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To Better Serve and Sustain the South: How Nineteenth Century Domestic Novelists Supported Southern Patriarchy Using the "Cult of True Womanhood" and the Written Word

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Abstract

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, American women were subjected to restrictive societal expectations, providing them with a well-defined identity and role within the male-dominated culture. For elite southern women, more so than their northern sisters, this identity became integral to southern patriarchy and tradition. As the United States succumbed to sectional tension and eventually civil war, elite white southerners found their way of life threatened as the delicate web of gender, race, and class relations that the Old South was based upon began to crumble. Despite their repressed status in southern society, most elite southern women chose to support the patriarchal system that had long controlled their lives, and were as devoted to the Confederate cause as elite southern men. For some women this support manifested as domestic novels, written by elite, white southern women for elite, white southern women. These novels, all published during the nineteenth century, heralded the traditions of the Old South. They pushed for continued support of the southern way of life, suggesting the best way for elite southern women do this was by becoming more virtuous, better educated, and less frivolous wives and mothers.

State University of New York
College at Buffalo
Department of History and Social Studies Education

To Better Serve and Sustain the South: How Nineteenth Century Domestic Novelists Supported Southern Patriarchy Using the "Cult of True Womanhood" and the Written Word

A Thesis in History

By

Daphne V. Wyse

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

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To My Dragon: Thank you for believing in me and refusing to let me quit. I am a better person for having you in my life, and I am grateful to have shared this journey with you.

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Introduction

January, 1862: The American Civil War is less than a year old and patriotism runs ablaze across the American South. The first wave of conscription is still a few months away and Southern armies are populated with volunteers who believe in the romantic ideal of war and the possibility of glorious victory.[1] As zealous patriots defend their homes and families, a wealthy gentlewoman sits in her boardinghouse room in Columbia, South Carolina lit only by candlelight. Her husband, a high-ranking member of the Confederate government has been called away on business, leaving this aristocratic lady to her journal; her daily musings on the world around her and the nation at war. On this night (the night of January 20, 1862) she muses upon her day: the people she encountered, the birth of a dear friend's baby, and of illness that has been plaguing her. Also included in the entry are thoughts about the "emptiness of life in wartimes" and the expectations of women. There are some who "disapprove [of her] highly" because she finds it difficult remaining quiet, ladylike, and polite when her sentiments and thoughts about the Confederate Cause course through her mind.[2]

At the time this entry was written, Mary Boykin Chestnut was just a Southern plantation mistress with an above average education and a passion for writing. She clearly held strong feelings about the war, the Confederacy, and the expectations of women, and writing was her only available outlet to vent her frustrations and emotions during this trying time. It would be more than a century before the original version of her seven-volume journal, which began in February 1861 and ended in June 1865, would reach the public eye, along with the letters, journals, and other previously unpublished works of nineteenth century southern women.

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[1] Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 15

[2] Mary Boykin Chestnut, *Mary Chestnut's Civil War*, edited by C. Vann Woodward (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 282-3.

Generations later, these documents, along with published novels, newspaper articles, poems, and short stories from nineteenth century women would help alter historians' visions on the role and efforts of women during the antebellum era and the Civil War.

Research shows that elite white, southern women during the nineteenth century were fighting just as hard as men, in their own way, to preserve the South in its present state. These women were not trying to break down social barriers, nor were they advocating for the rights of women. Instead they were doing their best to support the social system that had long controlled their lives because they loved and supported the South, even as their gender was continually marginalized. For some women, support bloomed in the form of domestic novels, with their devotion to the South presented through their prose. Domestic novelists used the written word to support their way of life by redefining the meaning of true womanhood and urging other women to do the same. As the nation was forced to combat sectional tension, war, and its inevitable aftermath, elite southern women recognize the need to redefine their roles in society. Through their novels, these women redefined the perimeters of southern womanhood, pushing for other elite, white women to be better wives and mothers, better educate themselves, and ignore frivolities, not because they wanted anything to change, but in support of traditional southern culture, southern patriarchy, and the fixed position of gender within the system.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, American women were subjected to restrictive societal expectations, providing them with a well-defined identity and role within the male dominated culture. Referred to by historians, including Barbara Welter, as the "cult of True Womanhood," these attributes were perpetuated by both men and women in American society. The "cult of True Womanhood" allowed a woman to judge herself and face judgment from others in her social circle so as to ascertain whether or not she was a true woman. In order to be

a true woman, she would have to represent the "four cardinal virtues" of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, effectively becoming the moral foundation of her society as materialism and corruption became more common among men.[3] Based on the ideals and gender roles made popular in England during the Victorian era, true women remained at home, championing the domestic sphere of influence, and supported their husbands as they frequented the public and political arenas outside of the home.[4] Women in both the northern and southern United States were subjected to the ideals and restrictions created out of the "cult of True Womanhood" for a time, but, by the mid-nineteenth century, women in the North were beginning to create new identities for themselves, outside of the expectations of the "cult of True Womanhood," as a result of increasingly regional specific activities, such as the abolitionist movement, the beginning of urbanization and industrialization, and the closer proximity of northern households and farms to one another.[5] Southern women, specifically elite white women, were tied to the household, referred to as "hostages" by Welter, and spent copious quantities of time isolated from other women due to the large distances between plantations. As a result, southern society maintained a stricter adherence to the definition of true womanhood.[6] It is these women, elite white women of the South, which are the focus of this paper.

Of the "four cardinal virtues" of true womanhood, piety, or religion, was considered the most central of the four. Religion was a "divine right" given to women so that they, in turn, could provide a moral base for men.[7] Great importance was placed on women being the religious and moral centers of the family unit. A pious woman was a "true woman" and the

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[3] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 10, no. 2 pt. 1 (Summer 1966), 152.
[4] Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 8.
[5] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 8-9.
[6] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," 151.
[7] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," 152.

other three cardinal virtues, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, are intrinsically linked to the notion of piety. Elite southern women were expected to be "unsullied and frail," virginal and attentive to the needs of her husband and family.[8] They had to be above suspicion, seated high up on a pedestal, safe at home where men could protect them and keep them from being morally damaged or made impure in any way. The absence of any of these virtues was considered "unnatural" and "unfeminine," for without them a woman was, according to historians, considered "no woman at all, but a [instead] a member of some lower order."[9] To maintain the standard of true womanhood was to maintain the patriarchical social system in the South. In most cases, elite white women were more than happy to do both.

The first chapter of this paper expands on this notion of the "cult of True Womanhood" and its effect on elite southern women during the antebellum era. In the nineteenth century, the South adhered to a strict patriarchical system built on the power of wealthy, white plantation owners. As the mothers, wives, and daughters of the patriarchs, elite southern women occupied a unique place within the social structure that was based on a delicate balance of race, gender, and class. Though they were not allowed to vote or to involve themselves in politics, vocations outside of the home, or other public endeavor, elite white women were the pillars that the Old South was built upon and their continued virtue, piety, and support of patriarchy was vital to the South's continued existence.[10] Therefore elite women were taught, both at home and in school, how to be feminine and pure; how to provide comfort and happiness at home for their fathers and husbands; and how to be the moral compass for their families.

Chapters two and three are devoted to a discussion of four domestic novels written by four different white southern women authors during three different decades of the nineteenth

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[8] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 87.
[9] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860, 154.
[10] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," 152.

century. According to historians, domestic novels were works of fiction written by women for women and generally "explored the possibilities of domesticity" to illustrate the need for loyalty to home and community.[11] In the case of southern domestic fiction, novels took place on southern plantations and at the childhood homes of the young heroines. The main characters were always young and beautiful belles, struggling to understand their place in southern society, much like the women who penned the characters. Providing women with simple and exciting narratives of fictional female characters, domestic fiction also gave southern women a sense of community that they too often lacked living on isolated plantations.[12] The four novels discussed in this paper not only reflect this need to create an imagined community for southern women, but each novel also represents the authors' proud and loving vision of the Old South and their personal reflections on southern society.

Published in 1838, *Recollections of a Southern Matron* by Caroline Howard Gilman is the first novel discussed, in addition to being the earliest published of the four novels. During the first half of the nineteenth century, outward sectional tensions were still relatively low-key and this is reflected in Gilman's novel. Gilman focuses on the beauty and splendor of the Old South throughout her novel, and devotes numerous passages to the superiority of the South over the North. Set at The Ashley, the paternal plantation of the heroine and narrator, Cornelia, *Recollections of a Southern Matron* is a semi-autobiographical account of a young woman's journey from the carefree whims of childhood to the wonder of being a young belle to the often difficult realities of matrimony and motherhood. Overall, this novel reflects the idea that a true woman could be pious, moral, and devoted while still being intelligent and strong without upsetting the patriarchical hierarchy of the South.

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[11] Elizabeth Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South: Defenders of Southern Culture* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 4.

[12] Faust, *Mothers of Invention,* 154.

Nearly fifteen years later *Eoline; or Magnolia Vale*, built upon this theme of a young belle's journey to adulthood. Written by Caroline Lee Hentz and published in 1852, this novel reflected the heightened sectional tensions and growing political turmoil in the United States. During a time when the South was drawing more and more criticism, due largely to its continued reliance on slavery, Hentz does her best to create an idealized version of the South that is both picturesque and kind, glossing over the issue of slavery to combat northern abolitionist criticism. The main character, Eoline, is cast from her childhood home when she refuses to marry the man to whom her father has promised her hand and finds herself teaching music at a finishing school for young southern girls. It is through her relationships and interactions, mainly at the school, Magnolia Vale, that Eoline realizes the importance of familial devotion, ending with her eventual marriage to the man her father intended and reconciliation with her family.

Between 1861 and 1865 the United States was viciously divided as a result of the Civil War. This provides the backdrop for Augusta Jane Evans' Confederate novel *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice*. Published in 1864, Evans' work reflects the patriotic zeal of the Confederacy and Evans' own personal expectation that all southern women and men devote themselves to the Cause. Following the lives of Irene and Electra, two childhood friends of different circumstances, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice*, is a long and detailed narrative of the importance of sacrifice and devotion both to family and country. Irene and Electra represent Evans' version of a true southern woman, as both sacrifice love and marriage to better serve the Confederacy and their beloved southern traditions.

Published in 1866, after the Civil War and during the early months of Reconstruction, *Sunnybank* by Mary Virginia Terhune is considered the last of the southern domestic novels.[13] Telling the story of Elinor Lacy and her family's ward Agatha Lamar, both young southern

[13] Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South,* 189.

belles, the characters of *Sunnybank* find their idyllic world turned upside down by war. They are forced to face the reality of losing loved ones, occupation by Yankee soldiers, and the realization that the life they had always known was changed forever as a result of the war. While like its predecessors in setting and characters, *Sunnybank* is unique because it tries to reconcile the traditions and structure of the Old South with the creeping realities of the New South.

In the fourth and concluding chapter, the discussion turns to the legacy of the domestic novel and the creation of the Lost Cause myth. Created by southern writers and sustained for generations by romantic tales of secession and Civil War battles and an idealized version of Confederate patriotism and support from the home front, the myth of the Lost Cause, according to historians, arose from a need to address the questions of southern identity and the meaning of southern defeat.[14] This became known as revisionist history. Women played a key role in perpetuating this myth. Following their traditional role set forth in the "cult of True Womanhood" and encouraged by domestic novels of the nineteenth century, elite white women exercised their roles as "guardians of the culture" and created organizations dedicated to remembering and idolizing the Confederacy.[15] These women struggled to maintain and uphold the traditions of the Old South and worked to reconcile them with the New South so as to create a new southern identity niche for elite southern women.

