important part of women's social, intellectual and emotional lives.

In this chapter, I have argued that Southern female readers carved out intellectual space for themselves before and during the Civil War. The spaces they created were both physical and abstract, and the results were that these women were able to find commonality with other women, cope with difficult challenges, and ultimately, find a sense of themselves. These spaces

²²¹ Ibid, pg 595. *Rachel Ray* by Anthony Trollope, *Eleanor's Victory* by Mary Elizabeth Braddon Maxwell, and *Vincenzo; or, Sunken Rocks* by Giovanni Ruffini, who also wrote *Dr. Antonio*. All of these titles were published in 1863. Dr. John Darby was General Hood's personal physician and a surgeon to the Hampton Legion. He went to Europe to retrieve a false leg for Hood, who had lost his leg at the Battle of Chickamauga.

were not unchallenged by patriarchal concerns, the war, and other issues, but still allowed for the development of ideas that gave women a voice in their society. The friendships these women formed carried this voice from house to house, helping to spawn what would become a uniquely Southern critique of society's restraints. And when the time for questions and critiques came, women would once again turn to the places they felt most comfortable exploring ideas: in their diaries and in fiction. This time, though, they would do the writing themselves.

CHAPTER THREE: *Reading the Self*

“There is one spectacle grander than the sea, that is the sky; there is one spectacle grander than the sky, that is the interior of the soul. To write the poem of the human conscience, were it only of a single [wo]man, were it only of the most infamous of [wo]men, would be to swallow up all epics in a superior and final epic.”
—Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

Like many diary-keepers in the nineteenth century, Nannie Haskins Williams called her diary her “book.” Within her book, she often wrote reflections on the books, poetry, and newspapers she read. For example, she felt that Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* “portray[ed] characters life *like*,” and spent the rest of her entry describing which characters she liked—Javert “is the finest character,” Marius “the most interesting body,” and Jean Valjean “the most admirable”—and those she didn’t—Cosette “was tiresome,” “Mabeuf “a fool,” and Fantine “woman in her weakest phase.” As she recorded her thoughts on plots and characters, she also transcribed quotes from works she liked. Williams treated her journal as a book as well and sometimes reread her diary entries and commented on her words of the past, reading the book of her life as she might a novel. She even considered writing a novel or memoir of her own one day, writing:

Yes, I would like to do something worthy of a woman’s name, but what could I do? I am not capable of writing a novel...I cannot write ‘Memoirs’ for I have none, but what every girl of eighteen has had...Suppose I were to write, call out all of my talent. I might be a—not a Hannah Moore, nor a Charlotte Bronte, nor a Madame D. Stael, but a Nannie Haskins.²²²

²²² Nannie Haskins Williams, *The Diary of Nannie Haskins Williams: A Southern Woman’s Story of Rebellion and Reconstruction, 1863-1890*. Ed. Minoa D. Uffelman, Ellen Kanervo, Phyllis Smith, & Eleanor Williams (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2014), 121, 77.

Invoking her favorite female authors when considering writing a novel isn't surprising because Nannie loved to read—something that's obvious when reading quote after quote copied into her journal for safe-keeping. Living in occupied Nashville during the Civil War proved a difficult experience for her—one that made her adolescence marked by self-doubt and difficulties with friends all the more complicated. By reading, writing about what she was reading, and then imagining herself as an author alongside some of her favorite writers, she demonstrates the interconnectedness of all three of these things. Her reading impacted how she thought about the world around her, which in turn shaped how she thought and wrote about herself in her diary. In short, reading was far more than an escape or a way to alleviate boredom. Instead, the books she read provided the language and the impetus to embrace her intellectualism and to explore her sense of self.

In spite of the inherent conservatism among Southerners—something that impacted ideas about reading and literacy in the region more generally—elite and middling Southern women read a lot more than the ubiquitous Sir Walter Scott (although they certainly loved his novels).²²³ Their reading, which was much broader than some reading historians previously posited, kept them in touch with transatlantic currents and literature that connected them with ideas well beyond those they encountered in their day to day lives. In short, elite women in Southern cities and even on isolated plantations remained a part of a broader reading public just as much as Americans in the North.

²²³ For an essential exploration of reading and literacy in the South, see Beth Barton Schweiger, "The Literate South: Reading Before Emancipation," *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, Volume 3, No. 3, September 2013: 331-359. For more on Southerners' obsession with Sir Walter Scott, see Rollin G. Ostterweis, *Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967). For a discussion of how college-age men in the South sought "national and regional belonging" through their intellectual pursuits (again, questioning the idea of the closed-minded Southerner), see Timothy J. Williams, *Intellectual Manhood: University, Self, and Society in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

The next several chapters describe how these Southern elite women went from reader, to self-writer, to authorship (in some cases). Specifically, this chapter will explore the reading of diarists and how that reading impacted their self-expression and reflection. I will describe what many of these women read, as well as how they wrote about the things they read. Reading patterns place these Southern women of letters well within larger intellectual currents and therefore makes them reasonable subjects for an intellectual history that values the everyday participant. Women encountered genres of the self in the things they read; they fed their selves with this reading, sustaining themselves through trials and finding commonality and contention with authors; and they imagined how the selves they found in reading impacted their own vision of self and how that vision could translate to their diaries and other writing they undertook.

Reading the Self

Some historians of reading and the book have discounted the South as a place that largely lacked a literary culture. Compared with the Northern United States and other places in the Western World, people in the South, they claim, read things that merely confirmed and bolstered inequality and the status quo. Thus, they argue, the transformative power of reading had fewer effects for Southerners.²²⁴ Southern elite women benefitted greatly from this status quo, and some of their reading choices were in line with what was considered appropriate for women of their station. And yet, as scholars such as Michael O'Brien have shown, many of them read beyond these borders—in authors that openly criticized slavery, in science and political

²²⁴ See, for instance, work by the Zborays on Northern reading habits, as well as J. V. Ridgely, *Nineteenth-Century Southern Literature* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014). Ronald J. and Mary Saracino Zboray, *Everyday Ideas: Socioliterary Experience among Antebellum New Englanders* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), and Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

philosophy, and in the sometimes sordid, increasingly cheap literature of the day.²²⁵ Why and how they did this can tell us a lot about their intellectual lives and subsequently, how they envisioned themselves. While reading may not have had truly revolutionary power for the women studied here, it did offer them new ways of coping, new languages for self-expression, and in some cases, new disappointments when life rarely lived up to novelistic expectations.²²⁶

What They Read

Over the past several years, I have been collecting and entering data from a dozen lengthy women's diaries about what they read, resulting in thousands of entries cataloguing titles, comments, dates, genres, and locations.²²⁷ What this data shows is that elite Southern women read widely in the nineteenth century—even before books were more affordable and more easily accessible. And while some of the data confirms previous conclusions about Southerners' penchant for the Waverly novels and all things Scott, just as often they read things long forgotten by the so-called "canon" of Western literature.

This is not to say that Southern women weren't reading things now deemed "the classics;" they were. Not surprisingly, Shakespeare, Sir Walter Scott, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton appeared repeatedly, as did Alfred Lord Tennyson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Charles Dickens. Five of the diarists read Bulwer-Lytton's play, *The Lady of Lyons*, while "The Lady of

²²⁵ See Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order and An Evening When Alone: Four Journals of Single Women in the South, 1827-1867* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993). See also Jonathan Daniel Wells, *Women Writers and Journalists in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), Catherine Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen: Women and Intellectual Life in the Early American South* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

²²⁶ I agree with Beth Barton Schweiger that equating literacy with liberation and freedom is oversimplified, but even if reading and literacy didn't automatically lead to independence, they did help shape women's intellectual and expressive lives. See Beth Barton Schweiger, "The Literate South," *The Journal of the Civil War Era*.

²²⁷ I have significantly more data than what is already in the spreadsheet. However, due to the constraints of time, I have not been able to enter more than these eleven diaries. The diaries included in the spreadsheet are: Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Sarah Lois Wadley, Fannie Page Hume, Kate Stone, Clara Solomon, Nannie Haskins Williams, Lizzie Alsop Wynne, Emma Holmes, Julia LeGrand, Mary Boykin Chesnut, and Priscilla Munnikhuyzen Bond.

the Lake” was their favorite of Scott’s. Nannie Haskins Williams wrote of *The Lady of Lyons*, “I have read it and think it is *splendid*.” Imagining herself as the romantic play’s male lead, she insisted, “If I had been Claude, I should have acted just as he did.”²²⁸ Sometimes a particular work made an impression that a number of diarists recorded. For instance, Edward Young’s “Night Thoughts” found its way into half the diaries, while Augusta Jane Evans wartime novel, *Beulah*, was read by four of the eleven. In terms of periodicals, all read at least a local paper, most at least one national or regional publication, and more than half read at least one form of *Harper’s* magazine (either the weekly or monthly). Histories were very popular with all the readers as well. For example, three of them read *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* by John Lothrop Motley, whom Emma Holmes deemed “an example for party spirit and inconsistency too common to the age.”²²⁹

Many women, however, spent much of their time reading titles long forgotten by contemporary readers and the majority of which are out of print. For instance, Joseph Holt Ingraham’s obscure work, *Edward Austin; or the Hunting Flask*, Gertrude Thomas liked “very much indeed.”²³⁰ Margaret Desmond’s “mysterious adventures” in Sarah Stickney Ellis’ *Agatha Beaufort; or Family Pride* captivated Sarah Lois Wadley—so much so that she and a friend became so involved in the storyline they were “not willing to stop” reading.”²³¹ In 1866, Lizzie Alsop felt that “That little book ‘Onward’ did me some good I think.” Jane Anne Winscom’s religious novel, *Onward, Or the Mountain Clamberers* inspired Alsop to “strive to be one of the

²²⁸ Nannie Haskins Williams, *The Diary of Nannie Haskins Williams*, pg 36.

²²⁹ Emma Edwards Holmes, *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes, 1861-1866*, 80.

²³⁰ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, pg 10, Vol I, 10-6-1848, Rubenstein Library, Duke.

²³¹ Sarah Lois Wadley, pg 249, Vol. V, 8-11-1864.

‘Mountain Clamberers,’ not turning back because of temptations & trials.”²³² While these titles may not have staying power with modern readers, they were a part of Southern reading culture in the nineteenth century and are important to our understanding of women’s engagement with it.

In addition, the narrative forms these women encountered—the genres that drew them in—often made the “self” a genre of its own. The literature they read was deeply reflective, told in first-person, epistolary, diary, or autobiographical form, and included lengthy analysis of characters’ or authors’ inner lives. Just as the diary had become a genre for nineteenth-century women, so too did the self. The self was something that could be “genrefied” according to the cultural fashions of the day. In other words, the Romantic, personal, secularized self the women encountered in the books and other literature they read reflected the selves they envisioned for their own lives and affected how they wrote about that self in their diaries.

How They Read

Nineteenth-century Americans read more than their predecessors in terms of scale and breadth. More Americans were literate than ever before, and literacy rates in the United States were some of the highest in the world.²³³ Wealthy and middle-class women in the South participated in the explosion of reading, and the books, periodicals, and religious texts they enjoyed became an important part of their intellectual and social lives. The women studied here made reading one of the centerpieces of their day. In other words, despite restrictions on their time (when those did occur), reading maintained an important place in their daily lives.

Even when it was a priority, sometimes it took women extensive periods of time to finish certain works. Reading these works, whether because they were complicated or simply long,

²³² Lizzie Alsop Wynne, Wynne Family Papers, VHS, pg 298.

²³³ Beth Barton Schweiger, “The Literate South,” 331-3.

became a habit for some women. Sarah Lois Wadley's father brought her a copy of Alexander von Humboldt's *Cosmos* in late 1862, and despite her best efforts, it took her a very long time to finish it. In October of 1863 she noted, "I am reading *Cosmos* again, am only in the third volume, for nearly half a year I had not opened the book until this last week."²³⁴ Finally, in March of 1864, she wrote, "I finished the last volume of *Cosmos* yesterday, have been more than a year reading it, it has given me a great deal of pleasure and information though there are several parts which I cannot now understand."²³⁵ A similar pattern emerged when she read the works of Alphonse de Lamartine. She read *Histoire des Girondins* for nearly two months in 1864, and took nearly a month to read *Des Confidences*, both of which she adored. Despite the time it took her to read the volumes, she confessed of *Histoire des Girondins*, "I could scarcely tear myself away from it yesterday, and am thinking of it all the time." Two weeks later, she noted that her interest in the book "seldom flags," and that she "read a great deal in it every day."²³⁶

Sometimes, the books they read sucked them into another world, often to the detriment of other obligations. For instance, Fannie Page Hume picked up Susan Warner's novel *Queechy* in April of 1860 and "became so completely absorbed as to forget work." She lamented, "It is too bad that I do not control my inclinations better! Am so completely lost when I get hold of a book I fancy." Hume recorded sentiments like these again and again, about *Rutledge*, *Henry St. John*, *Gentleman*, and about "my old favorite (Miss Pickering)." When a friend brought over her "favorite," she "yielded to the influence & was spell-bound the rest of the day." Again, she wondered if she would "ever be able to control myself in that line."²³⁷ Like Hume, Kate Stone

²³⁴ Sarah Lois Wadley, pg 99, Volume III.

²³⁵ Ibid, pg 176, Vol V.

²³⁶ Ibid, pg 252, Vol V, 8-13-1864; pg 270-1, Vol V, 9-24-1864.

²³⁷ Fannie Page Hume, 4-24-1860-Vol I, pg 34; Vol 2, pg 64.

sometimes found herself transported to other places and unwittingly kept there until the end of the story. In February 1862, she “commenced reading *Redgauntlet*,” a historical novel by Sir Walter Scott. After starting the book one evening, she “followed his fortunes through the gloomy morning. I saw him safely through his troubles and happily settled by 4 o’clock this afternoon.”²³⁸ *Household Mysteries*, Lissie Petit’s “Romance of Southern Life” absorbed Gertrude Thomas. She called it “one of those thrillingly interesting works, the plot of which is so well conceived and the interest sustained that one cannot lay it aside till it is finished.”²³⁹ Thomas had a weakness for travel narratives and novels. She had, as she put it, an “extreme admiration of courage” and a “natural love for adventure”—both of which made her love Gordon Cummings’ *Travels in Southern Africa*. Cumming’s book, she felt, made her “mind expand.”²⁴⁰

Recording Their Reading

Countless diarists wrote down the titles of the things they were reading. In some cases, their reading records appeared alongside brief entries describing the weather and recounting the visitors of the day or week. These diarists offered few thoughts on the things they read and perhaps only recorded their reading at all as a way to catalogue what they read and when. One example of this style is Floridian Mary Bailey. In her 1869 diary, her entries commented on weather, her sewing, and sometimes, what she was reading. For example, on January 30th, she wrote: “Still pleasant. My twenty second birthday. Sewed a little. Eat [sic] some of Sallie’s pudding. Read nearly all day. Finished reading Aurora Floyd late last night.”²⁴¹ Mary Bailey read many of the same things other diarists did—things like *The Mill on the Floss*, and *Nemesis*—but

²³⁸ Kate Stone, 86.

²³⁹ Gertrude Thomas, Pg 24, Vol VII.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, pg 146, Vol VI, P2, 6-12-1856.

²⁴¹ Mary Bailey Diary, UNC, pg 6.

she did not record any thoughts or reflections about her reading, indicating that it probably wasn't as essential to her sense of self. And while her brief notations don't indicate much about her personality or the ways she viewed herself, they do show us that reading was integral enough to be recorded in her diary.

Rather than recording books as they read, some simply kept a list for the year of "books read," as is the case of Virginian Maria Deriuex, who kept annotated and alphabetical lists of her for about seven years at the turn of the nineteenth century. In the margins of her commonplace book, she developed her own notation system of stars, triangles, dots, and other symbols, presumably for later reference. For instance, *Mysteries of Udolpho*, Ann Radcliffe's popular 1794 Gothic romance, has a diamond with a dot next to it, while she noted Jeremy Belknap's *The Foresters* (published in 1792 and considered by some to be the first American novel) with an asterisk.²⁴² In the mid-nineteenth century, Susan Massie also kept lists of the books she owned. Susan wrote twenty-two pages of book titles, how many volumes each book was, and then provided a total on the first sheet; her family owned 550 books ranging from Sir Walter Scott's *Kenilworth* to *Nicholson's Encyclopedia*, to Thomas Malthus' "On Population."²⁴³ Over time, she added a number of paper slivers containing more titles, demonstrating two things: first, her books were very important to her, even as they became less expensive; second, continuing to expand her family's library was important to her. The first volume of Gertrude Clanton Thomas' journal, which spans four decades, also included a list of books she read between 1848 and 1949. Though she also wrote about the books and periodicals she read in the pages of the journal, Thomas clearly wished to keep track of her reading in catalogue form. Her list offered titles and

²⁴² Maria Margaret Martini DeRiuex Commonplace Book, Virginia Historical Society, Mss5:5D4454:1, pg 12, 14.

²⁴³ Susan E. Smith Book Lists, Massie Papers, Section 26, "Miscellaneous," Virginia Historical Society, Mss1:M3855c2596-2603.

sometimes authors, but she did not put them in alphabetical order. Instead, they appeared in the order in which she read them, meaning that she likely wrote the list as she reread her diary.²⁴⁴

Commonplace books were also very popular with men and women in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries, and those who kept a commonplace book frequently also wrote diaries too. Commonplace books were, by nature, highly intertextual documents, where their authors experimented with writing their favorite lines, recorded memorable days, pressed flowers, postcards, hair, ribbons and other odds and ends, and even wrote original work. For example, Amanda Jane Cooley—whose often-depressing diary speaks to her loneliness and sadness with frequency, used her commonplace book to record original poetry that reflected these feelings of despondency. The book’s first two pages include poems entitled “On Forsaken Love” and “My Native Home”—poems whose titles give away the content.²⁴⁵ On the other hand, Virginian Jane Tayloe, who kept a commonplace book in the 1830s, created an index in her commonplace book for all the original poetry she recorded there.²⁴⁶

Some diarists, though, both kept records of what they read and offered extended thoughts on the reading material. The paragraphs they dedicated to their reading offer valuable glimpses of how they thought about the self and how it relates to others. Their entries prove useful to us both in terms of understanding Southern women’s intellectual culture and in terms of capturing how some of these women found languages to speak of their selfhood in their reading.

²⁴⁴ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, *Diary*, Duke, Box 2, Vol. I, pg 50-1.

²⁴⁵ Amanda Jane Cooley, *Commonplace Book*, Virginia Historical Society, Mss5:5R5412:1, pg 1.

²⁴⁶ Jane Tayloe Lomax Worthington, *Commonplace Book*, Lomax Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Mss1L8378a44, Vol. I.

Feeding the Self

Consuming Reading Material and Thirsting for Knowledge

The urgency some diarists felt about finishing books and other reading made their reading habits seem like a basic need. Using words and especially verbs associated with eating and drinking, these women linked books and other written material with sustenance, demonstrating the important, unique role that reading played in their lives. For instance, Mary Chesnut wrote that she “took Silas [*Silas Marner* by George Eliot] as a draught—did not stop until I had swallowed the last word.”²⁴⁷ Fannie Page Hume, on the other hand, tended to use words associated with eating to describe her voracious reading. When her friend Miss Davis brought her some “new books to look at,” she “eagerly devoured a sweet little work of Miss McKeever’s ‘The Flounced Robe...’” Several weeks later, she “devoured Beulah” until “nearly one o’clock.”²⁴⁸ Like Hume, Emma Holmes used eating verbs to describe her reading. In August of 1862, she wrote, “I have just ‘skimmed over’ or, as Lord Bacon says, ‘tasted,’ *Stansbury’s Survey of the Great Salt Lake*, including a sketch of the Mormons, their religion and government.”²⁴⁹ In this instance, Holmes relied both of the words of one her favorite authors and on the eating verb “tasted” to convey her experience in a meaningful way. When reading Frederick Saunders’ “Salad for the Solitary,” nineteen-year-old Lucy Breckinridge referred to the book as one might a pie, writing, “Tonight I picked up ‘Salad for the Solitary’ and thinking it appropriate to my feelings and position, took quite a large ‘slice’ of it.”²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ Mary Chesnut, pg 527.

²⁴⁸ Fannie Page Hume, Vol I, pg 4, 17.

²⁴⁹ Emma Holmes, pg 190.

²⁵⁰ Lucy Breckinridge, *Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill: The Journal of a Virginia Girl, 1862-1864*, Ed. Mary D. Robertson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 90.

Most frequently, when diarists used eating verbs to discuss the books they read, they described the texts as literary or intellectual treats or feasts. For example, Gertrude Thomas was excited to read Mary Cowden Clarke's *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*, writing that she "anticipate[d] a rich intellectual treat in reading this work."²⁵¹ Emma Holmes felt the same way about *Cinq Mars*, of which she wrote: "It is an intellectual treat and, when I finished it, the tears were in my eyes, and I felt as if I had lost personal friends in Cinq Mars and the 'sublime' de Thou."²⁵² In July of 1863, Lucy Breckinridge dealt with bad weather by spending her "time quietly reading Ossian and [Giovanni Russini's] *Lavinia*." Ossian's poems, in particular, were "so beautiful" that she could not "read a great deal at a time, but will make the treat last me a week or more."²⁵³ Clara Solomon, who lived in occupied New Orleans, wrote that she had "feasted on some parts of the 'Sunny South' a work which in my opinion becomes doubly attractive at every perusal. I can never tire of it." She confessed, "I do love dear 'Kate Conyngham,'" the book's author, and wondered, "Will our paths ever cross?"²⁵⁴

Like Solomon, Holmes often recorded her "literary feasts" with ardor. June 1862 found Holmes a refugee teaching far from her Charleston home. She had little to celebrate at the time, but "luxuriating in Lockhart's *Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott*" provided some solace. Though Holmes had read "almost all" of Scott's poetry and novels, reading John G. Lockhart's biographical work inspired "a new interest" for her. All in all, she found it "altogether the richest intellectual feast I have enjoyed for a long time."²⁵⁵ In May of 1864, as many around her

²⁵¹ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, *Diary, Duke*, Vol. VI, Part 1, pg 17.

²⁵² Emma Holmes, 200.

²⁵³ Lucy Breckinridge, pg 132.

²⁵⁴ Clara Solomon, 196.

²⁵⁵ Emma Holmes, 177.

experienced physical hunger due to conditions of war, Holmes found herself relishing the intellectual indulgences she found. She wrote, “I have to thank dear Miss Agnes [Bates], for another literary feast, indebted as I have been to her for so many already.” She had heard much about Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*, and once her friend, Agnes, recommended it without hesitation, she “procured it as soon as I could.” Once she began the novel, “I never rested till I had ‘devoured’ all,” although she lamented the fact that she couldn’t read it in French because of the “awkward, inelegant, unidiomatic expressions with which it abounds” due to translation.²⁵⁶ A year and half later, Holmes relayed the latest publication news of some of her favorite authors. She noted that “Miss [Dinah Maria] Mulock, our favorite,...has published *Christian’s Mistake and Mendelssohn*” while “Jean Ingleton...created a decided sensation by a new volume of poems.” Holmes wondered when (and if) she would be able to “enjoy any of these intellectual feasts.”²⁵⁷

In the eighteenth century, associating reading with consumption—and the word “devouring” in particular—was considered “vulgar” because it denoted superficial reading. More specifically, it was associated with novel reading and not coincidentally, women’s reading, which was considered by male intelligentsia to be less pensive and significant than that of men. Nineteenth-century women were aware of such stereotyping of female readers. For example, in 1863, Catherine Edmondston noted, “I feel the want of my books greatly.” Though her time for reading had diminished by that point, she felt her books had “stood silent monitors & a glance even at their covers refreshed me.” Catherine missed her books because she used them as references too. She worried, “My knowledge must be very superficial when have need to turn so

²⁵⁶ Emma Holmes, 348-9.

²⁵⁷ Emma Holmes 476.

often to the fount...I fear I am a woman of too many for the proper digestion & reflection.”²⁵⁸

Still, according to literary critic Louise Adams, connecting reading habits with metaphors of consumption is as old as the Bible (and maybe even older).²⁵⁹ Many of the women studied here used phrases like these during the Civil War, when they were enduring some of the most serious privations they would ever experience given their status and backgrounds. Turning to their reading as substitute sustenance indicates just how significant their reading habits would prove to be.

Finding Selves in Characters

In February of 1861, Mary Boykin Chesnut wrote, “How much I owe of the pleasure of my life to these much reviled writers of fiction.”²⁶⁰ Chesnut’s love of fiction (and pretty much all other forms of writing) was fairly common among women of her class and station. In fact, the written word absorbed many nineteenth-century Americans (and Westerners, more generally) in a variety of ways. Novels captivated them like we are captivated by television, they quoted poetry to describe their feelings and experiences, and used their religious reading as a yardstick for their own salvation. No matter the genre, reading material in the nineteenth century was often the crux of references, comparisons and analogies—especially in a culture that emphasized memorization and rhetoric in public and private schools. Ultimately, reading material sometimes provided the language for women to express themselves.

²⁵⁸ Catherine Edmondston, 343.

²⁵⁹ See Louise Adams, “Is ‘devouring’ books a sign of superficiality in a reader?,” *Aeon*, June 21, 2016, <https://aeon.co/ideas/is-devouring-books-a-sign-of-superficiality-in-a-reader>. For a discussion of how “how-brow” critics using phrases like “devoured a book” in a derogatory manner toward readers of popular fiction (and romance novels in particular), see Janice Radway, “‘Reading is Not Eating:’ Mass-Produced Literature and the Theoretical, Methodological, and Political Consequences of a Metaphor,” *Book Research Quarterly*, Volume 2, Issue 3 (September 1986), 7-29.

²⁶⁰ Mary Chesnut, pg 10.

Sometimes, characters in novels and poems became the frame of reference, as diary-keepers used specific characters to describe other people in their lives or experiences they were having. Mary Chesnut, for example, filled her diary with references to characters who she felt represented the people she knew (or simply knew of). She recorded an occasion when Varina Davis, wife of Confederate president Jefferson Davis, said she “was like Cuddie Headrigg in Scott’s novel—I ‘remembered her always at brose time.’”²⁶¹ When describing an acquaintance’s commentary on Southern women, she wrote, “she does not like their languor and easygoing ways, low voices, laziness, &c&c, would have them like the morning that Hamlet saw the ghost: ‘with an eager and a nipping air.’” She even wrote of her father-in-law as “my aged P,” referencing John Wemmick of *Great Expectations*, who calls his father “P” as a term of endearment.²⁶² On one occasion, she used literary characters from Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby* and a scene from Shakespeare’s *King Lear* to describe her reaction to other reading material. After trying to read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, she wrote, “It is bad as Squeers beating Smike in the hack. Flesh and blood revolts. You must skip that—it is too bad—or the pulling out of eyeballs in *Lear*.”²⁶³ Again and again, Chesnut used characters to describe people around her—especially characters created by Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens. Chesnut, who harbored dreams of literary fame, wanted to make her knowledge of literature obvious throughout the pages of her diary.

Like Mary Chesnut, Louisiana diarist Sarah Morgan wrote long, descriptive entries that weren’t short on opinions and personality. Also like Chesnut, Sarah was well-read and quoted authors to describe her thoughts on various subjects. Wartime Baton Rouge made Sarah turn to

²⁶¹ Mary Chesnut, pg 76.

²⁶² Ibid, 164, 190.

²⁶³ Ibid, 381.

her diary and her favorite authors to help pass the time or distract her from constant fears of occupation, cannon fire, and other concerns. She wondered in May of 1862, “Why did not Mark Taply [a character in Charles Dickens’ *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*] leave me a song calculated to keep the spirits up, under depressing circumstances?”²⁶⁴ In June of that year, she began a new volume of her diary, which was always an occasion for her to reflect on past and future. This time, she wrote, “just before I reach the lowest ebb, I seize my pen, dash off half a dozen lines, sing ‘Better days are coming’ and Presto! Richard is himself again! O what a resource that and my books have been to me!”²⁶⁵ The reference to Richard here is, of course, to Shakespeare’s *Richard III* and the king’s shifts in and out of perceived madness and was a common (mis)appropriation in the nineteenth century.²⁶⁶

Morgan also used one of Byron’s characters to describe her sister, Miriam, after an ill-fated attempt at courtship from Will Carter. The day after Carter confessed his feelings for Miriam, Sarah woke her up “with a ‘Good morning Zuleika.’ Why Zuleika, she asked. ‘What have you forgotten the bride of Abydos, that bride that was never married?’”²⁶⁷ In Lord Byron’s “The Bride of Abydos,” Zuleika’s father arranges a marriage for her with a man she has never met or even seen despite the fact that she loves another. When her father kills her cousin (whom she is in love with), she dies of grief. For the remainder of the entry, Sarah writes of Miriam as

²⁶⁴ Sarah Morgan, *The Civil War Diary of Sarah Morgan*, Ed. Charles East, 79.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 121.

²⁶⁶ The line was actually a part of Colley Cibber’s adaptation from 1699, although nineteenth-century Americans—including Abraham Lincoln—used this phrase very commonly. See Douglas L. Wilson, “His Hour Upon the Stage,” *The American Scholar Online*, November 30, 2011, <https://theamericanscholar.org/his-hour-upon-the-stage/#>, accessed October 9, 2017.

²⁶⁷ Sarah Morgan, *The Civil War Diary of Sarah Morgan*, Ed. Charles East, 359.

“my Bride of Abydos” and “my Peri with the singed wings”—a character from Thomas Moore’s *Lalla Rookh*.²⁶⁸

Characters familiar to nineteenth-century readers captured the feelings of some women in ways that they felt expressed best by referencing them. Priscilla Bond drew a number of comparisons between the literary characters she encountered as she read and those around her—including herself. In late 1863, she confessed, “I am like the unfortunate Mrs. Gummidge. I am a ‘poor lone lorn creetur’ tonight.”²⁶⁹ Mrs. Gummidge, the woe-was-me widow in *David Copperfield*, captured Bond’s feelings of fear, loneliness, and desperation while living in south Louisiana during the Civil War—watching troops from both sides come and go with some regularity. While she didn’t care for *Dombey and Son* as much, Priscilla “could not help seeing some resemblance to some of my relations in some of the characters—especially Mr. Dombey.”²⁷⁰ Like Bond, Emma Holmes expressed her loneliness with a literary reference. She lamented about being a refugee in Camden, South Carolina, writing, “Here...I feel as if entirely secluded, shut out from the world, the trees so close around the house form, as it were, a cage barring me in. Mrs. [Elizabeth’ Barrett [Browning]’s Sea Man’s yearning for his boundless ocean home finds a strong echo in my heart.”²⁷¹

In using literary characters to describe the people and happenings around them, diarists used their version of pop culture references much like we use television and movie characters to capture our feelings and experiences. Literary references—especially to things commonly taught

²⁶⁸ Ibid, pg 359-60. According to Charles East, the diary’s editor, a “Peri” is a “tiny fairylike creature” that appeared in Thomas Moore’s *Lalla Rookh*.

²⁶⁹ Priscilla Munnikhuysen Bond, *A Maryland Bride in the Deep South: The Civil War Diary of Priscilla Bond*, Ed. Kimberly Harrison (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), pg 260.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 290.

²⁷¹ Emma Holmes, pg 230. Brackets appear in edited version.

in schools or by governesses—gave women a specific language to talk about their experiences beyond the words immediately available to them. These analogies show that reading material animated how women understood the world.

Sometimes rather than seeing familiar faces in the literary lives they read, readers instead saw their dreams and ambitions brought to life through words. Like the movie stars of today, women found their “Beau Ideal” in the things they read. Miriam Coles Harris’ *Rutledge* provided the man of Emma Holmes’ dreams. In 1862, she reread the novel and fell back in love with its title character, Arthur Rutledge, writing, “Rutledge is my ideal of the man I would marry—intellectual, kind-hearted & so tender and loving to the way-ward impulsive heroine.” In him, “there is that indefinable ‘something’ which makes you feel you have met a master spirit, such a one, as even I should love to obey...one, too, who should open ‘the temple of his inner heart’ to me alone, that the cold outer world should never know the depths of tenderness hid therein.” In her paragraph devoted to “Arthur,” she even uses poetry to describe her reaction to scenes with him.²⁷² Mr. Rutledge also animated the girlish dreams of Clara Solomon and shaped the way she viewed potential suitors. She wrote of her friend’s attending physician: “Oh! I am in love with her Doctor. He is a perfect Mr. Rutledge, but unfortunately married and his wife is the loveliest creature upon whom my eyes ever rested.”²⁷³

While a number of diarists swooned for Arthur Rutledge, Gertrude Clanton preferred two “Guys.” She argued, “The two most interesting characters I know in modern fiction are Guy of Redcliffe and Guy Livingstone, two men, the antipodes of each other and each equally charming.”²⁷⁴ Guy Morville, the Byronic hero of Charlotte Yonge’s wildly popular *The Heir of*

²⁷² Holmes, 200-1. Holmes references a Dinah Mulock poem entitled “Plighted.”

²⁷³ Clara Solomon, 358.

²⁷⁴ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, pg 66, Vol. X, P1.

Redclyffe, is a devoted Christian who continually sacrifices himself after being misused by family members again and again and, of course, dies a tragic death. George Alfred Lawrence's *Guy Livingstone* was a very different sort of hero—one who relied on strength and cunning to get his way. Unfortunately, he still came to a tragic end after a fall from his horse.

Diarists even saw characters as models for their own lives—for better or worse. When dealing with financial troubles that caused serious embarrassment for her, Gertrude Clanton Thomas felt her experience compared with Hester Prynne, writing, “I remind myself of the woman in that powerful book of Hawthornes who wore upon her breast the Scarlet Letter.” Interestingly, Clanton also noted, “yet she was no more of a heroine in her concealment than many a Negro woman who has concealed for the same cause the name of their child's father...” Thomas' views on slavery were extremely complex, but comparing herself to a well-known literary figure seemed to offer her some solace from her public shame—even if her analogy was overdrawn.²⁷⁵ Clara Solomon's reaction to *Ernest Linwood* and its character Gabriella—even when reading it for “about the hundredth time”—was a mixture of awe and envy. The novel inspired a “shower of tears” and Clara proclaimed it “the most beautiful book that I have ever read. It is, in fact, a book of poetry.” She wrote that while she “sympathize[d] with the lovely Gabriella,” she also felt “envy [toward] the angelic heroine.”²⁷⁶

Finding Friends in Authors

In addition to using their reading as reference points in their journals, nineteenth-century Southern female readers sometimes imagined friendships with certain authors in the pages of their diaries. When these women imagined intellectual discourse with their favorite authors, they

²⁷⁵ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, pg 20, Vol XI, 12-5-1870.

²⁷⁶ Clara Solomon, pg 32-33.

inserted themselves into webs of ideas well beyond the places they lived. In so doing, they also created intellectual space for themselves that gave them a chance to explore their own efforts at writing. Discussing these authors as if they were imagined friends and confidantes alleviated these women's intellectual isolation and provided a deep connection with written work that resembled their own understanding of the world. In essence, their books became their "true" friends because their views often seemed different or unacceptable to their peers.

For example, Julia LeGrand found solace in federally-occupied New Orleans by imagining connections with her favorite authors. LeGrand, who had difficulty expressing her true opinions to peers, used reading material to comfort her in a time of need. In particular, LeGrand turned to Andrew Jackson Davis' *Great Harmonia*—the very same text at the center of her friendship with Mrs. Waugh (discussed in Chapter 2). Despite her devotion to Davis and his writing, LeGrand admitted, "I feel angry with Davis...for approving of this war...What good can grow out of such strife?" In particular, LeGrand expressed frustration that he "approv[ed] of the War, not if it is conducted restore Union, but for slavery."²⁷⁷ By writing about her disappointment in Davis' personal stance on the war, LeGrand confronted him on the issue of slavery as if he were a close friend.

LeGrand fantasized about knowing other authors, poets, and philosophers, too. On one occasion, she wrote,

I wish I could have known a certain poet who lived here before the war—Capt.
Harry Flash. I wish I knew Tennyson, Hawthorne, George Eliot (Miss Evans) and

²⁷⁷ Julis LeGrand Waitz, *The Journal of Julia LeGrand*, 131.

I wish I could journey back far enough on the pathway of time to meet the large,
untrammelled gaze of Edmund Burke.²⁷⁸

Interestingly, almost all of these thinkers critiqued some aspect of society that LeGrand felt unsure about. Harry Flash was a New Orleans poet who wrote several dirges for fallen Confederate soldiers, including Stonewall Jackson and Leonidas Polk. Flash's dirges portrayed Confederate soldiers as valiant martyrs and connected the "Cause" with God's will. Julia LeGrand, surrounded by her enemies and isolated from the Confederate government, admired these poems for providing her with an emotional connection to her country.²⁷⁹ Nathaniel Hawthorne often wrote about societal judgments, false appearances, and religious dogma, most famously in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of Seven Gables*.²⁸⁰ George Eliot, or Mary Ann Evans, unleashed psychological critiques of British society in her novels, critiquing aristocratic tendencies, materialism, and appearances and often featuring lower-class men and women as central characters. It is hard to know what Julia LeGrand read in the works of Edmund Burke. He was perhaps best known in the United States for his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in which he argued that the Revolution failed to achieve true liberty and was bloody, unnecessary, and driven by atheism. Burke's service in the House of Commons and much of his published works expounded classical liberalism and his peers considered him a "conservative" force in Parliament. LeGrand often reflected on the "tyranny" of the United States government in her

²⁷⁸ Julia LeGrand Waitz, *The Journal of Julia LeGrand*, 162.

²⁷⁹ My information on Harry Flash comes from the diary's editors' footnotes, Kate Mason Rowland and Mrs. Morris L. Croxall, "Notes," Julia LeGrand Waitz, *The Journal of Julia LeGrand*, 315.

²⁸⁰ Henry James, *Hawthorne* (London: Cornell University Press, 1997).

diary, but also questioned Jefferson Davis's leadership, indicating her wariness of a powerful government.²⁸¹

Charlestonian Emma Holmes also described some of her favorite authors as one might an acquaintance or friend. For instance, in July of 1861, she wrote, "Mrs. Elizabeth Barrett Browning died lately at Florence. I have always admired her and her writings so much that I regret her death very much." A prolific writer, Browning was wildly popular with British and American readers—especially her epic poem *Aurora Leigh* (a work that nearly all of the diaries I've read have mentioned, at least in passing).

Unlike Holmes, Nannie Haskins didn't pour praise on "Mrs. Barrett Browning's celebrated epic poem 'Aurora Leigh.'" ²⁸² She confessed, "I like it and yet I should not." And while she expressed hesitation about liking the poem, she did speak of the author in a way that bespoke friendship or intimate knowledge. She admired the poem's "newness of style," but found that it used "many commonplace and vulgar words, which are not allowable in poetry." Still, Williams wrote, "She was determined to make me like it whether or not they did." Writing of Barrett Browning as if she were an acquaintance seeking favor for her parlor poetry, Haskins creates an intellectual connection with one of the most notable female poets of her time.

Emma felt the same about Le Comte Alfred de Vigny, the author of *Cinq Mars*, a book which she called "one of the most graphic-historical novels I have ever read by any author." The novel told the story of Henri Coiffier de Ruzé, the Marquis of Cinq-Mars, who conspired against Cardinal Richelieu during the reign of King Louis XIII of France. To Holmes, *Cinq Mars* was an

²⁸¹ Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography of Edmund Burke* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

²⁸² *Aurora Leigh* was a nine-book epic poem written by Browning in 1856. Written in blank verse, the poem tells the story of a young woman in first-person narration. In addition to first-person narration, the poem uses diary form to tell the story (Aurora tells her story through diary entries).

“intellectual treat and, when I finished it, the tears were in my eyes, and I felt as if I had lost personal friends.” Two years later, she noted in her journal that Comte de Vigny had died, adding, “His private life was as pure, poetical & beautiful as his literary & social were distinguished.”²⁸³

After reading Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *A Strange Story*, Holmes wrote at length about its impact on her because of its “Genius.” Of Bulwer-Lytton, she noted, “I know nothing of Bulwer but his name and the fact that many of his earlier works are very reprehensible.” Despite her distain for his earlier works, she felt that *A Strange Story* proved his Christian faith, and wrote, “...What would I not give for some glimpses of his private life—not merely the outward shaping of it, but the inner Man—the springs of action & thought, the incidental circumstances which give a glue to many of his writings.”²⁸⁴

Like Bulwer-Lytton, Hugh S. Legare’s writing inspired a lengthy paean in Holmes’ journal. In March of 1865 she recorded, “I have been reading...Legare’s Life and writings, or rather ‘*living* in his society’ and drinking in deep draughts of ‘nectar.’ Before I only admired & honored him as one of our great men, one of those ‘intellectual heroes’ who will forever stand as one of the grand monuments of our past...” Holmes did more than just admire him—she visited his grave in Charleston’s “beautiful ‘City of the Dead’” and read letters he wrote to her “poor Uncle Edward [Holmes]”—which made her “love him for ‘the love he bore’” her relative.²⁸⁵

Not all of Emma’s imagined relationships inspired positive remarks. Augusta Jane Evans’ *Macaria* she liked “very much,” but of Evans, Holmes wrote: “she has certainly tried to display all her learning in a small space & has only shown herself thoroughly pedantic.” She continued

²⁸³ Emma Holmes 71, 200-1, 334.

²⁸⁴ Emma Holmes, 234-5.

²⁸⁵ Emma Holmes, 420-1.

to criticize Evans for the better part of a paragraph, questioning her understanding (or lack thereof) of German mysticism, which played a role in *Beulah*. Of mysticism and Transcendentalism (an important part of *Macaria*, according to Holmes), Evans “did not understand what she meant” and her effort to depict the philosophies was an “absurd failure.”²⁸⁶ Writing about Evans as if she were an annoying, know-it-all acquaintance brought Holmes closer to her reading in a more personal way—even if it was negative (as in this case).

Like Julia LeGrand, Sarah Morgan recognized that she could be a difficult friend. She conceded, “It takes long acquaintance for me to gain new friends; those who become so, do it from their own kindness, not because the attraction lies in me.”²⁸⁷ In July of 1862, she wrote, “I don’t pretend to say I am very pleasant or agreeable as a companion just now.” Again and again, she recorded her sister, Miriam’s, disappointment in her social performances, but Sarah just couldn’t bring herself to play the role expected of her. Instead, she turned to her books and her book (or diary) to express herself more freely.

Sarah didn’t mince words when it came to her opinions on authors and their writing. In fact, her commentary on some authors seemed in line with the critiques she offered of her worst enemies. That same July, she had “been reading that old disgester, Boswell.” Morgan “admire[d] him for his patience and minuteness in compiling such trivial details,” but she felt “no patience with the toady!” She found him a “vain, conceited prig, a fool of a jack-a-nape, an insufferable sycophant, a—whatever mean thing you please.” She felt much the same way about Johnson, who she called “a surly old bear; in short, an old brute of a tyrant.” Sarah was writing of James Boswell’s *Life of Samuel Johnson*, a semi-biographical account of Johnson’s life. Boswell’s

²⁸⁶ Emma Holmes 369-70.

²⁸⁷ Sarah Morgan, 83.

popular book sparked numerous critical conversations about writing biography, and inspired Sarah's strong opinions about both writers. After her tirade against the men, she compared their "narrow-minded and bigoted" writing with the behavior of "ordinary women here [in occupied Baton Rouge.]"²⁸⁸

At times, however, she did offer more positive thoughts on authors and their work. In April of 1863, she "longed for a Dickens" to paint a picture of some colorful companions—"to put them all together and make one amusing picture out of the seven."²⁸⁹ On an earlier occasion, she addressed Lord Byron directly in trying to understand her issues with making friends. She confessed, "...do you still suffer that very severe pang of feeling that you are very hateful and extremely disagreeable to people? ... 'I have not loved the world, not the world me.' Byron, I can with good reason adopt your words."²⁹⁰

Her author friends even found her in her dreams on occasion. In September of 1862, she devoted pages to her haunting dreams. Sarah "wanted to have a splendid dream" of welcoming her brothers home from their service as soldiers "but failed." Though that particular dream didn't come to her, she did have "royal, purple dreams that De Quincy could not purchase with his opium; dreams that I would not forgo for all the inducements that could be offered." This, of course, references De Quincy's autobiography, *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. She professed that her dreams allowed her to "pay a visit to heaven or fairy land," and there, she had "talked with people I have never beheld." In these dreams, she encountered some of her favorite authors, including the Apostle Paul, Charlotte Bronte, and Shakespeare. Of the latter two, she wrote:

²⁸⁸ Sarah Morgan, 162-3.

²⁸⁹ Sarah Morgan, 467.

²⁹⁰ Sarah Morgan, 262.

Charlotte Bronte has spent a week with me—in my dreams—and together we have talked of her sad life. Shakespeare and I have discussed his works, seated tête-a-tête over a small table. He pointed out the character of each of his heroines, explain what I could not understand when awake; and closed the lecture with ‘*You* have the tenderest heart I have ever read, or sung of’ which compliment, considering it as original with him, rather than myself, waked me up with surprise.²⁹¹

Morgan admired and read both authors and imagining herself in conversation with them as friends could help ease her loneliness and sense of not fitting in as she should. She quoted Shakespeare, especially, with some frequency and while this is not surprising for the time period, it is unusual that she recorded having a dream in which he complimented her. Despite “feeling acutely the want of sympathy, or approbation” from her peers, Morgan could imagine herself being accepted by her favorite authors.

Mary Chesnut was well-connected with the literati of Charleston, and even when she didn’t personally know particular authors, she wrote about them as if they were acquaintances. Chesnut always had an opinion to share, and George Eliot’s scandalous lifestyle inspired snarky comments in her journal on several occasions. When reading *Silas Marner*, Chesnut argued that Eliot was “not quite so orthodoxly pious” as she seemed in her writing. Mary expressed shock and disgust when Lucius Lamar told her of Eliot’s infamous living arrangements with George Henry Lewes—a married man. Chesnut remarked, “This writer who so well imagines and depicts female purity and piety...lives with Lewes...A fallen woman living in a contented—nay happy—state of immorality. Such a terrible shock to our preconceived ideas of her.”²⁹²

Several months later, Mary read *Romola* again. Still disturbed by Lucius Lamar’s revelation about Ms. Eliot’s lifestyle, she decided to read the novel again, to “take time, consider my ways, and not presume to judge George Eliot rashly.” Unfortunately, she couldn’t allay her

²⁹¹ Sarah Morgan, 254.

²⁹² Mary Chesnut, 527, 543-4.

misgivings for long, and several days later, Chesnut she wrote, “I do not believe Lamar. With *Adam Bede* fresh in my mind, I cannot believe the woman who wrote it ‘is a fallen woman’—‘living in a happy state of high intellectual intercourse and happy, contented immorality.’ She could not be happy. Dinah and the retribution that overtook Hetty speak out that she knows good from evil.”²⁹³ Dinah and Hetty are both characters in *Adam Bede*, with Dinah being a model of female piety and Hetty a prime example of a fallen woman herself.

Reading and rereading Eliot’s novels and questioning whether or not such an author was capable of such scandal in real life became a somewhat regular occurrence for Chesnut. She adored Eliot’s writing, and couldn’t bring herself to stop reading her novels. And yet, she never seemed quite comfortable with the idea that she could love such a “sinful” author so much. In October of 1864, seven months after she originally heard the news, Chesnut again addressed the subject. She was reading *Romola* once more and wondering, “Can this woman be a fallen woman—a creature Shakespeare would call a -----, Carlyle, an unmentionable woman?” She lamented, “Dress it up as you will, smother the Seventh Commandment with Genesis—here it stands. An unchaste woman must be immodest. We don’t go into morals at all. You could as well imagine a man who is a thief, liar, or coward to be good and decent the while.” In the end, she decided to willfully ignore the information about Eliot’s personal life as one might push away bad news about a friend or lover. She claimed, “It is all Lamar’s wrong hearing of English scandal. She writes such beautiful things of love and duty, faith, charity, and purity.”²⁹⁴ Because Chesnut so admired her writing, she felt Eliot could not possibly be party to such a “wicked” lifestyle. Rather than accepting Eliot’s personal choices as separate from her writing, Chesnut

²⁹³ Ibid, pg 577, 581.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 561-2.

kept the two intertwined, leading her to feel a sense of intimacy with the author despite not actually knowing her.

Gertrude Clanton Thomas adored to read and frequently fancied herself writing novels and poetry that would win her acclaim and intellectual companionship. On several occasions, she considered the lives of her favorite authors—women in particular—and compared and contrasted their ambitions and fates with her own. In March of 1865, “the height of [her] ambition” was to have “quiet” and “time to read,” and though in the midst of war and serious financial difficulties, Thomas somehow successfully found time to read. She wrote, “I have just been reading that sad record of an intellectual woman’s life Mrs. Gaskell’s biography of Charlotte Bronte,” and though she loved her writing, Thomas admitted, “I do not think that to have been the author of *Jane Eyre* would I have been willing to have suffered the torments of ill health, extreme nervous excitability and sensitive shrinking from mankind which she endured.”

After writing about Gaskell’s book as well as Anna Cora Mowatt’s *Autobiography of an Actress*, Thomas then turned to *Aurora Leigh*. Like Emma Holmes, she felt it was the “most interesting of books” and reflected, “What a noble woman Mrs. Browning must be. I don’t think among all the peices[sic] of poetry I have ever read I know of any thing more touchingly sad and characteristic of womans yearning, tender nature than a short peice called (I believe) ‘Writers after the battle of Gaeta.’”²⁹⁵ The poem she refers to, “Mother and Poet” by Browning, describes a mother’s pain after losing her two sons in war in Italy, and the speaker laments, “*I made them indeed / Speak plain the word country. I taught them, no doubt, / That a country’s a thing men should die for at need.*”²⁹⁶ Like the poet/mother/speaker in the poem, Thomas found many of the

²⁹⁵ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, Box 3, Folder 3 (Sept 1864-Oct 1866), pg 51.

²⁹⁶ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “Mother and Poet,” from *Last Poems*, accessed through <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43728/mother-and-poet>, 10-20-2017.

people around her suffering from grief after losing their children to war. After quoting “Mother and Poet,” she reflected, “Country glory and patriotism are great things but to the bereaved hearts of Mrs. Stovall and Mrs. Clayton [acquaintances] each moaning for the death of their first born what bitter mockery there must be in the words.”²⁹⁷

Cosmos, a five-volume treatise on science, nature, and the universe, inspired several diarists to consider the life of its author, Alexander Von Humboldt. Gertrude Thomas thought of Von Humboldt when she stole a few minutes for writing and reading while her children slept in October of 1865. She recalled, “Alexander Von Humboldt slept only four hours and did his best writing at midnight—I always am most disposed to write at night.” She added, obviously somewhat self-conscious, “I have unconsciously compared myself with the great author of *Kosmos* by expressing a similarity of taste...I have just finished reading the life and travel of Von Humboldt which I find charmingly interesting and instructive.”²⁹⁸ Sarah Lois Wadley had received her copy of *Cosmos* as a gift from her father, and she frequently recorded reading the volumes and her admiration for its contents. In March of 1864, Sarah finally finished the book, writing, “it has given me a great deal of pleasure and information though there are several parts which I cannot now understand....it has made me feel a sincere respect, admiration, and if I might so far presume, a love for its authour.” She continued, “the very name of Humboldt seems grand to me.”²⁹⁹ Both of these diarists felt sincere, deep admiration for Von Humboldt, but both of them also expressed intimate feelings, such as love or self-comparison, for him as well.

Virginian Lucy Breckinridge also viewed some of her favorite authors as her friends. Breckinridge was an avid reader who even named her beloved horse “Little Dorrit” after the

²⁹⁷ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, Box 3, Folder 3 (Sept 1864-Oct 1866), pg 51.

²⁹⁸ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, Box 3, Folder 3, pg 92.

²⁹⁹ Sarah Lois Wadley, Vol V, pg 176, UNC.

Dickens' novel of the same name. In January of 1863, she felt lonely, and described missing some friends and family. In fact, she confessed, "But for my companions, the Japonica, Luna and violets, and my beloved friends, Addison, Steele, etc., I think I should die of ennui."

Breckinridge's plants and the editors of her favorite magazine kept her company: "the former interesting companions are living in the window, *The Spectator* is constantly before my eyes."³⁰⁰

Joseph Addison and Richard Steele edited *The Spectator*, an eighteenth-century periodical with the express goal of moving intellectual conversation into the public sphere.³⁰¹ In this case, Addison and Steele served as pseudo-friends for Breckinridge, and also encouraged her to consider her intellectual ideas in discussions with peers as well as in her diary.

Breckinridge also offered her interpretation of Thackeray's female characters as one might gossip about a neighbor or friend. After reading "Jeamse's Diary," *Legend of the Rhine*, and *Rebecca and Rowena*—all of which are by Thackeray—she wrote, "I enjoy his kind of wit so much, though he is very hard on women." Lucy—who had very strong opinions about marriage in general, added, "I am sure he was disappointed in his marriage, but I am sure, if he was unhappy, it was his fault as much as his wife's."³⁰² She saw marriage as "nothing but suffering and hard work," which made her feel that even in Thackeray's case, "I never blame the women; they are all too good for the men."³⁰³

For some diarists, it was the book itself that became a surrogate friend. Gertrude Thomas adored Dinah Craik's novel *John Halifax, Gentleman*, which she wanted to read "over again."

³⁰⁰ Lucy Breckinridge, pg 102-3.

³⁰¹ Jurgen Habermas argued that *The Spectator* had a profound impact on the creation of a "public" and public thought in 18th century England. See Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*.

³⁰² Lucy Breckinridge, 181-2.

³⁰³ Ibid, 30, 182.

She added, “Strange is it not that persons continue to read new books when they can read an old book over with ever renewed interest and like studying the character of an old acquaintance [sic] finding something new to admire.”³⁰⁴ In other words, Gertrude viewed her books as companions worth revisiting on occasion to catch up and reconnect. Fannie Page Hume also personified her books at times, using friendship nouns to describe them. In March of 1860, she “enjoyed a loll with ‘Evangeline’ as companion.” Hume was quite fond of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s epic poem, which told the tragic story of two Acadian lovers.³⁰⁵ She was thrilled when she and her friends “read old books we hunted from their hiding places,” including while she called Maria Susanna Cummins’ *Lamplighter*—“a good old friend.” Hume also recorded reading *Nicholas Nickleby* several times in her diary, calling the novel her “old friend.”³⁰⁶ Clara Solomon also noted that she didn’t want to leave the house when she had “‘Ernest Linwood’ for a companion.” She loved the novel, and felt that it should be “called a book of poetry, for language was never before employed as the vehicle of such thoughts.”³⁰⁷

Imagining a Self

In many cases, these diarists measured themselves against the characters they found in fiction and poetry, which often ended in feelings of disappointment in themselves—especially with regard to piety. Fredericksburg, Virginia resident Lizzie Alsop read Dinah Mulock Craik’s novel *A Life for a Life* in mid-1864. Alsop wrote that the novel’s heroine, Theodora Johnston, was “so childish, & at the same time so womanly; a child, woman, just such a one as I should

³⁰⁴ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, pg 66, Vol X, P1.

³⁰⁵ Fannie Page Hume, Vol I, pg 20.

³⁰⁶ Ibid, Vol II, pg 58, 7.

³⁰⁷ Clara Solomon, pg 328.

like to be; & the hero, ‘Marc Urquhart, M.D.’ is the (167) very man one would like to love, so kind, & so ‘wise,’ so gentle & so good, a man to be looked up to trust.” Several months later, Alsop was still copying portions of the novel into her diary—sometimes at length.³⁰⁸ Like Alsop, Priscilla Bond also compared herself with a woman she found while reading, though in her case it was a memoir. After reading Susan Allibone’s memoir, *A Life Hid with Christ in God*, in 1859, Priscilla wrote,

It truly is a delightful book. I see so many of my own heart sentiments in it. Oh! If I was such a watchful Christian. But I am a wicked sinner. There is no good thing in me. It is my desire to live entirely to God, but the 'flesh warreth against the spirit.'³⁰⁹

Priscilla’s self-deprecating thoughts stemmed from other reading material, too. In August of 1864, she read William Law’s *A Serious Call, to a Devout and Holy Life*—a religious text that inspired numerous evangelical thinkers in the 18th and 19th centuries. The book made her wish to be as “perfect as Miranda” and “opened my eyes to many faults in myself.” Miranda—an example of a pious, humble, and chaste woman—made Bond doubt herself and question who she was.³¹⁰

Characters from novels dogged Fannie Page Hume with doubt and dissatisfaction with her own religious dedication. In 1860, she read *Edith’s Ministry*, a novel by Harriet McKeever, that made her exclaim, “Oh, that I could imitate one half of [Edith’s] lovely Christian graces. Reading such books always depresses me, makes me feel so acutely my own unworthiness.” McKeever’s book *Sunshine; or, Kate Vinton* had the same result, as Hume confessed, “I almost begin to doubt the existence of any true religion in my heart when I read of such, & compare my

³⁰⁸ Lizzie Alsop Wynne Diary, pg 166, June 28, 1864, VHS; Ibid, 191-2.

³⁰⁹ Priscilla Munnikhuysen Bond, *A Maryland Bride in the Deep South: The Civil War Diary of Priscilla Bond*, Ed. Kimberly Harrison (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 95.

³¹⁰ Ibid, 310, 316.

own actions & motives.” The next day, she wrote, “that book haunts me—almost regret having read it.”³¹¹ *Lady Mary, or Not of the World* made her “feel so dissatisfied with my self—I do wish I was better, a more decided Christian.”³¹² Marion Harland’s *Alone* made her wish that she “possessed ‘Ida’s’ thorough change of heart!—her Christian graces shamed me.”³¹³ Again and again, Fannie compared her faith to those she encountered in fiction, poetry, and nonfiction, something that seemed damaging to her sense of self, but which did encourage her to renew her efforts at leading a dedicated Christian life. Hume also drew comparisons between herself and other novelistic characters. In March of 1860, after reading Charles Reade’s *Love Me Little, Love Me Long*, a romance novel, she recorded that she had finished the book, and found “the denouement just as I expected, though brought about rather abruptly I think—Can’t flatter myself that I am ‘equal to Lucy.’”³¹⁴ Another “lovely Christian Lucy” made Hume think twice about her own piety in July of 1861. After finishing “that sweet book ‘Thankfulness,’” Fannie wished she could “imitate even slightly the lovely Christian Lucy,” who she found “beautifully portrayed” and hoped the book would “teach me some useful lessons.”³¹⁵

Lucy Breckinridge didn’t offer significant annotations about her reading in most cases, but Joseph Butler’s sermons were an exception. Over several weeks in 1862, she read a number of the English theologian’s sermons—who was also popular with Lizzie Alsop and Emma Holmes. Lucy read sermon after sermon on “Self Deceit,” “Human Nature,” and “Compassion,” among other topics, and wrote her reflections in her diary. She felt that the sermons were “so

³¹¹ Fannie Page Hume, Vol. I, pg 5, 11.

³¹² Ibid, Vol I, pg 87.

³¹³ Ibid, Vol III, pg 43.

³¹⁴ Ibid, Vol I, pg 24.

³¹⁵ Fannie Page Hume, Vol II, pg 44.

hard to understand,” but they still inspired her to shape her behavior to match their values. For instance, on October 8, 1862, after reading Butler’s sermon on “Government of the Tongue,” she admonished herself for talking about others, confessing, “I feel like being quiet for the rest of my life. Many have been the sins of my tongue! I wish I could have that sermon ever before my mind. I will try to be more watchful over that unruly member.”³¹⁶ Butler’s sermon on controlling words came to mind again after a visit from a particularly gossipy acquaintance. Her interactions with Lulie—who she felt had “*the* most venomous tongue”—encouraged her to “read again Butler’s sermon on ‘The Sins of the Tongue,’” and to “avoid” Lulie so that she could be “a happier and a better woman.”³¹⁷ His sermon on “Compassion” forced her to reconsider her views of her fellow humans. She admitted, “I thought before I read those sermons that I understood human nature, but I find that I only understood human nature perverted. I was a hard judge of mankind. I got my notions more from books than from observation.”³¹⁸ Even as she felt self-aware about getting her understanding of the world from books, she continued reading to find many of the answers to questions that kept her busy mind occupied.

The Self as Genre

In their diaries, middle-class and elite women of the nineteenth-century South engaged with ideas and trends from around the Western world. All of the diarists read at least some popular fiction, poetry, and history, and when they didn’t encounter these in stand-alone form, they found them in periodicals. Their reading ultimately shaped their ideas about the world around them, but also their ideas about themselves.

³¹⁶ Lucy Breckinridge, 67.

³¹⁷ Ibid, 145.

³¹⁸ Ibid, 70.

These female readers lived at a time of tremendous literary change—something that impacted what types of and how literature was available to them. Romanticism and its thought processes shaped women’s conceptions of self, as nature, individualism, and the notion that emotions were authentic arbiters of experience played significant roles in the way Western women conceived of their places in the world. While most of their favorite authors would not be considered true Romantics (due to when they were writing), their work was certainly inspired by Romanticism and in the vein of Romantic Realism. As the Romantic movement gave way to Victorianism and eventually to Realism, the heroines readers admired, the plots they aspired to, and the language they had access to changed as well. Literary scholar James Machor argues that we should see these shifts as a shift this period as a “shift not so much in genre forms as in reading formations,” contending—along with others—that the shift toward Realism was already occurring in the 1830s and 40s. Based on the reading patterns observable in these diaries, some literature was indeed moving toward Realism, but certain elements of Romanticism remained prevalent all the same.³¹⁹

In the late-antebellum and Civil War Era, what captured the attentions and imaginations of these reading women were personal stories—the first-person narratives or autobiographical tales first made popular by the Romantics. Whether told in the genre of poetry, history, or fiction, the reading material they mentioned again and again told stories of love, loss, and journeys of self. They avidly followed the fortunes of David Copperfield, criticized the continual ladder-climbing of Becky Sharp, and sobbed at the fate of poor Fantine. And while they read much that

³¹⁹ James Machor, *Reading Fiction in Antebellum America: Informed Response and Reception Histories, 1820-1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 312.

we're familiar with, they also read obscure local poetry and novels published anonymously or by long-forgotten authors who were the nineteenth-century version of a one-hit wonder.

Many of their favorite writings took autobiographical, epistolary, or even diurnal forms—something that impacted how women were able to conceive of writing a self and even how they thought about the self as a concept. Countless novels, poems, histories, autobiographies and biographies were written as first-person narratives, or in autobiographical and/or epistolary forms, all of which were popular with the diarists studied here. Just a short list of titles using such forms that were read by these women includes *The Moonstone*, *The Woman in White*, *Evelina*, *A Life for a Life*, *Armerdale*, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, *David Copperfield*, *Ernest Linwood*, *Jane Eyre*, and many others. More specifically, some of this fiction included examples of female autobiography or personal narratives and in some cases, diaries. For instance, Dinah Craik's *A Life for a Life* uses overlapping diaries kept by two lovers to tell its story. Her female diarist—Theodora Johnston, often called “Dora”—is smart and “plain,” and makes it clear that she doesn't care for society's expectations for women. As mentioned previously, Lizzie Alsop mentioned Dora in her journal, and saw her as a person worth emulating. She quotes the diarists' ideas about friendship and Christianity on several occasions. One passage she quotes addresses the idea of the self specifically: “Deceive not thyself, saying that because a this is not, it never war. Respect therefore, they old self as well as thy new. Be faithful to thyself, and to all that ever was thine.”³²⁰ For Lizzie, these “passages [were] full of truth & beauty.” She couldn't “describe with what mingled emotions I read it again & again. Each time I discover, some new depth of meaning.”³²¹

³²⁰ Lizzie Alsop Wynne, pg 191-3, 8-20-1864.

³²¹ Lizzie Alsop Wynne, pg 193.

Likewise, Miriam Coles Harris' widely-read novel, *Rutledge*, uses an unnamed female narrator to tell her gothic romance akin to *Jane Eyre*. Interestingly, Harris' disembodied female narrator reflects her own desire to maintain her anonymity as the author of the novel—something that backfired when several imposters tried to claim that they had written the book. Emma Holmes adored *Rutledge* (and the character himself) and sympathized with its “wayward, impulsive heroine, who, singular to say, has no name.” She thought of the character as “*very natural*.”³²² Mary Chesnut thought the novel was “excellent,” while Lizzie Alsop thought it strange that the “heroine’s name is not mentioned a single time in the work.”³²³ While most liked the book, Fannie Page Hume found the book too “highly wrought” and “not near so well written as ‘Beulah.’”³²⁴

Finally, women’s autobiographies seemed popular with some diarists. In particular, Anna Cora Mowatt’s *Autobiography of an Actress*, the author, playwright, and actress’ story of her self. Mowatt’s message to her readers in the opening pages of the book border on empowerment for women. She writes: “If one struggling sister in the great human family, while listening to the history of my life, gain courage to meet and brave severest trials; if she learn to look upon them as blessings in disguise: if she be strengthened in the performance of ‘daily duties,’ however ‘hardly paid;’ ...then I am amply rewarded for my labor.”³²⁵ For Gertrude Thomas, Mowatt was successful in her mission. In 1865, she read the book for a second time and concluded, “now as then could but be impressed with the cheerful genial womanly spirit of the book, essentially

³²² Emma Holmes, pg 200-1.

³²³ Mary Chesnut, 93; Lizzie Alsop Wynne, 6-6-1862, pg 35.

³²⁴ Fannie Page Hume, Vol 2, pg 25, 4-18-1861.

³²⁵ Anna Cora Mowatt, *Autobiography of an Actress; or, Eight Years on the Stage* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1853), 3-4 via Google Books: https://books.google.com/books?id=5r4eAn1f2sIC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

feminine.”³²⁶ Fannie Page Hume read Margaret Wilson Oliphant’s *The Days of My Life* in 1860. Though Oliphant’s novel wasn’t a true autobiography, the prolific fiction-writer used the autobiography as a form for her novel, and for Hume, it worked and she found herself “completely absorbed” in the book.³²⁷

Southern women accepted some aspects of Victorian literature and had to push others to the side to make it work with systems of power in their native region. For instance, they avidly read Charles Dickens, and yet, few of these diarists showed serious concern about slavery, inequality, or the nature of society. Beyond the lengthy passages they wrote about their religious imperfections after reading novels about Christianity, their concerns rarely went from expression into action. Though some diarists may have changed their daily habits to be more like the Christian women they encountered in their reading, most didn’t decide to volunteer to help the poor. For instance, after reading Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* in December of 1863, Mittie Bond wrote, “Oh, if the rich would think of their poor at such a time, it would not require the ‘spirit of the past’ to haunt them to bring forth their *better feelings*.” The next day she reflected on her own assistance for the poor, writing, “Have *I* sent a ray of comfort & sunshine into the hearts of any my suffering creatures?...I Hope so. I pray so.”³²⁸ One major exception was their service in Confederate hospitals and opening their homes to convalescing soldiers—though circumstances of war likely contributed to this more so than any reading material.

Another issue for reading women proved to be slavery. Many of their favorite novelists were Europeans and Northerners who disapproved of the institution and used their platform as authors to write anti-slavery novels and stories. Still, Southern women kept reading such novels.

³²⁶ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, pg 92, Vol IX, 10-14-1865.

³²⁷ Fannie Page Hume, Vol 1, pg 20, 3-7-1860.

³²⁸ Priscilla Bond, pg 259. 12-24-1863 and 12-25-1863.

For instance, Kate Stone read Mary Langdon's novel *Caste*, though she called it a "hateful, disgusting work on slavery of course and nothing true."³²⁹ She also read Harriet Martineau's *The Hour and the Man*—a historical novel about Toussaint L'Ouverture, the leader of the Haitian Revolution. She wrote of it, "He is represented as superhumanly good and great beyond all heroes of ancient or modern times...It is a disgusting book."³³⁰ Kate came to such a conclusion because it compared him with Napoleon and because of its representations of race. In 1856, Gertrude Clanton also read *Caste* and thought it was "interesting." She spent the better part of two pages describing the plot of the novel, which included an interracial relationship between a southern man and his Northern governess, who is "discovered" to be "the child of a mulatto slave."³³¹ When her fiancé finds out she is of mixed-race descent, he breaks off their engagement, though his heartbreak later makes him leave the United States for Italy, where the pair get married.

Gertrude's views on slavery were complicated, and she sometimes read to try to assuage her concerns about it. During the Civil War, she expressed doubts about slavery, writing, "to you my new journal, my new friend, I will confess that what troubles me more than any thing else is that I am not certain that Slavery is right." She firmly believed in the Confederacy and states' rights, "But as to the doctrine of slavery altho I have read very few abolition books (Uncle Toms Cabin making most impression) nor have I read many pro slavery books—yet the idea has gradually become more and more fixed in my mind that the institution of slavery is not right." Thomas' doubts made her read the novel *Nellie Norton* with greater interest. The book—a

³²⁹ Kate Stone, pg 112, 5-23-1862. The novel's full title is *Caste: A Story of Republican Equality* and was published under the pseudonym Sydney A. Story in 1856.

³³⁰ Kate Stone, pg 313, 2-1-1865.

³³¹ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, pg 130, Vol VI, Part 2, 4-17-1856.

“religious” rebuttal to abolitionists’ arguments by Reverend Ebenezer W. Warren—was one of many proslavery novels produced by Southerners in the late antebellum and Civil War period. Thomas hoped the books would “convince me that it [slavery] is right.”³³² Thomas returned to *Nellie Norton* again and again—reading the book several times and recounting her doubts about slavery once the war was over.³³³ For example, on election day in 1868, Thomas agonized over the voting taking place; after quoting Byron at length for comfort, she wrote, “I remember that it was upon just such a day as this a few years ago that I took ‘Nelly Norton’ with me and the Bible and wishing to convince myself upon the subject of slavery I went up the avenue and...read, studied and compared.” When worrying about the elections, she took another walk, which reminded her, “wether slavery was right or wrong it had been done away with,” and that worrying would do her no good.³³⁴

Reading books about slavery forced women to ask complicated questions about their society and its institutions. It’s likely that many Southern women simply avoided reading books like *Caste* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Some, however, chose to engage with ideas from both pro- and anti-slavery authors, showing a willingness to be reflective about their society, but also about who *they* were deep down.

The examples of femininity (in all its forms) that they found in works such as *Les Misérables*, *Vanity Fair*, *David Copperfield*, and “Lady of the Lake” also shaped how they thought about themselves and their patriarchal society. In 1860, Fannie Page found a traditional representation of women’s roles when reading Philip Slaughter’s *Man & Woman*. The book

³³² Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Box 3, Vol IX, pg 5, 9-23-1864.

³³³ She mentions her doubts and reading the book on October 8, 1865 after a significant break in journalizing due to extended illness.

³³⁴ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Box 3, Vol. X, pg 17, 11-3-1868.

attempted to explain and analyze why “so many more women than men” were Christians and was published in 1860 by Slaughter, who was the rector of Calvary Church in Culpepper County, Virginia—a neighbor county to Fannie’s home-county of Orange. Fannie was “much interested” in the book, and later wrote of it that she “admire[d]” the book and was “more than satisfied with it.”³³⁵

While many of the women portrayed in such literature represented traditional ideas about women, sometimes reading pushed Southern women into new and non-traditional ideas about women’s roles. For instance, Gertrude Clanton Thomas read some of Dinah Craik’s series of essays “A Woman’s Thoughts about Women” in 1864. She thought the piece from April 1858 “excellent.”³³⁶ She also read *Christine, or Woman’s Trials and Woman’s Triumphs* in 1856, which she described as “Being a very decided womans rights book advocating women—Their perfect equality with the other sex.” While Gertrude liked the book and thought “some of [the author’s] arguments were very good indeed,” she was frustrated with the plot, which ended with the heroine, Christine, marrying and declaring “she is glad that the tie of marriage is so strong that it cannot be broken.” For Gertrude, who felt the book was “advocating to the contrary,” to end in a marriage undermined the argument.³³⁷ Lucy Breckinridge read Jules Michelet’s non-fiction piece, *La Femme*, in 1862. She wrote of it, “I read some in Michelet’s book on ‘Woman.’ I do not like that kind of reading. It scares me of myself, and makes me rebel against my lot.” Lucy’s view of women’s “lot” were strong—to say the least. In 1864, she likened marriage to slavery, writing, “I saw a quotation tonight that expressed my ideas exactly, ‘The hour of

³³⁵ Fannie Page Hume, Vol I, pg 49, 6-18-1860 and pg 51, 6-24-1860; Vol I, pg 52, 6-29-1860; Vol I, pg 53, 7-2-1860.

³³⁶ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Vol VIII, Part II, pg 181, 8-27-1864.

³³⁷ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Vol VI, Part II, pg 130, 4-17-1856.

marriage ends the female reign! And we give all we have to buy a chain; Hire men to be our lords, who were our slaves; And bribe our lovers to be perjured knaves.”³³⁸ Still, after reading James Angell James’ *The Family Monitor*, which laid out the “duties of husbands and wives,” Lucy worried, “I know I am totally unable to perform my part—for I fear I shall fail in the first requisite. I hope and pray though that my marriage will prove a happier one than I now picture for myself. I *will* strive to do my duty at any rate.”³³⁹

With women as the centerpiece (and authors) of many Victorian novels, Southern readers found examples of stories they could relate to and simultaneously encountered narratives that confirmed women’s right to tell their own story (or for a narrator to tell it for them). While the power dynamics between narrator and female characters are complicated, these narratives still support the notion that women’s stories *should and could* be told. The fellowship and friendship that these diarists felt with their books and the authors who wrote them encouraged them to tell their own stories—in their diaries and sometimes beyond. Reading gave them the inspiration to write, gave them a language to do so, and offered formats and conventions for storytelling. Reading material encouraged them to think about their conceptions of themselves and when they did so, they felt an urge to write a version of that self on the pages of their diaries. When words of their own failed them, they turned to what they knew could help them speak their truths: their favorite authors and texts. When friends, lovers, and family failed them, those same authors and texts were waiting for a quick perusal, or for a communion of the soul with the intellectual values needed for the moment.

³³⁸ Lucy Breckinridge, 175.

³³⁹ Ibid, 218.

The pseudo-friendships these women developed with their favorite texts poured into their books of self. No matter how life's realities torn them down or made them question their situations and the world, their diaries forever remained their devoted confidantes. The next chapter will describe how these readers became writers—writers of diaries, and sometimes, writers of their own literature.

CHAPTER FOUR: *Writing the Self*

“Of these death-white realms I formed an idea of my own: shadowy, like the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children’s brains, but strangely impressive. The words in these introductory pages connected themselves with the succeeding vignettes, and gave significance to the rock standing up alone in a sea of billow and spray; to the broken boat stranded on a desolate coast; to the cold and ghastly moon glancing through bars of cloud at a wreck just sinking.”—Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*

Eighteen-year-old Lucy Breckinridge treated her diary as a friend right from the beginning. When she started her diary in 1862, she debated “what sort of friend” she should choose: “A discreet female of advanced age? A respectable maiden aunt? A young and intimate school mate? Or an old and attached governess or tutor?” After “reflection,” Lucy decided to go with the following imagined confidante:

...a female, rather older than myself and a great deal smarter, but whose sweet and gentle disposition shall call forth all my confidence, an expression of all my feelings and doubts, etc., and whose deep and loving interest in my family shall induce me to write anything which concerns them.³⁴⁰

Lucy’s companion, whom she named Harriet Randolph after “an old and valued friend of my mother’s,” became her confidante for the next two years. As she herself wrote when she began her journal, “I never had such a friend and I shall love her so much.” Though she often confessed about being “sick of this journal,” she continued writing to “my dear H,” who was the “recipient of my joys and sorrows for so long.”³⁴¹ She also reread her diary, noting in several entries about glancing back at older pages. In

³⁴⁰ Lucy Breckinridge, *Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill: The Journal of a Virginia Girl*, ed. Mary D. Robertson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1979), 25-6.

³⁴¹ Lucy Breckinridge, 173.

one of her last entries, Breckinridge reflected on her life, and the life she wrote into her diary, which she felt was “like a plain, little novel, written by a silly but practical schoolgirl.”

Lucy Breckinridge’s diary—which she felt was the “brown-backed novel” of her life—occupied its own genre—the genre of the self. Lucy felt she was writing a version of her “self” into her diary—one that served a purpose in the present and one that would shape her future. In late December of 1864, she considered her narrative of self and its chapters as she reread parts of the book she had created over the past two years. She confessed, “Some chapters I scarcely ever read, they are gloomy and filled with accounts of my enemies...Others, though they are sad, are yet sweet to remember, and I read them often and always with a softened, penitent heart.” One of her “favorite” parts was “near the end of the book,” where her “heroes and heroines” dwelled. This chapter, she felt, she would “read with most pleasure,” but would also inspire the “saddest, most melting mood.” In the end, her diary—a so-called diary of her life—was a receptacle for a version of her self suspended in time. Her notion of returning that self occasionally to read about its thoughts, friends, and experiences demonstrate that she felt the self was mutable—that it was something to be revisited and redefined, as well as shaped by narrative.³⁴²

Though we only have two-years-worth of diary-writing for Lucy Breckinridge, the patterns she established in her journal prove incredibly common when analyzing other women’s diaries from the time period. Southern women in the nineteenth century began their diaries for a multitude of reasons—some of which I previously described in Chapter One. Once they had begun their diaries, though, the ones that stuck with it developed

³⁴² Lucy Breckinridge, 220.

routines in the way they structured their entries, the ways they used their diaries, and how they related to their “books.” Even when their diaries were written explicitly for other readers, women developed close ties with their journals. When they *were* written for one reader—the author herself—they laid bare emotions and thoughts that didn’t always fulfill the expectations of patriarchal society. These female diarists expressing fury, lust, or frustration pushes the Southern lady off her pedestal, and while they might not have done much to change their overall circumstances, what many of these diarists had in common was attempting to make their own money through publication.

This chapter argues that Southern women in the nineteenth century used their diaries as a place for confessions, joys, and sorrows, but also as friends and a place to explore the vision they held of themselves. Diaries allowed women to envision a possible self and to come to terms with the realities of their lives. They also encouraged them to revisit the ways they described themselves in the past through rereading the pages of their diaries, and ultimately, to see how they changed over time. Whether they intended it or not, by writing these diaries in the ways that they did, Southern women experimented with the genre of the self. In essence, their diaries mirrored the selves they envisioned themselves being or becoming—something that developed them as writers and provided practice with conceiving of their identities and sensibilities as things that could be genreified. By practicing capturing the self as genre in their diaries, women laid the foundations to contribute to literary notions of selfhood later on.

Scholarship on ideas of the self spans many different disciplines and comes to varying conclusions about how humans understand ourselves and others. The vast majority of the scholarship on self-writing begins with the supposition that the self can be shaped and sometimes

explained through narrative—whether interior narrative, external narrative, or writing of any kind. According to Dan McAdams’ *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*, “each of us constructs, consciously and unconsciously, a personal myth.”³⁴³ McAdams argues that humans use stories and myth in order to define a self and to project value on that self. Personal myths allow us to make sense of our lives by bringing “together the different parts of ourselves...into a purposeful and convincing whole.” Our myths can operate both interior and exterior to the mind and often change over time. After we “begin to adopt a historical perspective on our own lives” in late adolescence and young adulthood, we revise our own historiography to be more realistic and complex.³⁴⁴

According to McAdams, these processes have varying conclusions when they occur in different life stages. Very early in our lives, we tend to conceptualize myths that are “grandiose” and meant to make us into one or several Western tropes: the traveler, the warrior, the sage, the maker, the lover, the caregiver, the friend or the ritualist. These different types give us a familiar language with which to formulate our own stories and allow us to categorize our experiences and the overarching “narrative frame for life.”³⁴⁵ These stories “often affirm a teenager’s perceived uniqueness.”³⁴⁶ Later in life, particularly in the twenties and thirties, we alter the historiography of the self and refine the imagoes that shape our narratives of self. Midlife we develop a sense of our own mortality and often want to build a “generativity script”—an intellectual and psychological legacy that allows a writer to insert him or herself into the present and future. This

³⁴³ Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York: William Morrow, 1993), 11, 13. McAdams is one of the preeminent scholars on the psychology of selfhood and has over two-hundred publications related to the connections between self and story.

³⁴⁴ Ibid, 102, 122.

³⁴⁵ Ibid, 150-6, 254.

³⁴⁶ Ibid, 80.

narrative provides “a sense of an ending” and a “satisfying vision or plan concerning how, even though one’s life will eventually end, some aspect of the self will live on.”³⁴⁷

A number of scholars also describe how we can shape our sense of self through writing and reading narratives, arguing that the “self and its experiences may somehow be represented in a text.”³⁴⁸ In his work on autobiography, John Paul Eakin contends that we “come to be the people we say we are when we write...the stories of our lives.” Like McAdams, Eakin sees our narrative understandings of self as a way for us to “make our sense of self in any present moment seem more unified and organized than it possibly could be.” Writing an autobiography orders our understanding of our lives and allows us to insert “self-determination” on events, experiences, and feelings we often have little control over.³⁴⁹ He pushes the connection between narrative and self further, arguing that “when it comes to our identities, narrative is not merely *about* self, but is rather in some profound way a constituent part of self.”³⁵⁰

For women in the nineteenth century, diaries provided a place for them to “realize their expressive potential in a society that formally repressed their articulation and made a virtue out of female nonparticipation.”³⁵¹ Diaries allowed them to ponder, write, and rewrite their selves as they saw them. They could describe themselves, record how others saw them, critique themselves, and imagine who they were or could be in their diary’s pages. The remainder of this chapter will describe how diaries became friends and confidantes of their writers, how they

³⁴⁷ Ibid, 227, 240.

³⁴⁸ John Paul Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 99.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, ix, 43.

³⁵⁰ John Paul Eakin, *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 2.