While the voices of elite southern women during the nineteenth century are incredibly important to the study of Civil War history, they are just one section in a larger chorus of voices. As a result, it is important to understand their stories in the larger historical context of the American South, the nineteenth century, and the Civil War. During the first half of the twentieth century, Civil War historians focused mostly on a "who, what, where, when, how" snapshot of

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[14] Sarah E. Gardner, *Blood and Irony: Southern White Women's Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1937* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 5.

[15] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 90.

history. Led by classical historians, such as Bruce Catton, this wave of scholarship focused on the battlefields, the men who fought, and the generals who led them. In his Pulitzer Prize winning book *A Stillness at Appomattox*, published in 1953, Catton describes the actions of both the Union and Confederate troops, giving faces to familiar names such as General Meade and General Lee, before following the action of men on the battlefield, some flanking the enemy and others that had left their safe trenches to move forward into the gunfire.[16] In subsequent years other historians, such as Shelby Foote, would follow a similar method of presentation, offering narrative histories of the American Civil War that provided rich detail but little synthesis on why the material was important. This ultimately narrows the scope of these histories. In addition, little, if any, attention is given to the social context of the country, laid out during the antebellum years, the role of women, or the importance of the home front effort in carrying both the North and South through the war.

The Civil War narrative, while never losing popularity, evolved in subsequent decades. With the market saturated in Civil War literature, the 1970s and 1980s saw focus shift away from stories of individual and group heroics on the battlefield, and become more focused on the politics of the war and its origins. Published in 1988, James McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom* revolutionized Civil War history by combining the popular rhetoric of battles and battlefield heroics with a deeper discussion on the development of the war during the first half of the nineteenth century. McPherson classifies the cause of the Civil War as a fight for *freedom*; not for states' rights, and not for slavery. He argues that the American Civil War was fought over the right to freedom from oppression, from slavery, from government interference, and from judgment, asserting that this freedom was won in battle and was not an inherited birthright.[17]

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[16] Bruce Catton, *A Stillness at Appomattox* (New York: Doubleday, 1953), 300.
[17] James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 243-44.

Focusing on the collective narrative and experience of the nation during the Civil War, not the stories of particular individuals, McPherson excels at portraying both the Union and Confederate sides in equal measure and avoids falling into the "lost cause" revisionist history trap that often comes with writing about the Confederacy during the Civil War. In the nearly 900 pages of *Battle Cry of Freedom*, McPherson spends a great deal of time discussing the importance of the antebellum era and the years of war, but focuses very little on Reconstruction or the legacy of the right to freedom that both sides were fighting for. This slightly limits the overall impact of the book, especially because of the central focus on freedom, a theme that certainly arose repeatedly during Reconstruction.

While Battle Cry of Freedom largely glosses over Reconstruction, there are a number of works that focus solely on Reconstruction, including one by McPherson. *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* was published in 1982 and focused on the idea that the Civil War and Reconstruction were key factors in modernizing the United States in the early twentieth century. Indeed, much of the research of Reconstruction focuses on the economic or political history of the period. Another top contributor to Reconstruction scholarship is Eric Foner with his book *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877.* Foner concludes in his research that it was the failure of the government to properly introduce free labor ideology into the South. Without a firmly supported free labor system, Reconstruction was doomed to fail. This places a large portion of the book's focus on the role of former slaves in attempting to rehabilitate the South after the Civil War. While certainly a comprehensive and knowledgeable volume, Foner largely ignores any research published before World War II, limiting his historical context to a largely revisionist base. In addition, Foner fails to recognize the importance of women and "Lost Cause" rhetoric in shaping the Reconstruction era.

The myth of the "Lost Cause" can be defined by the following statement: "The Confederacy was doomed from the start in its struggles against the superior might of the Union; yet against these impossible odds, its forces fought heroically for the cause of states' rights."[18] A great deal of literature, both fiction and nonfiction, has heralded this myth in the decades since the Civil War ended, leading many scholars to repeatedly try to answer the question "Why did the South lose the war?" More recently, however, historians, such as Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, have begun to focus more on the reasons why and how the Confederacy was able to fight for as long as they did, rather on the perceived inevitability of their defeat. In his book *The Confederate War*, Gallagher asserts that loss was not inevitable, but rather that the South was strong in its support for the war. The Confederate defeat happened on the battlefield, not as a result of "internal divisions" and diminishing morale in the South.[19] This is a significant contribution to the way southern Civil War and Reconstruction era histories are studied because it emphasizes the importance of what the South did rather than what the South was unable to accomplish. Gallagher also discusses the importance of the war effort on the home front, although there is little emphasis placed on women specifically, but rather on the support offered by southern civilians as a whole.

The study of women during the antebellum and Civil War eras did not pick up steam with scholars until the 1960s, with Anne Firor Scott writing what would become the major interpretation of elite southern women during the nineteenth century for more than thirty years. In her book, *The Southern Lady*, Scott argues that the war was a great factor in the emancipation of southern women, helping them alter their gender roles and crave a life outside of the role society designated for them. Since *The Southern Lady* was published in 1970, new research, led

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[18] Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, eds., "Introduction," in *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*, edited by Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010), 1.

[19] Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 12.

by historians such as Drew Gilpin Faust, Catherine Clinton, Victoria E. Bynum, and Laura F. Edwards has mostly proved that Scott overestimated the extent to which elite southern women broke free from the "cult of true womanhood" during the Civil War and Reconstruction years. These women argue that, while there was some change in the role of women during the Civil War, after the war women were reluctant to see that change through.

For more than a decade, Faust's *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* has represented the standard for southern women's Civil War research. Focusing on elite white women from 1861 to 1865, Faust argues that these women were the lynchpin of the Confederate Cause and it was their disillusionment with southern men and their ability to protect and provide that led to the demise of the South in the Civil War.[20] Describing in great detail the individual and collective efforts of elite white women during the war and their evolving feelings of selfishness as the years dragged on, Faust uses their own diaries and letters to piece together the reality these women faced while their husbands, fathers, and brothers were off at war. It should be noted, however, that Faust's account is still asking *why* did the South lose the war? This perpetuates the myth of inevitability that has long plagued southern histories and lends itself to Lost Cause rhetoric.

Laura F. Edwards, too, asserts this notion that elite white women were an integral and often overlooked part of the southern war effort. In her novel, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here: Southern Women in the Civil War Era*, Edwards focuses on both white and black southern women, paying a fair amount of attention to the antebellum era in addition to the lives of these women during the war years, expanding on a weak point in Faust's research. Stating that the southern home was the central pillar of southern society, Edwards challenges the notion that

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[20] Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 246.

women were separate from politics and the public sphere, recognizing that these women did all they could to remain relevant in the patriarchical society of the Old South.[21]

Providing a comprehensive study of southern women during the nineteenth century is historian Catherine Clinton. In multiple books, including *The Plantation Mistress* and *Tara Revisited; Women, War, and the Plantation Legend*, Clinton breaks down the social, economic, and political bonds that held elite southern women so tightly in their roles as wives, mothers, and physical manifestations of the male power complex. Clinton suggests that these women helped strengthen these roles in southern society and were as deeply devoted to maintaining the status quo. While Clinton does an excellent job reconstructing the lives of these women and providing an in-depth picture of their lives during the nineteenth century, she follows the pattern of most classical historians and focuses on reassembling the details of the women's lives, not on the importance of these women to the continued existence of the Old South.

More recently, southern women's scholarship has begun to focus more on the individual and unique contributions of elite southern women during the antebellum and Civil War years, with historians like Elizabeth Moss, Sarah E. Gardner, Catherine Kerrison, and Anne Goodwyn Jones focusing specifically on the written contributions of elite southern women. Focusing on women in the late eighteenth century, Kerrison's book *Claiming the Pen: Women and Intellectual Life in the Early American South* gives southern domestic novels and female authorship a historical context. With a market saturated with works about New England intellectual history and the intellectual contributions of men during this time period, Kerrison attempts to insert southern women into a conversation that often excludes them. Kerrison argues that, while elite southern women enjoyed reading novels and acknowledged the truths

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[21] Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women of the Civil War Era* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 43.

perpetuated within the pages of the books, in reality any feelings of female independence remained within the books. Thus, reading and writing actually helped to strengthen their subjectivity and reliance on the patriarchical system of the South.[22]

The idea that the novels produced and consumed by women had an effect on maintaining the southern social structure is the focus of Elizabeth Moss' book *Domestic Novelists of the Old South, Defenders of Southern Culture*. Moss argues that domestic fiction in the Old South was unique because the authors were defending the southern way of life as being morally superior to that of the North. Other historians, such as Gardner, whose research focuses on personal narratives of women during the Civil War and Reconstruction years, agree with this premise. Gardner argues that these women became writers as a way to make sense of their wartime experiences and, as a result, became the guardians of Civil War history as their narratives and memoirs were published.[23] In the process, elite white women remained true to the patriarchical social structure of the Old South and attempted to keep the southern tradition alive.

While these arguments are strong and valid, they are merely a starting point in the larger gender discussion of nineteenth century elite women. The words written by domestic novelists such as Caroline Howard Gilman, Caroline Lee Hentz, Augusta Jane Evans, and Mary Virginia Terhune do more than defend the Old South and the patriarchy that had long controlled their lives, as Moss and Gardner discuss. Instead these novels demand that southern women change and become better belles and mistresses in order to maintain the superiority of the South. This is where my research differs and begins to build on the foundation created by these historians. During a time when tensions were running high across the United States, the plantation system was being threatened in the South, and the upper class southern way of life was being criticized

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[22] Catherine Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen: Women and Intellectual Life in the Early American South* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 184

[23] Gardner, *Blood and Irony*, 48.

because of its devotion to a social structure that perpetuated slavery, domestic novelists recognized a need for elite southern women to recreate themselves, not as feminists, revolutionaries, or abolitionists as was happening in the North, but rather as better wives; better mothers; and better moral centers for their families.

Chapter 1: Women of the Old South and the "Cult of Domesticity"

"Plantation mistresses had dynamic and various roles in antebellum society. Women's functions were essential," writes historian Catherine Clinton.[1] Despite this ultimately true assertion, however, tales from the antebellum era and the Civil War battlefields have traditionally neglected to share that most important detail; most battles took place on southern soil, unintentionally forcing civilian participation, and giving women and children a front row seat to the death and destruction. It has only been relatively recently that historians have shared stories about battles taking place where women lived, raised their children, and where they tried to hold the home front together in the absence of men.[2] Without the support of the white, southern plantation mistresses, the South would not have been strong enough to secede or sustain a war against the Union as long as it did. These women supported the economic and social system of the South, even though the system they supported silenced them and kept them subordinate to men. They supported the Civil War, even though it snatched their men from their homes, provided the home front no military defense, and left many of these women young widows, threatening their shared identity as wives and mothers.[3]

It is because of their participation and support of secession and war that the stories and experiences of Southern women, specifically the elite white women, are of equal importance to those of men in the American Civil War narrative. These oft forgotten and long silenced voices, the voices of those elite southern women who were critically important in sustaining the social, economic, and political tradition of the South while their men were at war, provide an alternate, but compatible perspective on the Civil War. It is through these voices, captured in handwritten journals and letters, or published as fictional novels or forms of southern propaganda, that

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[1] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress,* xvi.
[2] Edwards, *Scarlett doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 66.
[3] Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 139.

southern women discovered their true selves. They used writing as an outlet to explore the meaning and importance of their roles in society and also to make sense of the changing world around them as the traditional way of life in the South was continually challenged by the modernization of the United States in the nineteenth century. As research has shown, despite their repressed status in the patriarchical society of the nineteenth century American South, elite white women were not fighting against the social system that controlled their lives. In fact, most supported and embraced it, choosing to explore and redefine the meaning of southern womanhood only as a way to support and sustain the South and its long held ideals and traditions.