³⁵¹ Judy Simons, “Invented Lives: Textuality and Power in Early Women’s Diaries,” in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries*, Ed. Suzanne L. Bunkers & Cynthia A. Huff (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 254.

became repositories of possible selves, and how self-writing influenced ideas about the genre of self.

Needing A Confidante

Diaries often became friends as a function of necessity, as many intellectual women in the South expressed serious dissatisfaction with their personal relationships. Although some of these women called themselves difficult (or seemed a bit thorny in their writing), often they felt frustrated with others because they felt that their peers either didn't share the same ideas as them or didn't respect their ideas wholesale. Sometimes, they felt misunderstood or like they didn't belong; others simply didn't like the people around them. In their diaries, women could be a truer version of themselves and could express things viewed as unacceptable in "polite" society. And in times of unsettling change or trauma, diaries could provide stability and were sometimes the longest-standing "friendship" these women experienced.

For example, Sarah Morgan experienced disappointment in friendships on a number of occasions. Sarah was confident in some matters and exceedingly self-conscious in others—something that comes across in her diary's entries. Her "beloved friend" Mollie "cut [her] to the heart" in May of 1862 when she spread a rumor around Baton Rouge that Sarah and her family had behaved "shockingly" after the death of her father and didn't appear to be expressing true grief. Sarah, who mourned the loss of her father and brother profusely in the pages of her diary, was distraught by the rumor, writing, "a lie is harder to refute than the truth, and this came near making me very sick. For three days at Linwood I could not hold up my head, or even talk."³⁵²

³⁵² Sarah Morgan, *Diary*, pg 71.

Sarah took this experience as her “first lesson in human depravity,” and decided she wouldn’t shed so many tears the next time a friend disappointed her.

Sarah recognized that she could be difficult to love, but also expressed resentment at the social expectations of her society. She reflected on her lack of “amiability”—as she put it. She pondered, “Apropos of talent, which would you rather be: a most amiable fool, or a vicious wonderous smart-man—woman rather.” Sadly, Morgan confessed, “I am almost ready to say I prefer being a *thundering* big fool, for the longer I live, the more I see that amiability is the most necessary thing that can make life endurable under some circumstances.” She continued, writing, “I *do* want to be amiable, and I hate to make such a lamentable failure.” In Sarah’s mind, being “good & amiable” meant not speaking her mind or having an emotional response to people around her—especially when they offended her sensibilities. She thought of herself as “too intensely sympathetic” and found that her “spirits ooze[d] out” when someone made a “disagreeable” comment to her, and when this happened, her “only safety lies in flight.”³⁵³ Two days later, she reflected on her friendship difficulties further, and expressed that her personality alone precluded her from making friends. She knew it took “long acquaintance for [her] to gain new friends.” She felt that “those who become so, do it from their own kindness, not because the attraction lies in me...Pharisee that I am.” And yet while Sarah loved these friends for loving her, she also wondered if they lived full intellectual lives, writing, “I look at them and wonder if God thought it worth while to give them souls to be crushed in that narrow little casket of the brain, which seems to die, and yet leave them living.”³⁵⁴

³⁵³ Sarah Morgan, pg 79.

³⁵⁴ Sarah Morgan, pg 83.

Sarah Morgan is just one example of many I have found in women's diaries from the nineteenth century. Because women's roles were so proscribed, their diaries often showed fears and frustrations when they failed to fit within the idealized boxes carved for their lives and personalities. Obviously, most women realized that these expectations were unrealistic, and yet, just as they do now, cultural narratives about the ideal woman shaped how they thought about themselves and others. Afraid to express their true opinions in public, some women felt what Sarah Morgan called a "strange, unaccountable shyness, and shrinking" when talking with others—even on subjects important to them and about which they were well-informed.³⁵⁵ While Southern society accepted women's presence in public intellectual life at least to a certain degree, the women studied here turned to their journals and eventually to other forms of writing to find an outlet for their thoughts.

Envisioning a Friend, Writing a Self

Amanda Edmonds was furious when a relative stole her diary and tried to read it without her permission. Thankfully, she wrote to her diary, "I saved you from dangerous perusal by one whom would little appreciate your sentiments. Thou would'st have been the subject of scorn and derision." She added, "O! these pages where lined the deep feelings of my heart in its wildest and lonely moments when they gushed from the fountain of a secret and hidden thought."³⁵⁶ Amanda's fears didn't just stem from her privacy being violated (though that was certainly part of it)—she also worried because her "dear journal"—the dear friend she envisioned through writing—reflected who *she* was.

³⁵⁵ Sarah Morgan, 434.

³⁵⁶ Amanda Edmonds, 20.

Southern women's real need for companionship and understanding encouraged them to envision their diaries as friends. Through writing, they created a friend—a friend who was at the core a reflection of some part of themselves—and then sought to have a meaningful and fairly consistent relationship with that friend. Thus, the pseudo-friendships contained in women's diaries show us the diarists' own representations of themselves and then how they interacted with their written selves over time. When they imagined a self, wrote a self, and interacted with that self, women made their selves a genre—one that could be changed and revisited. When women practiced writing a self in their diaries, they genrefied the self and formed the “wellsprings” of what would become the Southern Renaissance.³⁵⁷

In some cases, diaries were the friends of their writers in overt ways. Just as Lucy Breckinridge called her diary Harriet Randolph, other diarists gave their diaries names or simply called them “Diary” or “Journal.” Clara Solomon referred to her diary as “my Philomen” and celebrated getting a new book—one that was “*far superior to the other in appearance and texture*”—in which to record her thoughts.³⁵⁸ She was thrilled to have a better vessel for her story of self and expressed sadness when she began running out of pages. In July of 1861, she wrote, “Oh! Philomen, I am so sorry, but we will soon have to part. Your pages are numbered, and my fear is that your successor will be your inferior.”³⁵⁹ Throughout her journal, she greeted “Philomen,” telling her of her day, her thoughts, and writing to her as if she were penning a letter to an old friend. After getting a new volume in September of 1861, Clara wrote to her diary:

³⁵⁷ Bertram Wyatt-Brown has argued that Southern women were “the first ‘moderns’ of southern literature”—something I’ll discuss more in the next chapter. I argue that women were involved in this modernization of southern literary culture earlier than he suggests. See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Hearts of Darkness: Wellsprings of a Southern Literary Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 181.

³⁵⁸ Clara Solomon, 17.

³⁵⁹ Ibid, 79.

“Here we meet again, and I suppose you do not recognize yourself, but remember that ‘Dress does not make the man,’ and that you are nothing more to me than my ‘dear Philomen.’” After reassuring Philomen of her valued place despite a changing exterior, Clara added, “I hope that we may be months together; we are fast friends, bound by ties which can never be unlinked.”³⁶⁰ Apparently, even as the circumstances of writing and the pages she wrote on changed, Clara still turned to her “Philomen” with regularity. Sometimes, though, she had to apologize to Philomen when life got in the way of her writing. In September of 1861, for example, she wrote, “Conscious of my neglect, I now hasten to you, and implore your forgiveness, for the circumstance of not seeing you yesterday is, I am assured, a subject of much more grief to me than you.” Solomon wouldn’t call her busyness “neglect,” though, for her “thoughts were often with you [her diary].”³⁶¹ In the end, Clara recognized that “it [was] impossible for us to gaze into that ‘dim, unseen, future’” and said of her diary: “Who knows what you may be called upon to hear; how one day, I may be in the height of joy, the next in the depths of despair—But, through all the ‘ups and downs’ of life I expect to find you, the same unchanging friendship.”³⁶²

Clara Solomon’s dedication to Philomen sometimes went beyond friendship and her writings to her journal seemed almost like courtship. In October of 1861, she requested that her diary forgive her lack of writing, saying, “I have not seen you to day, except when I removed the dust from your robe. But I am not to blame, so cease your reproachings.” Quoting , she added, ““There is not an hour of day or dreaming night, but *I am with thee*...””³⁶³ She continued her flirtation, adding that Philomen had “a tendency to be jealous. This pleases me for it is an

³⁶⁰ Ibid, 96.

³⁶¹ Clara Solomon, 150.

³⁶² Ibid, 96.

³⁶³ Here, Clara quotes Barry Cornwall’s “Mirandola.”

indication that you value my society.”³⁶⁴ Several months later, when she finished a volume of her diary, she expressed sadness in its pages. She wrote, “And now, my Philomen, my cherished darling of two months, the time has come when we must separate. No longer shall I pour into your willing ear my thoughts & hopes, my fears & wishes.”³⁶⁵ The following day she confessed her love for the diary again, writing, “dear Philomen, do I invest you with a new robe, & by so doing increase, if possible, the love which days, weeks, months & years have matured...Need I again give utterance to the oft-repeated expressions of my affection? Need I say how dear you are to my heart, how essential to my existence?” As her journal couldn’t answer this question, she continued waxing poetic about what her diary meant to her. She confessed her concerns about “being separated from you [the diary]” and described such a situation as “madness.” Finally, she wrote, “My wish has been granted, for each succeeding month *has* strengthened the ties which bind me to you & like wedded love, I find that I love you more each day.”³⁶⁶ In her lengthy devotion to her journal, Clara quoted poetry and used a number of love-letter writing conventions—demonstrating that her relationship with her journal was one of the most essential relationships in her life.

Solomon’s interaction with her imagined diary-friend and their evolving relationship reflect the very sort of behaviors that allowed women to see their selves as a genre. Though she gave her diary its own name, which suggests a separation or otherness, Clara likely recognized that Philomen was more a reflection of her self than of any imaginary friend she could envision. The love and devotion she felt for the diary, then, actually represented the evolving views she held of herself.

³⁶⁴ Clara Solomon, 165.

³⁶⁵ Ibid, 357.

³⁶⁶ Clara Solomon, 357-8.

North Carolinian Catherine Edmondston saw her journal as a friend and confidante too, and her relationship with her journal represents similar connections between personified diaries and genre-fying the self. In September of 1862, she wrote, “It is lonely here tonight, so Journal, as you are my only companion, I feel like having a long chat with you.” She continued, writing as if she were thinking out loud: “Let me see, there are many topics which fill my heart & thoughts. We will discuss them.” Catherine described a few topics that were on her mind, but worried, “Cant I find I find one topic, pleasant, and at the same time open, which I can freely talk over with you, Journal? No not one!” She lamented, “*Literature* is the only perfectly unfettered and at the same time cheerful subject left to me,” but she recognized, “to dwell long on that changes you, Journal, from your legitamate[sic] & proper sphere to a mere Composition or Essay.”³⁶⁷ Rather than talking more about literature, Catherine chose to try to write about the Confederacy’s war efforts. Unfortunately, she was interrupted by household duties. Even in her diary, Edmondston felt she had to keep conversation appropriate and inoffensive—something she complained about (which I’ll discuss later in this chapter). For instance, days later she wrote, “Much has happened since I last discoursed with you, Journal, & something which I cannot even tell you as it is not my secret.”³⁶⁸

Entry after entry, Edmondston “chatted” with her journal, apologizing for not being able to write much (“Mama keeps up an incessant talking to me...Journal, you suffer for it”), mock-chastising her journal for being nosy (“Business, Journal, which is none of yours”), and celebrating her husband’s acceptance of her journal-keeping (“Last night Patrick made me a present of a nice new blank book”).³⁶⁹ Edmondston also personified her journal, calling it “high

³⁶⁷ Amanda Edmondston, pg 256.

³⁶⁸ Ibid 260.

³⁶⁹ Amanda Edmondston, pg 283, 290, 348.

spirited” and “high toned,” and addressing it directly.³⁷⁰ However, she did not always write this way. She seemed to do so mostly during the middle section of what survives. This section, including much of 1862, represented a period of her life when her husband was away fighting for the Confederacy and like most women in the South, her life was changing drastically in a short period of time. Additionally, during this time she expressed difficulties she was having with some of her friends, whom she felt were abandoning her or weren’t supporting her in ways she desired.³⁷¹

Like Edmondston, Lizzie Alsop wrote to her journal as she might a friend, and much like friendship, her relationship with her diary evolved over time. In general, Lizzie became increasingly aware of how difficult it could be to put one’s shortcomings on paper. In 1864, she apologized to her diary, writing, “More than a month has rolled past since you and I, journal, have had a talk; but I have not forgotten you. No in deed old friend, so prepare yourself to hear ‘lots & chords’ now that we are together once more.”³⁷² Again and again, Lizzie came to her journal to “have a quiet little talk” or to “confide” to its “keeping” her sorrows and happiness.³⁷³ At some points in her life, her journal proved her dearest friend, at others, her only true friend. In the early 1870s, she confided, “Journal it is well that you & I don’t have confidantes, because they might be wanting to know what you & I have so many secrets about, but I am not going to tell, and I will take care that they do not find out from you.”³⁷⁴

³⁷⁰ Ibid, 290.

³⁷¹ See pg 174, 283, etc. Edmondston was particularly frustrated by rumors swirling about her family—much like Sarah Morgan.

³⁷² Lizzie Alsop, pg 148, 4-11-1864.

³⁷³ Lizzie Alsop, pg 165, 252.

³⁷⁴ Ibid, 621.

As time went on, Alsop did have more difficulty keeping her diary as regularly as she wished, and apologies to her imagined friend became a theme. By the end of the Civil War, Alsop found herself in need of companionship but also with far more obligations than in the past. In May of 1865, she lamented, “Nearly a month since I have written a line in my journal, but no matter for that as everything is so different from the days of yore.”³⁷⁵ Similarly, in August, she wrote again, “More than a month since you & I have talked any together journal, & yet a mighty one sided conversation it always is, that between you & me; however for all that you are my only confidential friend now.”³⁷⁶ For the next several years, writing in her journal proved “anything but a pleasure, much as [she] once loved it,” and she confessed, “Journal I do not like to talk with you as I once did; & yet I know the fault is all my own, but I cannot tell even you what I think & feel.” Alsop felt anxious about writing her true feelings, saying, “All the child has gone, & even the joyousness of girl & maidenhood has left me, but I do not regret it much.”³⁷⁷ In 1869, she blamed other tasks for keeping her from writing, saying, “It has been a long time Journal since I wrote in you. Nearly three months; and why I hardly know, only that I have been very much occupied, sewing a great deal, & with more than my usual no. of interruptions.”³⁷⁸

Although being busy certainly played a role in her lapse of writing, something else was also likely at play. Despite making excuses about chores, Alsop also recognized that other things prevented her from writing, though she couldn’t always put her hesitations into words. In 1867, she confided, “From some cause or other, I do not seek so frequently for opportunities to write

³⁷⁵ Ibid, 263, 5-18-1865.

³⁷⁶ Ibid, 271, 8-14-1865.

³⁷⁷ Ibid, 325, 445. These entries are from 6-14-1866 and 10-31-1868. Between these two dates are numerous entries in which Alsop expresses many similar feelings about writing. She is too busy, she doesn’t want to write about her hardships, or she simply doesn’t have the emotional energy to write as much anymore.

³⁷⁸ Ibid, 478, 6-10-1869.

the history, partial to be sure, of my life, as I used to, & why so? Echo answers why?” One year later, she had confessed, “My poor neglected Journal; it is not because I do not value you, that you are shut up in silence for weeks & days, but only because of, well I do not know exactly why!”³⁷⁹ Alsop explained that she didn’t “like to write in [her] journal as [she] once did, partly because [she was] not in the habit of it; & partly because [she was] too fond of dreaming; having so many foolish wishes & thoughts to commit [herself], even with [her] journal.”³⁸⁰ Finally, in 1877, Alsop contended that her relationship with her journal changed because of life circumstances. She wrote, “for the first time for more than two years...I have given my Journal a minute. Strange! Contrasting this long silence with the frequent communings once between us, and yet not strange, or rather unnatural; for as years crowd upon us, we give less & less time to such pursuits as this, recording the thoughts & feelings of a simple life.”³⁸¹ Just as one’s relationship with an old friend might change, Lizzie’s understanding of her relationship with her diary and self-writing did as well. Though she blamed her lack of time for failing to write, perhaps writing the new circumstances of her life—without wealth, without many friends, and without a husband—proved too painful to record day after day. She recognized the flaws in the self she envisioned in her diary, and returning to commune with that friend proved more and more difficult. Lizzie’s hesitation to keep recording her life on paper reflects a number of the issues women had with writing a self.

³⁷⁹ Ibid, 7-3-1867; pg 422, 5-2-1868.

³⁸⁰ Ibid, 509-10, 12-20-1869.

³⁸¹ Lizzie Alsop, 9-15-1877.

Self-Conscious Self-Writing

Even when they avidly turned to their diary's pages, women expressed self-consciousness about the selves they wrote in their books. While they seemed more comfortable than might be expected talking about themselves in general, they did demonstrate hesitations about the type of self they portrayed in their diaries' pages—whether they intended the book for outside reading or not. Just as these women agonized over whether they were being true Christians after reading about fictional women (as is discussed in Chapter 3), they also wondered if their diaries were worth writing, whether their stories demonstrated they were bad people, and if they should continue their endeavors.

Some diary-writers were afraid of exposing the less-than-savory sides of themselves that was hard to admit was there. Mary Chesnut spent years trying to remove the parts of her diary that made her seem vain or petty. However, she did express concerns about the person who remained in her diary's highly-edited pages. In March of 1861, she worried, "What nonsense I write here. However, this journal is intended to be entirely *objective*. My subjective days are over." Chesnut had to get her thoughts off her chest, writing, "No more *silent* eating into my own heart, making my own misery, when without these morbid fantasies I could be so happy." And yet, Chesnut felt uncomfortable with her self-writing, confessing, "I think this journal will be disadvantageous for me, for I spend the time now like a spider, spinning my own entrails instead of reading, as my habit was at all spare moments."³⁸² Mary Chesnut—ever conscious of the self she spun in the pages of her diary—continued writing nonetheless.

Sarah Morgan expressed similar concerns about what she recorded in her journal and how she appeared in its pages. In August of 1862, she remarked, "If I dared keep the diary that is

³⁸² Mary Chesnut, pg 23.

ever in my thoughts, what a book this would be!” Unfortunately for Sarah, she had “no sacred or convenient spot where I can place any thing with security,” so writing a full accounting of her life was “not to be thought of.” Furthermore, she wrote, “there are some inward thoughts which I would shrink from having rudely exposed,” and rather than experiencing that embarrassment, she kept “to myself all that is worth recording, and industriously compile a whole volume of trash which even I will never have the patience to review.” Though Sarah didn’t worry about someone reading her journal—partly because she thought it would be too boring for anyone’s curiosity—she couldn’t bear the thought of having her weaker side exposed to all. Sarah frequently thought about the mask she wore in public and wrote about her struggles to deal with the constant role-playing in her journal. And yet, she felt she couldn’t even be completely herself in the pages of her diary for fear that she might not like the result. For instance, in June of 1862 she wrote, “I find I have two hearts: one open and exposed as ever to public inspection,...ready to laugh with the merry or cry with the sad,...the other is labeled ‘Private’ and is best undescribed.” Despite keeping one part of herself private, Sarah didn’t necessarily relish reflecting upon her private persona. Instead, she confessed, “It is the one sacred spot where no one has a right to look; it is my Holy of Holies where I myself seldom dare enter.”³⁸³

Gertrude Clanton Thomas expressed similar worries in her diary. In 1868, she confided, “I wonder too if there is not some truth in the remark that in every house there is a skeleton, some subject which by mutual consent is best to avoid.” She certainly felt there were skeletons in her closet, but “when the door opens and I catch glimpses...I try not to look but I cannot always help it.” Even though she recognized the weight these secrets added to her life, she wrote to her journal, “Even to you my dear friend I must not confide every thought I have. I would like to. I

³⁸³ Sarah Morgan, 132.

think that it would afford me inexpressible consolation but I cannot.” Clanton felt “there are depths in every womans nature which must not be sounded” and she had thoughts “which I would not wish my children to know.”³⁸⁴ She felt there were parts of herself (and parts of others) that she preferred to hold inside rather than putting her feelings on the page.³⁸⁵

More so than even Chesnut, Morgan, or Thomas, Lizzie Alsop expressed serious concerns about the person she revealed in her self-writing. Alsop demonstrated her unhappiness with her life’s progression fairly often, and the pages of her journal reflect a person who recognizes her faults, but has a difficult time coming to terms with the implications of them. In February of 1864, she wrote, “In you, my journal I must confide my thoughts and feelings. But what are they? I wish my life was...of a more devoted character; I am dissatisfied with my present course, & still never make an effort to alter my conduct.” She concluded by reflecting, “Why am I so careless of my true happiness?”³⁸⁶ Several months later, she wrote, “Journal, entre nous [between us], I am very vain & egotistical I fear...I sometimes felt really ashamed of my self, for being so ignorant & silly...I am ashamed to lead the useless life I do. Of no use to any one, or benefit to my self.”³⁸⁷ At times, she could not “commit my thoughts & feelings to paper,” but she “reckoned” this was for the best, “for it might be a subject of regret hereafter, & could not be of benefit to any.”³⁸⁸

Just as her relationship with her journal changed, so too did her willingness to be forthright in its pages about her problems. In 1869, she wrote, “My poor neglected Journal

³⁸⁴ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, pg 54, October 1868-November 1870, Part 1.

³⁸⁵ Because Clanton wrote her diary ostensibly for her children to read at a later date, things such as her husband’s issues with alcohol and concerns about the father of some children of mixed race on her family’s plantation don’t make it into the pages of her diary in clearly stated ways.

³⁸⁶ Lizzie Alsop, 146, 2-27-1864.

³⁸⁷ Lizzie Alsop, 152, 4-27-1864.

³⁸⁸ Lizzie Alsop, pg 395.

cannot reproach me, but my own conscience does for failing to come & unburden itself as of old.” Despite the fact that she didn’t want to write her faults into the pages of her diary, she still thought “when we feel most we are unwilling even to write it; but here recently I seem to have become more frivolous & unfeeling than I used to be...”³⁸⁹ In the space of one sentence, she admitted needing to write even more desperately because she had strong feelings, but saw herself as more unfeeling and silly than in the past. By 1873, Lizzie sought to shape her life’s story in a positive way. She confessed to her diary, “I try not to record on your fair pages anything which may cause me to cherish feelings of bitterness; It is so much wiser & better to remember the pleasant hours of our past, than to brood over its pains!” Thus, she tried to “forget words which burn, & only record those calculated to strengthen & soothe.” She wrote this explanation (and more) to justify the entry’s “desolate” feeling.³⁹⁰ Even within the pages of their journals, some women felt the need to perform roles that their society expected. Expressing disappointment or deep-seated unhappiness made them uncomfortable and self-conscious of the self they illustrated in their diaries.

Other diarists felt guilt for spending page after page detailing their lives—an activity that felt atypical to them—or worried about what they might reveal in their diaries’ pages. For instance, Catherine Edmondston wrote of her diary: “Mrs. Edmondston is a wonderful woman, & all her sayings, doing, & even her thoughts ought to be faithfully chronicled here. After all, what is the use of a Diary if one cannot be egotistical in it?!” Despite this declaration, Edmondston treated her diary-writing habits—at least in this instance—with humor, and confessed her admiration for “Pepys” and “his perfect self candour”—something that obviously made her

³⁸⁹ Lizzie Alsop, pg 482, 7-12-1869.

³⁹⁰ Lizzie Alsop, 633, 5-28-1873,

nervous. To her, Pepys was willing to catalogue “his failings, his vanities, nay even his pettinesses & his deceits” in his diaries, and while she admired his openness, she was “reticent” to write that way herself, writing, “But deliver me from other eyes seeing how like Pepys I can be!”³⁹¹

Sarah Morgan referred to the self-absorption of diaries on several occasions. In March of 1862, she criticized herself for being hypocritical, reflecting, “For a young woman who pretends to such a feeling of contempt for all egotism and self conceit, it strikes me, on looking back a page or two, I my self have displayed an inordinate amount of it.” She worried about filling the pages with introspective thoughts and seemingly trivial concerns, but wrote, “I would become a perfect bore if I talked of myself any more than I do, so I take refuge in writing all that is too preposterous to say aloud.” Even though Sarah saw everyday conversation as not the place for this type of conversation, she felt “one’s diary is surely private property, and there is no more fitting place for talking about the only inexhaustible subject in the world, the one of which we tire, namely—yourself.” Despite her (perhaps feigned) self-consciousness, Sarah also “assumed the right...of talking about myself as much as I please, satisfied that no one will take the trouble of saying for me, what I do not first say for myself.”³⁹²

Two years later, Morgan offered herself less leeway when it came to writing about herself. She chided, “I am so sick of me, me, everlasting Me! Cant I find a new subject?” She mocked her own sentiments, writing,

³⁹¹ Catherine Edmondston, 13. Samuel Pepys was a government administrator and member of Parliament in England in the mid-seventeenth century. As a young man, he kept a daily diary for nearly a decade, and his diary is one of the richest sources for understanding daily life in seventeenth-century London. Pepys’ diary was read by many in the nineteenth century, and even now, he is famous for the frankness of his entries and the breadth of the topics he discusses. All in all, Pepys’ diary demonstrates the shift from diary as emotionless chronicle or record of births and deaths into a more reflective, self-aware form.

³⁹² Sarah Morgan, 29.

Poor Sarah! Fighting against self contempt and that of others, raging at her own deficiencies, and at those who seek to hide them as well as those who lay them bare, loving every body, yet unwilling to have anybody love her, what wonder if she comforts herself with the pernicious poison of ‘Me, me, me,’ in private, for the humiliations, envyings, and yearnings she suffers elsewhere? The frequency with which she wrote about herself made Sarah write, “I hate myself!”—a strong statement simply because she kept a diary. She chastised herself for the ways she wrote about herself and others, writing, “I seem to pet myself, pamper myself, and stick Me up on a high altar above everybody else...It is very sad to hate yourself for what you are always apparently doing.” She even wished “some kind angel” would “make me over again, and worthy of breathing the breath of life” so that she could think in terms of “We” rather than “Me.”³⁹³ Though she expressed these thoughts with her typical dramatic flair, in her next entries, she was back to her usual confessions and self-deprecation. All the same, this entry—filled with frustrations and self-hatred—represents one of the strongest reactions to writing a narrative of self, though her feelings probably reflect the concerns of many women.

For some, the concern seemed a bit more simple: they didn’t want to seem boring. Upon rereading some of her journal, Lizzie Alsop wrote, “How silly some of it is afterwards.”³⁹⁴ Nannie Haskins voiced similar concerns in 1863, writing, “I read what I wrote before...and see how silly I am. It is a blessed thing that no one will see this book but myself.” She added, “For one moment I run on a sad strain, the next I dash off on something about marrying. I am a simpleton any way and I am afraid I will never be anything else.”³⁹⁵ Julia LeGrand worried about the “wearisome monotony” of her journal in 1863. After describing a number of terrible things happening in the Confederacy and beyond she wrote, “All these things and more the Tragic

³⁹³ Sarah Morgan, 591-2.

³⁹⁴ Lizzie Alsop Wynne, 9-23-1863.

³⁹⁵ Nannie Haskins, pg 13.

Muse and her sisters may gather and record in this awful year of '63—and here I am penning the common items which belong to a suppressed and narrow life; the pitiful details; *the painful platitudes*...incident to the everyday life of two women.” Still, she felt she had “some right to make my cry go up with the general voice, more especially that I feel indeed that I ‘have no language, but a cry.’”³⁹⁶ Later, LeGrand expressed her “hope” that her niece Edith would “never feel tempted to scrawl out such a production herself” after reading her writing. She later wrote an apology to Edith right into the diary, confessing, “Who knows what a fine journal I might not have written you if I had had the health and spirits to go about much, and had the privacy in which to record what I heard.”³⁹⁷ Emma Holmes also worried about writing “a journal in such times as these”—these meaning the Civil War and especially its end. Holmes expressed frustration that “each day [brought] such startling rumors and incidents that the brain is bewildered by the rush of events.” Her entire world seemed “a whirl of excitement, and all things are unsettled and uncertain.” Still, she vowed she would “try merely to jot down the most remarkable incidents as I remember them.”³⁹⁸

Likewise, Clara Solomon worried about appearing dull in an intellectual sense. She confided to her diary, “Oh! Philomen, I am *so* foolish. Every time I talk to you, I am more and more convinced of it. Sometimes I can scarcely express myself.” Clara felt that “*One* of the *greatest* gifts” was “that of language,” but also that ‘a little learning is a dangerous thing.’” According to Clara, her learning just made her more “aware of my ignorance.”³⁹⁹ In other words,

³⁹⁶ Julia LeGrand, 160. Here, LeGrand quotes Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s “In Memoriam A.H.H.”—a poem she quotes on several occasions (as do many of her peers).

³⁹⁷ Julia LeGrand, 210, 215, 255.

³⁹⁸ Emma Holmes, 433.

³⁹⁹ Clara Solomon, 53.

as an avid reader, Solomon felt self-conscious about her writing skills—even in a diary ostensibly meant for her own consumption, and on occasions for consumption by loved ones.

Catherine Edmondston nearly gave up her journal on a number of occasions because of her fears that it would be “but a record of lonely days & sleepless nights, of stern resolves against repining, & determination to be cheerful!” She admitted, “The spirit is gone! Of what use to record the body only of my daily life?”⁴⁰⁰ Days later, she worried “On looking back over my Journal I find that for some time back it has gradually ceased to be an echo of my own doings.” Due to the “loneliness” she felt, she went through her daily activities “mechanically,” and her diary became “but a meagre account of anything I either did, or felt or said”—something she didn’t want for her diary.⁴⁰¹ Despite these concerns, Catherine kept writing—for hundreds of pages in fact.

While on the surface this worrying about being boring seems simplistic, it represents something much more complicated. The fear of being boring represents women’s self-consciousness about their ability and right to tell their stories. From their encounters in literature, the only women who deserved to tell their stories at length were tragic heroines and exceptional women, while notable (and even not so notable) men could and should tell their stories. They avoided being boring so that their story was worth telling. Subconsciously, however, the very fact that they wrote about these concerns demonstrates that they felt some glimmer of self-worth and that they had the right and obligation to record their stories.

Finally, some felt that the diary as a genre failed the writer in some instances. Lizzie Alsop wrote, “Journal I can not transcribe upon your pure pages even, my feelings. God only

⁴⁰⁰ Amanda Edmondston, 71.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid, 73.

knows them; & so I wish it generally.”⁴⁰² At times, Lizzie meant that she couldn’t capture her feelings on the page because she lacked the words to do so; at others, she meant that didn’t wish to put her true feelings on the page. On separate occasions, she expressed both ideas, and as her frustrations with regular diary-keeping show, she had some reservations about writing a self in her diary.

Likewise, despite leaving hundreds of pages of journal entries cataloguing her experiences during the Civil War, Catherine Edmondston voiced significant doubts about the purpose of diary-writing and considered abandoning her journal. In 1861, she confessed, “...this journal disgusts me. I feel so much more than I ever think of putting on paper. How is it—do I feel too deeply to write? To analyze it?”⁴⁰³ Over a year later, she contemplated the same theme, declaring, “Journals are not correct exponents of peoples thoughts, wishes or feelings. Why it is I cannot say, but it is certainly the fact.” Though she didn’t worry about anyone reading her diary, she felt that her feelings came “partly” from “the habit of reticence which from long use I have acquired & partly mortification at the exceeding pettiness of some of the causes of annoyance which however small as they are do not the less make up my happiness or unhappiness.”⁴⁰⁴ As someone who kept a journal but edited it and burned many sections, Catherine likely saw her journal as a sort of genre—one that might be read by others and one that allowed her to reveal parts of herself—but never in totality.

Even before the Civil War, Gertrude Clanton Thomas relied upon her diary as a place to spill her heart’s secrets and her mind’s thoughts and frustrations. In 1848, she expressed frustration that it didn’t seem “possible for me to refrain from reading [novels] for six months or

⁴⁰² Lizzie Alsop, pg 455.

⁴⁰³ Amanda Edmondston, 61.

⁴⁰⁴ Amanda Edmondston, 201.

a year” despite the fact that it would allow her to “study much better.” When she wasn’t reading novels, she confided, studying came “just as natural for me [to] write in this journal as it does for me to eat a meal.”⁴⁰⁵ Comparing her study habits with her natural need to write demonstrates the integral part writing a diary played in her life. Her writing sustained her as food might, and allowed her to express emotions that weren’t as acceptable among her peers. In May of 1852, she admitted she had “complicated feeling[s]” about her future husband, Jeff, visiting her. Despite these feelings, she felt she could confess them in her journal, for as she put it, “What was a journal ever intended for?” She knew that once she finished “writing through this book I will get me another in which I will endeavor to unbossom myself—where I will breath[sic] every thought word and action of my mind. Where I will record all every feeling.” To Gertrude, writing in her diary was like eating and breathing—both necessities for life.⁴⁰⁶

On several occasions, however, Thomas expressed her doubts about the emotional honesty of diaries. In 1852, Thomas quoted Georgia poet Richard Henry Wilde to express her feelings about a diary’s “emotional outpourings,” writing, “‘There are some thoughts we utter not. / Deep treasured in our inmost heart / Ne’er revealed and ne’er forgot.’ Such has so often been my case.” To Thomas, “a journal is intended for the outpouring of thought and the expression of ones inmost feeling,” but she also felt “‘there are some thoughts we utter not’ either verbally or written and there are some emotions too powerful for words to convey an adequate description of them.” Her concerns about the emotional honesty of journals almost made her “abandon” her writing. Instead, she decided to keep on, claiming that “although the relation of facts is not very interesting still as I write for my own amusement I need not care.”⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁵ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Box 2-48-9: pg. 25.

⁴⁰⁶ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Diary, Box 2, Folder 4, April-June 1852, pg 32.

⁴⁰⁷ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Box 2, Vol 5, pg 29-30, 11-5-1852.

Wilde's quote about human's inner emotional lives stuck with Thomas fairly consistently, and although she seemed taken with the notion that many emotions can't make it onto the pages of a journal, she kept writing. In early June of 1855, she quoted the same lines again, but added, "And thus it is, there are some thoughts we utter not and not even to you my journal faithful record of the little events, which make up the sum of human ills, not even to you can every thought be confided." But even though she felt this was the case, she still wrote, "yet there are moments when I must write—must speak or else the pent up emotions of an overcharged heart will burst or break. Here can I calm my tumultuous emotions—with a heart throbbing and an agitated form."⁴⁰⁸ In 1856, she confessed, "Of late I have had no inclination for writing—and hereafter I will instead of keeping a journal merely write off extracts or anything I may fancy...A journal is a source of pleasure yet I wonder does any one ever write their inmost feelings, thoughts and emotions? Such as we sometimes see written in romances." Thomas came to the conclusion that most people probably didn't reveal all of their emotions, as "this would go towards furnishing a far greater store of amusement than the mere dearth of ordinary daily adventures" and, once again, as "Richard Henry Wilde says, 'There are some thoughts we utter not / Deep treasured in our inmost heart / Ne'er recorded and ne'er forgot.'" ⁴⁰⁹ Despite her seeming preoccupation with Wilde's idea, Thomas still needed to write.

In her diary's fifth volume, Sarah Morgan sat down with a "new treasure"—or book—in which to tell her life's story. She admitted, "I don't know what tempts me to do it, except perversity, for I have nothing to say."⁴¹⁰ Mid-1863 was a hard time for Sarah, and she had seriously considered burning her diary just days before. She had ended a long courtship, was

⁴⁰⁸ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Box 3, Folder 3, pg 43, 6-2-1855.

⁴⁰⁹ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Box 2, Folder 7, pg 150, 6-26-1856.

⁴¹⁰ Sarah Morgan 537.

residing temporarily in New Orleans, and had grown very weary of war. And even as she doubted she had anything to say, she wrote and wrote. Days later, she confided that her “idea of happiness is a rainy evening with a *comfortable* book to read, a solitary spot to hid one’s self with a fascinating piece of embroidery or nice piece of sewing, with a volume of Tennyson or Longfellow open before you.” Even though reading seemed her ideal situation, she instead was writing—writing even “without a word to say,” and it was “precisely when I have nothing to say that it takes me the longest to say it.”⁴¹¹ Ultimately, Sarah expressed self-consciousness about writing about herself constantly, but wasn’t self-conscious enough to stop doing so. Her diary was a place where she felt most accepted and the least disappointing to her peers—especially her sister Miriam.

Diaries and the Genre of Self

Many of the women studied here were deeply reflective and considered how they appeared to those around them and within the pages of their diaries. In their diaries, most were critical of themselves on at least several occasions, while some were quite cruel to themselves with regularity. In short, diaries were a place where women could safely voice their insecurities—much like they are now. At the same time, diaries were also a place where they could celebrate parts of themselves in ways that would be deemed inappropriate for women in Southern society. A woman who appreciated her own self-worth could be dismissed as vain in such a patriarchal society that demanded women be seen but not heard. Either way, these female diarists used their writing to explore who they were, analyzing who they were in the past, who they were in their present, and who they wanted to be in the future. The selves they wrote in their

⁴¹¹ Sarah Morgan, 542.

diaries existed outside their consciousness, allowing them to be shaped and shifted and reevaluated. In editing their written selves as they might an essay, women made the self a genre.

Louisianan Kate Foster hoped that by writing in her diary, she could inspire herself to be “a better woman.” In 1866, she bemoaned the fact that her “poor diary receive[d] very little of [her] attention.” Still, she hoped, “the little I put in it, by referring to I hope will serve to make me press forward & upward to the place in the better world where it is well for us to lay up for ourselves treasures.” While she expressed happiness that her temper had “become more even,” she still found it “hard” to “control the outburst of passion which sometimes seems to overwhelm me.” Kate felt frustrated by her failings, but noted, I must not give up for trying to do right is not the easy thing that doing wrong is...My efforts for being good and doing good must only end with my last breath.”⁴¹²

Foster grieved for her past and imagined her future selves in the pages of her diary. In the post-war period, she faced serious financial difficulties, the social stresses of being an “old maid” (as she put it), and coming to terms with the losses of several family members and many friends, including her two brothers. She found that “memories of the past [came] crowding upon the seeming gayety of the present like dim spectres from another world. As she reminisced about her past, “dreams of what [her] Future may be follow[ed] like gorgeous panoramas from some Eastern tale.”⁴¹³ She also found that her efforts to be “good” were easier some days than others. In September of 1866, she admitted, “I do want to die for no one loves me without suspicion. How I try to do what is right but it seems I am fated to do wrong oftener.”⁴¹⁴ In the end, though, Kate knew she “must go forth bravely to meet the future with the avowed purpose to succeed in

⁴¹² Kate Foster, pg 22, April 8, 1866.

⁴¹³ Kate Foster, 21.

⁴¹⁴ Kate Foster, 23.

all my undertakings.” Even when she was weary from all of her troubles and regretted what might have been, she felt that God would help her if she had “faith” and did her “duty.”⁴¹⁵

Like Kate Foster, Nannie Haskins (and after her marriage, Williams) expressed frustrations with the self she wrote in her book. As a teenager during the Civil War, she was very critical of herself for feeling what we might call depression today. In her diary, her inner voice found its way onto the page. For instance, after expressing weariness and loneliness in 1863, she wrote, “Now I am just going to stop all this foolishness. I will be cheerful.” After listing her blessings on the page, she added, “There is goes again, old *fusser*, complaining again are you. Shut your mouth you simpleton.”⁴¹⁶ Several months later she simply wrote, “I’m a simpleton,” and in 1864 she confessed, “I despise myself. I wish I had never been born. Oh! Oh! My God.”⁴¹⁷ Such statements reveal Nannie’s deep depression, but also her introspection. Painfully aware that she had to keep much of her dissatisfaction to herself, Nannie expressed frustration with the performances her society required. In 1864, she wrote, “Oh dear me! It seems that my heart will *break*...I can conceal my feelings very well. Persons scarcely think that while I am laughing, singing, playing and dancing I am *miserable* and do not enjoy it. Dear! Dear! I must conquer this spirit.”⁴¹⁸ Like many women at the time, Nannie found herself surrounded by peers but feeling consistently misunderstood or unable to be her true self.

Nannie kept her diary (with some breaks) through 1890, so her journal offers a unique glimpse of how the self she wrote into her diary changed over time. While she may have expressed self-loathing and loneliness in her teenaged diary, as she got older, her outlook

⁴¹⁵ Kate Foster, 28, 2-5-1872. Foster’s diary ends abruptly after this entry.

⁴¹⁶ Nannie Haskins Williams, 14.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, 29, 66.

⁴¹⁸ Nannie Haskins Williams, 65.

changed despite struggling with a number of challenges. Nannie married her older cousin, Henry Williams, in 1870. Williams was a widower with four young children, so Nannie's life became consumed by keeping house for a full family. During this time, Nannie still had days where she described herself as gloomy, but on the whole, she maintained perspective about the good things in her life. The family faced severe financial difficulties, and Nannie found herself desperate to try to alleviate the debts that weighed on her family's future and her husband's health. In August of 1880, she wrote, "My mind and body have both been in a sad condition as the French would say 'Je suis enceinte' and I have to *redouble my determination to go through* gracefully all that awaits me in the next few months. *Ah, 'tis hard.*"⁴¹⁹ Interspersed among such concerns and admissions of exhaustion are statements such as this one, that demonstrate Nannie reminding herself of the good parts of her life: "Really Life has many blessings for me and I try to expunge all the sweets and discard the bitter as we go along. I have long since concluded that we can't have all the blessings; and it is not always just as we desire; but we must take advantage of all the small opportunities to improve them and endure gracefully the crosses."⁴²⁰ Despite her attempts to be positive, Nannie found it was very "hard to always do *right*, even with the best intentions." She lamented, "I am so human. Sometimes I feel that my religion evaporates into thin air. If I live until I am good enough to die, my age will count centuries." She added, "I do have some very exasperating elements to contend with, some that I even shrink to acknowledge to myself."⁴²¹

Sarah Morgan also reflected on her self in the pages of her diary—considering who she was in the past and also envisioning the person she wished she could be in the future. Sarah's

⁴¹⁹ Nannie Haskins Williams, 155.

⁴²⁰ Nannie Haskins Williams, 172.

⁴²¹ Nannie Haskins Williams, 178.

diary—even from its first pages, which recall the deaths of her brother and father—is highly introspective. She dedicates pages and pages to news of the war and of peers, but she also spends significant space considering who she was and who she wanted to be. For instance, in July of 1862, she exasperated, “Is this to be my life for ever? I have such an insatiable craving for a better one! I so desire something nobler, purer, higher! Will I ever attain it?” She didn’t know what she desired, but “sometimes it comes in a wave...sometimes it steals over me, and I feel that Time has taken me back a thousand years, and I am no longer myself, but something greater, something—I know not what.” Morgan described feeling outside of her own body, and experiencing an unusual sense of time, writing, I feel that I have lived ages before, and felt these same things, and will feel them again a thousand years hence.” Morgan’s unusual feelings reflect a crisis of self, for she describes not recognizing herself in a mirror. She confessed, “sometimes, standing before a mirror where I could perfectly see myself, the thought has suddenly occurred to me ‘What, or who am I?’ and it is so abrupt, so unanswerable, that a feeling of dreadful awe creeps over me at the sight of this curious mysterious figure, so familiar, yet so unknown.” Morgan’s intense entry describes a person who knows herself intensely and yet doesn’t know herself at all; a person who feels an “intense desire to Know” and yet has lost “all sense of my personal identity.”⁴²² This alternate self—of the past, present, and future—drove Sarah to read, to write, to travel, and to search within herself. Her diary provided the platform to consider the person she could become. Sadly, Sarah didn’t feel she could be the person she hoped to see in the mirror. She knew that in the future, she would look back on her situation and wonder why and if

⁴²² Sarah Morgan 154-5.

she was happy. She confided, “Happy! Yes, I *should* be; but Am I? Can I be? Ah no! there is another life somewhere, for me; in the next world if not in this; this one does not satisfy.”⁴²³

Morgan’s self-doubts came and went with some regularity. One day, she thought of herself as too vain or self-centered, the next she found herself too shy and meek. In February of 1863, she worried that a “moral blindness [weighed] down my mental eyes so that I cannot read the lessons so plainly written by past experience, and grow no wiser, no better from its teachings.” She feared she would “Never be any wise, Never any better,” and yet, the ““immortal longings within”” her remained.⁴²⁴ Morgan admitted that since she was a young girl, she “felt the same strange, unaccountable shyness, and shrinking, even sometimes from those that [were] nearest and dearest to me, that I do now.” She feared that all her emotions and thoughts were painted on her face for all to read, confiding that she felt “made of glass...as though made of clear, transparent material in reality, so that every throb, every wish of my heart could be open.” Because of her feeling of being “like chrystal,” Sarah didn’t divulge her thoughts to her peers, who then assumed she was “secretive, and deep.” Morgan felt this as a form of pressure to be more complex than she actually was. Ultimately, this pressure to comprehend herself combined with pressures of the war caused her to worry she was “growing hard and ungrateful.” She admitted, “I am weary of my monotonous, aimless life.” She dreamed of “Something better—something beyond. My soul craves it.” She questioned her current situation, asking, “Was I made for this useless life? More! More! Light from above, nobler thoughts, nobler aspirations, a wider, or new field in life! Something nobler, Something beyond.”⁴²⁵ In the end, Sarah hoped to “begin anew”—a chance to “find the first error that made me the weak, insipid, despicable trash that I

⁴²³ Sarah Morgan, 156.

⁴²⁴ Sarah Morgan, 434. Here, Morgan quotes Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*.

⁴²⁵ Sarah Morgan, 564.

am now.”⁴²⁶ In the depths of her diary, Sarah could consider these dark and heavy thoughts, and while she didn’t find a solution to their perplexities, it no doubt offered at least some comfort to express them on the page.

Revisiting the Genre of Self

Sarah Morgan was a complicated diarist, and while her mysterious entries may leave us with more questions than answers, for her, her diary operated as potential reading material for the future. In March of 1862, for instance, she wrote, “I mean to record some few of my fancies now, that I may have the pleasure of contrasting them with those of a few years hence, to see whether I have become a better girl, or worse.”⁴²⁷ Sarah left us evidence that she reread her diary with some frequency through her commentary on events she wrote about the day or week before, but also in years past. In rereading past entries and commenting on them, Sarah was not alone. In fact, almost all the diarists studied here did just that.

Just as these women used the pages of their diaries to explore possible selves and to delineate the parts of themselves they hoped to change, they also used their diaries as reading material. By writing a self into their diaries and then rereading and evaluating that self at later dates, they demonstrate that they saw their “selves” as a sort of genre. As they wrote their diaries, they recognized that rereading their pages would be an important part of the diaries’ function. All at once, the diary became a place to write a self, to read again the self of the past, and to posit a self for the future—all while reserving the right to revisit this textual self at any

⁴²⁶ Sarah Morgan, 565.

⁴²⁷ Sarah Morgan, 29.

point for editing, rereading, or erasing (through burning, marking out, or removal from the diary).

Lizzie Alsop read her previous volumes and compared her present self with that of the past. In 1865, she admitted, “Journal I do not think I am contented and happy as I was last Winter & Summer. Sometimes I get impatient & tired; & then all goes wrong.” She worried, “I am fretful & unkind; and although I regret it, still I do no better.” As she went “through with [her] duties,” she felt “as if any change would be preferable; and for a little while I hate my life, everything becomes distasteful, & I get so selfish.”⁴²⁸ No matter how well she tried to put things into perspective, very much like Morgan, she had a “longing in my heart for something beyond, above myself.” Alsop saw her journal as one continuous narrative of her self, and hoped to see improvement between volumes. In 1867, she was excited to begin a new volume. She felt that while she began a new book—something that made it seem like the start of a new narrative—“all the volumes of my Journal seem but links in the chain of life, not distinct & separate episodes.” She called on God to bless her diary’s progress, adding, “grant for Christ sake that its pages are filled with the record of my life, I may grow in the knowledge & love of God.”⁴²⁹

Kate Foster and Lucy Breckinridge both has a very difficult time looking into the past they had written into their journals. After reading back over her entry from nearly five months previous, Kate confided, “Musing over the Past recalls pleasure & pains but sadness oppresses me until I feel as if to lay aside the burden of Life would be such peace and joy.” She felt that “the strifes of this life and struggles for what we need merely mere make me long to die.” In part, reflecting on her past merely made her see “where I have failed to do what would have brought

⁴²⁸ Lizzie Alsop, 256, 2-17-1865.

⁴²⁹ Lizzie Alsop, 394, 6-17-1867.

me happiness”—in particular, where she had missed opportunities to get married. Kate’s status as an “old maid” stung her to the core, as she was someone who believed that “a woman’s life is incomplete without Man’s sustaining influence.”⁴³⁰ Additionally, Kate mentioned on several occasions her desire to die so that she could join her brothers—both of whom were killed during the Civil War.⁴³¹

In 1861, Emma Holmes had more positive feelings associated with reminiscing in “old letters” and “old journals too,” which she called “treasures.” She felt that while they were “uninteresting and foolish to any one else. To me they recall scene after scene as vividly as if unrolled by a panorama, nay, the very tones and looks of the other actors in them are brought to mind.” The imagining her journals and letters inspired made her feel as if she was in the “society of my friends in hours of darkness and pain”—something that became more and more important as war created distance between and loss of ones she loved.⁴³² At times, rereading and recalling such “silly girlish memories” made Emma reflect on who she was and the relationships she had with others. In August that year, when thinking of her “past flirtations,” she bemoaned, “What a bundle of contradictions I am—I wonder if anyone ever *really* loved me.” Though she mused about her past loves, she wished to leave them “where they are”—in her memory—rather than putting them in full even in the pages of her journal—which she felt was “not to be trusted.” Instead, she wished she “had ‘the gift of the gray goose quill’ to weave them into a whole for my own amusement, or that of my friends.”⁴³³ In other words, while Emma didn’t want to put her

⁴³⁰ Kate Foster, Diary, 28, 12-7-1871, Rubenstein Library, Duke University.

⁴³¹ For example, “If I could only die and be with my darling brothers, no more misunderstandings.” Pg 23, 9-16-1866.

⁴³² Emma Holmes, *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes, 1861-1866*, 13.

⁴³³ Emma Holmes, *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes, 1861-1866*, 77.

romances into her journal (at least not completely), she did wish she could spin them into a story for later perusal.

Catherine Edmondston had mixed feelings about reading back over past entries and what that meant about how she saw herself. Nonetheless, she did so with some frequency, though her reactions to what she found varied. In 1862, she noted that she had begun her diary two years prior, and “what a change has come over the country since then!” When she started her diary, it was “but a record of domestic incidents, trifling in themselves, but interesting to us, because they made up our lives. Now how different!” Rather than a “trifling” record of everyday life, her journal was preoccupied with “War! War! It absorbs all my thoughts my anxieties my interests!” Catherine, however, admitted with a “sense of sadness,” “For once I will recur to my former simple home tastes & for auld lang syne give them a casual notice.”⁴³⁴

While some of Catherine’s reflections about her diary focused on its changing subject matter, she also wrote about changes to her sense of self. In early 1863, she confessed, “I have long ceased this practice of recording my own self examinations, ceased it since father gave me my mother’s papers & I read there much that I know she did not intend any one to see.” She recalled that after her mother’s death, she disposed of papers not meant for readers. Because she had no children, she feared there would be no one left to do the “sacred filial duty to destroy such memorials of me as I should not like to meet the eyes of those indifferent to me.”⁴³⁵ To save her husband the pain of burning her papers, she destroyed them herself—but not before she had read them all again.

⁴³⁴ Catherine Edmondston, *Journal of a Secesh Lady*, 185, 328.

⁴³⁵ Catherine Edmondston, *Journal of a Secesh Lady*, 344-5.

As she read her past papers and diaries, she “look[ed] at the Catherine Edmondston of twelve & even fifteen years back fairly in the face,” declaring, “I hardly know her!” The Catherine of the past was more concerned with religious struggles, something that made her ask, “It it that my conscious is less tender?” Despite feeling relieved that religion caused her fever “pangs” and “unhappiness,” she also worried, “I do not examine myself one half as often.” Catherine weighed a variety of things that had changed in her life over the years: where she lived, her marriage, her day-to-day concerns, etc. Though she ultimately didn’t find one answer to why that was, she also admitted, “I am a happier woman now.”⁴³⁶

No diarist reread her journals more than Gertrude Clanton Thomas, who wrote, read, and reread her journals over decades. Clanton consistently kept in mind the intertextuality of her journal as she wrote, thinking ahead about the reactions she might have to stories she recorded in the future. For instance, after an intense “conversation,” Gertrude wondered, “How can I write? It will suffice—Years hence when glancing over the pages of this journal, my eye will rest upon this page—landmark of one of the most exciting conversations I have ever held.” Though she was having trouble putting her emotions into words, she knew, “This page will awaken emotions and cause a heart perhaps grown cold...to wonder at the wild tumultuous throbbings of early womanhood.”⁴³⁷

Sometimes, she commented on the “Gertrude” she found in her old journals. As early as 1855, Gertrude was “reading over” her past journals and being hard on herself for the way she described her surroundings.⁴³⁸ In 1868, she reread a journal from 1852, remarking that she was

⁴³⁶ Catherine Edmondston, *Journal of a Secesh Lady*, 344-5.

⁴³⁷ Gertrude Clanton, pg 55, Box 2, 1855-6, Part 1, 6-2-1855.

⁴³⁸ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, pg 55, Box 2, 1855-6, Part 1, 6-26-1855.

“reminded of...how impulsive I was then.”⁴³⁹ Days later, she copied full entries from a diary in 1851—entries describing her seventeenth birthday. After rewriting a story about difficulties with school friends, Gertrude offered commentary on the past, writing, “Each age has its cares. The difference consists in the greater elasticity of temperament and the power of reaction. Looking back to that time I can see I suffered intensely.”⁴⁴⁰

While the journals and versions of herself of the past sometimes made her laugh, Gertrude also found “reading over old journals” to be “sad work.” She commented, “It is holding ‘the mirror up to nature’ and there I see much reflected which is discouraging and depressing.” She noted, “When I was younger I was constantly promising that I would live better, do better...Of late years I notice I promise less.” Because of the drop in promises to be a better person, Gertrude felt she could not “trust myself.” While she expressed disappointment that her new reality didn’t involve making promises of improvement, she resolved, “This is well it if does not degenerate into indifference, and oh my journal this is too much my present condition.”⁴⁴¹ In reading her past diaries, commenting on them in the diaries of her present, and imagining her future in her journal, Gertrude saw the emotions of her past with new eyes.

Just as we read novels differently at various points in our life, the Southern women who wrote diaries and later reread them experienced their pasts and their selves in new ways. In this chapter, I’ve described how diaries function as stories of the self, the relationships women built with their diaries, and how those relationships helped them explore their selves and possible selves. Diary-writing offered many of these women a way of coping with changes of all sorts. In the next chapter, I’ll delve deeper into the coping necessitated by the Civil War. Even as they

⁴³⁹ Gertrude Clanton, pg 27, Box 3, October 1868-November 1870, Part 1.

⁴⁴⁰ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, pg 44-5, Box 3, October 1868-November 1870, Vol I, January 1869.

⁴⁴¹ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, pg 130-1, Box 3, October 1868-November 1870, Vol II.

recorded their lives and turned to their diaries for comfort, they also recognized that some parts of their experiences couldn't make it onto the page.

CHAPTER FIVE: *Coping*

“Behold, we know not anything; / I can but trust that good shall fall
At last—far off—at last, to all, / And every winter change to spring.
So runs my dream: but what am I? / An infant crying in the night:
An infant crying for the light: And with no language but a cry.”—Lord Byron, *In Memoriam*, Canto 54

In April of 1861, Catherine Edmondston’s greatest concern was that she and her father disagreed about North Carolina’s decision to deny troops to the Union after Lincoln’s call. She didn’t understand why her father “look[ed] grave & unhappy,” and expressed she was “delighted” to hear the news. Still, she admitted, “This difference of opinion with Father has been very sad to me, for I think I can honestly say that it is the first time in my life that my judgment & feelings did not yeild[sic] to him.”⁴⁴² Once war began, Catherine—or “Kate”—was nothing short of an ardent Confederate. She disparaged Lincoln and other “wicked” Yankees with colorful language, celebrated the bravery and chivalry of Confederate troops, and commended the work of Southern women to support the war efforts.

Kate distracted herself by reading and writing—both in her diary and her own poetry. For example, in August of 1862, she wrote, “Amused myself with my ‘Index Rerum’ I suppose I might call it, writing down some facts & derivations which I have latterly found in my reading.” That day, she “read 120 pages of ‘Literatur du Midi,’ rather dull work, tracing the downward course of the Italian muse just now. From Tasso to Goldoni and Gozzoli.”⁴⁴³ Casually reading

⁴⁴² Catherine Edmondston, 54.

⁴⁴³ Edmondston, 247. An “Index Rerum” was an alphabetized collection of quotations and items for preservation. As with most diary forms in the nineteenth century, index rerums had their own “advice literature” on how to keep them. See for example: John Todd, *Index Rerum, or, Index of Subjects: intended as a manual, to aid the student and*

Italian literature, “enjoying [a] solitary cup of Tea,” and complaining about not receiving a letter from her husband, Edmondston was living through the midst of a civil war, but its edges and realities weren’t affecting her nearly as much as it did others. However, things didn’t stay that way forever.

As time went on and the war became more costly—in terms of men, money, and materiel—she remained hopeful, though glimmers of war-weariness shone through in her diary. In late 1862 she confessed, “I long to forget the War and dream away these October days in our usual ‘dolce par niente’ manner, but it is impossible! That dread shadow hangs over us & uncertainty & change is written upon every thing.”⁴⁴⁴ The next February, she wrote a lengthy poem entitled, “Peace!,” though she grumbled about a rumor of a peace conference.⁴⁴⁵ By July of 1863, she was at her wits end, writing, “This is a terrible state to live in. Expectation & anxiety unsettle and destroy one’s peace of mind... We sit here at home in a calm of *desperation*, I fear tho perhaps it may be *resignation*.” Gettysburg had devastated the Edmondstons. Though she didn’t lose a husband, father, or brother, she wrote about losing at least eleven family acquaintances. In early August, as more and more details about the ill-fated battle arrived in North Carolina, she wrote, “Sharpsburg was a bloody memory for North Carolina, but Gettysburg exceeds it in honor. The best blood in our state cries from the ground. Pennsylvania soil is drunk with it.”⁴⁴⁶ Sadly, despite Edmondston’s well wishes and optimism, the war only got worse.

the professional man, in preparing himself for usefulness; with an introduction, illustrating its utility and method of use (Northampton: J. R. Butler, 1839).

⁴⁴⁴ Edmondston, 267-8. Edmondston likely means “dolce far niente,” which means “pleasant idleness” in Italian.

⁴⁴⁵ Edmondston, 363.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 443.

Edmondston kept reading and writing, penning poems, and offering her thoughts about what she read, including on Dickens' *Great Expectations* which she thought "should rather be 'Great Disappointments.'" ⁴⁴⁷ Her reading and writing were comforts to her, and with every challenge and fear, she clung to her books. Even when she grew tired of writing her personal story, the stories that had entertained her for years lifted her spirits and offered their wisdom.

No books could prepare Edmondston for Confederate loss, however. On April 16, 1865, she wrote, "Since we heard of our disaster I seem as tho in a dream. I go about in a kind of '*drowsy dream*.' I sleep, sleep, sleep endlessly...I cannot grasp it or its future consequences." She added, "I sit & hear the young folks & Mrs Langdon talk of books, of poetry, & they seem to me to be talking of what *was* long, long ago. I read books, I liked poetry, when was it? Where are they all gone?" The end of the war and Confederate defeat undermined Edmondston's coping strategies and forced her to reevaluate their efficacy in a world that didn't include the Confederacy. Beyond her concerns about her ability to cope, Kate felt she was losing her sense of self, writing, "I seem to grope after my own ideas, my own identity, & in the vain attempt to grasp it I fall asleep." ⁴⁴⁸

Edmondston's difficulties with adapting her past coping strategies to the stresses of civil war and later, Reconstruction, were not unique. Many of the women discussed in the pages of this dissertation expressed their own frustrations with coping mechanisms that offered relief in the past, but were no longer working to alleviate anxieties, unhappiness, and fear. Diaries and reading offered solace for many women during war times, but for some, the usefulness of such activities faded and eventually gave way to other sorts of coping mechanisms, such as writing

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid, 423-4.

⁴⁴⁸ Edmondston, pg 695.

fiction, pamphlets, poetry, and other sorts of published and unpublished pieces. The spaces that elite white women had created for themselves in their diaries fell apart with the end of the war and slavery. The war proved a crisis of self, as well as a crisis of the genre of self.

No home remained untouched by war, and each woman had a story to tell about her struggles—and many chose to do just that on the pages of their journals and sometimes, in creative writing. The self-writing they did in journals provided the groundwork for introspective writing while reading offered language and form to guide creative expression. The war proved to be a profound dislocation—of values, of lives, of physical space, and of course, of the selves these women wrote in their diaries. Though they wrote for different reasons, these women all made the shift from reader, to self-writer, to writer, and understanding why and how that happened reveals much about how loss and grief inspired changes to their relationship with the written word.

The Traumas of War

As Drew Gilpin Faust and others have argued, the Civil War brought new challenges and new opportunities for Southern elite women—some welcome, some that left them feeling inadequate, scared, and frustrated.⁴⁴⁹ Most of the diarists in this dissertation expressed support for the Confederacy, though some had their misgivings about war—not surprisingly. Emma Holmes had a first-hand view of the bombardment of Fort Sumter, and while she expressed excitement at the possibility of an independent South Carolina, she also admitted that she was waiting for news, feeling “restless and anxious, listening to every sound with a beating heart, fearing to hear the announcement of the beginning of *civil war*.” She added, “What fearful

⁴⁴⁹ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

meaning is concentrated in those two little words.”⁴⁵⁰ Julia LeGrand wrote to her brother, Claude, who was serving in the 7th Louisiana Infantry, “Oh, if we were only all safe and together in some quiet land where there would be no war, no government even to make war! I long to be rid of the evil and suffering which spring from the passions of men!”⁴⁵¹ LeGrand held complicated feelings about the Confederacy and the war in general, but her desires to get away from it all were not unusual.

Death

Nineteenth-century women felt the fingers of death with a regularity that we can’t comprehend. They were used to loss—the loss of children, of parents, husbands, siblings, and friends, and the loss of economic security when these male figureheads left them to fend for themselves in a Southern economy that thrived on risk and complex webs of debt—of all which were very difficult to access for women. The Civil War brought death to their doors on a scale that all Americans struggled to comprehend.⁴⁵² As Gertrude Clanton Thomas wrote in 1862, the words “burying their dead” contained “untold agony...Hopes blasted—Joy destroyed. Life left blank—Hearts anguished-Wailing cries—and all the deep depths of despair. Over all the land what a throb of anguish! The great heart of a nation pulsating to a general woe.”⁴⁵³ Losing loved ones proved one of the most difficult things for women, and nearly all diaries mention efforts to process grief.

In 1861, three of Lucy Breckinridge’s four brothers were fighting for the Confederacy. Her favorite brother, John, was killed at Seven Pines, her brother Gilmer died in 1864, and James

⁴⁵⁰ Emma Holmes, 24.

⁴⁵¹ Julia LeGrand, 44.

⁴⁵² Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Civil War Library, 2009).

⁴⁵³ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Vol VIII, Part 1, 81.

was killed at the Battle of Five Forks—just days before the end of the war. A few months after her John’s death, she confessed to her diary, “Harriet,” “I loved him better than anyone on earth... We never formed a plan for the future I which we were not connected. Everything seems changed to me since he died.”⁴⁵⁴ Though her diary ends before James’ death, she reflected on the deaths of her two brothers in June of 1864. She confessed, “I feel so hopeless tonight. If I could only believe, as some, that peace may be declared in a few months, there would be some light in the darkness, but I can see no prospect for it.” Even with peace, she knew “So many hearths will be desolate when we do have peace that many a heart’s bitter cry will be, ‘The light hath risen but shineth not on me.’”⁴⁵⁵

Sarah Morgan had felt the heartbreak of losing family members several times even before the start of the Civil War. Her beloved brother, Hal, was killed in a duel in April of 1861, and her father died just months later in November of illness. Sarah lost countless friends and acquaintances to the war, including two of her three surviving brothers. In February 1864, Sarah’s brothers Gibbes and George died—Gibbes as a prisoner of war at Johnson’s Island, and George of illness. Sarah wrote of George’s death on February 11th, six days after writing about Gibbes. Her entry—quite short compared to the ones around it—simply reads: “O God O God have mercy on us! George is dead! Both in a week! George our sole hope—our sole dependence.” There are no entries in her diary for a month, but when she finally wrote, she poured out her soul for pages. She lamented, “Dead! Dead! Both dead! O my brothers! What have we lived for except you?...A life time’s hope wrecked in a moment—God help us!”⁴⁵⁶ She closed her entry by wondering, “How will the world seem to us now? What will life be without

⁴⁵⁴ Lucy Breckinridge, 36.

⁴⁵⁵ Lucy Breckinridge, 190-1. Lucy quotes a Henry Alford sonnet entitled, “Academe.”

⁴⁵⁶ Sarah Morgan, 597.

the boys? When this terrible strife is over, and so many thousands return to their homes, what will peace bring us of all we hoped?”⁴⁵⁷

Occupation

Many Southern women also dealt with invasion and occupation in ways that women of the North did not.⁴⁵⁸ Even when they didn’t deal with occupation directly, they interacted with federal troops who were passing through, who used their homes as bases and foraged on their property, or whose mere presence nearby unsettled tenuous relationships between mistresses and slaves. By the time the war began, Julia LeGrand and her invalid sister, Virginia, faced some pressing financial concerns and most of their immediate family had left Louisiana. Their brother, Claude, enlisted to fight in the war and left the two sisters in New Orleans to wait out the war with a widowed family friend, Mrs. Norton. In early 1862, New Orleans fell to federal forces, which changed LeGrand’s life (and those of all of the city’s residents) dramatically. LeGrand was frustrated by the rumor mill that thrived in the city, and, of course, by seeing federal troops move throughout the city on a daily basis, issuing orders that infuriated white New Orleans residents. Though she sometimes expressed sympathy for federal troops—at least average enlistees—she expressed great disdain for Butler and for Union officers more generally. In

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid, 603.

⁴⁵⁸ While Northern states certainly experienced temporary occupation, they didn’t see long-standing enemy occupation of large swaths of territory like what occurred in the South. See Stephen V. Ash, *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), Judkin Browning, *The Southern Mind Under Union Rule: The Diary of James Rumley, Beaufort, North Carolina, 1862-1865* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), Alecia Long and LeeAnn Whites, Eds. *Occupied Women: Gender, Military Occupation, and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2009), Gregory P. Downs, *After Appomattox: Military Occupation and the Ends of the War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

March 1862, she wrote, “These Federals have done so many awful things that we are prepared to believe *anything* of their capacity for evil.”⁴⁵⁹

By April of 1863, Julia had had enough of federal occupation, writing, “One by one our hopes are dying out. Our imprisonment is terrible. It does not seem to have the same effect on others as on Ginnie and me.”⁴⁶⁰ Her final entry on April 8, 1863 demonstrates her need to leave occupied New Orleans. She confessed, “I have *almost* a hope of getting out. Oh, what a joy it would be to be under the rood of kindred once more! Sister, the children, Claude and brother [Washington]; I never knew how much I loved them until now.”⁴⁶¹ LeGrand managed to leave New Orleans, settling in Galveston, Texas with family, where she stayed for the rest of her life.

Nannie Haskins Williams started her diary in 1863 while federal troops occupied her hometown of Clarkesville, Tennessee. General Ulysses S. Grant had captured the town one year earlier, and Union soldiers held it for the remainder of the war. White Clarkesville residents tried to keep spirits up, holding parties with some frequency despite shortages and occupying forces. Nannie had mixed feelings about such parties, however, and in April of 1863, she confided to her journal, “Somehow I think these are poor times to be having parties or picnics of any kinds.”⁴⁶² Though troops were a regular sight for Nannie, she mentioned them less than might be expected, though the struggles of occupation made their way into her diary. Unlike Sarah Morgan, who expressed empathy for federal soldiers (at least early in the war), Nannie felt no such compunction about wishing for their defeat. In December of 1862, she wrote, “There is great

⁴⁵⁹ Julia LeGrand, 250. For more on occupation in New Orleans specifically, see Gerald Capers, *Occupied City: News Orleans Under the Federals, 1862-1865* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965).

⁴⁶⁰ Julia LeGrand 298.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid, 310.

⁴⁶² Nannie Haskins Williams, 18.

consternation here among the Yankees...I hope and pray that [General Nathan Bedford] Forrest may catch them. That same Forrest strikes terror to their hearts.”⁴⁶³

Refugeeism

Some women chose to become refugees to avoid their homes becoming the battlefield; others became refugees through no choice of their own. Unlike poorer Southerners (and enslaved people, especially), elite women had resources and extended social networks which allowed them to move away from the fighting as it advanced—at least in some cases. While four of her five brothers served in the Confederate Army, Emma Holmes stayed in Charleston with her widowed mother—until a “terrifically beautiful” fire destroyed her home (and a good portion of the city) in December of 1861.⁴⁶⁴ Because of their connections, Holmes and her family moved around within Charleston, living comfortably with friends until her uncle found the family a living situation in Camden, South Carolina. In Camden, the Holmes were surrounded by family and friends, and Emma commented, “The citizens here are very kind and liberal to us refugees in every way.”⁴⁶⁵ By September, Emma felt differently. She wrote, “Last week I was dreadfully homesick ‘for the old familiar haunts and faces.’ Here we feel ‘we are strangers in a strange land,’ for though we are surrounded by neighbors and acquaintances, they do not seek us sociably...we are left to our own resources and loneliness.”⁴⁶⁶

Priscilla (or “Mittie”) Bond—a Marylander by birth—found herself living far from home and adjusting to married life in Louisiana when the war started. Bond initially liked the Deep South, though she missed her family terribly. However, as circumstances of war made

⁴⁶³ Ibid, 101.

⁴⁶⁴ Emma Holmes, 105.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid, 170.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid, 197.

communication more difficult and she witnessed large-scale plantation slavery more and more, she became very homesick. The war continued to make Mittie's life more complicated, for in summer of 1862, her husband, Howard, and several other men were accused of ambushing federal soldiers. Howard became a fugitive, and the Bonds expected troops to come knocking at any moment. On May 13th, Mittie worried, "We are looking for the Yankees every moment—such suspense—such agony of mind—I look at myself and can scarcely realize it is me."⁴⁶⁷ When soldiers did come, they told Mittie that if they found her husband, he would be hanged, then they "set fire to the house"—burning it to the ground. For the next several months, Mittie was a woman without a home, and she moved around to other plantations in the area that had been spared the torch. By the Fall of 1864, her husband was serving as Louisiana's state chemist—far away from Bond, who was in southern Louisiana. Priscilla's devotion to the cause—which was never unconditional—wavered tremendously during this period of refugeeism among family friends and distant relatives—all of whom she felt disconnected from. She confessed to her journal: "Oh! Peace *glorious* Peace how I long for it—Yes on any terms—what is all this blood shed for—for the negroes. They say I'm a Yankee—but if wanting peace is Yankee—then I *am one*. I am tired of *Disunion* of husband & wife."⁴⁶⁸ Suffering with consumption and without a home, Bond was lonely. By the end of October, she lamented, "Oh! How oft do I yearn for a sister or dear precious ma, to unburden my heart to. Surely wishing human sympathy can't be sin. Did not even Christ have a dearly loved disciple who he unburdened his trouble too!" Being far from home proved a significant part of her unhappiness, as she wrote, "When I think of my situation—with husband hundreds of miles from me—my

⁴⁶⁷ Priscilla Bond, 218.

⁴⁶⁸ Priscilla Bond, 312.

fathers house thousands of miles off & my utter inability to go to either—then of my dwelling amongst those whom I am so disagreeable & being compelled to live upon.”⁴⁶⁹

Sarah Lois Wadley described in great detail her family’s dramatic journey through woods, swamps, and rivers as they attempted to flee Louisiana for Georgia. Before federal soldiers arrived at her home in Ouachita Parish, Louisiana, Wadley’s family had decided to become refugees. In August of 1863, Sarah had mixed feelings about the family’s future, writing, “I cannot exactly describe my feelings, they are perfectly free from fear, I feel a sort of exhilaration...but not agitation, it does not seem possible to me that the Yankees should come here and I should see them, a sight which I have hoped and prayed I might never witness.”⁴⁷⁰ In September, they travelled countless miles in a sizeable wagon train, only to be refused passage across the Mississippi by federal troops. The Wadleys turned around, retracing their steps back to Oakland.

Kate Stone, who like Julia LeGrand lived in Madison Parish, also faced threats from occupying and transient federal forces and eventually became a refugee. By 1862, Louisiana crawled with federal troops, some of whom occupied New Orleans and others who were attempting to take Confederate strongholds along the Mississippi River, namely, Vicksburg. Kate’s family got used to frequent run-ins with Confederate and Union troops—but Kate expressed anxiety about interacting with either side given that they typically wanted something or were looking for someone. In March of 1863, Kate “cried the rest of the day and half of the night” after two federal soldiers took her horse, Wonka.⁴⁷¹ Several days later, her writing showed how living in a war zone tried her stability. She lamented, “The life we are leading now is a

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid, 313.

⁴⁷⁰ Sarah Lois Wadley, 42.

⁴⁷¹ Kate Stone, 182.

miserable, frightened one—living in constant dread of great danger, not knowing what form it may take, and utterly helpless to protect ourselves.” She also admitted, “We long for news from the outside world, and yet we shudder to think what evil tidings it may bring us.”⁴⁷²

On March 25, 1863, the Stones left Brokenburn—the family home—fleeing the onslaught of federal forces under General John McClelland. They joined many other refugees of all sorts on the roads—“nearly all” headed for Texas.⁴⁷³ While staying at their friends’ home, the Stones and their friends, the Hardisons, were robbed at gunpoint—according to her account, by one of the Hardison’s former slaves and several other enslaved men. The incident was terrifying for Kate and her family, and they left for Monroe, Louisiana as soon as possible, where they stayed with Sarah Lois Wadley’s family for around a month. After a chaotic journey, the Stones finally made it to Texas, where they stayed for the duration of the war.

Financial Insecurity

The war disrupted markets and created new ones, but either way it forced women to exercise ingenuity and to think about money in a new way. In most cases, the war brought financial insecurity that lasted well beyond 1865 and peace. And while some elite women were shielded from true want because of their wealth, shortages affected everyone. Wealthy Virginian Lucy Buck worried about shortages in December of 1862, writing, “I don’t know what in the world we are to do for salt when tis sixty and ninety dollars per bushel.”⁴⁷⁴ Lucy and her family lived in the Shenandoah Valley, which became a much-contested place throughout the war, and the Bucks served both federal and Confederate troops with some regularity—the former not by choice. Lucy got used to shortages of particular items, and also to doing some of the housework

⁴⁷² Ibid, 185.

⁴⁷³ Ibid, 191.

⁴⁷⁴ Lucy Buck, 163.

herself, for like many Southern women, she faced coming to terms with her family's slaves leaving the plantation—both logistically and ideologically. In June of 1863, many of the Buck's slaves took advantage of the unrest in the area and stole their freedom in the night. Lucy woke up on June 9, 1863 to find “there was no fire made, no water brought, no movement whatever below stairs.”⁴⁷⁵ Like many Southerners, Lucy was shocked and angry at the “servants”—especially at what she called “their ingratitude in taking the horses.”⁴⁷⁶ Despite her surprise, she and her family managed to do the labor their slaves had done for them for years. In fact, Lucy expressed pride in some of her new handiwork, writing that same day, “My biscuits were pronounced faultless tonight.”⁴⁷⁷

Fear

The Civil War brought with it unimaginable fear, uncertainty, and anxiety. Rumors animated fears of approaching troops, atrocities, and destruction, while the desperate desire for information kept women reading any newspaper they could get their hands on, despite the conflicting information they found in them. Julia LeGrand frequently complained about the rumor mill in New Orleans, writing, “Thousands of rumors are floating, and all our conversation is made up of a record of them,” in March of 1863.⁴⁷⁸ She expressed frustration with how gullible many of her neighbors and peers were, but also showed impatience with herself for believing the things she heard. Surviving on rumors, half-truths, and whispers, Julia confessed, “I think the fabled well has caved in and covered up dear *Truth* forever. If she survives sufficiently

⁴⁷⁵ Buck, 208.

⁴⁷⁶ Buck, 209.

⁴⁷⁷ Buck, 209.

⁴⁷⁸ Julia LeGrand, 235.

after this war is over to give us a history of it, it will be more than I expect of her.”⁴⁷⁹ Amanda Edmondston also frequently wrote about news and rumors circling among her peers. Though she sometimes devoted paragraphs in her journal to recording the things she heard, sometimes she chose not to, as she did in late February of 1865. She wrote, “The papers are filled with rumours as to what happened before the occupation of Columbia, but I will not fill you, O my Journal, with them.”⁴⁸⁰ Not surprisingly, Edmondston chose not to record rumors that conveyed bad fortunes for the Confederacy, while she recorded (with gusto) those that disparaged federal troops’ losses and shortcomings. Either way, she (along with most of her peers) found the nature of information sharing during times of war quite frustrating.

Race

Rumors and fear also animated women’s thoughts about the breakdown of slavery. Before the war, some of these diarists expressed some real concerns about slavery’s righteousness (although some certainly had no qualms about it, of course). As the war disrupted slavery and more and more enslaved people took their freedom for themselves, elite women struggled to comprehend the situation. Their half-hearted concerns about their slaves turned to fear and anger—something that continued well after the war, as I’ll show in Chapter Six. Ultimately, as George Rable and others have argued, when they realized their slaves didn’t subscribe to their paternalistic ideologies, they doubled down on their racist views and often became more ardent in their defenses of slavery and racial superiority.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁹ LeGrand, 242-3.

⁴⁸⁰ Catherine Edmondston, 673.

⁴⁸¹ George Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 114-21. A small sampling of texts that describe the breakdown of plantation relations include: Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). I am using paternalism here to describe the social fiction of relationships between masters and slaves as conceived by the

Prior to moving from Maryland, Mittie Bond's exposure to slavery proved very different than what she encountered in Louisiana. Her parents owned no slaves, and while many of her acquaintances did, she had never seen the large-scale slavery that existed on her new husband's and father-in-law's plantations. Given her love of reading, Bond had probably encountered abolitionist tropes in popular literature such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Even so, she wasn't prepared for the violence she witnessed on her new family's plantations.⁴⁸²

Josh Bond, Mittie's father-in-law, was a particularly cruel master—something that strained their relationship. In August of 1861, she remarked, "O, how my ears have been stressed today by the cry of the distressed! How bestial it is to whip the negro so severely. God will not wink at such cruelty!" The next day, she recorded that there was "more whipping going on" at the hands of her father-in-law. She admitted, "It is indeed hard to bear to be compelled to stay where such is carried on daily...He is the father of my husband, but I can never love him as such. I have no respect for him. He is too mean for anything."⁴⁸³

Mittie hoped to be a positive influence on her husband and father-in-law in terms of their treatment of slaves—at least before and in the early years of the war. In December of 1861, she chastised her husband "loud enough for his father to hear" for allowing their enslaved driver, Nace, to treat a runaway slave very poorly. She said to her husband, "Howard, if you are going to have a black master over you—it is more than I'm willing to have."⁴⁸⁴ Likewise, she was thrilled

masters. There are issues with the concept of paternalism (as catalogued by numerous scholars), but white elite Southerners certainly felt paternalism was real and the ideology shaped their views of their slaves.

⁴⁸² As Kimberly Harrison points out in her introduction to Mittie's diary, Maryland residents lived in a society "in which the institution of slavery had been historically under scrutiny," meaning that Bond was very likely aware of the critiques of slavery's violence but perhaps wasn't ready to witness them in person. See Kimberly Harrison, "Introduction," *A Maryland Bride in the Deep South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 2-4.

⁴⁸³ Priscilla Bond, 204.

⁴⁸⁴ Priscilla Bond, 210.

to record the wedding of “two of the servants.” Her husband performed the ceremony—a common marker of the paternalistic relations between masters and slaves—and she remarked, “I wonder what the ‘Yankees’ would think of it if they had seen, how happy they were, dressed in their *ball dresses*....”⁴⁸⁵

Several years later, though, Mittie’s views had changed. As federal troops approached Abbeville, where Mittie and her family were refugees, Bond admitted, “I am afraid of the negroes!” and confided to her journal, “The servants are all complaining.”⁴⁸⁶ Days later, she described a conflict she was having with some of the family’s house slaves. One slave, Amanda, “said she was sick,” while another, Mintty, told Bond that nothing was wrong with Amanda—she simply was “trying to get them off to the Yankees.” Mintty and Betsy—also a slave—told Bond “they don’t want to go, they find *home* very good, better than the Yankees can give them.” Amanda (or “Mandy”), on the other hand, said “she hopes the Yankees will come here; she will tell them to take our clothes & things from us, says she hates the *Bonds*.” This type of insubordination disrupted the racial hierarchy and made women like Mittie Bond feel helpless. Both Mintty’s and Betsy’s assurances that they would remain “loyal” and Mandy’s refusal to protect her master’s and mistress’s things demonstrate slaves attempting to navigate new opportunities for staking out space amid the chaos of war and the movement of federal troops into the area. While Mintty remained with the family for the duration of the war, even nursing Mittie during severe illness, in November of 1863, the Bonds sold Mandy to a neighbor. Bond noted, “she did not bid any of us good bye.”⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid, 213.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid, 246, 10-22-1863, 10-23-1863.