While the outbreak of the American Civil War cannot be traced back to a single catalyst, it is likely that the seeds of discontent were planted very early on in American history as the new nation developed. Since colonization, the Northern and Southern states had been steadily developing separate and distinct identities, due in part to differences in available resources and climate and in part to immigration patterns of European immigrants. During the nineteenth century, the differences between the two regions became more pronounced as change began to happen more rapidly in the North. While the North was still dominated by farming, parts of the region had begun to rely more on commercial activities to grow the economy, with an increased focus on city life as more immigrants from Europe began pouring in through New York City. This influx of foreigners ultimately had little impact on the southern states because plantation owners discouraged immigrants from moving South due to what some historians have described as a “xenophobic impulse to preserve their own homogeneity” and the immigrants’ refusal to compete with slave labor for jobs.”[4] While the North experienced industrialization, the South continued to grow its most profitable cash crop, cotton, and invest in land and slaves. As a result

[4] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 2.

of the differences between the regions political economies, the cultures of the North and South developed differently, most notably with the abolition of slavery in the North during the early 1800s and the South cementing the peculiar institution further into its social structure and identity. It was during the nineteenth century, as the sectional differences between the North and South became more pronounced that the abolitionist movement gained notoriety in the northern states. These abolitionists were fighting for the elimination of slavery in the United States and also for an end to racism and unjust treatment of minority populations in the country.[5] As the northern abolitionists became more vocal and pushed every moral and political argument possible to convince their fellow Americans of the evils of slavery, the South dug in their heels and strengthened their commitment to slavery, the subjugation of blacks, and the plantation system.[6]

Another highlighted difference between the regions was development of the roles and expectations of women, with the southern lady becoming the symbol for the "Old South."[7] Gender served as an incredibly important factor in the forming the legal structure of the South and this showed in many ways, including court decisions and public policy dealing with sexual, domestic, and racial issues.[8] Emphasizing well-defined gender roles and differences was instrumental in creating Southern identity and maintaining the separation between gender spheres was equally as important to maintaining the structure of the Old South. It is important to note that women in the North occupied mostly the same gender roles as their southern counterparts during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and that the legal structure in the North reflected much of the same rhetoric as that of the South, but opportunities afforded to

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[5] Claudine L. Ferrell, *The Abolitionist Movement* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 5.
[6] Ferrell, *The Abolitionist Movement*, 5.
[7] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 3
[8] Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 61.

women in the North, as a result of things like the abolitionist movement, along with a developing economy that did not rely on the patriarchical plantation system afforded them the opportunity to redevelop their roles to reflect regional changes. [9]

Beginning with the colonization of North America, and the difficult transformation of the British Colonies from "wilderness to settlement to cultivation," the success of the southern cause continued to rest on the involvement of women. As nineteenth century gender historian, Catherine Clinton, states in her book, *Tara Revisited: Women, War, and the Plantation Legend*, "White women may not have been the initiators of expansion, but they were forced into full partnership in the building of the plantation South."[10] While women were not given a choice regarding colonization in the New World, the expectations of patriarchal society and nineteenth century ideals led women, through supporting their husbands and their families, to become silent partners in the continued quest for European expansion.

Indeed, without the support of women, the antebellum South, and later the Civil War South, would have collapsed because men, the proverbial leaders of southern society, needed the devotion and support of their wives to push them in successful directions. George W. Peddy, MD writes to his wife Kate Featherstone Peddy, "I have written you several letters since I arrived here and not a word have I had from you. I think you ought to write to me for you and [our daughter] Laura are the pride of my life."[11] He later states in a letter that his "happiness in this life depends upon your true devotion as heretofore to me" which plays to the idea that a wife's main role, if she was an elite and white, of course, was to devote herself to her husband and her family. In *All that Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South*, Stephen W.

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[9] Clinton *The Plantation Mistress,* 13.

[10] Catherine Clinton, *Tara Revisited; Women, War, and the Plantation Legend* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1997), 29.

[11] *Saddlebag and Spinning Wheel: Being the Civil War Letters of George W. Peddy, MD and Kate Featherstone Peddy*, edited by George Peddy Cuttino (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1981), 10.

Berry II describes this phenomenon stating that "men believed women were supposed to bear witness to male becoming, to cheer them to greatness and to comfort them along the way."[12] Women provided a platform where men could create their own personal empire where they would always be loved and appreciated and always reign supreme. Essentially, men were the "knights in shining armor who rode out into the world, fighting [women's] battles for them," and women deferred to their knowledge and experiences, allowing men to make decisions because they lacked knowledge or experience of their own in the larger public sphere.[13] In a society where reputation was everything and the public successes and failures of men were highly scrutinized, women were the private support and validation that men needed to continue their quest.

When discussing the social structure of the antebellum American South, it is essential to recognize that much of it was based upon the ideals of Victorian England. Considered the era of Queen Victoria's reign, from 1837 to 1901, English society during this time had very specific notions on what gender roles should look like and how men and women should act. These notions are often referred to as the "cult of True Womanhood" or the "cult of domesticity" and provided a basis for women to judge themselves and also be judged by others.[14] The role constructed for women was based primarily on the concept of femininity. In this instance, the idea of being feminine was a purely psychological and man-made concept that provided a very specific and distinct model for the behavior of women.[15] A model Victorian woman was expected to possess many qualities; among them were morality, honor, and devotion to her

[12] Stephen W. Berry II, *All that Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 85.

[13] Christie Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 128.

[14] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly 10*, no. 2 pt. 1 (Summer 1966), 152.

[15] Rene Kollar, "Power and Control Over Women in Victorian England: Male Opposition to Sacramental Confession in the Anglican Church," *The Journal of Anglican Studies* 3, no. 1 (June 2005), 11.

family. Her duties were to her family, primarily to her husband, and her job was in the "domestic realm" where she could properly raise the children and serve her husband.[16] English author Coventry Patmore describes this perfect Victorian woman in his poem *Angel in the House*. Published originally in 1854, and later revised and rereleased in 1862, "Angel in the House" became a term used to describe a woman who embodied the Victorian ideal. The following excerpt from the poem sums up the theme of Patmore's work and also embodies the ideal of the Victorian woman. Book I, Canto IX begins with a section called "The Wife's Tragedy." Patmore writes:

> Man must be pleased; but him to please
> Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
> Of his condoled necessities
> She casts her best, she flings her breast…
>
> She loves with love that cannot tire;
> And when, ah woe, she loves alone,
> Through passionate duty love springs higher,
> As grass grows taller around a stone.[17]

Patmore's prose reinforces an idealized perception of women in Victorian England that was commonly accepted and enforced. By enforcing this "cult of womanhood," men were "justifying the secondary position of females" in English society.[18] In other words, the ideal Victorian woman was then expected to adhere to the social definitions of femininity and those definitions, in turn, maintained her continued subordination to men.

While the practice of the subordination of females began long before the Victorian era in England, the method of enforcement of female subjugation changed during this time to reflect a more emotional and intellectual approach and a less physical approach and this had an impact on

[16] Kollar, "Power and Control Over Women in Victorian England," 12.
[17] Coventry Patmore, *Angel in the House* (London: Cassell and Company, 1887), 74.
[18] Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 5.

how society viewed the role and place of women. Historian Deborah Gorham writes, "While female subordination has been a traditional element of Western European civilization, pre modern methods of enforcing it had relied largely on brute force or an appeal to biblical injunction. But since the end of the eighteenth century, the concept of femininity, which is based on a conception of human psychology that assumes that feminine qualities are 'natural,' has been the major ideological agent in enforcing the subordination of women."[19] Evidence of this can be seen in the language used to describe and address women, especially young women, by their superiors. In Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, the character of Blanche is repeatedly referred to using adoring pet names, such as "darling Blanche" and "queenly Blanche" and "my angel girl."[20] This was also a popular practice in the nineteenth century South. Popular literature, such as Mary Virginia Terhune's *Sunnybank*, instances women characters being referred to as "elf" or "mockingbird" by their fathers and husbands.[21] While these pet names may seem innocuous, ultimately their purpose was to emphasize a woman's place as a secondary member of society and reinforce the feminine ideal.

Another way in which Victorian society provided psychological constraint over women was by limiting their "intellectual training" and education. The Victorian upper and middle classes recognized that "knowledge is power" and firmly believed that this power and knowledge belonged in the hands of men.[22] Therefore, in order to limit women's knowledge, and as a result her ability to wield power in society, it was generally agreed upon that women had no need for serious education with some men, and women, believing that women would be "damaged" by

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[19] Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*, 5.
[20] Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* (London, England: Smith, Elder and Co., 1847), 219.
[21] Mary Virginia Terhune, *Sunnybank* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1866), 23.
[22] Simon Morgan, *A Victorian Woman's Place* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 36.

too much education or that it would lead women to ignore their household obligations.[23] This tied directly to the idea that men and women occupied different spheres of influence, a concept that is certainly reflected in the American South during the nineteenth century. In Victorian England, the division between the public, male dominated sphere and the private, female dominated sphere became more rigid during this time for a number of reasons, including economic change, a deepening class divide, and the influence of evangelical religion.[24] As a result, women were generally excluded from the formal public and political sphere. Although, to say that elite Victorian women held no influence on the public sphere would be incorrect. Much like elite, white women in the American South, as this chapter will later discuss, women in Victorian England were the moral pillars of their households, ensuring that their family's souls were pure and their eternal salvation possible. As a result, they exercised an "important influence on the political sphere" by influencing their husbands.[25]

The following excerpt from *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice*, by August Jane Evans, accurately sums up the attitude toward expectations of elite southern women during the antebellum years, "My dear Electra, I will shield you from trials and difficulties; I will prize you above everything; I know you are making a great sacrifice to be with me; I know how hard it is for you to leave your home and relatives. But, my child…remember, no matter what happens, you have promised yourself to me."[26] Women, more specifically, elite white women were expected to be seen and not heard. They were to be soft and feminine and submit to men at every possible turn. Adopted from Victorian notions of masculinity and femininity, which ultimately believed that men and women were meant to behave as polar opposites, a proper elite

[23] Morgan, *A Victorian Woman's Place*, 36.
[24] Morgan, *A Victorian Woman's Place*. 2.
[25] Morgan, *A Victorian Woman's Place*, 126.
[26] August Jane Evans, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice* (Richmond: West and Johnson, 1864), 31,

southern woman was weak and frail; incapable of being more than passive and emotional beings (ironic considering the documented strength of southern women to endure weighted sacrifice for the southern cause during the Civil War). Men, on the other hand, were strong and unyielding; they were aggressive and rational.[27] A short anecdote from the journals of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston illustrates expected societal differences between men and women. In an entry dated October 30, 1860, she writes about going to see the presentation of the Flag near her home during a rainstorm, "They fortunate in being women, occupied the balcony of the store to the exclusion of the masculine gender who stood without. It would never do for soldiers to mind the weather."[28] As the weaker gender, women were allowed to keep dry during the ceremony, while men, the stronger gender, were expected to stoically withstand the rain for the duration.

The devotion of both men and women to the ideals of the "cult of true womanhood," along with the deep belief in a paternalistic system, ultimately characterized the South during the nineteenth century. As historian Christie Farnham points out, "Being a lady remained relevant in Southern society long after it began to fade in the North…because the model was useful in maintaining a biracial society."[29] The same system that kept slavery alive and functioning in the antebellum southern states worked and continued to exist because white women were dominated and controlled by rigid societal expectations and rules that gave men all of the power. Elite white women, often referred to as belles or mistresses depending on their age and marital status, had very specific roles within the social framework of the South, not the least of which was remaining subordinate and faithful to their husbands, regardless of their personal misgivings. This does not mean, however, that idyllic expectations of womanhood were only found in the

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[27] Franham, The *Education of the Southern Belle*, 136.