⁴⁸⁷ Priscilla Bond, 336, 4-5-1865; 254, 11-30-1863. Minttie cared for Mittie despite the fact that her “beau” had been dragged from their kitchen on February 2, 1865 and shot in the face by neighbors. Bond doesn’t reveal whether or not he died, or what caused the conflict in the first place, but she seemed disturbed by the violence of the shooting

Circumstances of war and fear hardened Priscilla Bond's views of her slaves, and the same happened to Julia LeGrand in occupied New Orleans. LeGrand, who had been raised at least partly in Maryland like Bond, claimed, "I was once as great an abolitionist as any in the North." By the time of the war, however, LeGrand's views had changed dramatically. In January of 1863, Julia's acquaintance told her about a run-in she had with a "mulatto" who "gave her much insolence" and said "that if she had a daughter 'he intended to come and see her.'" When her friend relayed the story to her, LeGrand confessed, "My blood ran cold...and for the first time I realized our position here among these lawless negroes."⁴⁸⁸ Race relations in New Orleans were particularly complex, as federal troops occupied the city, recruited enslaved men to join the USCTs, and also tried to maintain order amid a hostile population. For white elites in the city, the racial "order of things" seemed turned upon their head.

Because of the instability of slavery in New Orleans, LeGrand frequently offered scathing comments about slaves, and in particular, about the notion that they should and could be freed. After her "servant" Julie Ann ran away, LeGrand was furious because she had "tried so hard to make her good and honest" and she was "living a vicious life" as a "degraded creature." Julia reflected on her former "sympathies" for enslaved people, which she felt had "blinded" her. She wrote, "But my experience with negroes has altered my way of thinking and reasoning...it was when we owned them in numbers that I thought they ought to be free, and now that we have none, I think they are not fit for freedom."⁴⁸⁹ For *pages*, LeGrand scribbled racial vitriol about

and noted in her entry, "We had never seen any thing amiss with 'Dave' & allowed him to stay here at nights." Priscilla Bond, 330.

⁴⁸⁸ Julia LeGrand, 99, 68. LeGrand makes claims to be a "former Abolitionist" at least twice. Such statements are nearly always followed by "but," making them a strange excuse for the terrible things that followed. Why LeGrand felt a need to justify views that were largely accepted by the plantation elite is what makes these statements come complicated, as they show an uncertainty about slavery.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid, 99-100.

black men being animals without sensibilities or social ties. In the end, she concluded that while slavery “can not be considered a good school for the white man,” it did improve the enslaved “physically and mentally.”⁴⁹⁰

LeGrand and her peers watched as more and more slaves took their freedom, and in a city occupied by federal forces, enslaved people saw the writing on the wall and took their opportunity. When her host’s slave, Mary, ran away and took a young enslaved boy with her, Julia wrote, “I must say that I can never get over my sorrowful feeling for a blow of this sort. I had expected better things of Mary,” who she claimed “had always talked of being fond of her mistress’ family.” LeGrand blamed Mary’s transgression on the “Yankees,” writing that they “have undermined every good feeling which at one time existed between these poor people and their owners... So many people have been betrayed by their *pet* servants.”⁴⁹¹ Given that she didn’t see slaves as intellectual equals, placing blame on “abolitionists”—the “Jacobins of America” in her mind—and federal troops isn’t surprising.⁴⁹²

Kate Stone—another Louisiana resident—had some harrowing experiences with enslaved people before she and her family left for Texas as refugees. As early as July 1861, Kate recorded talk of a “great upheaval” among the slaves in Madison Parish. She and others feared they would use Independence Day to cause “trouble.”⁴⁹³ When federal troops arrived in March 1863 at Brokenburn, the family’s plantation, Kate felt “the Negroes all behaved very well while the men were here. Most of them hid, and the others did not show the slightest disposition to go with them, though the Yankees asked them to go.” While she was pleased with her own slaves, she

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid, 101-2.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid, 262-3.

⁴⁹² Ibid, 112.

⁴⁹³ Kate Stone, 37.

added, “This country is in a deplorable state. The outrages of the Yankees and Negroes are enough to frighten one to death.”⁴⁹⁴ A month later, Kate wasn’t so pleased with the family “servants.” When the Stones left Brokenburn to avoid troops, the slaves took over the home and “Webster, our most trusted servant, claim[ed] the plantation as his own and is renowned as the greatest villain in the country.”⁴⁹⁵ Like Julia LeGrand, Kate blamed the “Paternal Government at Washington” for trying to “incite a general insurrection throughout the South.” She felt the government hoped to get “rid of the women and children in one grand holocaust” through a slave revolt, since, as Kate noted, “We would be practically helpless should the Negroes rise, since there are so few men left at home. It is only because the Negroes do not want to kill us that we are still alive.”⁴⁹⁶

Shortly after finding their home otherwise occupied and setting off for Texas, Kate, her family, and several neighbors were robbed at gunpoint by a group of “Negroes” who were “completely armed” (as previously mentioned). This incident—while terrifying for Kate regardless of the racial implications—did reflect how the attackers—presumably former slavers—sought to undermine the racial hierarchy. Kate seemed particularly distressed that the men were armed, that they talked to the women “in a most insulting manner,” that they took “anything [they] fancied,” and that they called “each other ‘Captain’ and ‘Lieutenant.’” Thus, the robbery alone would have been unsettling, but to see the racial order of slavery crumbling before their eyes in such an obvious, violent manner made Kate “completely unnerved.”⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid, 179, 182-3.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid, 192-3.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid, 297-8.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid, 194-6.

Reading, Writing, Coping

Reading as Comfort

To face these challenges, some diarists relied more than ever on their “books”—turning to literature and other publications to numb their realities. They formed reading groups with friends, read with peers and family while they sewed and did other housework, and read to entertain themselves during precarious times. And while reading sometimes served as a distraction, it often served a deeper purpose. Women read during the Civil War in search of meaning, in some cases, perusing the pages of histories and poems to make sense of the fractured and violent realities around them.

Priscilla Bond, a newlywed and recent transplant to Louisiana, faced a variety of challenges during the Civil War. Born and raised in Maryland, Bond felt like an outsider in her new home and described conflicts with her husband’s family with some frequency. Mittie also had consumption, and her condition worsened throughout the war as she moved from plantation to plantation trying to avoid federal occupation after Union troops burned the family’s plantation. Reading offered her companionship and meaning as she sought to deal with the stresses of extended illness, homesickness, and being separated from her husband while he served the Confederate government. At Christmastime 1863, Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* occupied her time and proved an “agreeable companion.” Her friend, Mrs. Maxwell, sent the novel to her, and she felt that it could “be better appreciated now than any other time,” since the holidays were the “season to bring forth new thoughts—to fill the heart with emotions not felt every day. It is a time to turn out malice, hatred & revenge from our hearts & let sweet peace & forgiveness dwell therein.” Plagued by difficult circumstances, the story made Bond consider her blessings. She

mused, “It has furnished good & I *hope* profitable food for the future. Have I sent a ray of comfort & sunshine into the hearts of any my suffering creatures? I hope so.”⁴⁹⁸

In June of 1864, she expressed similar thoughts about E.D.E.N. Southworth’s *The Initials*, writing, “I have not felt lonesome as I usually do [on] rainy days for I’ve been reading such an entertaining book by Mrs. Southworth, the ‘Initials’ it is called.” The book distracted her from her sadness, and she wrote, “I have felt very heart sick about my dear husband, & if I did not occupy my thoughts by such reading, I believe it would make me *truly sick*.”⁴⁹⁹ Julia Kavanagh’s *Adele* provided similar comfort in January of 1865. By that time, her consumption had gotten severe, and while she had to stay in bed for several days, she “amused [her]self” reading the novel and reflecting, “I was extremely interested—it shows if we only trust in *Providence* all things will work out right—every cloud will be dispelled and those crosses will only purify our hearts—the clouds when gone will leave a serene & clear sky, which will be enjoyed the more for having been over shadowed by them.”⁵⁰⁰ A book promoting the design of Providence no doubt provided comfort to Mittie, who faced her own mortality due to illness while also worrying about her husband and family members.

Illness and war forced Bond to read novels and poetry differently. In February of 1864, she read *The Fair Maid of Perth* and *Castle Dangerous*, “both of which are very interesting and highly historical, but”—she wrote—“‘Anne of Geierstein’ bears off the palm.” She reflected, “*This* is the time to read and appreciate Scott’s novels, whilst *war*, is in the land; we can better understand them.” The next few days were difficult for Bond, as her consumption confined her to her bed with coughing fits. She confessed, “I feel very badly today—I cough a good deal, &

⁴⁹⁸ Priscilla Bond, 259.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid, 303.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid, 327.

feel so weak. My heart feels so *sad*. Life *almost* seems like a burden.” The next day, however, poetry provided some solace and hope. She copied five stanzas of Phoebe Cary’s “Nearer Home”—a poem about finding religious peace as death approaches. Bond wrote, “How lovely those lines are! They are my own sentiments. ‘Let me feel as I would when I stand on the shore of the river of death!’”⁵⁰¹ In the end, Mittie Bond saw her books as companions during what was likely the most challenging period of her life. Despite fear, shortages, and “gloomy weather” (among many other things—Mittie “kept [herself] from feeling it so much—by sewing reading, & writing.” She wrote in February of 1865: “My books are my chosen, choices [choicest] friends! How I *do* love them! They & I seldom quarrel—sometimes I find a little fault with part of their expression.”⁵⁰²

Catherine Edmondston often distracted herself from worry by reading. Books served a larger purpose for her, however, and she often sought meaning in things she read. In early 1863, she wrote, “I feel the want of my books greatly...they stood silent monitors & a glance even at their covers refreshed me.” Edmondston who—like Mary Chesnut—was fond of quoting poetry and prose to describe the things around her missed her books in part because she realized how much she needed them as references “in my daily life.” This admission made her embarrassed about her memory capabilities, but she still longed for her books.⁵⁰³ Rumors about the war and about the fighting at Gettysburg, in particular, forced her to turn to books for comfort. That fateful July, she wrote, “I wander about the house, trying to sew, play chess, & make blunders

⁵⁰¹ Ibid, 278-80.

⁵⁰² Priscilla Bond, 334.

⁵⁰³ Edmondston, 343.

from preoccupation & at last take refuge in my own room & try to bury thought in Wilkie Collins 'No Name'—in which for a time I am successful as I find it deeply interesting.”⁵⁰⁴

Likewise, in 1865, Edmondston “derived great comfort” from reading history. In January, John Lothrop Motley’s *A History of the United Netherlands* assuaged her concerns about the impending failure of the Confederacy. She confided, “We are not so divided, lean not so much on foreign aid, & are not reduced near so low as they were, & yet by perseverance they triumphed.” She obviously hoped the Confederacy could have similar fortunes despite their many setbacks by 1865.⁵⁰⁵ That March, she read the *Life and Times of Bertrand Du Guesclin* by David Flavel Jamison, which “led me back to the fountain head—Froissart--& I have read it again for the third or fourth time with I believe greater zest than I ever did before.”⁵⁰⁶ Froissart, a French chronicler, appealed to Edmondston in part because his descriptions of French leadership at the Battle of Navarrete, which she felt were “suitable to our [the Confederate] situation.” She felt that Froissart was “a wonderful book & one which should be almost a ‘vade mecum’ [reference book] in a boy’s education” because of its “nice sense of honour, the high chivalric tone, [and] the admiration of personal courage which it inculcates.”⁵⁰⁷ As military circumstances became desperate for the Confederacy, many Southern women made arguments about the honor of Confederate soldiers—something that became a main tenet of the Lost Cause years later.

In 1863, Sarah Morgan described her “idea of happiness” in the pages of her lengthy journal. For the twenty-one-year-old, happiness was “a rainy evening with a *comfortable* book to read, a solitary spot to hide one’s self in with a fascinating piece of embroidery or nice piece of

⁵⁰⁴ Edmondston, 423.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid, 654-5.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid, 680.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid, 680-1.

sewing, with a volume of Tennyson or Longfellow open before you.”⁵⁰⁸ Just as a quiet corner with a book was her sanctuary, she felt her “most dreadful trial” was “spending a lonely day without a book in reach.”⁵⁰⁹ Reading and writing were her happiness and solace, and circumstances of war didn’t stop her from coping with stressful situations by turning to books—her own and those by other authors. The war had disrupted the flow of books to Baton Rouge as it had nearly everywhere in the South and federal soldiers took much of the Morgans’ library in 1862. In August of that year, Sarah and her family returned to their home in Baton Rouge after federal soldiers had ransacked the house. She lamented the fact that “Not a book remained in the parlor, except Idylls of the King...Every book of any value or interest, except Hume and Gibbon, was ‘borrowed’ permanently.” Sarah especially “regretted [the loss of] Macaulay more than all the rest.”⁵¹⁰

Even after the family’s library was stolen, Sarah managed to find things to read. She was bedridden after an ankle injury, so when a soldier suitor showed up in January of 1863 with a copy of *Kate Coventry*, a novel by George John Whyte-Melville, Sarah was thrilled. She wrote, “That blessed Mr Halsey (what a different strain from the one I sang in my last diary!) like an angel of mercy sent me Kate Coventry yesterday, just when I was pining for a *bonne bouche* [tidbit] of some kind.”⁵¹¹ Another soldier-friend—this one married—did the “sweetest deed imaginable” and brought her a copy of John Abercrombie’s *Intellectual Philosophy* to read. He even offered “his services to explain or help me in case I should find any difficulty” in reading the book. Though Sarah explained away her relationship with Colonel Breaux by writing, “his

⁵⁰⁸ Sarah Morgan, 542.

⁵⁰⁹ Sarah Morgan, 352.

⁵¹⁰ Sarah Morgan, 239.

⁵¹¹ Sarah Morgan, 398.

taste and refinement lead him to prefer [the company] of ladies, to that of rough men,” his intellect and their shared love of reading drew her to him in was that eventually became problematic and led to a dramatic encounter with his wife.⁵¹² Questionable flirtations aside, Sarah kept reading, and while diary writing proved to be her true emotional outlet, she found significant solace in her reading.

Gertrude Clanton Thomas worried about access to books very early in the war. In July of 1861, she complained, “I have read nothing new for some time. The blockade has prevented the importation of new books and loyal as I am and wish to be I think that for a time this will prove a serious inconvenience.” Thomas recognized that readers would be pressed for time “just at present for if we read ‘the signs of the times’ and keep posted in political events we will have little time for any thing else,” but she worried about “after the war [was] over, or if it continues for some time what shall we do for books?” Her solution was to “repay [books she owned] a second perusal with a more matured mind,” but she knew should would “miss the delightful pleasure of culling over half a dozen new books to see which we shall read first.”⁵¹³ Thomas managed to get a copy of Augusta Jane Evans’ Confederate novel *Macaria* in June of 1864—just months after its publication. Desperately worried about her husband’s safety, Thomas wrote that she hoped the novel was not about the war, stating, “I am tired of the war & rumors of war—I wish to read some thing which is not connected with it.” And still, when she recorded her thoughts about the novel, her main comment was that she was “indignant because nothing was said of the war” in the beginning.⁵¹⁴ Her contradictory statements demonstrate that while Thomas

⁵¹² Sarah Morgan, 308-9.

⁵¹³ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Vol XIII, Part 1, pg 14, 7-21-1861.

⁵¹⁴ Thomas, Vol XIII, Part 2, pg 157, 6-29-1864.

was sick of hearing about the war, she still hoped to find answers in her reading about its meaning.

Thomas also found solace in her books and turned to reading fiction, history, and poetry for comfort. In 1864, her family moved from Augusta to Belmont, their plantation outside the city, and Gertrude was nervous about it but hoped to “read something which [would] strengthen and invigorate the tone of my mind.” She “wish[ed] to read some healthy, strong, sensible, womans writing—Nothing sentimental or romantic—No strange dream of fiction.” To Thomas, “the silent struggles of each heart, the nervous depression of a womans nature, the responsibilitys resting upon her—make of her a heroine.”⁵¹⁵ Around Christmas that year, Thomas also read *David Copperfield* “for the third or fourth time and [fell] under the influence of its delightful charm, renewing acquaintance with some of the best characters Dickens has ever drawn.”⁵¹⁶ Thomas found comfort for her religious concerns in reading as well. In September of 1864, she was reading the memoirs of John Foster, a Baptist minister, and wrote, “I like the book very much and was particularly interested in his argument against the eternity of future punishment.” She found “some consolation” in his admission of struggling between two opposing forces (one Christian and one less than Christian) within himself—something she struggled with as well.⁵¹⁷

Literature calmed Gertrude’s emotions and busy mind, but it also helped her put her feelings into words. More than once, she compared the experience of living through the war to William Mudford’s gothic story, “The Iron Shroud.” In September of 1864, she confessed, “How I do wish this war was over. I wish to breathe free. I feel pent up, confined—cramped and shall confess I confess it am reminded of that Italian short story of The Iron Shroud where daily—

⁵¹⁵Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Vol XIII, Part II, pg 165, 7-4-1864.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid, Vol IX, pg 32, 12-27-1864.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid, Vol XIII, Part II, pg 189, 9-15-1864.

daily hourly and momentarily the room contracts, the victim meanwhile utterly impotent to avert the impending doom.”⁵¹⁸ When a “freshet”—or flood caused by melting snow and thaw—threatened to flood the Thomas’ home in January of 1865, Thomas wrote, “I have been often and forcibly reminded during the day of Maggie Tullins tragic death as recorded in the Mill on the Floss.”⁵¹⁹ Gertrude refers to Maggie Tulliver, George Eliot’s novel’s protagonist, who drowns with her brother attempting to rescue their cousin after a river flood. Fortunately for Thomas, the flooding spared her and her family as well as their home, though other fears soon replaced her worries about drowning, as federal troops approached.

Self-Writing for Comfort

While reading offered escapism and meaning for Southern women during the Civil War, many of them found that the only place they could express their true feelings and anxieties about the war was their diaries. Even though journals were often read by family members and friends, the women discussed here expressed feelings and thoughts they sometimes felt uncomfortable sharing with their peers directly. As they had been before the war, diaries were confidantes—places where women’s vulnerability and fear and anger could dwell in contrast with the expectations they found elsewhere.

In 1862, Sarah Morgan wrote of keeping her diary, or, “journalizing:” “It has become a necessity to me.”⁵²⁰ For the rest of the war (and beyond), Sarah kept her journal, writing of her concerns, fears, sadness, but also her joys, triumphs, and her hopes for the future. When she and her family waited for the impending arrival of federal troops, Sarah worried about them destroying her home, writing, “They will leave all things we love and value beyond expression,

⁵¹⁸ Ibid, Vol XIII, Part II, pg 195, 9-17-1864.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid, Vol IX, pg 41, 1-11-1865.

⁵²⁰ Sarah Morgan, 121.

one heap of smouldering ashes!” Because of this, she wondered, “Why then do I write this, since it is to burn with the rest? Ah! There is a proof of my hopeful disposition! They tell me these things must be, before many days, but I am willing to believe ‘Better days are coming, we’ll all go right!’”⁵²¹ “Better days are coming” is a phrase Sarah wrote often, and even when times were exceedingly difficult and she had nothing but sad news to report, she kept writing.

This is not to say that Sarah felt that writing her diary was a worthwhile or admirable task—quite the contrary. In fact, she expressed significant doubt about the contents of her journal and—not surprisingly—proved her own greatest critic. For example, in May of 1863, she wrote, “I wonder why I could never keep a respectable diary? I have a very amusing one in my brain, ...but some how I keep it all there, afraid to commit it to paper, partly for fear it should fall in the hands of those it is not intended for, and partly because it would be too much trouble to write all I should like to remember, as I should like to have it written.” Sarah felt frustrated by what she reread, which she found “so trite, so stale, so tedious and matter of fact, so dry and uninteresting, that I am strongly tempted to throw it in the fire every time I look at it.” Though she was disappointed that her journal seemed uninteresting, she still realized its importance to her, writing, “I may as well keep it to remember the dark hours when pen and ink proved my best friends, and soothed many an ache for me. One should not forget tried friends; then Vive pen and ink!”⁵²²

Like Sarah Morgan, Gertrude Clanton Thomas found a friend for the emotional and physical tolls of war in her journal. In August of 1861, she “realized one of the most eventful moments in [her] life—Mr Thomas left for the seat of war.” For the next several weeks, Thomas

⁵²¹ Ibid, 140.

⁵²² Sarah Morgan, 494.

used her journal to confess her deep sadness and worry, describing having to suppress her emotions on a regular basis. In writing a letter to Mr. Thomas, she “gave way to an uncontrollable burst of grief but it was soothing and I felt relieved afterwards,” and as she recorded the incident in her diary, she noted, “I must have employment for my mind and thoughts”—something her diary provided.⁵²³ And yet, Gertrude felt she couldn’t capture everything on paper, partly because of time and partly because things were simply happening too quickly. In February of 1862, she noted, “Events of the utmost importance are occurring daily almost hourly. It is only in quiet times that I can write. When my nerves are strung to their highest tension I have no time for writing. My pen refuses to fly fast enough to record the thick coming events.”⁵²⁴ She showed similar concerns several months later, writing that despite how much she wished to “convey some faint idea of the times in which we live,” she felt “events crowd so rapidly upon us that we learn to wonder at nothing.”⁵²⁵ Even with her concerns about capturing the events transpiring around her, she still recognized her need to write, confessing in 1862, “Dear old journal I shall expect to look to you for comfort many an hour this summer.”⁵²⁶

Two years later, Thomas was in even more dire straits, as her husband was still away fighting, her father had died, and she worried about having to flee federal troops who were closing in on Augusta. On the Fourth of July, she wrote in her diary about how concerned she was about potentially becoming a refugee, writing, “I expect I annoy Mr Thomas by my frequent allusions to this subject so hereafter my journal I think I shall tell you when any thing worries me for you know it is almost impossible for me not to have some one to talk to.” At that moment,

⁵²³ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Vol VIII, Part 1, pg 27, 8-18-1861, pg 34.

⁵²⁴ Ibid, Vol VIII, Part 1, pg 62, 2-17-1862.

⁵²⁵ Ibid, Vol VIII, Part I, pg 90, 7-2-1862.

⁵²⁶ Ibid, Vol VIII, Part I, pg 83, 6-9-1862.

having a journal didn't fulfill all of Gertrude's emotional needs, and she confessed, "I wish I had a book with a key to it in which I could write what I feel. There is a song 'Whisper what thou feelest' and it is just this almost irresistible inclination which I sometimes have to confide in some one." Thomas desired a space even more private than a journal because "There are thoughts, doubts, suggestions which present themselves to my mind. If I could only talk of them."⁵²⁷ This deep discomfort Thomas expressed demonstrates how unstable the genre of self had become. As the journal's safe space collapsed, women found the selves they had written in them challenged.

Thomas' complaints about her journal weren't consistent, and on more occasions, she wrote about how much of a relief it was to have a place to write at all. In October of 1864 when she worried that her husband would be killed defending Atlanta, she noted, "I try to look upon the bright side yet as dark came on I began to feel gloomy and instinctively I turned to my journal 'ever present help in time of trouble.'"⁵²⁸ After a three-week break from writing, she wrote again, "I am in trouble and instinctively I turn to my journal."⁵²⁹ And in late November—terrified of leaving her home and of the quickly-approaching troops—she agonized over the idea of leaving her diary behind or having to destroy it. She began packing her diary volumes in a chest, putting them away with "all the cherished mementos of my girlhood and the letters of Mr Thomas and my own—together with my journal, faithful record of my life since I was fourteen." Her "courage faltered," though, and she admitted, "I felt as if I was putting away a portion of my life—Tears rushed to my eyes and with bended head I prayed that this bitter blow might be

⁵²⁷ Ibid, Vol VIII, Part II, pg 164, 7-4-1864.

⁵²⁸ Ibid, Vol IX, pg 8, 10-21-1864. Here, Thomas quotes Psalm 46:1, showing that for her journaling was as important as religion to her.

⁵²⁹ Ibid, Vol IX, pg 17, 11-17-1864.

spared me.” She added, “I could risk leaving silver but those journals, those letters, those treasured locks of hair I could not let them go and I have packed them to be sent off instead of the silver.”⁵³⁰ Thus, in a pivotal moment of her life, Thomas chose her diaries and letters—her words and the words of her loved ones—over material things.

While her desire to cling to paper memories isn’t surprising, her actions are more revealing than they seem at first glance. Beyond just a desire to preserve these papers, Thomas sought to protect the part of herself she had written into her diary’s pages. Even though the space for exploring the self was not guaranteed amidst such chaos, she couldn’t let the self she had painstakingly written into hundreds of pages of journals disappear forever. Instead, she would try to rewrite that self on new pages and preserve the older version by keeping her diaries.

Creative Expression

Within their journals, some women coped by writing poetry amid their books of selves. Nineteenth-century Southern women were well-versed in Romantic poetry, which relished emotional expression and self-seeking art. Some diarists wrote ardently patriotic poetry to the Confederacy, while others wrote poems of a more personal nature. Either way, this creative writing served a similar purpose as their diaries and reading: it helped them to process and cope.

Mittie Bond recorded poetry and hymns in her diary before the war began and continued throughout it, but amid her thoughts on James Montgomery and Sir Walter Scott she wrote lines of her own. Bond was over a thousand miles from her family, living with her in-laws in Louisiana and facing federal troops, displacement, and worrying about her husband. Not surprisingly, Mittie thought of her family often and missed them terribly. In July of 1862, she wrote a poem in her diary for her mother, whom she longed to see. For six stanzas, Bond wrote

⁵³⁰ Ibid, Vol IX, pg 23, 11-22-1864.

about “thinking of” her mom and her desire to “hear [her] gentle voice” and “feel [her] loving kiss.” She then wrote, “My husband’s kind and true mother, / As one could be to me; / But in all the world, there’s no other, / I love *like* I love thee.”⁵³¹

Fauquier County, Virginia resident Amanda Edmonds recorded poetry in her journal too. Amanda—or “Tee”—had two brothers fighting for the Confederacy, her father had died in 1857, and regular and irregular warfare occurred in and around the Piedmont Valley where she and her family lived. When Union troops came to Paris, Virginia in 1862, Amanda frantically hid her journal after writing, “I bid you farewell...With my last good night my Journal, for I fear for your safety. No Yankee eye shall ever scan these pages or have the pleasure of destroying the little memories, incidents of the past.” In the past, Amanda had apparently buried her journal; in this case she would “secure for [it] a good hiding place” somewhere else—a “more comfortable place of rest” than the “cold, damp ground.”⁵³² Fortunately, troops didn’t take Amanda’s diary, and she kept writing.

In July of 1862, Amanda “composed a few lines for Cos. Mag (Humphrey),” which she recorded in her journal. Her cousin wrote to her, asking if she “found enough [romance and novelty] in this war.” Mag felt that Amanda’s ideas about romance would prove dark one day, and Amanda noted, “Yes, terrible romance, abounding with suspense and anxiety.”⁵³³ Amanda’s assessment of the war was, “Yes, wild and thrilling scenes have held / A joyous sway upon my heart, / But what a dread romance is this / To fill in life so sad a part.” Amanda Edmonds recorded her flirtations with Confederate soldiers, but to her, “this plagued, horrid, awful war / Has proved to me a romance too long.” Despite the poem’s somber beginning, it ended on a

⁵³¹ Priscilla Bond, 224.

⁵³² Amanda Edmonds, 74.

⁵³³ *Ibid*, 103.

more hopeful note. Tee wrote, “Well be it so, and I’ll still own / The grateful gift of Heaven bestowed / To fill my heart with feelings high, / Be life a smoothe or rugged road.”⁵³⁴

Catherine Edmondston wrote poetry quite frequently, and unlike many of the diarists studied here, her interests in publication started during the war. Most of her poetry was religious in nature (or at least in theme), but she also wrote several poems in support of the Confederacy and its leaders. Following the death of General Albert Sidney Johnston in April 1862, Edmondston penned a lengthy poem mourning his death that she “Respectfully Inscribed to President [Jefferson] Davis.” The poem celebrates the friendship of Davis and Johnston, mourns the loss of Johnston, and criticizes the “base invaders” from the North.⁵³⁵ Several days later, Edmondston decided to send the poem to President Davis—but only after getting her husband’s permission. She signed the poem “A Lady” and then addressed herself in the diary, mimicking a conversation between two versions of herself, writing, “There! Now Mrs Edmondston I hope you feel better, but, Madam, let me tell you that those lines which you took such pleasure in sending will hardly reach your hero’[s] eyes...Are you sorry now that you asked your husband to let you send them? No? Then you are not so wise as I thought you were!”⁵³⁶

Edmondston described wanting to have her poetry read by others as “vanity,” but it’s clear that that was her hope because she continued writing lines about political matters. In June of 1862, she wrote a poem about Edward Stanly, the short-lived military governor of North Carolina and how he betrayed his state. She confessed, “I have written some lines which I would greatly like to fall into his hands, but as I see no possibility of that I will ‘een confide them to my journal, that it at least may see how I loathe the Traitor!” The scathing poem criticizes Stanly

⁵³⁴ Ibid, 103.

⁵³⁵ Catherine Edmondston, 145.

⁵³⁶ Ibid, 152.

(spelled “Stanley” in the poem) for agreeing to be Lincoln’s military governor and connects him with the violation of Richard Dobbs Spaight’s grave. Spaight (spelled Speight in the poem) was governor of North Carolina in the late-eighteenth century and was killed in a duel by Edward Stanly’s father.⁵³⁷

The final political poem included in her diary was “To Maj Gen Butler, U.S.A., Upon hearing that he had caused the coffin containing the body of Gen A S Johnston C.S.A. to be opened”—not surprisingly—another scathing poem for one of the most hated figures in the South. After describing Butler’s “craven” behavior, such as imprisoning Eugenia Phillips and allegedly opening Johnston’s coffin, Edmondston ended the poem by writing, “Remember Butler! Aye! Thou blot upon thy country’s scutcheon! / Aye! / Remember Butler! It shall be a war cry to humanity! / Remember Butler & New Orleans! Aye! The world remember! / Him who wars on Woman and the Dead!”⁵³⁸ Kate actually hoped to have this poem published, as she sent it to the *Richmond Enquirer*—supposedly so she could get her husband’s “unbiassed opinion of them.” Sadly, the newspaper did not publish it, or as Edmondston put it: “Alas, my friend, the Enquirer did not think them equal to the trash usually published in its columns & tho day after day I looked for them they have never appeared.” Kate decided to read the poem to her husband anyway, and she was thrilled when he replied, ““That is stirring, Katie.””⁵³⁹

After recording her Butler poem, Catherine justified her creative writing in her diary and showed her conflicted feelings about female writers. She argued, “This faculty of writing rhymes amuses me & as I neglect no duty by it, I think it no harm to indulge it.” She then addressed

⁵³⁷ Ibid, 200-1. Troy Kickler, “The Forgotten Governor,” *North State Journal Online*, 12-14-2017, <https://nsjonline.com/article/2017/12/the-forgotten-governor/>.

⁵³⁸ Ibid, 281-2.

⁵³⁹ Ibid, 280.

herself, as she frequently did when critiquing her poetry, chiding, “Tho’ the lines themselves are not found worthy of a place in the Poet’s corner, still if mediocre poetry gives you any pleasure, Mrs. Edmondston, by all means enjoy it. But beware. O! beware of stepping out of your sphere & publishing them.” She elaborated on her thoughts about women publishing, saying, “Then indeed you would forget a woman’s first ornament, modesty. Women have no business to rush into print; so wide an arena does not become them.”⁵⁴⁰ Though Edmondston made these statements, her actions show that she had mixed feelings about women seeking acclaim for their writing. In truth, Edmondston sought the artistic approval of her husband and politicians she admired and demonstrated that she was willing to send her work for publication—even if she wasn’t ready to sign her name at the bottom yet.

Edmondston also wrote religious poetry and hymns that she recorded in her diary, and while her political poetry tended to help alleviate anger, her religious poetry was much more focused on hope and fears. In May of 1862, she “finished some lines which [she] had commenced years ago” because she felt the timing was appropriate in the “time of this our Country’s darkest gloom.” Entitled “As Thy Days, So Shall Thy Strength Be,” the poem describes asking for God’s help in keeping faith despite fears of death and desperation. Edmondston wrote, “When the Past has its sting & the present is Drear / And I look to the Future less with hope than with fear / Say ‘I am thy friend; lean thou wholly on me, / And know as thy days are so shall thy strength be.”⁵⁴¹

A month later, she recorded a hymn she had written “years ago before [she] was married” that was inspired by Psalms 87: 7 and offered criticism of her writing. Like “As Thy Days, So

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid, 282.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid, 174-5.

Shall Thy Strength Be,” this poem is about having faith through challenges. This time, though, she assessed her development as a writer and worried about not improving. She worried, “Both lack originality, but am I making as much of my material now as I did then?” She continued, adding, “I hope so, for I can conceive no more sorrowful or humiliating thought than for one honestly to be convinced that he is not the man he was, that age or neglect has dimmed the force of his intellect, the brilliancy of his imagination.” She invoked the bard himself to capture her feelings, adding, “‘Let me not live after my flame lacks oil, to be the snuff of younger spirits,’ says Shakespeare—a wise wish—and one which I hope will be granted me.”⁵⁴²

On several other occasions, her diary became a site for recording her creative writing, but also her critiques and thoughts about her skills. Again and again, Edmondston worried about how her husband would react to her writing, but also clearly desired publication and recognition.⁵⁴³ In early July of 1862, she entertained herself by “writing some Lines on the Mosque of St Sophia.” She had been working on the piece for a while, and in the past, she had planned to send it “to Longfellow [to ask] him to elaborate & adorn it, but this War has taken all relish from his productions.” As she had in previous entries, she addressed herself through her critique, writing, “The fact is, Mrs Edmondston, they lack the poetic inspiration! The lines are good, smooth, pretty, *very neat* in short, but they do not stir the blood or make one pulse beat quicker.” She went further, explaining to herself her fears about not being able to express her emotions fully. She confessed, “There is a something which you wish to say, something you *feel*, something which these lines do not say & which, Madam, in short, I fear you are not capable of saying!”

⁵⁴² Ibid, 196-7. This quote is attributed to *All's Well that Ends Well*, Act I, Scene 2.

⁵⁴³ Edmondston wrote again about sending poems for publication so that she could “get Mr Edmondston’s unbiased opinion of them” in February of 1863. See Edmondston, 358-9.

Still, she noted, “At any rate then I am thankful for the capacity of *feeling*, thankful that I can *feel* a grand idea, an exquisite beauty, even if the expression of it has been denied me.”⁵⁴⁴

A desire for peace became the subject of several of Catherine’s poems. In late February 1863, she recorded a lengthy poem entitled “Peace!” and the next day, again derided her writing talents. The poem describes the sound of peace rippling across the nation and its impacts on various individuals: the soldier’s wife, the farmer, the soldier, his children, and “a lone mourner”—a widow of Sharpsburg. Edmondston’s evaluation of her writing the next day proved unforgiving. Her entry started abruptly with her writing, “Do you know Mrs. Edmondston why your own poetry does not give you pleasure? I will tell you, Madam; it is because your mind is a *store house*, not a *mine*. You take nothing from it but what you have formerly put there.” Rather than celebrating the good qualities in her writing, she simply compared her poem to the writings of her favorite authors, saying, “turn to the bookcase, take down Tennyson or Bulwer’s translation of Schiller, read ‘In Memoriam’ or ‘The Mystery of Reminiscence,’ & then re read your own!” She admitted her high standards for herself, but ultimately concluded, “No Madam, the poet is ‘nascitur not fit’ & ‘nascitur’ you are not...Poet you cannot, Imitator deign not; useful everyday sympathizing woman you are.”⁵⁴⁵

On December 29, 1863, she copied in another original poem about peace, this one called “A Prayer for Peace.” These lines list out the wrongs Edmondston felt Southerners suffered in the war, but ended with a promise to keep up the fight for “Freeman’s right,” drawing a line from the Revolution to the Civil War.⁵⁴⁶ These poems show that Edmondston’s patriotism had its limits. By 1863, she—like many Americans—were ready for an end to the war. Writing helped

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid, 226.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid, 364-6. Edmondston means “poeta nascitur non fit,” meaning “The poet is born, not made.”

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid, 511-13.

her cope with the war and air her grievances with Northern commanders, but it also allowed her self-expression and an opportunity to celebrate her identity and intelligence in powerful ways. As she remarked about reading an old poem she found about “Twilight” in November of 1864: “It in a way rejuvenates me to read them & I seem to take up an old train of thought & feeling in a manner unexpressibly pleasant to me. It is tho I am the same & yet not the same person all at once.” In the midst of war, reading lines written with “youthful effusions” probably did do something to alleviate worry. Writing provided the outlet that so many women needed.

Literary Dislocation

Sometimes reading and writing simply weren’t enough to deal with the burdens of war, and as time went on, some diarists and readers lost faith in keeping up with their literary habits. While the shift in attitude wasn’t always chronological or permanent, the war’s length and severity did impact how some women thought about coping through reading and writing. For these women, giving up on their reading and writing meant giving up on a part of themselves—the self they wrote into existence in the pages of their diaries. The war challenged the autonomy women found in their diaries because women feared federal troops or slaves would steal them (and sometimes they did). As their spaces for exploring the self grew smaller and smaller, elite women’s privilege to soothe themselves in their own way diminished.

For instance, in December 1861, Priscilla Bond contemplated the two-month break in her diary writing. She wrote, “What a long time has passed since I penned a line here. Why do I not write oftener in my journal? I believe it is because my thoughts are so often sad ones.” Mittie was particularly homesick at this point and rewrote in her diary a phrase she often thought of in

difficult times: “As my day is so shall my strength be.”⁵⁴⁷ Her situation was far bleaker in January 1864. Her loneliness and isolation were heightened by her serious illness, and her in-laws chastised her for writing in her diary. She lamented, “I am blamed for writing even in my book—but my thoughts *must* find vent in some way—though it hurts me very much to write—yet it is one of the few *pleasures* I enjoy.”⁵⁴⁸

Gertrude Clanton Thomas had a difficult time keeping up with the rapid change occurring during the war, and in some cases, she simply lost the will to record bad news all the time. After her father’s death and her husband’s departure for the front lines, Gertrude confessed, “Often during the last two months as my glance fell upon my journal I have wished that I could take my pen and record a few of the events which were transpiring—tell of some of the occurrences which are making history but my pen is not ‘the slave of my thoughts.’” She continued, writing, “My mind is sluggish and my will is weak and undecided. I lack energy. My journal gives incontrovertible testimony to that effect. I will be confidential to you my journal, I had almost said my friend and admit to you that spiritually, intellectually, & physically I have been for the past few weeks dull inert and desponding...intellectually my mind has seldom worked with less activity.” Gertrude was embarrassed to admit that she hadn’t had the “energy to read a book which will require the least effort,” so she had been reading *Macaria*, *Grace Lee*, “Byron’s Corsair” and *Peterson’s Magazine* instead.⁵⁴⁹

In March 1865, Gertrude expressed similar concerns about her diary writing and reading. After a break, she returned to her journal, writing, “I know I will regret hereafter that I have made no record of time and events which are fraught with so much interest, record of events

⁵⁴⁷ Priscilla Bond, 209-10.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid, 265.

⁵⁴⁹ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Vol VIII, Part II, pg 155.

which are hourly making history—but I cannot I shrink from the task.” After four years of war, Thomas confessed, “At times, I feel as if I was drifting on, on, ever onward to be at last dashed against some rock and I shut my eyes and almost wish it was over...I am tired, oh so tired of this war. I want to breathe free.” Her true desire was to “be quiet to have no distracting cares—time to read—leisure to think and write—and study”—to “get away—to forget in reading or in writing or in talking the ever present, the one absorbing theme of war.”⁵⁵⁰ Even as she lamented her exhaustion, Thomas still looked to her journal to capture some of her most difficult thoughts and feelings. And while she continued to write, her relationship with her journal had certainly changed. Her difficulties simply overwhelmed her ability to express them in writing, and it wasn’t until after the war that she found new ways of getting her thoughts on paper.

Though she kept reading, writing her diary, and composing poetry, Catherine Edmondston expressed doubts about how much these activities were helping her and whether or not she should continue. After hearing about General Lee’s evacuation of Petersburg and Richmond, Edmondston wrote, “Came news last night, news that I cannot realize; it falls on my outward ear, but I do not believe that it fully enters into my inner sense or I could not be thus calm.” Immediately after Lee’s surrender in particular, Edmondston wrote in her journal, but found it more difficult than ever. After she learned of the surrender, Kate destroyed many of her papers. She found herself “stunned &...unable to look forward to a single day, to a single consequence in the future.”⁵⁵¹ Days later, she and her husband prepared for the arrival of federal soldiers by hiding their valuables—including her journal, which she ironically left with her slave

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid, Vol IX, pg 50-2, 3-29-1865.

⁵⁵¹ Catherine Edmondston, 688-9.

Owen. She wrote, “And now, old friend, you my Journal, for a time good bye! You are too bulky to be kept out, exposed to prying Yankee eyes...No, old friend, we must part.”⁵⁵²

Edmondston reconstructed her diary entries she kept on “odds & ends of paper” after she hid her journal. On April 16th, she confessed, “It is an odd state to which I have reduced myself, to an utterly paperless condition.” She had destroyed her letters from throughout the war and “secreted” her journal away—worried she might “never see it again.” She lamented, “Every letter I possessed, letters which I had cherished as my heart’s blood, mementos of those I had loved & lost years ago, literary memoranda, excerpts, abstracts, records of my own private self examinations, poetry—all, all destroyed” to keep them from falling into “Yankee hands.” She apparently worried that her papers might be published in “Northern journals,” which “teem[ed] with private papers stolen from Southern Households.” Kate hoped that soon, she would “withdraw” her journal from its hiding place and “finish [it] with a triumphant announcement of Peace & Independence!”⁵⁵³ Unfortunately, when she picked up her diary months later, it would be to record Confederate defeat.

The war’s seismic shifts altered the courses of lives forever and without relent. The Romantic self that had celebrated the individual, nature, and man’s (or woman’s) inherent goodness and flaws died on the battlefield to a certain extent. That self, which Southern women had embraced and wrote into their own lives’ stories, simply couldn’t exist anymore. All the markers of their identity—family, finances, and race—had changed, and in their minds, not for the better. The spaces Southern women had carved out for themselves were collapsed amid fears they shared of “Yankees” stealing their diaries, which disrupted the agency they had demanded

⁵⁵² Edmondston, 692.

⁵⁵³ Catherine Edmondston, 696.

and undermined the self-production that occurred in such spaces. Thus, the war was a crisis of many things, no doubt, but it was also a crisis of the genre of self.

CHAPTER SIX: *Editing the Past, Writing a Future*

“Reading is out of the question—I can’t fix my attention on books. Let me try if I can write myself into sleepiness and fatigue. My journal has been very much neglected of late. What can I recall—standing, as I now do, on the threshold of a new life—of persons and events, of chances and changes, during the past six months...?”
—Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, Marian Halcombe’s diary⁵⁵⁴

No woman informs our understanding of the Civil War more so than the quintessential diarist of the era: Mary Boykin Chesnut.⁵⁵⁵ Even as other voices have made their way into the broader narratives, Chesnut remains a stalwart sentinel of the Southern Civil War experience, name-dropping and “zinging” her way through the years of the war and those immediately around it. Mary is humorous, intelligent, and exceedingly well-connected, just as she is vain, petty, and needy.

And yet, the voice of Mary Chesnut that scholars rely on and documentarians quote with abandon would not exist as we know it without the help of a male historian—C. Vann Woodward—who won the Pulitzer Prize for painstakingly putting her diaries and the lengthy edits to them in order. As Woodward showed us in 1981, Chesnut edited and re-edited her diary for decades, and did so decades after the “events presumed to have been recorded as they happened.”⁵⁵⁶ In fact, Chesnut herself distinguished between the “Diary,” or “book,” and her

⁵⁵⁴ Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2005), 154-5. Collins’ novel—a favorite with the diarists in this dissertation and an “experiment” in fiction according to Collins himself—blended the narratives of a variety of characters into its storytelling method, including a significant portion told by the “diary” of Marian Halcombe.

⁵⁵⁵ In addition to her diary writing, Chesnut frequently records original poetry in the margins of her diary and wrote at least three manuscript novels—all of which contain autobiographical elements. See “Diary in Fact—Diary in Form,” *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, Ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981, xxii-xxiv.

⁵⁵⁶ “Diary in Fact—Diary in Form,” *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, Ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981, xvi.

“journal or notes.” The former was a literary piece produced specifically for eventual publication; the latter was private and not meant for public consumption. In his edited version, Woodward brought us all of Mary’s writing that survives—the good, the bad, and the ugly, and if she was around to stop it, no doubt she would have (since she had deleted many of the less-than-flattering passages in her editing process).⁵⁵⁷

Despite all her hard work, Mary Chesnut never knew the admiration and acclaim she so desperately wanted in her lifetime. Chesnut, a daughter of privilege and substantial social clout, dreamed of literary renown more than anything else, but her diary wasn’t published for the first time until 1905—nearly twenty years after her death. Isabella D. Martin and Myrta Lockett Avary collaborated to bring Mary Chesnut’s masterpiece to the presses. Martin, a “friend” of Chesnut’s, believed Chesnut had “given her complete authority” over the diary manuscript and sought out Avary, “who had recently edited a volume of Civil War memoirs,” to help her cut the manuscript down by a third. The two women also expressed an interest in deleting anything not in keeping with the emerging Lost Cause narrative. A novelist, Ben Ames Williams, released his own edited version in 1949, and by Woodward’s estimation, he took “great liberties with the text” to make it more readable.⁵⁵⁸ Woodward took his time editing Mary Chesnut’s diary, inspired by Edmund Wilson’s call to action in his landmark study of war literature, *Patriotic Gore*. The result is a magnum opus—a truly revealing text that shows the reader how a nineteenth-century diarist self-consciously constructed her story of self over large swaths of time.

⁵⁵⁷ C. Vann Woodward, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, xxvi.

⁵⁵⁸ C. Vann Woodward, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, xxviii-xxix.

Even before these later iterations of Chesnut's diary were published, her diary was already a deeply interesting experiment in the genre of self. In editing and reediting her journals with the express goal of publishing them, Chesnut staked a claim about white women's part in defining what the Civil War was, how it would be remembered, and what that meant for the self. Although the war undermined the ways women like Mary Chesnut defined themselves (through race, money, and status), they could still use their writing to make a statement about who they were. The "self," destabilized by war and the end of slavery, could find stability again when women wrote their stories for the public. In the end, the Civil War diary became *the* genre of the Civil War, and women's diaries stand out from their male counterparts' as *the* narratives of the Civil War experience.

Whether they remained diehard Confederate supporters to the bitter end or secretly hoped for an end to the war no matter the outcome, elite Southern women faced a changed world when peace came in 1865. Losses—both physical and financial—altered the lives of all Southerners, including the millions of slaves now freed from bondage. Even when their loved ones who had been fighting the war came home (and so many did not), life was different, and women had new roles to play in the home and in public. Once again, women turned to their diaries and books to comprehend the sea of change around them. And ironically, their diaries—the form that failed them in so many ways—became the quintessential genre of the Civil War civilian (and in some ways, the whole war) experience.

Countless scholars have catalogued the emotional and physical traumas of the American Civil War. A number have even considered specifically how, despite Walt Whitman's doubts, the "real war" *did* find its way into American literary production North and South.⁵⁵⁹ In his book

⁵⁵⁹ Just a few examples include: Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1962), Daniel Aaron, *The Unwritten War: American Writers and the*

Hearts of Darkness, Bertram Wyatt-Brown posited that the women who lived through the Civil War were the true wellsprings of the Southern Renaissance that occurred throughout the region decades later.⁵⁶⁰ The women discussed here certainly found new ways to express themselves to deal with the trauma and loss brought on by the Civil War. And yet, while they did bring new types of narrative to their journals, the fiction, poetry, and other literature they wrote often reflected a deep need to uphold the status quo. Even as these women expressed nostalgia for the old order of things, their literary activities in the postwar period again made space for women in public, intellectual arenas—something that challenged patriarchal relations in subtle ways, even when it wasn't intentional.

While they tried to rewrite their pasts, these Southern women also found new spaces to explore and redefine the genre of self. In their writing, they explored the selves they had become in a post-Confederacy South—despite Bertram Wyatt-Brown's claims that "seldom did these women reveal their inner lives even as they explored...the dark places of the mind."⁵⁶¹ On the contrary, the pieces these women wrote were deeply personal. As they had projected a vision of their selves onto their diaries, they again envisioned who they were, who they had been, or who they hoped to be.

Civil War (New York, 1973); Stephanie Foote, *Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in the Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001); Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, *Writing out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Sarah Gardner, *Blood and Irony: Southern White Women's Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1937* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), Sharon Talley, *Southern Women Novelists and the Civil War: Trauma and Collective Memory in the American Literary Tradition since 1861* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2014), Randall Fuller, *From Battlefields Rising: How the Civil War Transformed American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵⁶⁰ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Hearts of Darkness*, 181.

⁵⁶¹ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Hearts of Darkness*, 183.

The Aftermath of War

While women didn't serve as soldiers (though there are some exceptions), they felt the stings and arrows of loss all the same. Civil war is a powerful disruptor, and in the American South, it reshaped the worlds of white elite women in incredible ways. Death, financial ruin, hunger, fear, and dislocation (both physical and ideological) haunted Southern women through the rest of their lives, and these specters of the past had varying impacts on women's emotional and intellectual lives. The ways they had defined themselves—through family, through wealth, and through race—were all uncertain after the war, leading to a crisis of the self. Through all these difficulties, the women studied here turned to reading and writing, as I've described in previous chapters, and the Civil War didn't diminish their need for words; instead, the war increased it, though the nature of the relationship with words changed.

Defeat

Coming to terms with Confederate defeat was the first challenge these women faced. On April 7, 1865, Mary Chesnut wrote in her diary, "Richmond has fallen—and I have no heart to write about it...They are too many for us. Everything lost in Richmond, even our archives. Blue-black is the horizon."⁵⁶² For her, the Confederacy *was* its literary production, and when that was gone, the experiment in Confederate nationhood was too. Chesnut—after recording lengthy, play-by-play notes on rumors and news about the war's end for months—wrote in May of 1865, "We are scattered—stunned—the remnant of heart left alive with us, filled with brotherly hate." She added, "We sit and wait until the drunken tailor who rules the U.S.A. [Andrew Johnson] issues a proclamation and defines our anomalous position. Such a hue and cry—whose fault? Everybody blamed somebody else. Only the dead heroes left stiff and stark on the battlefield

⁵⁶² Mary Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 782.

escape.”⁵⁶³ She confessed two days later, “A feeling of sadness hovers over me now, day and night, that no words of mine can express.” Still, she managed to find a way to make the most of her situation. Living in a crowded house with her in-laws, she noted, “Plenty of character study in this house—if one had the heart.”⁵⁶⁴

Amanda Edmonds, a 26-year-old Virginia resident, was devastated by Confederate defeat as well. Her brothers served in the Confederate Cavalry and Colonel John Mosby and his men frequently stayed with the Edmonds at their home, Belle Grove. On April 9th, she recorded in her journal, “A sorrowful day in the annals of history for us. I am writing now later than that date, but I cannot forbear recording it here as one of the saddest of the War—General Robert E. Lee surrendered his army...Tis useless to picture here such a calamity to our cause.”⁵⁶⁵ Even when Confederate defeat was assured, she couldn’t shake her sadness, and wrote in her diary on the Fourth of July, 1865, “I have had the blues six long weary weeks and I feel that no change of place or society could chase them away.”⁵⁶⁶ By September, Amanda’s hopes were shaken, and she confessed, “Oh! Oh! Just to contemplate the miserable changes that four years have brought upon our happy country, changes that we can not get used to; it is enough to drive the strongest crazy.” She added, “What we are to come to the Lord only knows! We hope for the best & trust a High Power, though He seems to have forsaken us in this affliction.”⁵⁶⁷

By April of 1865, Emma Holmes was having trouble keeping up with her journal. On April 7th, she wrote, “It is almost absurd to pretend to write up a journal in such times as these,

⁵⁶³ Mary Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 814.

⁵⁶⁴ Mary Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 814.

⁵⁶⁵ Amanda Edmonds, 219.

⁵⁶⁶ Amanda Edmonds, 226.

⁵⁶⁷ Amanda Edmonds, 232.

for each day brings such startling rumors and incidents that the brain is bewildered by the rush of events.” She added, “We live in a whirl of excitement, and all things are unsettled and uncertain.”⁵⁶⁸ In late April, Holmes wrote about returning to the Union and Lincoln’s assassination. She couldn’t believe either, lamenting, “To go back into the Union!!! No words can describe all the horrors contained in these few words. Our souls recoiled shuddering at the bare idea. What can ever bridge over that fearful abyss of blood, suffering, affliction, desolation, and unsummed anguish stretching through these past four years.”⁵⁶⁹

Like Emma Holmes, Kate Edmondston and Kate Stone had difficulty writing about Confederate defeat. Edmondston wrote on May 7, 1865, “What use is there in my writing this record? What profit, what pleasure do I find in it? None! None! Yet altho it is an actual pain to me I continue it from mere force of habit.” She felt hopeless about the future, writing, “We are *crushed!* Subjugated! And I fear, O how I fear, *conquered*, & what is to me the saddest part, our people do not feel it as they ought—like men who have lost their Liberty.”⁵⁷⁰ Kate Stone—who learned about the end of the war later than most due to her isolation in Texas, wrote on May 15, “*Conquered, Submission, Subjugation* are words that burn into my heart, and yet I feel that we are doomed to know them in all their bitterness. The war is rushing rapidly to a disastrous close. Another month and our Confederacy will be a Nation no longer, but we will be slaves, yes slaves, of the Yankee government.” For Kate the real tragedy was the waste: “our hardships, our sacrifices, and worse of all, the torrents of noble blood that have been shed for our loved Country—all, all in vain. The best and bravest of the South sacrificed—and for nothing. Yes, worse than nothing.” Even though Kate hadn’t heard about the surrenders yet, she added:

⁵⁶⁸ Emma Holmes, 433.

⁵⁶⁹ Emma Holmes, 436.

⁵⁷⁰ Catherine Edmondston, 708.

“There is a gloom over all like the shadow of Death. We have given up hope for our beloved Country and all are humiliated, crushed to the earth. A past of grief and hardship, a present of darkness and despair, and a future without hope. Truly our punishment is greater than we can bear.”⁵⁷¹

Beyond the difficulties around the end of the war itself, many women worried about what the future held—how the country would put itself back together—especially when Lincoln was assassinated just days after the surrender. They also worried about the future and how former Confederates might be treated by the United States government. Wild news and rumors circulated by word of mouth and by newspaper (in places where they were still being printed) and many people didn’t know what was true or false. Catherine Edmondston confided in her journal, “We sift the news & vainly endeavor to separate the chaff from the wheat.”⁵⁷² Emma Holmes wrote of similar concerns, scribbling, “no one tried to speculate on our future, such sudden & unexpected darkness had fallen upon our prospects.” When the end of the war brought together people separated for years, she wrote, “Everyone seemed to cast thought aside & while patiently waiting a ray of light, to try to enjoy the present reunion of friends.”⁵⁷³ Sarah Morgan felt serious distress about peace and Lincoln’s assassination. Morgan called Booth’s actions “dastard murder” and wrote, “Do I justify this murder? No! I shudder with horror, wonder, pity and fear...I abhor this, and call it foul murder, unworthy of our cause...Let not his blood be visited on our nation, Lord!”⁵⁷⁴

Loss

Even after they came to terms that a Confederate nation would never be, Southern women’s families and homes would never be the same. Four of Kate Stone’s five brothers served

⁵⁷¹ Kate Stone, 340.

⁵⁷² Catherine Edmondston, 702.

⁵⁷³ Emma Holmes, 437.

⁵⁷⁴ Sarah Morgan, 607.

in the Confederate military at some point or another. Her brother, Coleman—or Coley, as she called him—died in September of 1863. Her mother’s younger brother had already been killed in action, and another of Kate’s brothers had died of disease. She confided in her journal, “The moonlight falls clear and cold on the graves of three of those who made the mirth and happiness of our home only two short summers ago...Now what remains of the high hopes, the stirring plans, and the great ambitions that burned in the hearts and filled the brain of these gallant boys—only a handful of dust.” She added, “What charms can peace have for us when it does come bereft of our nearest and dearest?”⁵⁷⁵ In April of 1865, “talk of defeat” made Kate furious because she felt it “seem[ed] a reproach to our gallant dead.”⁵⁷⁶ After her family returned to Louisiana from Texas after years of being away, Kate found a home changed beyond her recognition. She wrote, “It does not seem the same place. The bare echoing rooms, the neglect and defacement of all...But if the loved ones who passed through its doors could be with us again, we might be happy yet...We must bear our losses as best we can. Nothing is left but to endure.”⁵⁷⁷

Sarah Morgan would have understood Kate Stone’s pain well, for she and her family faced similar challenges after the war. As mentioned previously, Sarah’s father and closest brother had died before the war began—the former of illness and the latter in a duel. Then, in 1864, the family received word that her two brothers serving the Confederacy had both been killed within a week of one another. Because of their heavy losses, Sarah worried about seeing Confederate troops return home. Though she “pray[ed] for the return of those who have fought so nobly for us,” she also “dreaded” their arrival in Baton Rouge. The return of Confederate

⁵⁷⁵ Kate Stone, 262.

⁵⁷⁶ Kate Stone, 334.

⁵⁷⁷ Kate Stone, 364.

soldiers only made her feel the loss of her two brothers that much more. She confided in her journal, “Since the boys died I have constantly thought of what pain it would bring to see their comrades return without them—to see families reunited, and know that ours never could be again, save in heaven.”⁵⁷⁸

Pecuniary Troubles

Financial concerns shaped the lives of many Southern formerly-elite women. They and their families had invested heavily in their hopes for an independent South, and many if not most women who had lived comfortable or even indulgent lives before the war found their circumstances dramatically changed. Some women lost their male providers to the war itself; others found that even when their male relatives didn’t die, the money they had was worthless and the land couldn’t work itself after their slaves left (something I’ll describe later). For example, after the war, Emma Holmes—who had faced some economic challenges prior to the conflict—the end of the war brought serious difficulties. The summer after the war ended, she decided to take in sewing “to assist in paying for our washing, etc.” Even with her financial troubles, Emma still couldn’t let go of her classist ideas, writing, “It certainly won’t be much more than that, for I’ve always considered seamstresses as a dreadfully ill-paid class & always declared I would never take sewing as my means of livelihood, for it would soon kill me or at least make me feel like committing suicide.”⁵⁷⁹ By early 1866, her situation had worsened, and she confessed, “Despair is laying its icy hand on all. Day by day it becomes harder to get money there for the necessities of life...No man can tell what a day may bring forth.”⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁸ Sarah Morgan, 610.

⁵⁷⁹ Emma Holmes, 461.

⁵⁸⁰ Emma Holmes, 485.

Mary Chesnut made similar complaints about her new economic realities in her diary. In June of 1865, she wrote, “There are two classes of vociferous sufferers in this community: (1) those who say, ‘If people would only pay me what they owe me!’ (2) ‘If people would only let me alone. I cannot pay them. I could stand it if I had anything to pay debts.’” She added, “Now we belong to both classes. Heavens! What people owe us and will not or cannot pay would settle all our debts ten times over and leave us in easy circumstances for life. But they will not pay. How can they?”⁵⁸¹ Sadly, time didn’t make her circumstances any easier, and for virtually the rest of her life, Mary wrote frequently of debts and wrote and sold short pieces to try to fill the coffers (although, she certainly wanted the acclaim as well).

Kate Stone and her family—like Emma Holmes—had lost the family patriarch a full six years before the start of the Civil War. Despite her husband’s death, Kate’s mother Amanda had managed the family’s financial affairs quite well, freeing the 1,260-acre plantation of debts. The war changed that. The Stones returned to an empty home, fallow fields, and with no money. Kate and her siblings struggled to adjust, and money concerns kept her from wanting to socialize. After two years of hardship, Kate confessed that she felt “fully forty years old,” but she managed to feel better after attending a fish fry—only after “a good cry.” After spending time with her neighbors, Kate admitted, “Since then, Mamma, the boys and all of us have been going to everything and have found even poverty in company more bearable than when suffered alone.”⁵⁸²

⁵⁸¹ Mary Chesnut, 830.

⁵⁸² Kate Stone, 369.

Race

Finally, the end of the Civil War meant an end to slavery—at least in name. Southerners had an especially difficult time coming to terms with the dramatic changes to the racial hierarchy, and Southern female diarists wasted no words in describing the resentment they felt about it. Gertrude Clanton Thomas managed to write in her diary with some regularity during and immediately after Confederate defeat. However, after July of 1865, she didn't write again until October, and when she did, it was to lament how the end of slavery ruined her life. She recalled reading *Nellie Norton* (the proslavery novel mentioned previously) a year earlier and expressing doubts about the righteousness of slavery. She reflected, “To day Slavery as it once existed is a thing of the past & has no longer an existence in the Southern States.” For Thomas, this fact proved disastrous financially, and she wrote that her family was “reduced from a state of affluence to comparative poverty.” Slavery's end also made her question her faith, which she confessed “had been woven together” with her “faith in revolution” and religion more generally due to the Bible's references to slavery. During the break in her journal, Thomas experienced extended illness after having a baby (who died after a premature delivery). In her first entry after nearly dying from postpartum illness and after losing a baby, Thomas chose to write in her journal about the end of slavery—demonstrating how significant of a trauma it was for her.⁵⁸³

Likewise, Kate Stone—who had already experienced dramatic change with regard to slavery during the war—struggled to adjust to a post-slavery South. After an arduous journey from Texas back to Louisiana, Kate wrote in September 1865, “We found nearly all the Negroes in a state of insubordination, insolent and refusing to work.” She added that her mother “had a

⁵⁸³ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Box 3, Vol IX, pg 88-90, October 8 & 14, 1865. Thomas had expressed sadness when she learned of her pregnancy during the war. When her child died, she expressed relief, writing, “He seemed both to enter upon lifes toubled cares and moaned his little feeble spark of life away and the angels took him home to Heaven the next night after he was born—took him home and I thank God that it is so!”

good deal of trouble with them for a few days,” but then they “quieted down...and they are doing as well as ‘freedmen’ ever will, I suppose.”⁵⁸⁴ Days later, Kate wrote about conflict between her brother Johnny and their new hired hands. She described the workers as “a number of ex-Negro soldiers, who strutted around in their uniforms and were hard to control, and admitted, “I was deadly afraid of them.” After fighting with one of the young men, Johnny “shot and came near killing him, and was mobbed in return.” The field hands carried him to the house and were going to kill him, according to Kate. Only one of the freedmen intervening and her uncle’s “opportune arrival” saved him from the “howling, cursing mob...all brandishing pistols and guns.”⁵⁸⁵

Although many diarists wrote about the end of slavery at length, Catherine Edmondston expressed her thoughts on the matter with the most candor. Edmondston professed emancipation to be a “terribly cruelty” to freed slaves, and called freedom an “unexpected, unsolicited gift.” She believed that slaves couldn’t possibly want freedom, and even if they did, she was convinced they would simply “drift without a rudder into the unknown sea of freedom.”⁵⁸⁶ Yet, she expressed shock and fury with her “maid” Fanny left without even saying goodbye. In October of 1865, she described Fanny’s initial “devoted and affectionate manner,” and recalled, “At times she actually wept over me & with the most earnest & tender solicitude she constantly cared for me.” “Yet,” Kate wrote, “When I was scarce able to walk without assistance she left me without provocation or warning, left me in the night, and that too without the slightest notice.”⁵⁸⁷ The next few entries in her diary catalogue her fury and disgust with freedmen and the “horrors of

⁵⁸⁴ Kate Stone, 362.

⁵⁸⁵ Kate Stone, 368-9.

⁵⁸⁶ Catherine Edmondston, 711.

⁵⁸⁷ Catherine Edmondston, 717.

Yankee rule,” as she saw it.⁵⁸⁸ By October, she was convinced that her diary would describe “nothing but more oppressions, & exactions & the most impertinent & officious meddling with one’s own private concerns.” She added, “Were I to write them all this would be but a tiresome repetition of the same story, to wit, a preference of the Negro to the white man, a deliberate attempt to debase the latter in a vain endeavor to elevate the former.”⁵⁸⁹ Edmondston’s frustrations—certainly more emotional than representative of reality—demonstrate just how difficult it was for Southern women (and men for that matter) to accept an end to slavery.

Despite these challenges, Southern elite women had to figure out how they could move forward—even if that meant exhibiting a preoccupation with the past. Numerous scholars have argued about whether the war and its aftermath were liberating or restrictive, full of opportunity or a reversion to a strictly hierarchical status quo, and while the answers to these questions are complicated, one thing that is absolutely certain is that many of the most prolific diary writers continued their craft. When faced with new and unfamiliar challenges, these women wrote, and while we don’t always have diaries from the postwar period, they left us new kinds of paper trails. Sometimes those papers led women to celebrate the successes of Confederate men through the Lost Cause; sometimes it meant rewriting the details of their lives—or imagined lives—in fiction; and finally, it sometimes meant taking the stories of self they had been writing over the years to fruition—seeking publication.

⁵⁸⁸ Catherine Edmondston, 714.

⁵⁸⁹ Catherine Edmondston, 719.

Rewriting the Past, Envisioning a Future

In her seminal work, *Within the Plantation Household*, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese argued that “women’s tradition of public self-representation developed slowly and largely within the confines of dominant attitudes toward appropriate gender roles.” Furthermore, “even by these standards, southern women proved reticent.” When they “broke the barriers,” they tended to do so within the confines of the gender and racial hierarchies of their region.⁵⁹⁰ While Fox-Genovese was writing about the antebellum South, her analysis of southern women’s hesitance to force change rings true for the period during and after the Civil War.

Southern women wrote for a variety of reasons after the Civil War. First, it was becoming more and more common for women to publish and to publish with great financial and critical success, as book production became cheaper. Economic difficulties encouraged many women to try their hand at authorship. After experiencing the war firsthand, many had stories to tell and a rapt audience above and below the Mason-Dixon line and beyond. Many Southern women remained committed to celebrating the sacrifices of Confederate men, and some chose to do so by writing novels, poetry, pamphlets, and histories dedicated to such endeavors. Finally, for some, writing was their only outlet. Diary-writing and reading had provided them with the comforts they needed during the war, but the end of the Confederacy and the realities of Reconstruction demanded something further, and it was in that period that most decided to write for publication.

Just after the war, Emma Holmes decided to try to publish a translation of *Life of Bayard*, the story of Pierre du Terrail seigneur de Bayard, or, the Chevalier de Bayard. Bayard—a French knight and military hero—was well known for his chivalry, honor, and charm—all things that

⁵⁹⁰ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 247.

appealed to a woman reeling from Confederate defeat. In August of 1865, Emma wrote to a friend, “proposing” that he publish her translation from the French, and “asking employment as a translator of new French works.” For Emma, the “labor of love” was more than something to make money. She admitted, “I have so long yearned to distinguish myself in some way, as a benefactor however small, to the public,--to feel that I had not lived utterly in vain, and that I should leave behind me a single stone to add to the grand fabric of human intellect.”

Holmes felt most comfortable translating because she doubted her abilities to write her own work. She confessed in her diary, “Original I know I could not be, for long as I have desired it, I have never felt that ‘divine afflatus’ without which I think, it would be worse than folly to attempt to write.” Even with these worries, she felt “the ‘cacoethes scribendi’ strong upon me whenever I read & enjoy any fine French book, & want others to share my enjoyment through my means.”⁵⁹¹ Holmes found her hesitations frustrating, as “all [her] friends believe[d her] capable of writing well & easily.” She continued, writing:

Tis strange, too, how many tales I weave in my day dreams, of facts & fiction, of others & myself & have done so from childhood, & yet they are always in fragments. I can feel intensely even in those delicious day dreams, in which surrounded by old friends, I live over past happy scenes or imagine new ones, can feel ‘their pleased eyes read my face’ & hear those soft tones which thrill my every vein. And yet it all vanishes like the fairy mists of the morning when I would attempt to pen them. I can tell a plain story but cannot draw characters or group them, & yet, if only the talent were given, what fine materials lay ready at my hand. Fiction can never equal reality.⁵⁹²

Despite these issues with self-confidence, Holmes continued her literary endeavors. In October of 1865, she wrote to her friend again, asking if the *Life of Bayard* publication could work. Unfortunately, he wrote back saying that “the best translation would be mere waste paper

⁵⁹¹ Emma Holmes, 465.

⁵⁹² Ibid, 465-6. “Cacoeethes scribendi” is Latin for an uncontrollable urge to write. It’s also a poem by Oliver Wendell Holmes.

now on the Southern market, for only school books were being called for, & negroes were the only ones who had money to buy,” the latter comment clearly demonstrating the author’s racial attitudes much more than reality. Still, Russell—her friend—encouraged her to write to Harper & Appleton, and she did so “by Dr. [James A.] Young...who went on to New York last week in business connected with the book trade, & who undertook to negotiate the matter for me.” Even with the bad news from Russell, Holmes still had “hope.”⁵⁹³ In the end, Holmes found little luck with publishers for her French translations, writing, “All the publishers say their hands are full of new publications, but school books are keeping them particularly busy.” “Besides,” she wrote, “paper is scarce from the scarcity of cotton & the great drought which has dried up many water powers.”⁵⁹⁴ Thus, the same shortages and difficulties that drove Emma to write glutted the market with scribblings of all sorts and made their publication even harder.

Catherine Edmondston found writing in her journal and to her family and friends difficult after the Confederate surrender. On April 17, 1865, she tried to write a family member, but “an unconquerable fit of nothing-to-say came over” her. Instead, she wrote, “I yielded to the *dolce par niente* feeling & wrote some lines, which I indulge myself in copying as a reward for having burnt so much of my own composition poetry & prose.”⁵⁹⁵ The next several pages, Catherine filled with a poem she had composed that March that starts with a line from Bulwer’s “King Arthur”: “Man’s Noblest Poem is Man’s Bravest Deed.” The poem—dated March 23, 1865 at its end—seems to address an unspoken assertion that “we” (likely the South) has “no Poetry.” In several scenes, the poem catalogs the sacrifice of Southern soldiers, women, and children in

⁵⁹³ Holmes, 471.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid, 475.

⁵⁹⁵ Catherine Edmondston, 697. Catherine likely means “*dolce far niente*”—an Italian phrase meaning “pleasant idleness.”

dramatic and romanticized terms. After she draws each example, Edmondston addresses her reader directly, asking, for example, “Find ye no Poem here?” and “Call ye not that true Poetry?” And while the poem contends that “what we hold most dear, / most sacred” doesn’t “Die in the full vigor of our manly strength, crushed by the / Juggernaut of War!,” it concludes, “Tis not *now* that men *write poetry*.” Instead, “Our lives are Poems / & in the record of brave deeds, / Of calm endurance, of patient fortitude, the legacy of Blood / we leave behind us, / Our children yet shall find their noblest Poem!”⁵⁹⁶ In the end, this poem was just the beginning of Catherine’s efforts to celebrate Southern soldiers, women, and literary culture, though it would take her some time to publish her magnum opus.

After the war, writing in her diary became more and more difficult for various reasons. In June of 1865, Edmondston wrote, “More than a month since I wrote a line in my Journal, but what of that? I have only missed the enumeration of a series of petty annoyances, of humiliating orders from our Yankee masters.” In fact, she confessed, “This Journal is now but a pain and grief to me. It is a transcript of disappointed hopes, of crushed expectations, which have all the bitterness of death without the lively hope of a Resurrection. A few words will give my life since Johnston’s Surrender, a few words, but containing the sorrows and cares of a lifetime.”⁵⁹⁷ Between July and October, she didn’t write at all due to illness. On October 1st, she wrote, “Three months since I last wrote a line in this book, and *three what months!* In the first place sorrow, anger, anxiety, & distress to such an extent as were endured by me during the months of May, June, & part of July bore their usual fruit & after weeks of indisposition my health at last gave way & for five weeks I was seriously ill.” Even when her journal began again, Edmondston

⁵⁹⁶ Catherine Edmondston, 697-9.

⁵⁹⁷ Edmondston, 712.

didn't seem to have the heart to write in the ways she had previously. On October 4th, she opened her entry with: "Nothing but more oppressions, & extractions & the most impertinent & officious meddling with one's own private concerns." After complaining at length about freedmen's efforts to vote and serve on juries, she wrote that she had "commenced...copying into my book the scraps of paper, old memorandum books, etc. on which I have kept my Journal since I secreted it on the 11th of last April." With some bitterness, she added, "Fortunately my task is not a heavy one. My sickness & the utter despair I was in all last summer having curtailed my record sadly. What an emptiness it all is!"⁵⁹⁸

Despite her hopelessness, Edmondston eventually felt inspired to write again, though her diary ends in early 1866. She and her husband, Patrick, remained on their plantation, Hasoceca, after the war, though the family's circumstances changed. Kate's sister Nora and her daughters moved in with them in 1868, and her father died in 1869. Prior to the war, the Edmondston's relied on Catherine's father, Thomas Pollock Devereux, for financial security, and he owned the two plantations they lived on in Halifax County. By the time of his death, his debts "amounted to well over \$290,000" and "the staggering debts charged against Devereux and his heirs sealed the family's financial ruin."⁵⁹⁹ Even with this economic setback and Kate's bad health, Patrick and Kate lived fairly happy lives together until his sudden death in August 1871. Patrick's death proved terrible for Edmondston, and she wrote to her nephew, Willie, "I am so weak in mind—almost as powerless as a little child! I am utterly incapable of any extended process of thought for every power & energy of my intellectual being seems numbed." She added, "You can prevent the crust of age & isolation thickening around & over me until I become self absorbed—self

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid, 719-20.

⁵⁹⁹ Catherine Edmondston, Introduction, xxiv.

contained—hateful to myself & to all with whom I come in contact.” Edmondston had lived to serve her husband’s happiness for so long, that his death made her feel “as one who has hitherto been a keen enjoyer of nature sights—were he suddenly afflicted with color blindness. The things are there—the earth—the sky—the clouds—the flowers. But where is their brightness?”⁶⁰⁰

Through her illness and grief, Edmondston wrote, and in 1872, she published *The Morte d’Arthur: Its Influence on the Spirit and Manners of the Nineteenth Century*, a forty-page pamphlet. Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur* (1485) compiled and translated many French and English stories about King Arthur and his cast of supporting characters. The book served as the main inspiration for British Poet Laureate Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*—one of the most popular works of poetry of the nineteenth century. Edmondston, who read avidly and saw herself as a hobbyist poet, was likely well familiar with the original and the work it inspired. She saw the “Influence” of the *Le Morte D’Arthur* and its notions of chivalry on Southern society and used the manners and honor of Arthur to compare Union generals with those of the Confederacy—not surprisingly—in a less-than-flattering light. She dedicated the work to her aunt, the widow of Confederate Lieutenant General Leonidas Polk, and wrote that Polk “exemplified in his life and character the spirit of ancient chivalry as handed down to us in the Morte D’Arthur.”⁶⁰¹

Edmondston used the remaining pages of the pamphlet to condemn the Freedmen’s Bureau, criticize federal commanders, and celebrate the chivalry of Southern ones. She blamed Northern tyranny for the “decline of the South,” arguing that their intervention wrecked the

⁶⁰⁰ Catherine Edmondston to Willie Cannon, September 10, 1871, rpt in *The Diary of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston*, 731-2.

⁶⁰¹ Catherine Edmondston, Epilogue, 733.

“superior social order” of the South and “pitted black against white.”⁶⁰² According to a distant relative of Edmondston, “much of the content was taken from her journal.” Though Edmondston published the pamphlet anonymously (which is not surprising given her questions about women publishing, as discussed on page 28), her sister Mary Bayard Clarke “immediately guessed the identity of the author” after reading it.⁶⁰³ Clarke was a well-known author herself, who published such works as *Mosses from a Rolling Stone*, *Clytie & Zenobia*, and a translated collection of Victor Hugo poems, while she also edited *Southern Field and Fireside*, a literary magazine for ladies and wrote novelettes for *Peterson’s Magazine*.⁶⁰⁴ While Edmondston didn’t experience the literary success her sister did, her voluminous diary has survived as a testament to her need to write. Catherine Edmondston died on January 3, 1875 of consumption after years of illness. For Kate, as her diary became difficult to write because it meant coming to terms with Confederate defeat, creative writing allowed her to vindicate the South in the way that many Southern women did after the Civil War.⁶⁰⁵

Nannie Haskins struggled to understand what the future held for her and her family as the war came to its end. On May 8, 1865, she wrote, “Surely this must be a dark dream: Is there no South? No Army to avenge our wrongs. Has our beautiful Dixie been overrun by the vile &

⁶⁰² Suzanne Cooper Guasco, “Catherine Devereux Edmondston: ‘My lines are cast in such pleasant places,’” in *North Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, Volume 1, ed. Michele Gillespie and Sally G. McMillen (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2014), 113.

⁶⁰³ Ibid, 733. This epilogue was written by Mary Moulton Barden, a niece of Celia Moulton Lively, who was one of the children of Mary Bayard Clarke and her husband, Colonel William J. Clarke. According to the diary’s editor, Barden used family-held letters to write an epilogue describing what happened to many members of the Devereux family after the war.

⁶⁰⁴ See Beth Crabtree, “Clarke, Mary Bayard Devereux,” *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, ed. William S. Powell, online at <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/clarke-mary>.

⁶⁰⁵ For lengthy discussions of women’s contributions to romanticizing the South and venerating Southern men, see Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*, Sarah Gardner, *Blood and Irony*, and Karen Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

ruthless Yankee...For four years lives & means have been sacrificed upon the Altar of Liberty. But Alas, they have been overcome by *numbers*.”⁶⁰⁶ She worried about her brother, Ben, who the family hadn’t heard from since the end of the war and had been imprisoned on Johnson’s Island since Gettysburg. Her brother finally returned “quite thin,” but alive, in July of 1865.⁶⁰⁷

After the war, Nannie kept writing her diary, though she admitted she felt “nothing of importance has transpired.”⁶⁰⁸ For her, the diary offered the promise of a “pleasant” read later in life. She also continued reading, recording her thoughts on poetry, fiction, history, and other forms of writing. Her journal ends in April of 1866, but picks up again in July of 1869.⁶⁰⁹ In the gap, her life changed dramatically, as the family left the town of Clarksville for Graysville, Kentucky, a tiny crossroads of farmland and thus, a dramatic change in the social scene. Her life changed forever in 1870 when she married her cousin Henry Williams, a widower with four children who was nineteen years her senior. Nannie’s mother “bitterly” opposed the match and Nannie almost broke off the engagement “two or three times,” but they were married on October 6, 1870.⁶¹⁰ Nannie read frequently, recorded her thoughts about the books, newspapers, and poems she liked (and didn’t), and shared her love of reading with her husband and step-children.

From 1871 to 1880, Nannie’s diary either doesn’t exist or didn’t survive. Given her four step-children, plus adding four children of her own in those years, it’s certainly possible time constraints inhibited her writing. At their farm, Greenleaf, in Todd County, Kentucky, Nannie and Henry struggled to make a living, and in her next surviving diary entry from March of 1880,

⁶⁰⁶ Nannie Haskins Williams, 113.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid, 116.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid, 116.

⁶⁰⁹ It’s unclear whether she kept a diary in this period or not. She did write on the first page of her subsequent diary that there were “some twenty or thirty pages here that I tore out, for which I am now very sorry.” Whether those pages chronicled that period or not remains unknown. See Haskins, 135.

⁶¹⁰ Nannie Haskins Williams, 144.

Nannie wrote, “Just now I am trying with all my energies, both physically and mentally to draw forth from my *slow dull* imagination a Romance of Practical Life, to see if I cannot help my dear husband in lightening his burden.” By that time, she had written ten chapters, and seemed to enjoy the challenge, though she worried it would be a “miscarriage of Love’s Labor Lost.” To inspire continued endeavors, she quoted Jean Paul Richter, the German Romantic writer, writing, “Work on, never flag, and your industry will avail in the end.’ That industry is the secret of all success.”⁶¹¹

Though “want of paper” put a damper on her writing, she continued—largely due to terrible “misgivings” about the future due to a bad crop.⁶¹² In October, she wrote, “Oh how I wish I could finish my novel. It would be worthy, and surprise Henry with a nice life from *my industry*.” Nannie was busy, but she vowed to “keep stealing a little time now and then till I finish it, even tho it never burdens the Press.” Beyond the financial hopes Nannie had for her novel, she also wrote, “Writing gives me much occasion for reflection and self-examination & will in that way brighten my intellect and in turn reflect on my children.”⁶¹³ By September of 1881, Nannie worried constantly about money. She confided in her diary, “Debt is a canker worm that eats the bud out of the flower of happiness. Something will have to be done to pay off or we will suffer. Oh what will it be. Why can’t I succeed in my undertakings?”⁶¹⁴ In addition to her novel, Nannie wrote about “trying to write a story”—again—to bring “some money into the

⁶¹¹ Ibid, 153-4.

⁶¹² Ibid, 154.