[28] Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, *Journal of Secesh Lady: The Journal of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, 1860-1866* (North Carolina: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1979), 12.

[29] Franham, The *Education of the Southern Belle*, 176.

South. Women in the northern regions, more specifically the New England and Middle Atlantic states, were subjected to restrictions on their behavior and legal rights during the early nineteenth century, it is just that the circumstances of their subordinate status manifested and evolved much differently than that of southern women, due greatly to the fact that they were less isolated than their southern counterparts.[30] Indeed, women in the North were generally closer in proximity to one another and were not required to travel with chaperones as were southern women. This, in theory, allowed northern women to develop more intimate relationships with other women and work together to recreate their roles in society, whereas southern white women on isolated plantations and farms were more restricted in their social engagements and more firmly bound to the household and private sphere society had crafted for them.

In addition to being supportive, loving spouses, there were a number of other expectations that Southern society placed on elite women. One such expectation that grew in importance during the antebellum and war years, as the southern states started to define themselves as a separate nation from the northern states, was that of constant, unyielding purity and moral consciousness of elite white women. Manifesting through the lessons taught to young southern belles, and reinforced by the rules of society, women then transitioned into plantation mistresses and wives. Catherine Clinton addresses the Southern ideal of female purity and morality in her book, *The Plantation Mistress*:

> The idealized image of the Southern lady had numerous sources. Men were virtually obsessed with female innocence. The notion of white women as virginal precipitated a wide series of associations: delicate as lilies, spotless as doves, polished as alabaster, fragile as porcelain—but above all, pure as driven snow…Southern men portrayed white women as unsullied and frail…thus the patriarch imagined his family as a domestic haven sheltered from the pernicious influences of the world and guided by his perfect wife.[31]

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[30] Clinton, The Plantation Mistress, 8.
[31] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 87-89.

What this description shows is that women were judged not by their ability to work or think or act, but rather Southern women were judged by their looks and their ability to perpetrate the twin ideals of purity and femininity, both to their husbands and Southern society, while remaining well-mannered and soft-spoken so as not to bring shame upon their families. It was men such as George W. Peddy, MD who desired these traits in a woman. He writes to his wife Kate, "I do not want you to do anything. I did not espouse you for no such purposes. I done so for my high esteem of your intrinsic worth; also that you might remain handsome."[32] Despite men desiring these traits, however, they were not the only ones to expect them as women expected these traits from other women. This is evidenced in a letter elite southern mistress Mary Chestnut included in her journals. This letter, written by Mrs. Louisiana Bradford, reads, "The ladies of your state, I have always admired. There is a well assured confidence of position about them, that renders any little efforts as to Etiquette or Assumption on their part unnecessary to convince other people of the fact—And therefore, they are plain and unassuming. This elegant simplicity is so desirable, that I trust it will be kept in our fashionable circles."[33] Mrs. Bradford's words sum up what many historians have begun to realize: the reason that the patriarchical system of the antebellum South succeeded was because women *also* bought into the system. Most women recognized that they lived within a culture that reinforced male power and they did not fight against it.

It can be argued that this obsession with female purity was, in fact, the cornerstone of the social structure of the American South. In order for the "peculiar institution" of slavery and the increasingly outdated patriarchical system of the South to continue to exist, elite southern women had to be as pure and virginal and perfect as possible. Essentially, if belles and plantation

[32] *Saddlebag and Spinning Wheel*, 216.
[33] Chestnut, *Mary Chestnut's Civil War*, 73-74.

mistresses could exist above reproach, "their husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers could boast of the superiority of their civilization…The sullying influence of slavery must not touch women of the upper class lest the entire [social] structure crumble."[34] This placed elite women's sexuality on a pedestal, one that was visible across the entire South and represented the necessary counter to the corruption and harsh reality that upper class white men faced as leaders of the society. In order to protect the vision that these women represented, any inappropriate liaisons with African American slaves were forbidden by law. Despite clear double standards that allowed white men to bed slaves at their leisure, allowing a white woman, especially an upper class white woman, to lay with a slave would have been catastrophic for the feminine ideology that had been so carefully crafted. As a result, southern planters divided women into two categories: ladies, who were always white and pure; and whores, generally consisting of black women and any white woman who defied social construct and deviated from the accepted sexual behavior.[35] As the protectors of feminine purity, and ultimately, the legacy and continued strength of the South, men had to live up to the expected masculine standard of the era; otherwise their "bid for greatness" would be futile and tarnished.[36] The purity of southern women was bigger than just them. It provided justification for slavery and the plantation system.[37] It allowed men the power to rule as husbands and masters. It represented how southerners perceived themselves and their culture. Without that perception, everything the South worked to achieve and maintain would fall apart; their way of life would be destroyed.

As previously stated, the nineteenth century social structure of the American south was based, in part, on Victorian notions of masculinity and femininity, highlighting the need for

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[34] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 89.
[35] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 204.
[36] Berry, All *That Makes a Man*, 46-7.
[37] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 221.

society to create distinct power dynamics. While women were clearly subordinate to men in this system, it is important to remember that gender alone is not sufficient to assess the position of women in the South; nor are race or class enough. Instead, it is necessary to "analyze the interlocking of gender, race, and class…in order to grasp the meaning of their assigned roles, behavior, and overall impact on society."[38] Assuming this statement to be true, the logical conclusion that can be reached from it is that in order for the patriarchical social structure of the South to succeed, it would have to be supported by those ensnared within it. As Kate Featherstone Peddy writes to her husband, "I don't know when to quit writing about how I worship, for love is too meaningless to convey my ideas of how much you are to me…I never can think of you, my husband, without a sign of regret to think how unworthy I am of so great a prize as your own handsome and brave self."[39] This statement illustrates two things. First, that she values her husband's self-worth above her own and clearly worships him in a way acceptable for the time period. Second, and perhaps more subtly, it reveals that she is in full support of the existing societal structure of the South by expressing her belief that she is beneath and unworthy of her husband's greatness. Mary Chestnut also makes reference to a woman expressing support for patriarchy through her actions. With a touch of disdain, she writes, "Mrs. C. has adopted a languid and helpless manner. She has taken the belle-mere example to heart."[40] Recognize here that the women in these examples, and elite Southern women overall, were not necessarily supporting the hierarchy of the South consciously, or even with the slightest realization that they were doing should do otherwise.

So, why would these women support a system that provided them with little power and forced their subordination to men at all stages in their lives, from their fathers, to their husbands,

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[38] Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 18.
[39] *Saddlebag and Spinning Wheel*. 13.
[40] Chestnut, *Mary Chestnut's Civil War*, 400.

and possibly back to the fathers, brothers, or other close male relation, if their husbands died? According to historian Victoria E. Bynum in her book *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South*, "the legal submission of a woman's identity upon marriage affected more than just her right to own and control property. The law granted husbands control over the family purse strings, full custody of children and the right and responsibility of governing wives behavior, by physical force if necessary."[41] This means that women had nearly no civil rights, were forced to submit to the will of the men in their lives, were expected to remain pure and virginal for their entire lives, and yet most still did not wish to rebel against the system.

Perhaps one reason why elite white women contributed to their own subordination has to do with enjoyment of status and inclusion in a society that placed great importance on wealth and class. As a result of being based on the delicately woven fabric of gender, race, and class, the social structure of the South relied heavily on inclusion and exclusion to maintain its strength. It can be said that women and men of the antebellum South understood themselves in a number of different contexts, including race, the distinguishing factor between being free and superior or enslaved and inferior; gender, which created a system of dependence that gave the patriarch his power; and class, the most subtle, but distinguishing marker of wealth and power[42] Ultimately, southern society was built on a never ending struggle for power and dominance that upper class white men controlled and their women helped to maintain. Historian Laura F. Edwards writes, "Women and men of the slaveholding class looked down their noses at women from both yeoman and propertyless families because of the sharp class distinctions they drew…propertyless white women and free black women were beyond contempt, ranking so low

[41] Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 61.
[42] Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 3-4.

that many slaveholders did not even include them in the same category as other women."[43] Being an elite white woman may not have been the same as being an elite white man, but it was far better than any alternative offered otherwise.

It was also quite possible that elite women continued to support the social structure in the South because their education had not given them the tools and knowledge to rebel against the system, but rather taught them to fear change and those who would instigate said change. Catherine Clinton states, "Antebellum mothers taught their daughters, above all, to conform."[44] In addition to conformity, elite southern women were also taught to defer to men at every turn because men were their "knights in shining armor" whose role was to protect women and shield them from the dangerous, corrupting influences of the public sphere. [45] Illustrating this idea is an anecdote again from the journal of Mary Chestnut. On March 9, 1861 she writes of an instance when she was spending time with a dear (male) friend she had not seen in years after dinner. In the middle of their conversation, a man, called the Judge by Chestnut, interrupts as he wishes to discuss a work related issue with the friend. Despite her personal feelings at being interrupted, and her curiosity regarding their conversation, Chestnut writes, "…but I knew better [than to complain or ask to stay] and fled the room."[46] Conforming to societal expectations, and deferring to the protection and experience of men would have allowed little opportunity or need for women to operate in the public sphere, which would limit their opportunities to create networks and relationships or gain the tools needed to rebel. As discussed previously, women in the northern states were also taught to conform and behave according to proper Victorian ideals;

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[43] Edwards, *Scarlett doesn't Live Here*, 33-4.

[44] Catherine Clinton, *The Other Civil War: American Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), 51.

[45] Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle*, 128

[46] Mary Chestnut, *The Private Mary Chestnut: The Unpublished Civil War Diaries*, edited by C. Vann Woodward and Elisabeth Muhlenfeld (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 29.

however the abolitionist movement, comprised of a relatively minority portion of the northern population, gave them access to a different form of expression and self-discovery not available to women in the South. As the movement gained support in the 1840s and 1850s, women began to realize that they should support the cause as they were marginalized in much the same was as blacks in American society.[47] While northern women comprised only a small part of the movement, their efforts were no less important with many showed their support by signing petitions and organizing fundraising events rather. Participation in the abolitionist movement allowed these women to be directly involved in small but effective roles in an effort to reform society. [48] This involvement gave them the tools and the network needed to challenge their place in society in a way unavailable to women in the South.

The expectations of southern women, and their assigned societal role, were riddled with inconsistencies and conflicting ideals, but the general message was the same for these belles and mistresses—domesticity and the household was the woman's domain.[49] Another aspect of the ideals of Victorian womanhood, women were expected to "remain within the domestic sphere both because her duties were to be performed there, and because contact with the wider world would damage their ability to perform those duties."[50] As in English society, southern women were expected to remain within the private sphere of the home while the men reigned in the public sphere, dealing with politics, economics, and other worldly issues. Catherine Clinton details the general expectations of the plantation mistress in her book *Tara Revisited: Women, War, and the Plantation Legend*. Clinton writes, "The plantation mistress was expected to provide for her husband's slaves in four important areas: food, clothing, shelter, and medical

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[47] Lisa Tendrich Frank, editor, *Women in the American Civil War* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 5.

[48] Frank, *Women in the American Civil War*, 6.