⁶¹³ Ibid, 157.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid, 162.

till, for ‘tis *very bare & empty*.” Likewise, she mentioned having a paper “on the subject of ‘Books and Boys’” published in the local paper.⁶¹⁵

While economic motivations drove most of her writing, Nannie was also ambitious for her family’s prospects. In early 1882, she wrote in her diary, “I have had my mind set on making something and elevating my family to a position that I desired them to hold.” Still, Nannie recognized her blessings—“a loving husband; a plain but comfortable home; healthy, handsome, bright children.” This realization made her set aside her novel in progress—*Pursuit of the Phantom*—“after a severe struggle with my ambitious nature” in favor of making “the best of *what is*, let the *might be* alone, and put my most loving trust in a Higher Power.”⁶¹⁶

In addition to writing to cope, Nannie maintained some intellectual relationships that seemed to life her spirits. For instance, she joined what was likely a reading club called “Our Neighbors,” and in 1855, the women met to read “the Life and Character of Victor Hugo.” The ladies enjoyed music, lunch, “ice cream, raspberries, and two kinds of cake.”⁶¹⁷ A reading club would not be surprising given the importance Nannie placed on social reading. Many entries describe reading as a family and in 1889, she gave each of her children a magazine subscription to “have some good influence on their minds.”⁶¹⁸

Though Nannie’s diary ends in 1890 (or doesn’t survive beyond then), she continued writing occasionally. Her husband died in 1900, and Nannie moved to Birmingham, Alabama, where she lived until 1930. Williams remained actively engaged in her intellectual community and participated in a lyceum, literary club, served as historian for the local D.A.R., and was

⁶¹⁵ Ibid, 166, 178.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid, 178.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid, 21.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid, 37.

active in her church—activities all documented in letters to her daughters Lucy and Teresa. She described reading “Enid & Geraint” with her “Roundtable,” and wrote to Lucy: “This is the Idyll that portrays the most perfect womanhood. I wish so that you and Teresa could belong to a reading circle just to have the experience of...analyzing—such excellent mental training.” Nannie argued that such “animated discussion” helped her intellectual development when she was younger, writing, “truly my literary efforts are my aftermath.”⁶¹⁹ Nannie recalled to Teresa a visit from a lecturer who taught a “six lecture course” on “leaders” such as “Socrates, St. Francis of Assisi, Victor Hugo, Carlyle; Emmerson[sic] and Tolstoy.”⁶²⁰ She also enjoyed theater, attending “Al Fresco” productions of several Shakespearean plays and enjoying an opera performance.⁶²¹

In addition to showing her continued desire for intellectual community, Nannie’s letters reveal that she continued reading and writing. For instance, she wrote to Lucy while on a visit to Hot Springs, Arizona about some “very interesting book[s]” she was reading called *The Land of the Deepening Shadow* and *Inside the Russian Revolution*, though she noted: “it is not necessary to read so many War books. By time they are out of Press something else has happened.”⁶²² In December of 1910 or 11, she wrote to Teresa about her “Tennyson” and “The Brownings,” both of which she called “companions lying where I can see them.” Nannie confessed, “nothing

⁶¹⁹ Nannie Haskins Williams to Lucy Stark Williams, 12-11-? (likely after 1900), pg 3. “Geraint and Enid” is a section of Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*. The pair of lovers are characters from Welsh folklore and are connected with Arthurian legends.

⁶²⁰ Nannie Haskins Williams to Teresa, 11-18-1909.

⁶²¹ Nannie Haskins Williams to Teresa, 7-19, 1909, pg 5. She saw at least three plays at the country club.

⁶²² Nannie Haskins Williams to Lucy Stark Williams, 2-19-? (likely 1917 or 18), pg 5. The books she refers to are D. Thomas Curtin’s *The Land of Deepening Shadow: Germany at War*, and *Inside the Russian Revolution* by Rheta Childe Dorr, both published in 1917.

appeals to me more than the books that I have & need.”⁶²³ Several years earlier, Nannie wrote to Teresa about a book that made her reminisce about her past—the novel *Stepping Heavenward* by Elizabeth Payson Prentiss. Nannie “came across it and while it did not look inviting [she] began reading it and found it a very natural story of a spoiled, impulsive, talented girl, full of quirks and...every day incidents.” She added, I am going to send it to you by the first chance and it is worth reading to see that we are not the only unthinking, upstartish girls ever born, and in time become tame and useful.” Though she only had time to “read a few pages at a time,” she would “pick it up as a young, fanciful girl visitor for a few minutes.” Most interestingly, though, the novel made her think of herself. She confessed, “it reminds me so forcibly of a ‘Journal’ that I kept for years—full of Ego.”⁶²⁴ Though her letters don’t mention any more fiction or poetry-writing, Nannie did mention writing newspaper articles several times. After attending a party while visiting Phoenix, Arizona that was “simply a Scream,” Nannie wrote up a description for the Phoenix Paper at her friends’ requests. She relayed her activities with pride to Lucy, writing that she was the “Toast of the Ranch.”⁶²⁵ Additionally, according to her diary’s editors, she wrote for the D.A.R.’s national magazine on behalf of her local chapter.⁶²⁶

Throughout her life, reading, diary writing, and creative writing all served important purposes in Nannie Haskins Williams’ life. At the various stages of her life, she used them in different ways, though always tied to her sense of self. Early in her life, her diary was a

⁶²³ Nannie Haskins Williams to Teresa Williams Donald, 12-28-1910 or 1911, pg 5. In all likelihood, *The Brownings* was about the famous literary couple, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who were both poets (Robert Browning was also a playwright). Williams read and quoted E. B. Browning’s work in her diary.

⁶²⁴ Nannie Haskins Williams to Teresa Williams Donald, 1907, pg 5.

⁶²⁵ Nannie Haskins William to Lucy Stark Williams, 2-26-?, pg 3.

⁶²⁶ See Footnote 92 of Minoa D. Uffelman’s introduction to *The Diary of Nannie Haskins Williams: A Southern Woman’s Story of Rebellion and Reconstruction, 1863-1890*, Ed. Minoa D. Uffelman, Ellen Kanervo, Phyllis Smith, and Eleanor Williams (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2014), 222.

confidante, her books a solace from the Civil War being waged around her; in the middle stage of her life, her diary was a place to confess worries, wishes, dreams, and regrets; and later in life, reading and writing became more social for her than they had ever been. She attended various reading clubs her entire (documented) life and placed value on intellectual connections she created with peers and with her family.

After the death of her husband, General Benjamin Hardin Helm, during the Civil War, Emilie Todd Helm became something of a professional widow. As the Confederate half-sister of Mary Todd Lincoln, Emilie's loss and grief were as public as her sister's—at least for many Southerners. A twenty-six-year-old with three young children, Emilie was traumatized by Ben's death and for sixty-six long years, she found purpose in her life by honoring her husband's sacrifice through activities with the United Daughters of the Confederacy and General Helm's "Orphan Brigade," who referred to her as "Mother."⁶²⁷ Emilie was beautiful, clever, and her writings reflect her education.

When she was dying in 1930, Emilie chose to burn her diaries because they contained "too much bitterness." However, many of Emilie's other papers survive, and after the war, she wrote several narratives that seem autobiographical in nature. While she uses alternate names for characters, or simply leaves the narrator unnamed, the short narratives reflect Emilie's need to celebrate the Lost Cause and also to reckon with the immense changes brought on by the war. Emilie's creative writing wavers between nostalgic, morbid, and angry, and reflects a deep need to rewrite the realities around her.

⁶²⁷ For more on Emilie Todd Helm's postwar commemoration activities and experiences as a widow, see Angela Esco Elder, "Emilie Todd Helm (1836-1930) and Mary Todd Lincoln (1818-1882) 'We Weep Over Our Dead,'" in *Kentucky Women: Their Lives and Times*, ed. Melissa A. McEuen and Thomas H. Appleton Jr. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

One piece, entitled “War Reminiscences,” describes Helm’s trip to Chattanooga after hearing of her husband’s wounding. The narrator, presumably Helm, enters a crowded train and describes a handful of soldiers attempting to help their wounded onto the train. There weren’t any seats left, and the conductor asked the men to remove the soldier who he said wouldn’t last the journey. They conceded and laid the man on the platform “just outside of my window.” The narrator adds, “Before the train left the poor man had breathed his last as the shrill whistle proclaimed our departure.” The narrator has a run-in with another group of soldiers who were on furlough, though one of their companions had “death...written upon his countenance.” This dying soldier wanted nothing more than an apple like those that grew “in my mother’s yard.” Fortunately, the narrator pulls an apple from her bag and replied, “This is not from your mother’s yard but it is a southern apple, won’t this do until you get home?” Of course, a “gleam of a smile lit up his dying face,” and while he couldn’t eat the apple, he admired it and put it under his pillow. The narrator closes the scene by remarking, “He was waiting for the train but the Eternal railway was the fastest route and reached him first.”

Again and again, the narrator has brushes with the dead and dying. Another soldier she sees lounging on the train platform turns out to be dead, something that “added greatly to the depression with which I started on this Journey.” And finally, the worst death of them all comes with a telegram stating: “The General is dead.” After this news, she writes, “I cannot describe the return journey and for days and weeks after I scarcely remember at all.”⁶²⁸

Racial themes predominate in many of Emilie Todd Helm’s stories. As a daughter of privilege, Helm’s deep-seeded discomfort with the destruction of slavery isn’t surprising. What *is* surprising is how willing she is to write about race. Her stories reveal that beyond the obvious

⁶²⁸ “War Reminiscences,” Miscellaneous Writings, pg 1-4, Box 8, Emilie Todd Helm Collection, MSS15, Kentucky Historical Society.

major adjustments for elite white women with the end of slavery—financial loss, a sudden increase in household labor, and more insecure relations with those around them—a million subtle changes lurked beneath the surface.

“The Spirit of 1860,” fits within the frame of typical “Lost Cause” nostalgia—especially in terms of how it portrays race relations. The short narrative tells the story of Mrs. Henry, a Kentucky widow, and her “three manly sons.” Mrs. Henry “had inherited a Negro Man Ben and his wife Chloe,” who are described as “part of the family.” Chloe had a temper, but “a thorough understanding existed between her mistress and Chloe.” When the war came (very dramatically by the author’s telling), Mrs. Henry’s son Charles went to fight for the Confederacy because—of course—he believed the “Cause of the South” was “holy and just.” Helm portrays a divided border-state community, writing that the two younger sons, who wished to stay and protect their mother, eventually join the Confederate Army, leaving their mother to fend for herself.

Her choices to describe the sons as driven by ideology and honor demonstrate a desire to place her characters well within the parameters of the Lost Cause narrative, which contended that Southern soldiers fought for honor and family, and with bravery and dedication.⁶²⁹ Southern men refusing to fight would never fit with such a hyper-masculine narrative, so while Helm’s men don’t fight in the war early on, protecting their mother is what keeps them out. Neighbors who are hostile to their pro-Confederate beliefs create a dangerous situation, and only threats on their lives force them to abandon their mother. Even more interestingly, the men use this “underground railway” to safely and secretly leave their town. The implication here is that anti-

⁶²⁹ For more on the Lost Cause and how women created and engaged with narratives about the Civil War, see Karen Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Southern Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), Sarah Gardner, *Blood and Irony*, and Caroline Janney, *Burying the Dead But Not the Past: Ladies’ Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012) and *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

Confederate sentiment was just as dangerous as slaves trying to escape their masters.

Conveniently, slavery gets left out of the equation—at least in terms of *why* the soldiers were fighting.

Helm spends most of her time in “The Spirit of 1860” weaving a familiar story—the trope of the “loyal slave.” After poor Mrs. Henry is forced to fend for herself for two years, circumstances in the household start to get difficult—especially considering she still has Ben, Chloe, and their two children in the house. Even after two years, when “many of [the slaves were] taking advantage of [the emancipation proclamation] had left the homes of their Masters,” Ben and Chloe stayed. In fact, they “did not seem to know that the war was going on as far as one could tell,” although she notes, “but Negroes are measured in their speech and do not tell all that is in their hearts.” To avoid a conflict over wages she couldn’t pay, Mrs. Henry tells Chloe she and her family can have their freedom and they will have to find a new home. After their conversation, Chloe throws a tantrum, yelling at her children, “White folks aint gwine to keep you no longer and you got to work.”

The next day, Mrs. Henry finds Chloe, Ben, Eliza Ann and Mary Jane all toting laundry into their home. The four of them are taking in laundry from the community to make money. When Mrs. Henry asks Chloe why, she replies that she’s trying to provide for herself, adding, “I aint got nowhere to go and dis here home is good enough for me—Ise got to do somethin.” At the end of the week, Chloe diligently hands over the money she made washing to her mistress, telling Mrs. Henry, “My white chillen expects me to stay and take care of you.”

After the end of the war, two of Mrs. Henry’s sons return home, but one has a longer route to take. Ben, who “love[s] to steal” for this mistress, goes to Baltimore and runs into the third Henry son (who remains unnamed), who is looking for money for the trip home. Ben steals

food from his temporary job as a waiter and makes elaborate meals for his “master.” He is thrilled to bring him home to reunite with his mother.

Years later, Chloe is still a part of the family, and after Mrs. Henry’s death, her sons build Chloe a house. Chloe grows roses and saves the “best of these [roses]...for the graves of her dear ‘white people.’” Though her “‘white children’ live at a great distance from their old Kentucky home,” they always make time to have “tea with their black mammy” when they come to town. She is overjoyed to make them food and break bread with them whenever they do come to visit. Helm closes the story with a Bible verse: “Be thou faithful with death and I will give thee a crown of life.”⁶³⁰

The complex racial relations portrayed in this story are significant, and while it employs a number of stereotypes alive and well in the Lost Cause, the story also makes some subtle statements about white women’s place in a wartime and postwar South. In many ways, Chloe is a thinly-veiled representative of Emilie Todd Helm’s “mammy” Sally, and simultaneously represents the mammy trope that appears in many postwar Lost Cause novels and short stories.⁶³¹ With a short temper, good nature, and loyal character, the “mammy” is endlessly devoted to her mistress. In this story, the slaves don’t even know the war is happening and even if they did, wouldn’t care to leave the comfortable and happy home provided by their masters. Even when given the chance to leave, Chloe and Ben decide to make money to give to their mistress. While the story advances the narrative of the happy slave, it also demonstrates the powerlessness many white women felt after the end of the Civil War. With their husbands, brothers, and sons dead or

⁶³⁰ Revelation 2:10. “The Spirit of 1860,” Miscellaneous Writings, pg 1-8, Box 8, Emilie Todd Helm Collection, MSS15, Kentucky Historical Society.

⁶³¹ For more on the parallels between Sally and Chloe, see Stephen Berry, *House of Abraham: Lincoln and the Todds, a Family Divided by War* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2007).

gone, slavery crumbling, and economic security non-existent, women felt that the things that defined them were no longer stable. In her story, “Mrs. Henry” can’t adapt to the new order of things while she watches her former slaves exercise ingenuity when the going got tough. Emilie—a widow herself—probably wondered how women like her would find new ways of supporting and defining themselves—a theme in several other short stories. Emilie Todd Helm straddled the line of past and present, using her widowhood to create a public platform for herself, which allowed her to push the boundaries of Southern womanhood while also doing so through a traditional role (ie: as a wife).

Two final stories explore racial uncertainty in the postwar South. “Wanting a Occupation” describes a white woman’s interaction with a former slave looking for a reference. “Miss Emma” runs into Jennie Stith in the street, and Jennie asks her to sign a paper certifying she’s an “honest girl.” Emma scoffs at the paper, noting that it had already been signed by two members of the black community. Emma asks if she wants to be a cook or do housework—revealing her racialized ideas about black women’s work capabilities and opportunities. Jennie replies, “No indeed. I don’t want to do narry one. I want a occupashon.” In this line, Emilie had spelled “occupation” correctly, then scratched it out to make Jennie’s words in dialect. Not surprisingly, Emma finds Jennie’s desire for an occupation other than cooking or housework “insolent” and she refuses to sign the paper. She also adds, “When white people want a recommendation they are very polite about asking and know what they want.” In the end, a “negro man” passing by tells Emma that Jennie wants to “be engaged to sell things.” Emma turns to Jennie to confirm this, and she replies, “Yes um,...you know, a occupation.”⁶³² Again, Helm

⁶³² “Wanting a Occupation,” Miscellaneous Writings, pg 1-2, Box 8, Emilie Todd Helm Collection, MSS15, Kentucky Historical Society.

mocks a freedwoman's efforts to make a living, and shows discomfort with the new relationship between white and black women. She describes Jennie as "insolent" for seeking employment outside jobs deemed appropriate by former masters, and for this transgression, she refuses to offer her a recommendation.

No story captures Helm's deep anxieties about the postwar racial order more so than "How Aunt Emily Phillips Changed Her Name." In this instance, the narrator, Emily Phillips, bemoans the fact that "Since the war it has been the custom among the negroes in the South to take the name of the white people to whom they belonged"—a custom that is a "great annoyance and inconvenience" for the white families. Emily confides that it was her "misfortune to have a namesake, who called herself Emily Phillips." This proved unfortunate for the "original" Emily because the "colored express driver" delivered her packages to the black Emily, who then opened the packages with her "ruthless hands." The "Republican" postmaster had no interest in Emily's complaints about the wrongly-delivered packages since he wanted to convince her "there was perfect equality in the administration of his office." Emily confronted "black Emily," telling her she should change her name, but black Emily replies, that "Fore God she had as much right to her name as I had to mine."⁶³³

Then, in a scene reminiscent of Poe, unexpected visitors knock on the door on a dark, rainy night deliver terrible news: Emily's son has been terribly clubbed by a policeman while resisting arrest. In fact, he would probably die from his injuries, the unwelcome guests add. Upon hearing this news, Emily is understandably devastated, though she can't help but think her son would never resist arrest.

⁶³³ Again, see Stephen Berry, *House of Abraham*, for more on this.

In the next several paragraphs, images from her past rush through Emily's mind: her son as a baby, gripping her finger as babies often do, and the room where she "passed that awful night on my knees by the coffin of my dead husband." Emily remembered the death scene of her husband vividly—"even the pattern of the wallpaper, and the pictures on the wall." Emily Phillips (like Emilie Todd Helm) was a Civil War widow, and the loss of her husband caused considerable "anguish." After these visions, Phillips finds that she can't even cry, which she feels is "even worse than before."

As a neighbor attempts to help get her ready to go to her son after two hours of torture, the unexpected messengers rush back in with news more shocking than the last: it was "all a mistake!" The message was for "Aunt Emily Phillips"—or, black Emily—and it was her son who had been injured. After this news, Emily feels incredible relief—so relieved, in fact, that she's finally able to cry after being "voiceless" when she thought it was her son.

Out of black Emily Phillips' tragedy, Emily Phillips plots her revenge. Aunt Emily's son recovers, and when white Emily sees her in the street, she congratulates her on her good fortune—after she's found out that black Emily is drawing a pension under the name Emily Emmons. White Emily suggested again to black Emily that she change her name because she was "tired of being annoyed and scared to death, by her having the same name as mine." She adds, mocking Aunt Emily's words: "You know, Aunt Em you have no right to that name." Black Emily replied similarly as she had before: "Fore God I have as much right to the name as you have." And then white Emily delivers her last blow, replying, "if you once again call yourself by the name Emily Phillips, I shall have your pension stopped—you cannot be Emily

Phillips and Emily Emmons as well.” Aunt Emily rolls her eyes and the narrator ends the story with the self-satisfied phrase: “Since then Aunt Em calls herself Mrs. Emmons.”⁶³⁴

The story of the white and black Emilies captures Emilie Todd Helm’s concerns about the racial order in the South—concerns that she shared with many other white elite women. In essence, black Emily is a black version of herself—something that undermines her privileged position in a racially-stratified society. Black Emily’s choice to defy white Emily’s wishes that she change her name further illustrates the conflicts over power and self-determination after emancipation. White Emily—despite feeling powerless to change the situation at first—finds a way to manipulate things in her favor. By threatening to take away Aunt Emily’s pension if she won’t change her name, white Emily strips her of two markers of freedom with one action. Taking away her ability to choose her name (and to choose one that antagonizes a white member of her community) steals a part of her identity—a part that had been kept from enslaved people for centuries. Threatening to take away her pension took her livelihood and financial independence—another right that only came with freedom.

These stories offer just a sampling of Emilie Todd Helm’s writings. While her diaries haven’t survived, what we can glean from these semi-autobiographical writings is that emancipation dwelled in the forefront of white elite women’s minds in the postwar era. Helm’s stories represent death and race in complicated ways—even if they she tries to dress them in nostalgia. In addressing these themes head-on and in very un-Romantic ways, Helm embraces a

⁶³⁴ “How Aunt Emily Phillips Changed Her Name,” Miscellaneous Writings, pg 1-5, Box 8, Emilie Todd Helm Collection, MSS15, Kentucky Historical Society.

literary style that was new and unfamiliar to many nineteenth-century Americans. The “surreal horrors” that find a home in her plots and characters are, in fact, modern in some ways.⁶³⁵

Sarah Morgan had already experienced plenty of death and change before the end of the war came. She had lost her father and three of her brothers before and during the Civil War. Her family’s home was ransacked and destroyed in 1862, and she lived out the rest of the war moving from place to place. With the end of slavery and the death of the family patriarch, the foundations of her privileged economic status melted away. Toward the end of the war, she and her mother relied on the kindness of her half-brother, Judge Philip Hicky Morgan, a New Orleans resident and “Unionist sympathizer.”⁶³⁶ After the war, they remained in Philip’s household, a situation that made Sarah echo Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem “The Rainy Day” in 1866: “My life is sad, and dark, and dreary, it rains, and the wind is never weary.”⁶³⁷

Eventually, Sarah, her mother, and her nephew, Howell, moved in with her younger brother James (or Jimmy in her diary). For a while, the assorted family members lived together quite nicely, with Sarah and her mother serving as mistresses of James’ expansive estate near Columbia. When James married in 1873, though, things changed. The household seemed a bit crowded for three mistresses, and Sarah found herself deeply unhappy again but stuck in the situation due to economic dependence. She began to come to terms with the prospect that she may never marry—a reality that many Southern women had to face after the Civil War wiped out hundreds of thousands of fathers, brothers, sons, and incidentally—men of marrying age.

⁶³⁵ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Hearts of Darkness*, 182.

⁶³⁶ Giselle Roberts, “Introduction,” *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson, with Selected Editorials Written by Sarah Morgan for the Charleston News and Courier* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2004), xxii.

⁶³⁷ Wadsworth’s poem reads: “The day is cold, and dark, and dreary; / It rains, and the wind is never weary.” This poem seems very popular with nineteenth-century audiences and these opening lines, especially, get quoted a lot.

Later in the year, though, Sarah had a secret. She had signed a contract to write for the *Charleston News*, and her first editorial was released on March 5th of that year. Sarah's journey from journaling woman on the road to old maid to regular editorial writer was an interesting one. Part courtship, part mentorship, the relationship that Sarah had with her editor—Frank Dawson—an old war buddy of her brother, Jimmy's, proved to be a story right out of a romantic melodrama—a very intellectual one, that is.

Frank met Sarah in early 1873 right after his wife had succumbed to consumption and despite his deep grief, found himself smitten with Sarah. The two began corresponding soon after his visit to the Morgans' home and Dawson encouraged her to write one of the literary comparisons she drew of the war as a political editorial.⁶³⁸ Frank made it obvious that the feelings he had for Sarah were genuine and based largely on shared intellectual interests—namely, their love for reading and writing. In his first letter to Sarah, he sent her “some New Orleans papers and...the second volume of *Middlemarch*, the French Revolution, & *Valerie Aylmer*.”⁶³⁹ Days later he mentioned *Middlemarch* and *Valerie Aylmer* again, noting how thrilled he was to have “so much to talk about” the next time they saw each other.⁶⁴⁰ Nearly all of Frank's letters contain at least a reference to reading material of some sort, whether it's a quote or a suggestion for reading, or a mention of something he wishes to read with her.

Though they adored many of the same things to read, they disagreed about women's proper roles. While Sarah felt a “lady's place was ‘in perfect subjugation to man,’” Frank felt

⁶³⁸ Sarah compared “the fate of the people of Louisiana to that of Andromeda, a Greek mythological figure whose father had chained her to a rock and left her to be devoured by a sea monster.” Giselle Roberts, “Introduction,” *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson*, xxxi.

⁶³⁹ Francis Warrington Dawson to Sarah Morgan, 1-15-1873, rpt in Giselle Roberts, *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson*, 2-3.

⁶⁴⁰ Francis Warrington Dawson to Sarah Morgan, 1-19-1873, rpt in Giselle Roberts, *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson*, 4.

there was “repose in strength not in weakness.” He compared his affections for Sarah to “Petrarch & Laura”—the poet and his muse, with Laura being “an image of physical beauty & intellectual symmetry, an epic woman,” and Petrarch “by her side, conscious of his power, but looking up to her for the inspiration & guidance of his life.”⁶⁴¹ Having Frank to cheer her on and provide a platform to publish changed Sarah’s life. On March 4, 1873—the day before her first piece appeared in the *News*, Frank wrote to her: This is indeed inauguration day: the inauguration for you, let us pray, of a new career—one for which you have full capacity and in which you will do even more good for others than for yourself.”⁶⁴²

Over the rest of 1873, Sarah published a number of editorials on a variety of subjects—many of which reflected changes in how she thought about Southern society, women’s place in it, and about the social scene at White Sulphur Springs, where she served as an undercover correspondent for the newspaper. Though Sarah sometimes expressed discomfort, Frank Dawson encouraged her to tackle topics not thought entirely suitable for female writers by some nineteenth-century Southerners, and even when she did write about such subjects, she “worked closely with Frank to preserve her anonymity at all costs.”⁶⁴³

Sarah’s first editorial took her into the realm of politics—a place generally reserved for male Southerners, at least in public. Though anonymity protected her identity in some ways (as it had people like Louisa McCord), Morgan took a risk by writing and publishing the piece—which overtly criticized politicians in Louisiana. Entitled “The New Andromeda,” the editorial characterizes Louisiana and the people of the state as Andromeda, “chained to the rock” and

⁶⁴¹ Francis Warrington Dawson to Sarah Morgan, 2-9-1873, rpt in Giselle Roberts, *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson*, 10-11.

⁶⁴² Francis Warrington Dawson to Sarah Morgan, 3-4-1873, rpt in Giselle Roberts, *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson*, 20.

⁶⁴³ Giselle Roberts, “Introduction,” *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson*, xxxiii.

waiting for a “Perseus” to rescue her. Political corruption placed her there, and “hundreds of thousands of men, women and children silently [endure] the suffering entailed upon them by the strife of politicians.” Morgan referred to the 1872 election in which both Republican and Fusion candidates claimed victory, leading to a standoff that President Grant had to end. The article ends with an appeal to readers to send a Perseus to “rescue a perishing sister.”⁶⁴⁴

While political commentary may have launched Sarah’s career, most of her columns dealt directly with women—their roles, identities, and purposes in a postbellum South. As Giselle Roberts and Anne Goodwyn Jones have pointed out, “Sarah’s work provided her with a safe realm in which to explore and deconstruct femininity, marital status, and age.”⁶⁴⁵ Beyond these claims, Sarah’s writing allowed her to explore new possibilities and new selves. Though her self-writing appeared in public rather than in a journal form, she still saw her “self” as a genre, and her editorials reflect her coming to terms with various aspects of her inner and outer lives.

On March 15, 1873, Sarah revisited a subject she had written about in her journal on several occasions: old maids. Morgan frequently expressed strong opinions about matrimony and her discomfort with the notion of settling in a marriage just so she wouldn’t be an “old maid.” For instance, in May of 1862, she confessed, “I am not ashamed to say...that women who look to marriage as the sole end and object of life are those who think less of its duties.” On the other

⁶⁴⁴ Sarah Morgan, “The New Andromeda,” *The Charleston News*, March 5, 1873, rpt in Giselle Roberts, *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson*, 20-22.

⁶⁴⁵ Giselle Roberts, “Women,” *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson*, 52; Anne Goodwyn Jones, *Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).

hand, women who saw its “responsibilities, and feel its solemnity, are those who consider it by no means the only aim and purpose of life.”⁶⁴⁶

Likewise, weeks later she wrote, “Dena says marriage is awful, but to be an old maid more awful still. I wont agree. I mean to be an old maid myself, and show the world what such a life can be.” She continued, adding, “I have heard girls say they would rather be wretched, married, than happy as old maids. Is it not revolting?...I can fancy no greater hell—if I may use the only word that can express it—than to be tied to a man you could not respect and love perfectly.”⁶⁴⁷ For Sarah, the idea of marrying someone who wasn’t her intellectual equal seemed like a terrible prospect, as she had written earlier in her diary about her Beau Ideal, “I cannot respect a fool, he must be intelligent. I place that first, for I consider it the chief qualification in man.”⁶⁴⁸

Sarah and her friend Marie eventually had a plan to be old maids together. She wrote in September of 1863 that while everyone laughed at them for saying so, she and Marie said “to each other almost daily with an emphasis that makes it almost ludicrous ‘We will never, never marry.’” The pair had plans to live in a Spanish castle in the Pyrenees with a “perfect view of sunset” in a “comfortable” home with a “fine library.” Above the door of this quiet abode would be inscribed: “No gentlemen or children admitted.”⁶⁴⁹

If these blunt statements didn’t reveal Sarah’s thoughts about marriage and the unfair stigma attached to old maid-dom clearly enough, her 1873 editorial “Old Maids!” certainly did. She started by describing the “contempt” the name Old Maid bestowed upon unmarried women.

⁶⁴⁶ Sarah Morgan, *The Civil War Diary of Sarah Morgan*, ed. Charles East (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1991), 81-2.

⁶⁴⁷ Sarah Morgan, *The Civil War Diary of Sarah Morgan*, ed. Charles East, 175.

⁶⁴⁸ Sarah Morgan, *The Civil War Diary of Sarah Morgan*, ed. Charles East, 61.

⁶⁴⁹ Sarah Morgan, *The Civil War Diary of Sarah Morgan*, ed. Charles East, 548.

Morgan asked some pointed questions about the old maid stereotype: “Does any one know the typical Old Maid?” She answers—in so many words—no. Then, she asked, “And yet is there anything more common than wrangling wives and impatient mothers? Does any one believe that the class whose chief weakness is a love for cats and canaries, are moved to bang little innocents, as tender mothers are privileged to do?” In other words, married women and mothers are no different from old maids, and yet, because “they have husbands,” they are forgiven these sins. Furthermore, while “the idealized Mother is glorified by poets for tending her puny babies in her self-inflicted nursery, it is [the] Old Maids” doing all the work to better society. Women she mentions as evidence include Dorothea Dix, Florence Nightingale, Emily Faithful, Grace Darling, Charlotte Corday, Rosa Bonheur, Joanna Baillie, Hannah More, Joan of Arc, Augustina Zaragoza, and Queen Elizabeth I.⁶⁵⁰ Ultimately, Morgan concludes that the Old Maid “has no fear for the future; for, at the worst, her destiny is in her own hands, and she is not chained to a dead hope and a living despair.” She asks her readers, “Shall we laugh with the multitude of Old Maids, or cry, Heaven help the Wives!”⁶⁵¹

In this editorial, Morgan both undermines the negative station of old maids in Southern (and really, American) society and also challenges the privileged status assigned to mothers in a patriarchal society. She questions the societal pressures to marry for money and asks, “Is not the

⁶⁵⁰ Giselle Roberts identifies all these women in her footnotes. Dorothea Dix was an American nurse and mental health treatment advocate, Florence Nightingale was an English nurse, Emily Faithful was a British advocate for women’s employment, Grace Darling rescued shipwreck survivors off the coast of England in 1838, Marie Anne Charlotte Corday d’Armont was a royalist supporter in France who “stabbed Jean Paul Marat in his bath to avenge his attacks on the Girondists (Corday is a popular figure with many of these women), Rosa Bonheur was a well-known French artist, Joanna Baillie an English poet, Hannah More was a popular English writer, Joan of Arc was the famous French female military leader, Augustina Zaragoza was famous for “bravery when Zaragoza, Spain, was besieged by France,” and Queen Elizabeth I of England—the country’s most successful female monarch. See Roberts, *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson*, pg 58-9.

⁶⁵¹ Sarah Morgan, “Old Maids!,” *The Charleston News*, March 15, 1873, rpt in Giselle Roberts, *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson*, 55-59.

loveless marriage the real reproach?”⁶⁵² Morgan’s thoughts on becoming an Old Maid and her efforts to question how her society viewed unmarried women reflect her own concerns and frustrations with her life. As Sarah had written in her diary, she seemed more willing to live and die an old maid than marry someone she didn’t love or respect. Unfortunately, though, the design of American society and Southern society especially didn’t designate a place for unmarried women. They were viewed as dependents, as outsiders, and as shrill shrews without a purpose.⁶⁵³ And while Sarah certainly captured the double-standard and unfair stereotypes associated with unmarried women but not unmarried men, she also showed that she felt deep discomfort about becoming an old maid herself. For instance, in the 1870s, she typically introduced herself to new people as a widow rather than explain why at thirty-one years old she remained unmarried.⁶⁵⁴

In addition to dismantling critiques of old maids, Morgan encouraged other measures that would advance women’s place in society. On April 2, 1873, she published an editorial celebrating the Kentucky legislature for passing a law that undid property coverture, allowing women to retain some rights over property they brought into marriage. Though she felt “a true wife would gladly give all she owns to save her husband from the consequences of misfortune,” she did contend that if the husband engaged in “reckless waste”—in all likelihood, alcohol and other “weaknesses of spirit”—the wife who denied her husband “the opportunity of inflicting hopeless poverty” on her family “is more noble than the wife who weakly yields, and afterwards

⁶⁵² Ibid, 57.

⁶⁵³ Kirsten Wood and Christine Jacobson Carter have shown how *some* widows and unmarried women, respectively, carved out some space for themselves in the patriarchal South before the Civil War. Kirsten Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South, 1800-1865* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

⁶⁵⁴ Giselle Roberts, “Women,” *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson*, 52-3. Sarah again considered the unfair ways Southern society treated aging women in “Age,” *The Charleston News*, 6-32-1873.

deplores her loss.”⁶⁵⁵ Sarah also advocated for better work opportunities for women—a cause near and dear to her heart given her family and financial circumstances. She argued, “Poverty, to man sharper than a serpent’s tooth, pierces woman even more cruelly” because women couldn’t do the physical labor available to men if they could “lay aside all false pride.” In particular, she expressed concern for elite and middling women, who were “developed as rare exotics for the ornament of refined homes” and after the war were “thrown as ruthlessly as broken flowers on the stones of an unsympathetic world.” Rather than casting such women aside, she encouraged companies to hire them as clerks and office workers and other types of “honorable, useful labor.”⁶⁵⁶

Despite these proto-feminist views, Sarah was no suffragette. In May of 1873, she wrote an editorial entitled “Suffrage-Shrieking” that harshly criticized the Woman’s Suffrage Association for their views on the Fifteenth Amendment. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony—the leaders of the organization—disapproved of the Fifteenth Amendment because it didn’t provide suffrage for women. Sarah felt cries for women’s suffrage undid the more practical advancements women were experiencing in work. She wrote, “The ravings of dreamy fanatics [suffragettes] only injure a cause which would be pushed to its legitimate results if the repulsive pretensions of the Anthonys and Stantons were withdrawn...No one would deny women the opportunity of self-support.” The suffragettes’ “denunciation” of President Grant only undermined the push for “fair compensation for [women’s] toil.”⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁵ Sarah Morgan, “The Property of Married Women,” *The Charleston News*, April 2, 1873, rpt in Giselle Roberts, *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson*, 60-1.

⁶⁵⁶ Sarah Morgan, “Work for Women,” *The Charleston News*, April 15, 1873, rpt in Giselle Roberts, *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson*, 61-3.

⁶⁵⁷ Sarah Morgan, “Suffrage-Shrieking,” *The Charleston News*, May 20, 1873, rpt in Giselle Roberts, *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson*, 204-5.

In addition to analyzing women's roles in the postwar South, Sarah wrote on themes that animated her deepest hopes and fears. Her column "Brothers versus Sisters" bemoaned the "loss of a brother's affection"—just as she mourned the end of her close relationship with her brother James after his marriage to Gabriella Burroughs. She considered the "lack of essential condition of duration" in female friendship in "Friends." Sarah described her difficulties making and keeping friends on numerous occasions in her diary, so her frustrations with the "absurd excesses and unaccountable caprices" in female friendship aren't surprising. Finally, she criticized Northern intervention in Southern race relations in "Whites and Blacks." Sarah Morgan firmly believed in paternalistic ideas that white elites knew what was best for slaves (and subsequently freedmen and women) and that their "interests" were "nearly identical." She argued that "Northern adventurers" used freedmen as a "political tool" to be "defrauded and oppressed."⁶⁵⁸ Racial privilege and slavery had defined Morgan's life before the end of the Civil War, and like all of her peers, she sought new ways to reimagine racial superiority in the Reconstruction Era.

Sarah's life changed forever again when she finally agreed to marry Frank Dawson, and on January 27, 1874, the pair married after years of courtship. They had three children (two of whom survived), and Sarah maintained an active role in writing book reviews and helping Frank with content and direction of his newspaper, though she "largely abandoned her editorial writing, which she had always regarded as a burden on her health and well-being." Sarah and Frank had a marriage of "equal partnership, framed by love and mutual respect"—a marriage that met all her expectations for her Beau Ideal and one that she would willingly forego her "old maid" dreams to enjoy.

⁶⁵⁸ Sarah Morgan, "Brothers versus Sisters," *The Charleston News*, July 12, 1873, "Friends," *The Charleston News*, November 8, 1873, "Whites and Blacks," *The Charleston News*, May 12-1873, rpt in Giselle Roberts, *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson*, 81-90, 199-201.

Sadly, their story does not have a happy ending. Frank was shot to death in 1889 by Dr. Thomas McDow after he confronted McDow about his suspected “liaison” with the Dawsons’ governess. Dawson hit McDow with a cane, and McDow shot him, supposedly in self-defense. McDow attempted to hide his crime, burying Dawson under his stairwell, but he eventually “surrendered himself to the authorities.” In court, he claimed self-defense, and was “acquitted of all charges”—which made Sarah’s heartache even more devastating. Years later she wrote, “He [Frank] would have asked nothing better than to die doing his duty—in defense of a helpless woman.”⁶⁵⁹

Despite all her losses, Sarah kept writing. She wrote a number of short stories and articles and her first published work was a translation of *Autour du Mariage* by Gyp.⁶⁶⁰ She also penned a story titled, “A Tragedy of South Carolina,” that appeared in the November 1896 edition of *Cosmopolitan*.⁶⁶¹ In style and content, this story is reminiscent of William Faulkner’s and Flannery O’Connor’s short stories written decades later. The story opens with the main character, “the colonel,” swearing that he was a “gentleman” who “kept his word.” In this case, he had said to his neighbors, “Sure are you let those hogs of yours in my cotton, I’ll blow your brains out!” The colonel made his threats to the poor “cracker” mother and son who kept hogs next door. He resolved to “keep his word” and called his hapless hand and former slave, Scipio,

⁶⁵⁹ Sarah Morgan diary, July 13, 1896, Vol. 5, Dawson Papers, rpt in Giselle Roberts, “Afterward,” *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson*, 253. Despite previous threats of violence and complaints from female patients, McDow was acquitted. Sarah Morgan had brought back the au pair, H  lene Burdayron, from Europe. McDow “became infatuated with H  lene” and stalked her relentlessly, asking her to marry him despite the fact that “he already had a wife, Katie, and a mistress, Julia Smith.” McDow had been implicated in several murderous schemes before he killed Frank Dawson. He told his mistress that he would kill his wife so he could marry her, and even bribed his brother to kill his father-in-law so that his wife “would inherit his considerable wealth.” Fortunately, he never carried out these plots. For more, see Roxana Robinson, “The Strange Career of Frank Dawson,” *The New York Times Opinionator*, March 20, 2012.

⁶⁶⁰ “Gyp” was the pseudonym for French author Sibylle Riquieti de Mirabeau.

⁶⁶¹ Sarah Morgan Dawson, “A Tragedy of South Carolina,” *Cosmopolitan*, Vol. 20, Nov-April 1895-96, pg 53-62, available via HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015074636054;view=1up;seq=69>.

to go down to the poor whites' cabin from his beautiful ancestral home.⁶⁶² On his way out, the colonel hears his daughter, Lorena, calling for him, and here, the narrator describes how he had become such a cruel and godless man. Originally from a wealthy family, the colonel's fortunes changed when the Civil War took his land and money with the end of slavery. His beautiful wife, who had been the envy of other women, tried to labor to help keep the family afloat, but died, leaving her daughter motherless with a father who had lost his pride and as a result, his religion and sobriety.

The colonel and Scipio arrive at the cabin, and the colonel confronts the sunbonneted-woman with the same phrase as before: "I told you I'd blow your brains out if you let your hogs in my patch again. I'm going to keep my word." Rather than do his killing himself, the colonel forces Scipio to shoot the woman and then her son, Teddy.⁶⁶³ Scipio, who begged his "maussa" not to have to do so, gives in after his master flies into a rage and threatens to "brain," or beat, him too. Afterwards, the colonel calmly instructed Scipio to hide in the cane break near the property and then to leave altogether, giving him a flask for his journey. Scipio happily complies, happy to see "new scenes unconnected with any prospect of toil."

In the next scene, the narrator provides the perspective of the "crackers" chicken—who "circled around and around" her owners trying to figure out why they were being so "lazy." Two other poor whites arrive and they argue about whether or not to tell the sheriff about what they had seen, as they had watched the whole scene from the woods. Eventually, they tell the sheriff, and he goes to question the colonel after discovering the bodies. The sheriff asks if the colonel

⁶⁶² The name "Scipio" is surely a reference to Scipio Africanus, or Scipio the Great, the famous Roman general and consul who defeated Hannibal during the Second Punic War against the Carthaginians.

⁶⁶³ The fact that he forces Scipio to kill the poor whites signals to the reader that in addition to being a violent alcoholic, the colonel lives without honor because he forces another man—his lesser, to boot—to uphold his vow for him.

would mind if he hanged Scipio on his property if he were found, and the colonel replies “cordially,” “Oh! Hang him, by all means, if you catch him!”

When questioned, the freedmen and -women who had assembled covered for Scipio, who they knew would be scapegoated by the colonel’s implication and the sheriff’s preference to hang a black man over questioning the authority of a powerful white man. Ultimately, when the sheriff held an “inquest” about the deaths, the “jury” crowd on scene decided that the two murdered people “came to their death by gunshot wounds inflicted by a person or persons unknown to the jury”—a resolution amenable to the sheriff because it didn’t implicate a white man and to the freedmen because Scipio went free (and another member of the black community wouldn’t be accused).

The story flashes forward a decade or so, and finds the colonel haunted by a “ghastly woman with a calico sunbonnet.” She follows him everywhere, and eventually, he boards up and leaves his home and everything in it—except his favorite drawing done by his daughter, Lorena. Even after moving, the woman haunts his new “poor cottage.” The only place she doesn’t find him is his wife’s grave, and the only time he slept was there “on that desolate mound of earth.” Eventually, his “ghastly” tormentor gets the best of him, and he calmly gathers the gun he gave to Scipio for his dastardly crime and carries it with him to his wife’s grave. There, he kills himself, and Lorena finds him the next day. She died soon after, falling down a hill and coming to a final resting place among flowers and vines. Neighborhood residents find her and carry her to the pitiful cottage where she and colonel lived, only to find the drawing she had done years before matched her own death scene: a “girl in the dawn of womanhood, of rarest beauty, lying dead at the base of the crag.” The story closes with the colonel’s ghost being continually haunted by the dead woman whose life he ordered snuffed out.

“A Tragedy of South Carolina” deals with many of the themes found in work like Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily” or *Absalom! Absalom!* Death, racial strife, moral and physical decay, and complicated reversals of hierarchies animate the plot and characters in the short story. Morgan’s engagement in themes like these demonstrate that the roots of the Southern Renaissance and its unique brand of modernism lay before the turn of the century, and even before Bertram Wyatt-Brown supposed in *Hearts of Darkness*. After moving to Paris in 1898, she published a “French version of the Brer Rabbit stories,” *Les Aventures de Jeannot Lapin* and “Les Pisonniers,” a “French translation of Mary Cholmondeley’s *Prisoners*.”⁶⁶⁴ Plagued by ill health, Sarah remained in France for the rest of her life. In 1909, she died in Paris, and her son, Warrington, published her Civil War diary in 1913.

Like Sarah Morgan, Julia LeGrand was no stranger to grief or hardship by the time federal troops reached New Orleans in 1862. By that time, thirty-three-year-old LeGrand had lost both of her parents, a fiancé, her home, and nearly all of her family’s money. Still, the war caused her and her family significant struggles and the postwar period didn’t prove any easier. When dealing with occupation, food shortages, fears of slave uprisings and many other concerns, LeGrand tried her best to remain hopeful about the future. As a “lover of humanity,” she believed that an end to the war—no matter the outcome—would be better than continued slaughter and desolation.

Time, though, changed some of her views. By 1863, she couldn’t take much more. Without faith in the reading material she desperately clung to throughout her trials or even the sense that her journal could help her through, she fled New Orleans as a refugee and spent the remainder of her life in Texas. Even while LeGrand experienced loss and hardship, she found

⁶⁶⁴ Giselle Roberts, “Afterward,” *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson*, 249-54.

love in Texas, too, with a German immigrant, Adolph Waitz, whom she married in 1867. Despite finding a husband, LeGrand's unhappiness wasn't over, as her sister, Virginia, died suddenly in the terrible flood in 1875, her husband died, and she experienced fairly serious financial concerns all the while.

In spite of these hardships, LeGrand found time to write, and though no diaries survive from this period of her life, she left behind a number of letters and two unpublished novels.⁶⁶⁵ The Civil War challenged LeGrand's faith in diary-writing and reading in ways she didn't expect. She had been so hopeful that her books would help her through the greatest crisis of her life, but the war's challenges forced her to find new ways of coping. In her case, writing fiction turned out to be the answer.

Less than a year after the end of the war, Julia LeGrand admitted in a letter to Ned Pye, her nephew, "All my life—since I could think at all—I have been grieving over the downfall of my family." Unlike other family members, who blamed "doom and destiny" for the family's financial ruin, LeGrand "saw plainly that it was the destiny of inaction and a want of judgment."⁶⁶⁶ In early 1866, Julia LeGrand expressed a fatalistic and downright depressing view of her situation. She confessed that she "often [got] up in the morning feeling angry with all the world" and wondered whether or not she and the rest of her family would "ever be ... happy

⁶⁶⁵ According to Edith Pye Weeden, LeGrand's niece, her aunt had written "in her happy girlhood... a novel which is a vivid picture of the life of Southern people in those days. [It is called 'Our Neighborhood' and is dedicated to Prof. James Albert Harrison. After her marriage, Mrs. Waitz wrote another novel, dealing with the dreadful days following the close of the war." Kate Mason Rowland and Agnes E. Croxall, "Biographical Sketch," *The Journal of Julia LeGrand: New Orleans, 1862-1863*, 32-3. I don't think either the of surviving fragments are *Our Neighborhood*, although it's possible that *Mildred* is the novel about the close of the Civil War.

⁶⁶⁶ Letter, Julia LeGrand to Ned Pye, February 18, 1866, Box 13, Folder 3, "Hutcheson and Allied Families Papers, 1836-1997," Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University (hereinafter: "Hutcheson Family Papers"). Judging from context clues, it seems that LeGrand primarily criticized the male LeGrands for her family's misfortunes. Unless otherwise specified, the letters used here are in Box 13 of the "Hutcheson Family Papers."

again.”⁶⁶⁷ After her brother Washington’s sudden death, LeGrand told Ned that she “ha[d] learned to envy those who die.”⁶⁶⁸ After years of enemy occupation in New Orleans as well as hardships caused by war and financial ruin, LeGrand’s sentiments reflected how many southerners felt after the Civil War. Forced to deal with defeat and the complete destruction of their social, racial, and economic hierarchy, some southerners felt despondent about their futures.⁶⁶⁹

Between 1866 and 1878, LeGrand wrote at least two novels, of which only fragments remain. Though LeGrand “never published anything,” her niece, Edith Pye Weeden, recalled that ““in her happy girlhood [LeGrand] had written, purely for her own pleasure, a novel which [was] a vivid picture of the life of Southern people in those days.”⁶⁷⁰ According to her diary’s editors, LeGrand wrote two others novels: one “dealing with the dreadful days following the close of the [Civil] War” and one called “Guy Fonteroy,” with a “hero” based on Charles Harlan, her ill-fated fiancé.⁶⁷¹ Rather than incorporating elements of Realism or Naturalism—the predominant

⁶⁶⁷ Letter, Julia LeGrand to Ned Pye, January 15, 1866, “Hutcheson Family Papers;” Letter, Julia LeGrand to Ned Pye, undated, but sent between January 15 and January 26, 1866, “Hutcheson Family Papers.”

⁶⁶⁸ Letter, Julia LeGrand to Ned Pye, February 18, 1866, “Hutcheson Family Papers;” Letter, Julia LeGrand to Ned Pye, February 25, 1866, “Hutcheson Family Papers.”

⁶⁶⁹ Many historians have described how southerners dealt with defeat. Many became depressed and anxious; others became angry and defiant. For information on the process of recognizing defeat, see Jason Phillips, *Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007); LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000); Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2001); Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁶⁷⁰ Julia LeGrand Waitz, *The Journal of Julia LeGrand: New Orleans, 1862-1863*, “Biographical Sketch,” ed. Agnes E. Croxall and Kate Mason Rowland (Richmond: Everett Waddey Company, 1911), 32-3. Agnes Croxall and Kate Mason Rowland corresponded with LeGrand’s niece, Edith Pye Weeden, who told them about LeGrand’s attempts at authorship. It was also Edith who arranged for the diary to be published. Edith shared the same type of close relationship with LeGrand that her brother Ned did. From correspondence with her nephew, Ned, it’s clear that LeGrand did send some of her written work to publishers but never had any luck in terms of publication. She assumed it was because they were “Yankees.”

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 33, 24.

literary styles of the time period—into her writing, LeGrand used sentimental language and plotlines to express herself through text.⁶⁷² According to literary scholars, “postbellum America” defined “the literary ... *against* sentimentality and the domestic culture of letters,” making LeGrand’s choices even more unexpected.⁶⁷³ Because of their style and subject matter, LeGrand’s novels likely served a more personal purpose. In the small pieces of her novels that remain, LeGrand used a central female character to portray life in the nineteenth century.⁶⁷⁴ LeGrand abhorred the “rumors” and “deliberate falsehood[s]” that had filled newspapers, speeches, and literature during the war, which may have led her to write her own accounts of life before and during the war.⁶⁷⁵ LeGrand admitted that northern editors probably would not read her writing, but she wrote anyway.⁶⁷⁶ Ultimately, LeGrand’s novels offered subtle criticisms of prewar patriarchal relations, allowing her to adopt some elements of southern culture while reconsidering her past experiences with patriarchy’s disappointments.

⁶⁷² I am not asserting that *most* writers wrote in a Realist or Naturalist style during the postwar period, but many of the authors who achieved popular success chose these two styles for their writing even though many elements of sentimental “moral philosophy” remained a part of Realist fiction in particular. See June Howard, “What is Sentimentality?,” *American Literary History*, Vol. 11, No. 1, (Spring, 1999): 72.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid*, 73.

⁶⁷⁴ Several pages of two fictional pieces remain. I will refer to the pieces as “novels” because they match descriptions of the novels described in the Biographical Sketch included in LeGrand’s edited diary. Though the papers are not labeled, the handwriting is Julia LeGrand’s based on numerous letters included in the same archival collection. In both cases, the pages of the novels that exist have extensive gaps missing. I will refer to the first novel as *Mildred* after the name of its heroine. The second novel that remains is *Guy Fonteroy*. The main character of this novel is based on Charles Harlan according to Julia LeGrand’s diary’s editors.

⁶⁷⁵ Julia LeGrand Waitz, *The Journal of Julia LeGrand: New Orleans, 1862-1863*, ed. Agnes E. Croxall and Kate Mason Rowland, 58, 80. Julia LeGrand expressed consistent distaste for northern portrayals of Southerners during the Civil War. Jonathan Wells discusses the southern antebellum market for northern and transnational literature at length in *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class*. In *Domestic Novelists in the Old South*, Elizabeth Moss describes southern domestic novelists publishing (mainly with northern presses) before the war and describes many of them with her subtitle: *Defenders of Southern Culture*. Alice Fahs focuses *The Imagined Civil War* on wartime production, though she describes the southern desire to establish a unique literary and publishing culture throughout her book. Nina Silber’s *The Romance of Reunion* describes how northerners perceived southerners and their culture in postwar literature, plays, and other cultural forms.

⁶⁷⁶ LeGrand wrote in a letter to her niece that “they”—the editors—“will not not ever read the things people send them now so I am told. Books are piled up waiting for perusal and half ... are not perused, returned, or thrown off.” Letter, Julia LeGrand to Edith Pye Weeden, August 30, 1878, Box 14, Folder 11, “Hutcheson Family Papers.”

Her novel *Mildred* opens with Mildred Raymond, “an heiress to an immense fortune” looking “as helpless and forlorn as any other lonely, friendless girl.” Though she sat in “a handsomely furnished private parlor in a fashionable hotel,” Mildred felt her surroundings were a “dreary prison” because after her “grandfather’s sudden death,” she felt like a “stranger in her native land.”⁶⁷⁷ Mildred was “alone” in the world, and worried about how she might get her financial affairs in order. This opening scene captures Julia LeGrand’s life experiences and sensibilities in several ways. First, LeGrand’s mother, Anna Croxall LeGrand, “was an heiress when young” and lost everything, likely at the hands of her well-intentioned but luckless husband, Claudius LeGrand. Julia LeGrand always regretted her mother’s fall from the status of “heiress,” especially because it meant that she spent most of her life in “common drudgery.”⁶⁷⁸ Julia LeGrand probably expected a different life than the one she lived as well, for in her younger years she had received a formal education in Alexandria, Virginia, visited the famous “Springs in Virginia,” and spent New Orleans opera seasons at the “St. Charles Hotel” with a “train of servants.”⁶⁷⁹ Like Mildred, Julia had suffered when the family patriarch died, an event that led to the family’s financial ruin. LeGrand frequently saw herself as an outsider or anomaly in the South and described in her Civil War diary how her humanitarian sensibility caused intense intellectual and spiritual loneliness. Mildred saw “existence” as a “burden unless it were excited by love.” Charles Harlan’s letters to LeGrand and her diary had expressed similar sentiments.⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁷ “Mildred,” Box 14, Folder 13, “Hutcheson Family Papers.”

⁶⁷⁸ Letter, Julia LeGrand to Ned Pye, January 26, 1866, “Hutcheson Family Papers.”

⁶⁷⁹ Julia LeGrand Waitz, *The Journal of Julia LeGrand: New Orleans, 1862-1863*, “Biographical Sketch,” ed. Agnes E. Croxall and Kate Mason Rowland, 22-3.

⁶⁸⁰ There are multiple passages in Charles Harlan’s letters to Julia LeGrand that describe that he felt life was not worth living without her love. In one case, Harlan combines these sentiments with his literary sensibility. He tells

Later in the novel, Mildred reunites with family—presumably in New Orleans—and tries to help twin female cousins settle a suit in court.⁶⁸¹ In the end though, a male family member makes a claim for the girls' inheritance, leaving them “disinherited.” Mildred helps the girls prepare to “leave the only home they had ever known”—“Friendly Hill.” Again, LeGrand uses her own past in her fiction. LeGrand and her family lived at Friendly *Hall* near Vicksburg until the late-1840s, when financial disaster dislocated and nearly split up the family.⁶⁸² LeGrand associated Friendly Hall with a more stable period of her life and the place in which her first love blossomed with Charles Harlan. LeGrand and Harlan both had highly emotional connections with Friendly Hall based on their memories there. In essence, LeGrand gives glimpses of her own life in her fiction, using her writing as a place to memorialize happier times and to process her traumatic experiences.

After her family's financial downfall, Mildred “decided to go to Texas” to work as a teacher while the twin girls went to a convent for their education. After the Civil War, LeGrand and her sister Virginia tried desperately to open a school in Hempstead, Texas to support the family. The pair were finally successful after moving to Galveston and Julia LeGrand had students on and off at least until 1878.⁶⁸³ LeGrand likely taught because it was her only means

LeGrand, “Your love is all my joy in life ... without it I could wish now to sleep forever the dreamless sleep.” The latter part of this phrase pays homage to Hamlet's famous “to be or not to be” soliloquy.

⁶⁸¹ I believe the family reunites in or near New Orleans because Mildred finds her Texas teaching job in the *Picayune*; “Mildred,” Box 14, Folder 13, “Hutcheson Family Papers.”

⁶⁸² Charles Harlan's early letters were addressed to “Friendly Hall.” As discussed in chapter one, starting in 1849, Harlan addresses his letters to Raymond, Mississippi rather than to Friendly Hall and responds to LeGrand's sadness about her family's displacement.

⁶⁸³ LeGrand first mentions trying to open a school in her letters to Ned Pye, Letter, Julia LeGrand to Ned Pye, January 15, 1886, “Hutcheson Family Papers.” She writes to Edith Pye in 1878 that “the school is over for the summer” and that she had “moved” her “papers into the small schoolroom.” Letter, Julia LeGrand Waitz to Edith Pye, August 30, 1878, Box 14, Folder 11, “Hutcheson Family Papers.” Virginia LeGrand apparently died “suddenly in 1875, in escaping from one of the great Galveston floods.” Julia LeGrand Waitz, *The Journal of Julia LeGrand: New Orleans, 1862-1863*, “Biographical Sketch,” ed. Agnes E. Croxall and Kate Mason Rowland, 32.

for economic survival, and it is possible that she stopped taking students after her marriage in May 1867 to Adolf Waitz, a German immigrant. LeGrand taught students after his death and probably continued teaching until her own death in January 1881.⁶⁸⁴

The novel's fragmentary nature does not account for what happened to Mildred and the rest of LeGrand's fictional characters. What remains, however, reveals significant aspects of LeGrand's postwar sensibilities. In some ways, LeGrand felt betrayed by the men in her family and patriarchy itself, much in the way that Mildred and the twins do after their relative makes a claim against them in court and takes their inheritance. Patriarchal ideologies promised elite women lives of social supremacy and male protection, but LeGrand found that the men in her life proved selfish and incompetent. Writing *Mildred* gave LeGrand an opportunity to consider her past in a different light. Rather than portraying only the tragic consequences of financial ruin, she explored how the women in her family endured and survived in an unfriendly, hierarchical world.

LeGrand's novel *Guy Fonteroy* mirrored some elements of her past, offered sentimental reflections on her experiences and also incorporated characteristics of seduction novels to analyze patriarchy. The novel features a female heroine facing tragic and unfortunate circumstances. Unlike *Mildred*, however, *Guy* features a heroine similar to those found in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century seduction novels, which often starred an innocent and beautiful heroine who is seduced and betrayed by a lover.⁶⁸⁵ The preserved part of this novel starts on the third page with Guy, the hero of the story, "soothing his excited fancy by looking at

⁶⁸⁴ According to her diary's editors, LeGrand outlived her husband for several years and continued to live in Galveston, where she died in 1881. Julia LeGrand Waitz, *The Journal of Julia LeGrand: New Orleans, 1862-1863*, "Biographical Sketch," ed. Agnes E. Croxall and Kate Mason Rowland, 32.

⁶⁸⁵ See Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

his treasure”—a “tiny girl” he rescued from a shipwreck near his cliff-side home. He “applied to his ‘treasure trove’ the beautiful words of Shakespeare—‘custom cannot stale her infinite variety,’” words from *Antony and Cleopatra* that LeGrand used in her diary to describe the “world above” her and the “voices of the eternity” in the stars.⁶⁸⁶

Guy and his father raise the “tiny girl” in their home and over time, “Guy became a tall and stalwart young man” while Nellie—the “girl”—grew to be a “beautiful maiden, with eyes pure and blue as the softest skies of summer and hair like the gold of sunset.” In Guy’s opinion, “the peace and serenity of heaven lingered about her and her voice was sweeter than the songs of birds at night.” LeGrand describes Guy as “an enthusiast and a dreamer who dreamed dreams and built surreal palaces” in his mind for Nellie. Guy considers Nellie a “direct gift from Heaven,” connecting her with innocence, purity, and devotion, all character traits of sentimental heroines. Many of Guy’s “imaginary scenes called to him from out in the distance and whispered fame and honor,” “always” in Nellie’s “tone” of voice. Guy “longed ardently” to “fight the battle of life” and “to lay his trophies at [Nellie’s] feet.”⁶⁸⁷

The next pages jump forward in time and portray a more dismal scene.⁶⁸⁸ The narrator asks of the reader: “This unfortunate child—search ... not her elegant face with your penetrating eyes.” Nellie, now an “unfortunate” young woman, is pale and ill. Guy’s father suggests they “send for Dr. Alden ... immediately,” “at which Nellie grew paler than ever” and “entreated him not to go.” Instead, she decided to “walk on the cliffs” outside their home and “breathe the cold

⁶⁸⁶ “Guy Fonteroy,” Box 14, Folder 13, “Hutcheson Family Papers.” These Shakespearian lines appear in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act II, Scene II, lines 235-6. In the scene, Enobarbus talks to Antony about Cleopatra’s charms, saying that while a woman’s fickleness was typically seen as an undesirable quality, Cleopatra’s “variety” made her more intriguing. Julia LeGrand Waitz, *The Journal of Julia LeGrand*, 187. This date of this entry is March 8, 1863.

⁶⁸⁷ “Guy Fonteroy,” “Hutcheson Family Papers;” these quotations what are labeled as the “3rd” and “4th” page in the same handwriting.

⁶⁸⁸ “Guy Fonteroy,” “Hutcheson Family Papers;” The pages of the novel that remain are very difficult to read. The first pages are clearly marked “3rd Page” and “4th Page,” while the second section either reads “41” or “141.”

air” to improve her condition. Context clues imply that Guy was gone and that Nellie, who waited for his ship to return, enjoyed looking out to sea at the same spot where her own mother perished in a shipwreck at the beginning of the story. Unfortunately, while walking, Nellie “heard a quick step on the rocks behind her” and turned to stand “face to face with Dr. Alden,” who took her “hands” and asked if she was “looking already for [her] lover’s ship.” Nellie clearly felt uncomfortable, asking Dr. Alden not to “speak of him please,” and pulling her hands away as “a mortal pallor swiftly blotted out the color [from] her cheek.” Dr. Alden told Nellie he was leaving the next day, saying, “[i]n the morning the Albatross will spread his wings and bear me away from this spot.” He assured her that “no one [had her] happiness more at heart than” him, at which her “small mouth quivered” and she began to cry, replying that she “never felt [her] loneliness so deeply before.” This section ends without a resolution—leaving Nellie and Dr. Alden standing on the cliffs where the story opened.

There are several significant parallels between the characters and plotline and LeGrand’s life and the people in it. Like Guy, Charles Harlan was a dreamer. He had romantic visions of his future with LeGrand and in order to achieve his dreams, he had to fight the “battle of success” by leaving LeGrand to pursue economic stability and “honor” in California.⁶⁸⁹ The shipwreck that makes Nellie an orphan and exists as a “reminder” of the tragic past also has symbolic significance. Shipwrecks were “a common metaphor of financial distress in popular [nineteenth-century] fiction.”⁶⁹⁰ Harlan always referred to Julia LeGrand as “Nell” in his letters, making the name “Nellie” even more significant. Finally, in Guy’s absence Nellie faced loneliness and

⁶⁸⁹ Letter, Charles Harlan to Julia LeGrand, July 7, 1848, “Charles Harlan Papers.”

⁶⁹⁰ Scott Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 55.

instability, much as LeGrand felt while Harlan was gone. Yet Nellie endures an attempted seduction by another man, something LeGrand never wrote about experiencing.

LeGrand's portrayal of the innocent, beautiful woman as a lonely, physically ill, and emotionally vulnerable figure is telling because it reveals the ways in which she had come to think of herself as a victim of southern patriarchy and the men in her life who did not live up to its obligations. While the actual circumstances that caused this transformation are unclear, the context clues imply that the plot mirrors a seduction novel. Nellie may have been seduced or propositioned by Dr. Alden, which would make her lose her true innocence. As seduction novelists had done, LeGrand contends that women are more virtuous than men, and that men are a threat to their innocence and purity. Guy was out seeking "fame and honor," Guy's father was ill and distracted, and Dr. Alden, who should have been a caretaker for the community, abused her trust. Using tropes found in seduction novels, LeGrand expressed her admiration and frustration with Charles Harlan through her treatment of Guy Fonteroy. Despite his good intentions, Guy still leaves Nellie unprotected and alone to face her loneliness. Harlan's failure to succeed in California likely left LeGrand heartbroken and discouraged; these feelings shaped her ambivalent portrayal of him. Without knowing the ending, however, it is impossible to judge whether or not Guy makes an intrepid return to rescue Nellie from her "Albatross" and start a life together.⁶⁹¹

⁶⁹¹ Dr. Alden refers himself or perhaps a ship as an "Albatross" which may signify Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," published in William Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. Though not originally received well, the collection's themes partly inspired the Romantic movement and gained popularity as tenets of Romanticism grew in importance. In the poem, a ship captain makes a fatal choice to shoot an albatross, which causes the wind to stop blowing and the ship to become stuck at sea. The captain must wear the dead albatross around his neck as penance for his choice. Whether he calls him an Albatross, or burden, or the ship, LeGrand surely chose this phrase for a metaphorical reason.

Even without definitive endings, LeGrand's novels reveal how she used her writing to process and reevaluate events and people from her past. If her novels cast her heroines, and herself, as victims of a disappointing system of patriarchal social interactions and cultural narratives, writing about her experience with patriarchy allowed LeGrand to declare her independence from that social and cultural system. LeGrand wrote to her niece, Edith Pye, that she knew that her writing could "never do anything to aid" the family financially. Yet in 1878, over ten years after her letter to Ned Pye that first mentioned "writing [a] book," LeGrand was still "trying to get another story together."⁶⁹² She confessed that she "hardly [felt] like a human being and but for an incessant lonely aching," and wondered whether or not she "had a heart." Though she did "not believe that anyone who has been on the outside of life so long as [she had could] describe rightly what [was] in it," LeGrand still used writing to come to terms with her past. While her "imagination"—"like all [she] ever had"—"was dead and buried," taking with it her ability to write "an imaginary tale," she could still use writing novels to explore and analyze her past in ways she could not otherwise. Using familiar sentimental tropes and carefully constructing identities and plotlines allowed her the freedom to explore new cultural narratives and to express her sensibilities more intimately than ever possible. Though she "cut [herself] off from the world" later in her life, LeGrand never gave up on texts. Her relationship with them merely changed with circumstance.⁶⁹³

After the Civil War, LeGrand no longer hoped to cut through façades and surface appearances by reading and reflecting upon texts in her diary. Instead, because she felt no American authors captured reality through text, she inserted herself into literary culture—and

⁶⁹² Letter, Julia LeGrand to Edith Pye, August 30, 1878, Box 14, Folder 11, "Hutcheson Family Papers."

⁶⁹³ Letter, Julia LeGrand to Edith Pye, August 30, 1878, Box 14, Folder 11, "Hutcheson Family Papers."

particularly southern literary culture—by writing her own, more authentic version of reality through fiction. Rather than use the fashionable mode of the era LeGrand chose older literary models, perhaps in an effort to challenge the dominant literary culture of the North. In fact, many southern authors defied transnational literary culture by developing a style and method of their own—regionalism.⁶⁹⁴ Yet Julia LeGrand’s interactions with texts and her own writings exhibit deep ambivalence about patriarchy, spirituality, and social relations in the mid-nineteenth-century South. Her literary sensibilities indicate that nineteenth-century southerners’ engagement with texts was far more complicated than the historical literature implies.

Coping with war and Confederate defeat proved the greatest challenge for these women because of these events touched all parts of their lives. Some rose to the challenge and found new lives, opportunities, and identities. Others, wrecked by grief, loss, and despondence, never truly recovered. One thing bound these women together, however, and that was their consistent reliance on reading and writing to understand and cope with their lives. In their diaries and in the creative works they wrote during and after the war, they built stories of self that shaped their experiences and their society. By combining elements of northern and European literary style and culture, the Southern female diarists explored in this dissertation created a form that was distinctly southern *and* embedded in national and transnational cultures simultaneously. The women actively participated in creating the literary culture of the South, reading themselves into local, national, and international texts, and then contributing directly to that literary culture by writing about their lives and, more generally, about their region.

⁶⁹⁴ Though regionalism developed in all regions of the United States and in other places in the world, southern authors in particular focused on writing in a regionalist rather than realist style. Because regionalism focuses primarily on local concerns, it is possible that regionalist writers were using literature to reconstruct the South. On a smaller scale, LeGrand’s fictional efforts, while based in part on transnational trends, also included elements of regionalism. See Tom Lutz, *Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

If Modernism means leaving no theme untouched and describing “the meaningless, surreal horrors of which human beings are capable,” then why wouldn’t these female authors—describing death, abuse, lost love, and the complete breakdown of society as they knew it—be considered the first Modernists? If the Great War inspired nihilistic questions about the meaning of life and inspired a generation of Americans to write those questions into culture, why couldn’t a civil war—perhaps an even more cataclysmic event than World War I—inspire similar artistic outpourings? When the Confederate experiment failed, Southern women’s lives were dislocated in a way that left many feeling like strangers in a strange land. They became outsiders, exiles, yearning to rebuild their sense of self in the only way left to them: through writing. In their writing, they could look back on their “former selves” and give those selves another living day by writing them into existence.⁶⁹⁵ Or, they could write a self that didn’t exist yet—hoping that someday she might become a reality.

⁶⁹⁵ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Hearts of Darkness*, 182, 187, 189-90.

EPILOGUE: *Closing the Cover*

“So this is the end—shall I ever care to write again?”—Kate Stone, September 28, 1868

“Well, this is the last page of the book that has gone with me through all our journeyings,” Kate Stone wrote in September of 1868. More than seven years earlier, she had started the journal amidst the beginnings of war. Her book had seen her through the most difficult time of her life, to Texas and back, and into the Reconstruction Era. With the gift (or burden) of hindsight, Kate looked back through the pages of her diary, and concluded, “With youth, health, and everything surrounding me for comfort and happiness, with unmistakable blessings, I was yet an unsatisfied, discontented girl.” On her journal’s last page, Kate resolved, “I will try always to see the silver lining to the cloud. All my life I have been surrounded with love and care, far more than I deserved, and I will try in the future to be more worthy of the blessings that brighten my pathway.” She concluded by writing, “So this is the end—shall I ever care to write again? FINIS.”⁶⁹⁶

There’s no way to know if Kate’s “neat” conclusion—complete with a “The End”—was an original part of her journal or if she added the ending for flourish and to tie up loose ends when she published the diary in 1900. She confessed in a short prologue to the published journal, “How I wish I could write well so that this old life could live in the imagination of my children, but I never had the gift of expression with my pen,” demonstrating that she was interested in

⁶⁹⁶ Kate Stone, *The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861-1868*, ed. John Q. Anderson, 377-8.

creating a “story” that at least *seemed* ordered.⁶⁹⁷ Kate provided an “ending” for her readers, which allowed her to stress the lessons she learned over the course of writing her life’s story. Gratitude and hope amid disruption and loss were the main things she wanted a reader to glean from the pages of her journal.

On New Year’s Day 1890, Nannie Haskins Williams wrote her last diary entry. She recalled the “happy” Christmas she had shared with her large family. Though all ten of her children couldn’t be there to celebrate, Nannie was thrilled to have most of them there and wrote, “How I hug the times we meet together now.” She worried about her son, Haskins, getting married too early and recorded the deaths of Jefferson Davis and Henry Grady. She didn’t have much to say about Jefferson Davis but called Grady “the most promising and conciliating of our Southern writers. He is a great loss to the South.” On the very last page of her “book,” she wrote down a memory—one that reflected on her own mortality. She remembered a small family reunion in Nashville in 1885 where “*Five generations* representing nearly the compass of a century” were present. She remembered the oldest family member there—her Aunt Patsy—and recalled “the dear old lady died a few weeks after we were there.” After this fond reflection, Nannie’s diary ends. Whether she continued keeping a diary that simply doesn’t survive or whether her journaling days were over remains a mystery, though some of her letters to her daughters do survive. Nannie lived in Birmingham for some years and returned to Clarkesville with her youngest daughter Lucy before her death in 1930.⁶⁹⁸

Not all diaries completed the genre of self’s arc from opening the book to closing the cover so neatly. Julia LeGrand stopped mid-sentence: “Mr. Randolph was trying to convince her

⁶⁹⁷ Kate Stone, *The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861-1868*, ed. John Q. Anderson, 11.

⁶⁹⁸ Nannie Haskins Williams, *The Diary of Nannie Haskins Williams*, 197, 199, 203.

that we had Farragut, and as we had heard all his arguments before, and as we were sitting...”⁶⁹⁹

LeGrand’s diary probably ends so abruptly because she never intended for it to survive.

According to her diary’s editors, the journal initially started with the beginning of the war and continued until its end, but when LeGrand was traveling, she feared her bags might be searched by federal troops, so she destroyed it. Fortunately for us, a portion was “preserved...among the leaves of an old novel she had been reading aloud to her friends during the long and tedious evenings of their forced marches.”⁷⁰⁰ If this statement is true, the diary survived as a result of her need for and love of reading, a testament to the value LeGrand placed on texts as indispensable sources for making sense of her turbulent world.

Sarah Morgan offered several “adieux” to her diaries. In June of 1862, she wrote, “My poor old diary comes to a very abrupt end, to my great distress. The hardest thing in the world is to break off journalizing when you are once accustomed to it.” To make things more difficult, she felt her diary had “proved such a resource to me in these dark days of trouble that I feel as though I were saying goodbye to an old and tried friend.” Her diary had been a solace—a silent listener that “proved a relief to me where my tongue was forced to remain quiet!” She was convinced that without it, she “would have fallen victim to despair and ‘The Blues’ long since.” She closed the entry by writing, “‘Vive pen, ink, and paper!’ and add[ed] with regret ‘Adieu my mental Conductor! I fear this unchained lightening will strike somewhere, in your absence!’”⁷⁰¹ Her next volume ended when she laid “aside” the journal because she “procured a nicer one.” She looked back on that volume’s pages and reflected, “What a stupid thing it is! As I look back,

⁶⁹⁹ Julia LeGrand Waitz, *The Journal of Julia LeGrand: New Orleans, 1862-1863*, Ed. Agnes E. Croxall and Kate Mason Rowland (Richmond: Everett Waddey Company, 1911), 311.

⁷⁰⁰ Kate Mason Rowland and Agnes E. Croxall, “Biographical Sketch,” *The Journal of Julia LeGrand: New Orleans, 1862-1863*, 33.

⁷⁰¹ Sarah Morgan, *The Civil War Diary of Sarah Morgan*, Ed. Charles East, 116-7.

how faintly I have expressed things that produced the greatest impression on me at the time, and how completely have I omitted the very things I should have recorded!” She continued, writing, “Bah! It is all the same trash! And here is an end of it—for *this* volume, whose stupidity can only be equaled by the one that precedes, and the one that is to follow it.”⁷⁰²

Morgan had similar thoughts about the next volume, and confessed, “And here is the end of my poor book. I wish two pages out of every three had never been written.” She added, “What tempted me to make such a record? A dozen times I have debated with myself as to the propriety of throwing the whole in the fire.” Her fear—like Julia LeGrand—was that someone who didn’t “understand me as well as I do myself” would find and read it. Ultimately, she decided to keep the journal—at least to “wait a year or two” before giving it to the flames. She hoped, “Perhaps this may enable me to find a moral for the story of my life, not yet told. Keep it in spite of all, and let time prove its uses.”⁷⁰³ Like Kate Stone, she wanted to write a moral into her life’s story like the ones she encountered in fiction and non-fiction alike. Sarah kept a diary sporadically for at least part of the rest of her life, but she destroyed the volume from 1871-1872, which she called “the most awful years of my life.”⁷⁰⁴

Gertrude Clanton Thomas had a difficult time saying goodbye to the journal that was her confidante through most of the Civil War. In September of that year, she had filled up her “Dear old journal” and needed to start a new one. Still, Thomas confessed, “It is always a rather solemn hour of retrospection the finishing of a journal. I realise that I am putting away a portion of my life.” She added, “I really dislike to give you up—to lay you aside and form a friendship with a

⁷⁰² Sarah Morgan, 186.

⁷⁰³ Sarah Morgan, 532-3.

⁷⁰⁴ Even if she didn’t keep a diary, she did keep a scrapbook that covers 1853-1882. Sarah Morgan Dawson scrapbook, Dawson Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

new one.” She had such difficulty starting over because, as she said, “I have shown more of my real self to you than to any of your predecessors, and a weak vacillating creature I have proven myself, never attaining to my own idea of excellence----.”⁷⁰⁵ Gertrude’s negative self-assessment provides a self-reflective ending to what was a depressing book. Some of the most traumatizing things that would happen to Thomas occurred in those pages, and while some terrible things were yet to come, the things in that volume prepared her to handle heartache and disappointment differently the next time they came knocking.

Six years later, she was finishing another journal (though she had filled another in the meantime). This time, rather than criticize herself, she wrote, “I could, but will not indulge in one reflection which will leave a cloud upon the record of my life I have made. In a few days I will commence another book. Let this end with a record of the purest joy given to women to know”—the gift of “pride” in one’s child.⁷⁰⁶ Sure enough, Gertrude had learned to see the bright side of things, and while the volume she closed held as much heartbreak as the last, who *she* was had changed since she had closed the last cover.

In August of 1889, Thomas wrote the final entry in her last surviving volume. She recorded the beautiful weather and her excitement after hearing her son and daughter were coming to visit. While family matters took up most of the space, her final paragraph was dedicated to her reading and writing. She noted that she had attended a “club meeting” the previous week and that she received her subscription to “The Old Homestead a magazine published in Savannah.” Doubtless she was excited to receive the magazine since “In the August number was a paper I wrote on Henry IV” and in the September issue, her “paper on Ophelia

⁷⁰⁵ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 8-30-1889, Diary, Box 3, Vol. 8, Part 2, pg 200-1, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

⁷⁰⁶ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 11-13-1870, Box 3, Vol. 10, Part 2, pg 200.

from the play of Hamlet” would appear. She added, “I read both of them before the Hayne circle. I have received many complimentary notices but little substantial encouragement to write.”⁷⁰⁷ Gertrude’s love of Shakespeare closed the book of her life, though she scribbled a number of quotations on the inside covers, ending with a quote from Robert Browning’s *Paracelsus*:

I go to prove my soul!
I see my way as birds their trackless way
I shall arrive! What time what circuit first
I ask not.
In some good time. His good time I shall arrive
He guides me and the bird.
In his good time.⁷⁰⁸

Though her surviving diaries end in 1889, Gertrude Thomas lived until 1907. In the intervening years, she was active in the Hayne Literary Circle (mentioned above), the Ladies’ Memorial Association of Augusta, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), and the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Gertrude’s husband, James Jefferson Thomas, was an alcoholic by that time (something alluded to, but not typically addressed directly in her journal), which makes her involvement in the WCTU even more meaningful. Thomas—who had frequently commented on politics in her journal for decades—was very active with the NAWSA and “spent her last years speaking at various women’s suffrage conventions across the nation.”⁷⁰⁹

Women’s diaries ended in a variety of manners. When they end, some women’s paper trails go cold. For some, their paper trails are just getting started. Either way, they’ve left their words behind as representatives of themselves. Their bodily selves can’t speak for them

⁷⁰⁷ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 8-30-1889, Diary, Box 4, Vol. 13, pg 84-5, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

⁷⁰⁸ Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 4-30-1890, Diary Box 4, Vol. 13, pg 92.

⁷⁰⁹ Katherine E. Rohrer, “Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas (1834-1907),” *New Georgia Encyclopedia Online*, 9 October 2014.

anymore, but they left their journals to speak for them—or least for a part of them. The genre of self served its purpose after all, for here I am, over 150 years after the fact, letting their words tell me about their society. The only part of them I know is what they wanted me to know. The parts of themselves they hid deep down remain secreted away.

And yet, their emotional literacy and the abilities they had to speak those emotions into being (when they wanted) is truly astounding. In current culture, people are more “connected” than ever before through technology like video-chatting, email, texting, and various social-media platforms. Our potential to connect with people continents and maybe even worlds away exceeds what is has ever been, and the possibilities are constantly expanding. Still, though, this constant connection may not be a good thing.

People feel surrounded by people and simultaneously all alone. They share large parts of their lives with thousands of people and yet they feel misunderstood. We can connect with people like us through social media, but numerous studies have shown that social media doesn’t make us feel connected with other people and instead heightens feelings of depression.⁷¹⁰ We live in a world that by many standards is more equal and promising than ever before, and still, many of the same constraints that shaped the lives of nineteenth-century Americans plague us today. Two in particular—racism and sexism—seem as alive and well as ever.

A sense of loneliness, feeling misunderstood, and being constrained by social forces that seem beyond their power animate the concerns found in many women’s diaries in the nineteenth century. In their diaries, Southern women could describe these insecurities and face the parts of themselves they didn’t like. Their society could be rigid in many ways, but Romanticism at least

⁷¹⁰ A number of recent studies have tied excessive social media use with depression. One example is: Sidani, et al, “Association Between Social Media Use and Depression Among U.S. Young Adults,” *Depression and Anxiety: The Official Journal of the ADAA*, Vol 33, January 2016.

allowed for meaningful reflection on their feelings and their place in the world. Ultimately, they could be vulnerable.

According to researcher and author Brené Brown, being vulnerable is a gift—a gift that allows us to be in touch with our true selves. In her extensive research on vulnerability, Brown contends that women especially are conditioned to hide parts of themselves to avoid rejection, ostracism, and worst of all, shame. This “culture of shame” hearkens back to the “old-time religion” familiar to my research subjects. It wasn’t just that the sin was bad, the *sinner* was bad too. Despite all the angst their culture piled on, these women found a way to cope that worked for them: they owned their stories by writing them.

Brown acknowledges that the very same things these women used to make sense of their lives can help us now, too, since shame and vulnerability have defined the human condition for millennia and will continue to do so. She writes, “Owning our story can be hard but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it. Embracing our vulnerabilities is risky but not nearly as dangerous as giving up on love and belonging and joy.” She adds, “Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light.”⁷¹¹ In the end then, our desire and need to tell our stories—however hard that may be—is what makes us human. However we accomplish that—through art, diaries, letters, social media, or old-fashioned conversation—we are better off when they are told.

⁷¹¹ Brené Brown, *I Thought It Was Just Me: Women Reclaiming Power and Courage in a Culture of Shame* (New York: Gotham Books, 2007).

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