[49] Clinton, *The Other Civil War*, 22

[50] Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*, 6.

care…She was expected to manage a range of arduous tasks, [among them were] planting gardens…dipping candles, spinning thread, weaving cloth, knitting socks, sewing clothes…preserving vegetables and churning butter.[51] While a woman did all of these things, it was equally important that she maintained her staunch, lady-like mannerisms and purity of body and spirit that men had come to expect. The conflict of these two ideals, the woman who ran her household and the mistress who was pure, virginal, and idle, which was at the heart of both the definition of southern womanhood and southern patriarchy, can perhaps best be summed up in the following excerpt. One southern gentleman, while visiting the home of an antebellum planter, was "charmed by the grace and hospitality of the hostess. She was warm, gentle, and refined in manner…a model of what he expected 'the southern lady' to be. Having gained the permission of his host to stroll around the plantation alone during this visit, [he] one day spied his host's wife hard at work." The southern gentleman goes on to abashedly admit to seeing the woman "considerably disarrayed; hoop removed from her skirt…up to her elbows in brine."[52] What made the visitor so embarrassed was that he caught the mistress behind the scenes, so to speak. It was inappropriate and improper for him to see her actually working; to see her undone and outside of her role as the charming, accommodating, lovely hostess was not acceptable according to the expectations and rules of southern society.

Perhaps an even better illustration of the importance of the perception of elite white women can be seen through Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*. Even though this novel takes place in nineteenth century England and not in the American South, with the southern social structure based on that of Victorian England, the parallels between the two reveals what could have easily been a scene from the Old South. A potential suitor, and distant cousin, named

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[51] Clinton, *Tara Revisited*, 41.
[52] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 16.

Mr. Collins visits the home of Mrs. Bennet and her daughters; he accidentally offends Mrs. Bennet with his thoughtless words,

> The hall, the dining room and all its furniture, were examined and praised; and his commendation of everything would have warmed Mrs. Bennet's heart, but for the mortifying supposition of his viewing it all as his own future property. The dinner, too, in its turn, was highly admired; and he begged to know to which of his fair cousins the excellence of its cookery was owing. But here he was set right by Mrs. Bennet, who assured him, with some asperity, that there were very well able to keep a good cook, and that her daughters had nothing to do in the kitchen. He begged her pardon for having displeased her. In a softened tone she declared herself not at all offended; but he continued to apologize for about a quarter of an hour.[53]

Mrs. Bennet takes such offense to the words of Mr. Collins because it was improper for women of her class to be associated with such tasks as cooking or spending too much time in the kitchen. Certainly women were domestic and expected to remain at home, but to suggest that an elite white woman, especially a young belle, would do actual work, which would leave them less than perfectly delicate and beautiful, was unacceptable. This excerpt from *Pride and Prejudice* also touches upon the importance of young women to impress potential suitors since their future depended on them making "good and favorable matches that will bring honor to [their] families."[54] Mr. Collins, examining the dining room and the furniture, exemplifies one way in which young women were judged, in this case on their family's merits and status in society. By examining the family's possessions, he was judging the family's worth and, as a result, the worth of the young woman he was courting.

Important to the matchmaking process was the presentation and abilities of the belle herself. As many historians have noted, "Fascination was the essence of the Southern belle. She was thought to be pretty—not sexy, for that would have been incompatible with the image of her

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[53] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: RD Bentley, 1853), 57.

[54] Laura Patterson, "From Courtship to Kitchen: Radical Domesticity in Twentieth Century Women's Fiction," *Women Studies* 32 (2003), 907.

pure unspoiled, innocent nature…because they could not all be beautiful, friends and relatives insisted that feminine accomplishments, lady-like behavior, and high moral character would do just as well."[55] It was for this purpose, to be perceived as the most lady-like, moral, and accomplished of women that young belles were instructed in the ways of painting, drawing, needlepoint and music. Considered appropriate "domestic occupations" for women were walking and traveling for amusement as this allowed them to "market" themselves while still entertaining men and remaining delicate and wholesome.[56] Sarah Morgan Dawson, a Confederate belle who was only fifteen when the Civil War broke out, writes in her journal of learning piano and guitar which intended to teach her lessons of "patience and perseverance" in addition to being acceptable hobbies for a young southern woman.[57] Confederate lady Belle Edmondson writes about her sewing, another appropriate feminine activity, and on a day when she has not sewn at all, she describes herself as "little use to myself, or anyone else."[58] Mary Chestnut also provides interesting insight on the importance of being interesting and accomplished as a lady over the importance of being the most beautiful belle in the room. Chestnut writes about a Mrs. Lafayette Borland Harris, describing her as a "beautiful woman" whom she had met more than twenty years prior when Mrs. Harris was a "tearing belle" amazed that suitors would remain interested in Chestnut over her in spite of her attractive looks. Chestnut adds, "I never was handsome… [Yet] men did fall in love with me wherever I went."[59] While Chestnut does not speculate any further on why men would find her more interesting than

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[55] Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle*, 127.

[56] Patterson, "From Courtship to Kitchen: Radical Domesticity in Twentieth-Century Southern Women's Fiction," 908.

[57] Sarah Morgan Dawson, *A Confederate Girl's Diary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913), 2.

[58] Belle Edmondson, *Diary of Belle Edmondson, January – November 1864* (transcript), from the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 40.

[59] Chestnut, *The Unpublished Civil War Diaries*, 16.

the beautiful Mrs. Harris, it is easy to assume that her upbringing, lady-like demeanor, and feminine accomplishments helped attract such a high level of attention.

When discussing the lives of elite southern women and their hobbies, accomplishments, and adherence to the strict expectations of southern patriarchy, it is impossible to fully understand their value without taking an in-depth look at educational opportunities, curriculum and teaching available to elite southerners during the nineteenth century, especially because it was this education that gave these women the ability to write novels, keep journals, and think about life on metaphysical terms. The attitude towards the education of elite women during the antebellum era was simple. It "furnished [a woman] with the education and social skills that prepared [her] for life as a belle, and later as a wife, mother, and mistress."[60] What this insinuates is that both informal and formal education for women in the South were as much products of the social structure as everything else. Women were not intended to become knowledgeable, and to learn as men did, but rather, schooling gave them the opportunity to become properly educated in the decorum of society and southern womanhood. The reality of education available to women in the South is that it was of generally low quality and was intended to cultivate "her actual ignorance of worldy reality (which the image [of the ideal woman] called innocence)" by instructing her mainly in the arts, needlepoint, and often a foreign language, usually French.[61] In her memoirs, Eliza Ripley discusses the realities of her childhood education in New Orleans, Louisiana in the 1840s. She writes, " Is it any surprise that the miscellaneous education we girls of seventy years ago in New Orleans had access to, culminated by fitting us for housewives and mothers, instead of writers and platform speakers, doctors and

[60] Giselle Roberts, "The Confederate Belle: The Belle Ideal, Patriotic Womanhood, and Wartime Reality in Louisiana and Mississippi, 1861-1865," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 43, no. 2 (Spring 2002), 190.

[61] Anne Goodwyn Jones, *Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 27.

lawyers—suffragettes? Everybody was musical; every girl had music lessons and every mother superintended the study and practice of the one branch deemed absolutely indispensable to the education of a *demoiselle*."[62] Ripley sums up exactly what elite women's education in the nineteenth century South was about: it was about crafting women as perfect compliments to the patriarchical social structure of the South.

One of the advantages of being of the elite planter class was the option for young women to attend boarding school to supplement their education. Quite the privilege, white women who attended these schools were of a select few who received special instruction on modesty and piety, considered two of the most important traits a southern woman could possess.[63] Historian Christine Farnham discusses what she describes as the "paradox" of educating southern belles, stating that "proponents of…education for females [had] to offer young women an education equivalent to the best that was available to young men, but they, and society, generally believed that males and females were diametrically different. Their dilemma, then, was to convince parents and the general public that they offered the best possible education (i.e. a "male defined curriculum"), which nevertheless produced the best possible female (i.e. the southern lady).[64] The question then becomes, what is a male defined curriculum? While it is possible that a male defined curriculum could be described as classes and lessons equal to those that young men were engaging in, it seems much more likely that a male defined curriculum is simply what it sounds like: a curriculum for women as defined by the male dominated society in which they lived. Eliza Ripley's description of her lessons at school certainly seem to support this idea as she goes into great detail about learning to curtsey, sit and stand properly, and maintain proper posture.

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[62] Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans: Being Recollections of My Girlhood* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912), 10.

[63] Mary Louise Weaks and Carolyn Perry, eds., *Southern Women's Writing: Colonial to Contemporary* (Florida: University of Florida Press, 1995), 8.

[64] Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle*, 68.

She describes simple tasks such as sewing buttons, darning socks, and patching holes in garments as an essential and expected part of her curriculum, further stating that the repaired items were examined each Thursday and had to pass inspection from the teachers before they could be dismissed.[65] These lessons show the dominating belief that young women were to learn feminine tasks to keep their patriarchs pleased. Subjects, such as science, math, or logic, were intended only for men and outside the realm of feminine understanding and also ran the risk of making women dangerous thinkers by giving them too much knowledge.

As was previously mentioned, walking was considered an acceptable "domestic occupation" for women and was thus cultivated by women's schools. Eliza Ripley writes,

> There also were stately walks to be taken twice a day for recreation; walks down on the "Strand," or some back street that led away from college campus and flirtatious students…We marched in couples, a teacher to lead who had eyes both before and behind, and a teacher similarly equipped to follow…In bad weather we were shod with what were called "gums" and wrapped in coats long and shaggy and weighing a ton. Waterproofs were a later invention. Wet or dry, cold or warm, those exercises had to be taken to keep us in good physical condition.[66]

In addition to providing young women with daily exercise, it can be argued that these walks were also intended to help them later meet good suitors as walking afforded the option of meeting people outside of the home and provided an excuse for a young man to accompany a young woman in a proper and public manner. Even after she was married, Mary Chestnut continued her habits of walking, often writing in her journal that she and so-and-so had been walking and "had a pleasant chat."[67] The object of elite female school curriculum in the South was "the development of the girl into a lady, healthy in person, refined in feeling, pure in morals, and

[65] Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans*, 15.
[66] Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans*, 15-16.
[67] Chestnut, *The Unpublished Civil War Diaries*, 28.

humble in religion."[68] The daily walk, along with other lessons, such as music, or art, or sewing, were intended to make elite women desirable brides, and pious wives.

Schools were not the only places where southern belles learned these lessons. Just because an elite white woman could not, or by choice did not, attend boarding school does not mean she went without these lessons taught in the schools. On the contrary, those who did not learn at school learned from their mothers, or the reigning maternal figure in their lives. Some believed that higher education for females was an absurd notion and refused to send their daughters to boarding schools. Others perhaps believed it frivolous or unnecessary or perhaps just could not afford the expensive tuition costs. Either way, southern belles were taught "appearance, her personal accomplishments, her ability to sing, dance, and play the piano were all deemed evidence of her family's wealth and gentility" and it was their job to cultivate them to their fullest extent so that she could "enhance her family's prestige through a favorable marital alliance."[69] In many cases it is quite possible that the lessons learned at home from one's own mother were just as effective, if not more so, than those taught in a school. In her novel, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, Caroline Howard Gilman writes at length about the heroine's mother, describing her abilities as a sausage and cheese maker; "her sausages were pronounced to be the best flavoured in the neighborhood, her hog's head cheese was delicacy itself;" her abilities as a hostess, "an orange lead, which when crushed in the hand sent out a pleasant odor, was laid on every finger bowl;" and her overall abilities as a devoted wife, "no one ever managed an establishment better."[70] There is little doubt from this description that this

[68] Richard T. Brumbly in a letter to Ann Eliza Brumby, April 3, 1858, from the Richard T. Brumby Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, as quoted in Christine Farnham's *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 120.

[69] Roberts, "The Confederate Belle: The Belle Ideal, Patriotic Womanhood, and Wartime Reality," 193.

[70] Caroline Howard Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1838), 25.

woman is a skilled and successful mistress and that the Gilman's heroine was lucky to be learning important skills from such a woman. Young women in the antebellum south who were educated at home may not have had the social interaction and experience as those who attended boarding school, but their education was in no way compromised. In both cases, the expected result of a young lady's education was that it would result in a proper and refined lady who would become a successful wife and mother.

With so many slaves, yeoman farming families, and landless, poor white families populating the South, the literacy rates were very low in the nineteenth century. Among upper and upper middle-class women, however, reading was incredibly crucial in daily life. Eliza Ripley states that, "After hymn singing Sunday afternoons there was reading from some suitably saintly book. We had "Keith's Evidences of Prophecy." The tension of our minds produced by "prophecy" was mitigated once in a while by two goody-goody books, "Lamton Parsonage" and "Amy Herbert," both, no doubt, long out of print."[71] Women were encouraged to read books of this nature, books that provided spiritual guidance that would help them on their path to ideal southern womanhood. In a way, books provided supplemental education and guidance to the lessons taught to them by their mothers and teachers. While busy plantation life allowed for few leisure hours, women tried to make time for literature because "of the value they set for mental improvement, as well as for the pleasure they derived from reading.[72] It also allowed them time with their families and husbands, as reading aloud was often a popular form of entertainment in the evenings and allowed both men and women to reflect on themselves and their devotion to their place in society.

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[71] Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans*, 16.
[72] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress,* 172.

In addition to spiritual, religious, and "goody-goody" books, novels also found their way onto nineteenth century reading lists. Catherine Clinton writes, "Controversy raged within plantation society, as in all of America, over the subject of novel reading. Although plantation mistresses generally professed disapproval, popular novels found an increasingly wide audience among them."[73] Indeed novels proved quite popular among plantation women for a number of reasons. One reason for their popularity was that it allowed these women an escape from their reality, if even for a short time. Especially once the Civil War began, "women of the southern elite found in the privilege of their education and their literacy a significant source of wartime consolation…waking excursions into the realm of books and intellect offered them a world beyond suffering, war, and death, a world in which they found an order, a meaning, and a sense of control and purpose too often lacking in their disrupted, grief-filled lives."[74] Another reason novels proved popular among belles and mistresses was that they provided them with companionship that they were not privy to living on big, isolated plantations. It is possible that many women felt out of touch with what was happening in society, in the cities, outside of their homes. Novels provided them with visions of life in the city, or in other areas of the country, and, even if it was only for a short time it provided them with a feeling of inclusion and comradery that was lacking in their daily lives. [75]

Writing too was considered an acceptable feminine activity, and it was one that many elite southern women enjoyed immensely. Prior to the Civil War, and then even more so during the war, women tried to make time everyday to write in their journals and write letters to friends and loved ones.[76] By writing to their husbands on the battlefield and extended family allowed

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[73] Clinton, The Plantation Mistress, 173.
[74] Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 153.
[75] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 174.
[76] Weaks and Perry, *Southern Women's Writing*, 8.

them to feel connected to the outside world and also allowed for news on what was happening during the War in other parts of the South. Also, through journal writing, women did future generations a favor by "recording the momentous and historic events" of their time and, as a result discovered a new "agent of spiritual and emotional growth."[77] This is important because, like reading, writing letters or journal entries gave women another outlet to explore the changes taking place in southern society, and another way to escape the harsh realities war brought upon them. During the nineteenth century, southern women also explored new public avenues with their writing, including printed newspaper articles and published novels. This had a two-fold effect on women and southern society. It allowed women to publically defend the South and their culture in print and it also allowed them to explore and better understand themselves.[78] Especially for women novelists, their works were defenses of the South and southern nationalism, and, at the same time, they were efforts to redefine their role in society to better serve the South.

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[77] Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 161-162.
[78] Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 162.

Chapter 2: The Rise of the Domestic Novel in the Antebellum South

In his 1839 play, *Richelieu; Or the* Conspiracy, English author Edward Bulwer-Lytton coined the phrase "the pen is mightier than the sword.[1] Few phrases sum up the efforts of southern women authors as accurately. The previous chapter briefly outlines the limitations of elite southern women during the nineteenth century, including the strict belief that women belonged at home and out of the public arena, unless properly chaperoned.[2] Among approved activities for planter class women were both reading and writing. Throughout the antebellum era and during the Civil War, writing was actually one of the few occupations open to Southern women, and allowed many a desperately needed creative outlet.[3] Writing of all kinds, but especially the writing of fiction stories allowed women to remain within the confines of the home, as society expected, while still giving them some contact with the outside world.[4] Even though fictional stories, more specifically novels, were often considered inappropriate reading material for belles and mistresses, the reality was that many upper and middle class southern women voraciously read novels, and especially hungered for those written by other women.[5]

While pious literary works and religious texts, such as The Bible or Richard Allestree's *Whole Duty of Man*, were considered standard texts in educating young southern belles as to their place in society, over time, novels became equally important for women in the Old South.[6] Beginning in the eighteenth century and continuing into the nineteenth century, novels helped to fill the gaps in women's education. Historian Catherine Kerrison discusses the importance of

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[1] Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Richelieu; Or the Conspiracy* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1896), 89.
[2] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 62.
[3] Faust, *Mothers of Invention,* 167.
[4] Weaks Perry, *Southern Women's Writing*, 9.
[5] Faust, *Mothers of Invention,* 154.
[6] Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen*, 17-18.

novels in educating southern women in her book *Claiming the Pen: Women and Intellectual Life in the Early American South*. She writes,

> For the first time [women] were the main characters of a book; the important issues of their lives—friendships, courtship, marriage, and child rearing—carried the plotline; and as a series of conversations with other women, novels helped women readers begin to realize that the dilemmas with which they struggled were not idiosyncratic to their own experience, but symptomatic of the social arrangements under which they all lived.[7]

As Kerrison's quotation implies, the importance of novels for southern women lies in the camaraderie they experienced while reading them. In novels, women could read about things that actually affected their lives, and sympathize with the characters as they faced similar struggles. For women, reading novels was as much an emotional exercise as it was an intellectual exercise.[8] In a society where women generally remained at home and propriety kept them from engaging in philosophical or face-to-face conversations with their friends and acquaintances, it seems appropriate for the novel to fill a social void in their lives.

The novel was more than a teaching tool for young southern women. Especially during the Civil War years women often needed a distraction from the realities of war and used novels to take "waking excursions" in order to enjoy a world where the horrors of suffering and war did not exist. It was in novels they found order and meaning so they could finally feel a sense of control that often lacked in their daily lives.[9] In a deeper way, novels also provided moral and spiritual guidance during uncertain times, and helped women foster a sense of community that would have otherwise been closed to them due to distance and the standards of southern society. This allowed for an alternative perspective on the lives of women that differed from that of

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[7] Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen*, 129-130.
[8] Faust, *Mothers of Invention,* 158.
[9] Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 153.

"traditional advice literature."[10] And, perhaps most importantly, novels offered women a chance to contribute to and become involved in the escalating sectional conflict between the northern and southern states without upsetting their expected place within the social structure of the South.

By the late 1840s, the United States was at war with Mexico due to the annexation of Texas in 1845, leading to a dispute over the Texas-Mexico border. The United States reigned victorious, ending the war in 1848, and, as a result, gained a large amount of new territory from Mexico, including what are now New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, California, and Texas to the Rio Grande. While this should have been heralded as a success and celebrated across the United States, it actually created more regional tension between the northern abolitionists and free soilers and the southern slave states. With the expansion of the country came the problem of whether or not to expand slavery into the new territories. Efforts by a small but vocal abolitionist movement in the northern states rendered this issue more problematic and urgent than it had been originally when slavery inside the country as a whole had been the topic of discussion.[11] Leading to a continued focus by southern plantation owners on how to protect slavery and the southern way of life, by 1850 slavery was the dominant issue for elite white southerners in both state and national politics. Southern men frequently claimed it was their "right" to own slaves and take their slaves into the new "free" territories, ultimately creating a larger argument about whether or not southern rights were in jeopardy.[12] Despite politics being designated unsuitable for a woman's sphere, elite women were just as invested in the issue of southern rights and slavery as men, they were just unable to advocate for the cause in the same

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[10] Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen*, 110.

[11] Michael Perman, *Pursuit of Unity: A Political History of the American South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 61.

[12] Perman, *Pursuit of Unity*, 62.

way as few resources were available to them. Women formed creative solutions through literature, resulting, for some, in the form of written novels as a way to herald the supremacy of their beloved South, provide other women a way to feel connected to the Cause, and share their opinions on how women should react to the criticism facing their way of life.

While the first American novel is considered to be William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy*, published in 1789, and writing continued to be a male dominated profession through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. It was the writing of women willing to use their words to teach that had the most dramatic impact on southern belles and mistresses.[13] Indeed, women, such as Caroline Howard Gilman and Caroline Lee Hentz wielded pens in a society where swords were off-limits, to create their own unique brand of southern literature, often known as the domestic novel. Gaining popularity in the early nineteenth century, domestic literature was written by women, for women. It was grounded in Victorian values of morality and emphasized the importance of home and tradition in women's lives.[14] Using the plantation as the main setting, domestic novelists in the South, such as Gilman and Hentz, simultaneously portrayed the picturesque Old South as harmonious and eternal, and lauded the society that kept them bound and submissive, while still pushing the boundaries of the roles and expectations of women within the pages of their books. Gilman and Hentz's portrayal of the South and southern culture served a dual purpose, allowing them to write a love letter to the South while simultaneously reconciling their expectations and roles in southern society with the changing political and social climate of the United States.[15] By looking at one novel from both of these authors, it becomes clear that their intended purpose was not to break down the social barriers that held them, but rather, they were defending southern patriarchy, southern culture, and the

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[13] Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen*, 129.
[14] Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South*, xix.
[15] Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South*, xviii

woman's place within it even as they redefined southern womanhood while the nation spiraled closer and closer to war.

Although Caroline Howard Gilman was born in 1794 in New England, she spent some part of her adolescence at her brother's southern plantation and became a permanent resident of the South upon her marriage in 1819.[16] Critical of the South, and especially elite southern women during her youth, Gilman oft referred to them as "trifling" and considered them little more than prideful gossips in letters to her sister.[17] Time eventually changed Gilman's view of both the South and its women, however. Publishing three novels in her lifetime, as well as dozens of poems and short stories, it was in 1838 with the publication of Gilman's semiautobiographical novel, *Recollections of a Southern Matron* that her views and opinions on her adopted culture became readily available. It is clear from Gilman's writing that she firmly believed in the supremacy of southern culture and society; however, she saw the role of women as needing revision. Her main heroine, Cornelia, was essentially a modern young belle (at least according to the standards of the time) whose story took place within the traditional Old South. Despite her modernity, however, Cornelia did not present as a feminist or as a woman unhappy in her surroundings, but rather she represented the need Gilman saw for woman to be better, stronger, and more educated for the benefit of the South.

Although published twenty-three years prior to the first shots of the American Civil War, *Recollections of a Southern Matron* is still of incredible literary importance to this time in history, providing a strong defense of the Old South in the face of criticism from northern states and some southern states. Gilman does her best to promote the plantation South as an earthly paradise while mocking northern culture at every possible opportunity. Throughout her novel,

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[16] Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South,* 37.
[17] Moss, *Domestic Novelists of the Old South*, 37.

Gilman consistently offers biting criticisms of what she considers "northern" or "city" culture, most particularly during her description of the education of her young heroine. At one point in the story she refers to a "succession of governesses" that taught the main character, Cornelia Wilton, and her brothers, but then corrects herself stating, "I beg pardon; this honorable name is not popular in America. I think we speak of them as young ladies who *stay* with us to teach our children."[18] Later in the novel, she dedicates an entire chapter to an unfortunate Yankee man, Joseph Bates, who was to tutor the Wilton children, her tone matter-of-fact, and often quietly mocking as she describes the ludicrousness of his Connecticut ways and northern teaching style. She writes, "Alas! How many young men have plodded, and pushed, and been coaxed and hustled through a kind of education in the eastern states, and then presented themselves as teachers to the children of southern gentlemen!"[19] Her character Cornelia's disdain for the man and his northern ways is clearly her own when she later finds issue with Mr. Bates' manner of speaking the word "get." Mr. Bates tells the Wilton siblings that they must "git red of these curious ways of talking" which only annoyed Cornelia. She comments on this statement writing, "Thinks I, what does *git red* mean? I have since found that many well-educated persons in a city, which is acknowledged to be the most enlightened in the United States, use this expression; and ladies, very intellectual ones too, say [it]…let me at this point protest against the word *get*…There is no sentence that is not better without it and when it gets to *git*, it is intolerable."[20] By making fun of the Yankee speech patterns and educational style, Gilman is affirming her love for, and belief in, the South and its system of education for the elite white children. It is clear that Gilman was a firm believer in what she called the "true South," as she dedicated her career to the discussion and defense of southern culture and clearly hoped to gain sympathizers and

[18] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 31.
[19] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 39.
[20] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 41.

supporters to her cause by railing against northerners and their education system. [21] Like-minded women who agreed with her representation of the South would certainly be more likely to react favorably to her other points describing the need for women to reexamine their roles in society.

Gilman's appreciation and support for southern society presented itself in her descriptions of male and female characters throughout her novel. As nineteenth century women's historian Catherine Clinton points out, "Many plantation mistresses recognized that they lived within a culture that reinforced male [dominated] culture [and power]"[22] This is evident in Gilman's very first description of characters in *Recollections of a Southern Matron*. She writes. "…the baby sister who looked like a sunbeam on the world and passed away; my first born, he who was twined to my heart's pulse by ties as strong as those which call up its *natural* vibration; my noble brothers, and my poor cousin Anna, who planted herself the rose that blossoms on her grave!"[23] Note that the language used in these descriptions is very gender specific. The baby sister is described as a "sunbeam" and the cousin Anna is described as "poor," which in this case indicates weakness and fragility, especially when read in connection with the rest of the sentence about her death and the rose planted on her grave. In stark contrast, the first born son is characterized by words that indicate masculinity, "strong" and "natural," and the brothers are described simply as "noble" which in the nineteenth century south would be considered among the highest praise for a man.

More evidence of Gilman's personal feelings towards the South, and women's place within society, lies within her description of Cornelia's mother. Gilman describes Cornelia's mother as having "whole acres of charm," and while not necessarily brilliant of mind, Mrs. Wilton was "good-tempered and sensible, a demure look and reserved manner concealed a close

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[21] Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South*, 1-2.
[22] Clinton, *Tara Revisited; Women, War, and the Plantation Legend*, 44.
[23] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 10.

habit of observation…home was her true sphere; there everything was managed with promptitude and decision."[24] This one description tells volumes about Gilman's personal opinions on the role of women within southern society; she was not looking to change the public status or accepted place of women in the South, but rather she was trying to convince other elite white women that it was necessary to maintain the wholesome, old-world symbol of womanhood that was being threatened. Much like other women authors of her time Gilman was not embracing feminism or the ideals of class reform, but instead she was embracing the "hierarchical domestic structure" of the South, as literature and popular opinion before her had always done.[25] While it might be too radical to suggest that Gilman's writing was furthering the patriarchical order of the South, it is fair to suggest that she was furthering the traditional opinion of women in southern society perpetuating ideas that supported the notion that women were subordinate to and were expected to cater to the needs of men. For example, in describing Mrs. Wilton's efforts at caring for a sick man, Gilman writes, "It was now that mamma's quiet virtues shown beyond the glare of intellectual accomplishments. She attended him devotedly; prepared luxuries to his taste; watched his looks with untiring but delicate assiduity."[26] In a society that valued pious, pure, and submissive women, women who were taught at a young age the importance of upholding the ideal of feminine devotion, Mrs. Wilton personified the ideal southern woman.[27] Heralded for these characteristics, the "modern" young heroine, Cornelia, is clearly intended to idolize and reap the benefits of having such a devoted and womanly mother. This does not mean, however, that Gilman strictly adhered to all of the ideals southern culture

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[24] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 24-5.
[25] Betina Entziminger, *The Belle Gone Bad,* 33.
[26] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 62-3
[27] Victoria E. Ott, *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age During the Civil War* (Carbondale, IN: Southern Indiana Press, 2008), 5.

held about women. She both criticized and supported women of the South, despite her clear fondness for her adopted region.

In her discussion of the place of the southern belle in the American novel, historian Kathryn Lee Seidel writes, "The fiction of these women writers shows that they agreed that vanity was a terrible flaw in women and that women best served in the home, but they insisted that women were not intellectually inferior and they were challenged by the prescriptions against 'warmth' in women."[28] One might think that Seidel wrote that sentence explicitly about Gilman, since the excerpt basically sums up the entire essence of Gilman's novel. In one particular chapter, Cornelia and her cousin Anna attend their first public ball, with Mr. Wilton as their chaperone, of course. Accompanying them to the ball was a "city belle, an experienced one, who dared to laugh when she wished to, and sometimes oftener and louder than was necessary. She seemed to know everybody, and staked sugarplums and gloves by the dozen with every challenger, without looking at the horses…Anna and I shrank back timidly, half envying Miss Lawton's nods, and smiles, and ready words to her passing acquaintances."[29] Later, Miss Lawton is described as "counting her triumphs, on her fingers" after the ball."[30] While Gilman never explicitly states her disdain for this sort of behavior from the city-belle, the contrasting images of Cornelia and her cousin waiting quietly and patiently to be escorted into the ball by Mr. Wilton leaves the reader feeling that Miss Lawton's actions are rather deplorable and exist in the story only to be criticized. Cornelia's childhood friend Lewis sums up the author's feelings towards the vain, empty-headed belle when he tells Cornelia, "I hate a belle as I do a green persimmon. Calculating all night, and dressing all day…when a man marries a woman, he gets a

[28] Kathryn Lee Seidel, *The Southern Belle in the American* Novel (Tampa, FL: The University of South Florida Press, 1985), 10

[29] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 112.

[30] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 114.

body without a soul, and sometimes a dress without a body."[31] By personifying a woman like Miss Lawton as a harbinger of all things wrong with southern women, Gilman accomplishes two things: first she dismisses the idea of the fashionable belle and instead campaigns for women to act more like Mrs. Wilton for the betterment of southern society; second, more subtly, and perhaps most importantly, Gilman is pushing for a more intelligent, alternative standard for female behavior, intending for women to be less ornamental and more useful and moral, as the example of her main character Cornelia Wilton shows.[32] Her comments on Miss Lawton being a body with no soul lead the reader to believe that belles who only act for themselves and to fuel their need to feel beautiful are not benefiting the South and its way of life.

Throughout Gilman's novel, Cornelia clearly represents the embodiment of what Gilman considered the ideal, elite southern woman archetype. She is well educated, having studied "two hours daily my musical tasks, and delighted my Papa by addressing the French conusul, on a visit to Charleston…in his native tongue" in addition to learning history, literature, and botany (though it is important to note that the subjects she studied were *safe* and *approved* curriculum for a young lady, intended only to make her more interesting to potential suitors and to improve her ability to be a wife and mother). Despite studying approved subjects, this amount of learning would certainly have been considered strange by her peers during this era. Her father even comments his opposition to her education stating, "The girl would consider herself more learned than her father."[33] Later relenting, however, Mr. Wilton tells her tutor that educating Cornelia is fine "only do not spoil her eyes and shoulders."[34] By having Mr. Wilton initially opposed to Cornelia's education, and later commenting on the importance of keeping her looks unspoiled,

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[31] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 116.
[32] Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South*, 38.
[33] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 56.
[34] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 56.

Gilman is acknowledging the southern norm that young women learn how to be ladies and honor their families. This is accomplished by remaining handsome and desirable so as to reinforce class boundaries and create a suitable marriage to enhance the prestige of their families.[35] Through Mr. Wilton's consent, however, and the physical and mental strength that Cornelia consistently exemplifies throughout the novel, Gilman strives to prove her point about the need for southern women to redefine their personal expectations, within the scope allotted to them by the patriarchical society, for the good of the South.

Gilman uses the contrast between Cornelia and her cousin Anna to further explain why women should alter their expected role in the South. While Cornelia is beautiful and charming, in addition to being strong both in mind and in body, her cousin Anna Alston is the complete opposite. Although she is not an empty-headed city-belle as Miss Lawson, Anna's character is hardly given any more esteem throughout the novel. Anna is described as being an "exquisite beauty" and also of "surpassing loveliness" in her character, with "her patience under reproof, [and] her cheerful attendance on the wants of others" as her most defining characteristics.[36] Alone these character traits are not terribly problematic, as the ideal southern woman ought to be giving and cheerful in her ministrations to her husband and family, however there is little else to be heralded about Anna in subsequent pages. Again and again Cornelia describes her cousin as "delicate" and "beautiful" with "nothing looking prettier than Anna's light figure," but other than playing the harp and singing this seems to be the extent of her abilities as a person.[37] Upon falling in love with Cornelia's childhood friend Lewis, Anna marries and is soon widowed as an unfortunate accident takes Lewis' life. Unable to withstand being left alone, as her only goal in

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[35] Roberts, "The Confederate Belle: The Belle Ideal, Patriotic Womanhood, and Wartime Reality in Louisiana and Mississippi, 1861-1865," 193.

[36] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 111.

[37] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 112.

life was to be beautiful and charming so that a strong man would marry and care for her, Anna is unable to manage Lewis' estate after his death and ultimately "she ceased to eat; to sleep…a feverish restlessness wrought her soul and body" and she died, having believed her reason to life was gone.[38] While this is tragic and has a serious impact on Cornelia's life, it is clear that her death is symbolic of Gilman's call for a change in the definition of southern womanhood. Ultimately, Anna is too delicate--she represents what Gilman perceives as weakness with southern women and her death symbolizes the need for women to shed this weakness to save and strengthen the South.

Cornelia, meanwhile, falls in love with a handsome lord named Arthur Marion who is badly burned and scarred while saving a small child in a fire soon after the young lovers announce their engagement. At first Cornelia is afraid that she will not love Arthur any longer, for his handsome face was forever changed, but she realizes that Arthur is still himself despite his burns. Overcoming her fear that his changed physical appearance will affect their union, Cornelia realizes that she is strong enough to bear whatever may come. Indeed, Cornelia was "delighted to be the minister of comfort to Arthur."[39] Later she proved herself once again to be more than capable of handling the often difficult duties of wife and mother, burying her first born son after his sudden death. It is these physical strengths and mental strengths that Anna did not have—characteristics that allow Cornelia to survive the strain these events cause. The need for a young plantation mistress to withstand the physical burden that marriage and motherhood bring is a message often forgotten when discussing the Old South, but the daily grind of plantation life, mingled with the need to refrain from being too preoccupied with self is one that

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[38] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 151.
[39] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 233.

cannot be overlooked.[40] Unlike her cousin Anna, Cornelia learned more than how to be a good belle and mistress. Cornelia's education was supplemented with physical exertion, such as daily horseback rides with her father or long walks with her friends and brothers.[41] While still pious and conscious of her place as a woman in society, Cornelia represented the potential for change without upsetting the patriarchy upon which the Old South was built. A combination of beauty, morality, strength, and intelligence, Cornelia was neither weak nor helpless, nor was she independent and without the need for a strong and capable man in her life. Her character symbolizes the balance of tradition and change. Evident by her ministrations over her wounded husband, and later her willingness and ability to run their household when he traveled for business, Cornelia shows readers that a good southern woman does not have to be ornamental, wholly dependent, and simple to be a good wife and southerner.[42] She just has to be faithful, generous, sympathetic, and devoted to her cause.

Another antebellum domestic novelist whose words are considered ardently supportive of the ways of old southern culture and tradition, but still examined the possibility of redefining the role of women in society was Caroline Lee Hentz. Perhaps the best known of Hentz's antebellum works is *Eoline; or, Magnolia Vale*, first published in 1852. As a teacher for more than twenty years across the South, Hentz was a great proponent of the need for a more solid educational foundation for elite southern women. She believed that "preoccupation with fashion, concern with the making and spending of money, and increasing disregard for virtuous conduct on the part of the southern elite threatened the safety of southern society."[43] In a manner similar

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[40] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress* , 139.

[41] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 56.

[42] Eugene Genovese, "'Our Family White and Black': Family and Household in the Southern Slaveholders Worldview," in *In Joy and Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South, 1830-1900*, edited by Carol Blesser (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 87.

[43] Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South*, 42.

to Gilman's, Hentz believed it was possible for women to avoid this frivolity , and to alter their expected position in the South without overthrowing or challenging the social hierarchy that had long existed. While her opinions are less transparent in *Eoline; or Magnolia Vale* than Gilman's were in *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, Hentz's heroine, Eoline, reacts with both deference and indifference to her expected role in society, as did Gilman's Caroline. That Hentz uses a more veiled approach in relaying her message that Gilman, was likely due, at least in part to the changing political climate in the United States at the time. With more than a decade between *Recollections of a Southern Matron* and *Eoline; or, Magnolia Vale*, sectional tensions were steadily mounting between the North and South and the southern way of life faced more heavy criticism than it had previously received when Gilman published her novel. Inevitably drawing unwanted attention to the South's "peculiar institution," southern writers battled criticism of slavery by exaggerating the positive aspects of the plantation economy and omitting the negatives.[44] Hentz certainly among them, portrayed the South in her novel as picturesque, beautiful, and without need of change.

Eoline; or, Magnolia Vale is the story of Eoline, a heroic southern belle who defies her father, refuses to marry someone she believes unfit for matrimony, and is banished from her affluent family to a small, private boarding school where she teaches music and struggles to reconcile what her life once was with what it has become. From the first page, Hentz paints a familiar portrait of the Old South. Eoline's father, Mr. Glenmore is described in just the third sentence as "a portly and commanding looking man…[who] entered and took his accustomed seat" while Eoline is described a few short sentences later as "flitting from window to window…[looking] around the room with a smiling countenance, as if pleased with the air of

[44] Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South*, 42.

home-born comfort and luxury that pervaded the room."[45] Immediately this description calls to light the accepted physical differences between men and women, with the man appearing strong and masculine and the woman appearing delicate and demure. This description also addresses the assigned and accepted roles of men and women in the South. The woman was expected to fulfill "a domestic and maternal role" at the behest of and for the comfort of the patriarch, be that the father or husband.[46] This deference to the standard male-female relationship continues throughout the first chapter as Hentz describes Eoline's efforts to entertain her father first by singing to him, next by reading to him, and finally by amusing him with a simple game such as backgammon.[47] When Mr. Glenmore refuses all of her efforts, Eoline responds by saying, "I am sorry I cannot amuse you sir. If you please, I will take my book and sit quietly and demurely in the corner, like a good little girl, without disturbing your meditations."[48] This scene is notable for a number of reasons. First, all of the activities in which Eoline tries to engage her father, music, literature, and backgammon, all detail perfectly acceptable, feminine hobbies for a young belle and the suggestion of them fits well within the scope of the scope of "true womanhood." Additionally, Eoline's comment to her father defers both to his status as the man of the house and also to feminine expectations because, by calling herself "a good little girl" and offering to sit in the corner, Eoline accepts her subordinate role in southern society.

The main source of conflict in the novel is Mr. Glenmore's desire for Eoline to carry out an arranged marriage with which she vehemently disagrees. When Eoline responds with disapproval of the marriage, Mr. Glenmore responds, "I do love you—I do wish your happiness; and I know better than yourself, how to secure it. You will thank me, one day, for the authority I

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[45] Caroline Lee Hentz, *Eoline; or, Magnolia Vale* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 5.
[46] Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 21.
[47] Hentz, *Eoline; or Magnolia Vale*, 6.
[48] Hentz, *Eoline; or, Magnolia Vale*, 7

now exert. Eoline, you must obey me in this. You *must* marry Horace Cleveland."[49] In the nineteenth century, as historian Laura F. Edward points out, to "challenge the authority of husbands [or fathers] was to challenge the authority of masters" and in a society so deeply tied to racial and class hierarchy, they were often the same people.[50] Eoline's outright refusal to accept her father's demand that she marry Horace Cleveland was also a refusal to adhere to the larger social scheme, resulting in her banishment from her home and her father's affections. Upon realizing that Eoline would not conform to his will, Mr. Glenmore states, "It is her own fault. She is a fool and she deserves to suffer, and she shall suffer. It is for her to bend, not me…I have said she shall marry Horace Cleveland and she shall marry him, or be henceforth no daughter of mine."[51] To disobey the patriarch was unacceptable and, at least in this case, the punishment for doing so was quite harsh.

This argument between Eoline and her father creates an interesting juxtaposition between the author's opinion of southern society and women. While clearly Hentz agrees that Eoline should be accepting of her father's will and her rightful place in society, later reinforced further by the reconciliation of Eoline with her father and her eventual marriage to Horace Cleveland, she also appears to be cultivating the idea that perhaps the definition of southern womanhood and gender norms needs to be altered. Hentz gives Eoline "contradictory notions" of what women should be like, a trend that often presented itself in the heroines of nineteenth century southern literature.[52] This is a classic example of a woman prescribing to and embracing the ideal of southern patriarchy, but still using the written word to explore the context of what it means to be a woman in the South.

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[49] Hentz, *Eoline; or, Magnolia Vale*, 10.
[50] Edwards, *Scarlett doesn't Live Here Anymore,* 15.
[51] Hentz, *Eoline; or Magnolia Vale*, 23.
[52] Seidel. *The Southern Belle in the American Novel*, 8.

In much the same way that Gilman perpetuated change as a necessity for elite southern women, for the good of the South and their way of life, so too Hentz heralded the need for elite women to reexamine placing value on "shining and glittering" and learn to better fulfill the role of wife and mother for the betterment of the South.[53] Good southern women needed to be balanced, not extreme. Hentz represents the need for balance through the two expressly static characters, Amelia Wilton and Miss Manly, as comparisons to Eoline's changes throughout the novel. Amelia Wilton is a secondary character introduced as the invalid daughter of Mr. Glenmore's old friend Mr. Wilton. Amelia was once "fair and beautiful" but she possessed one fault, she had too yielding a temper and was "ever swayed by the will of those around her, it was impossible to discover whether she had a wish or will of her own."[54] This led her to marry a man she did not love and did not love or treat her kindly and he returned her to her parents a stagnant and spiritless shell of a person. In some ways Amelia exemplifies the southern ideal; she is yielding, devoted, and purely innocent and passive. She is virtuous and pure, with her "goodness" intrinsically linked to her innocence and ignorance of evil.[55] This innocence and ignorance ultimately proved harmful for Anna, however, because she failed to recognize such negative traits in her husband. Amelia's adherence to all of the traditional feminine ideals is her fatal flaw. Her poor health and demise into an invalid state are potentially a metaphor for all of southern womanhood. What Hentz is saying here is that, if southern women continue to act in such an empty, weak manner, then it will ultimately lead to the demise of southern traditions and the death of the South. In such a complicated and heated political climate, with rumblings of war closing in, this was a serious threat that Hentz clearly believed needed to be addressed.

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[53] Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South*, 42.
[54] Hentz, *Eoline; or Magnolia Vale,* 114.
[55] Jones, *Tomorrow is Another Day*, 9.

On the other end of the character spectrum, Hentz introduces the character of Miss Manly, the strict, disciplinarian of a headmistress at Magnolia Vale, the boarding school where Eoline takes up teaching music after being banished from her father's home. Called the Colonel behind her back by the girls at the Magnolia Vale, Miss Manly is described as being of "extraordinary height" and of running her boarding school with military strictness and an unyielding sense of propriety.[56] In so many ways she is the exact opposite of the Amelia character, considering herself the ultimate authority at Magnolia Vale and refusing to acknowledge any desires or opinion other than hers as valid. An example of this thinking can be seen right after Eoline arrives at Magnolia Vale. Miss Manly asks that Eoline play some music for her, to prove her worth as a music teacher. Eoline requests to instead perform in the morning, stating that she is too tired after her long journey and that Miss Manly "must excuse" her "and "will have the goodness" to allow her a respite until morning. Miss Manly's responds to herself saying, "Must and will! We do not allow but one person to use those words here. Really, my young lady deports herself most royally."[57] It is through Miss Manly that Hentz cautions against women becoming too independent and reliant on themselves. Miss Manly is alone, unmarried, and is considered undesirable despite her impeccable manners and unyielding love of tradition. Miss Manly ends the story as she began it, unmarried and alone, allowing the reader to see that the path of Miss Manly is not the correct path for women any more than that of Amelia. Rather it is through Eoline and the joining of these various pieces that the readers see the possibility of change to the social norm of women.

Although Eoline begins the story willful, headstrong, and clearly the product of a luxurious, elite upbringing, it is through her that Hentz breathes the idea of change. By

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[56] Hentz, *Eoline; or, Magnolia Vale*, 38.
[57] Hentz, *Eoline; or, Magnolia Vale*, 43.

comparing her character to those of Amelia and Miss Manly, Hentz shows that Eoline has characteristics of both women, but in moderation with some of her own flair for good measure. It is also through Eoline that Hentz is able to caution against too much vanity and emphasis on the "superficial role society has assigned [to women]."[58] Eoline, like any acceptable young belle, is described time and again in the novel as "fair and youthful" with the "sweetest smile in the world" that "completed the conquest her beauty had begun."[59] In addition to being beautiful, she is charming and gay, and described by Horace Cleveland as a "beautiful and accomplished girl, but he had deemed it a matter of course that all young ladies must be beautiful and accomplished, and it excited him in no especial emotion."[60] Indeed, it is more than just her beauty, charms, and ability to sing and play music "like an angel" that makes Eoline particularly special because, as Hentz has alluded to throughout the novel, this alone is not enough for women. Rather, Eoline is special because she has a "brave resisting spirit" and throughout the story is able to learn how to be a more pious, intelligent woman who can care for herself as well as others. She realizes at the end of the novel that she "did not wish to be a belle," but rather she wished to be of comfort and aid to others, to be more self-sacrificing while still maintaining her morality.[61] This allows her to be reunited with her father, and ultimately marry Horace Cleveland, though of her own choice, because she fell in love with him, not because she was forced to. Her actions represent, again, the need Hentz sees for southern women to change and avoid falling into old traps and stereotypes. Eoline is able to live her happily ever after because she recognized the need within herself to change and adapt to the world around her. In order for the South to attain its happily ever after, elite women would have to do the same thing.

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[58] Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South*, 42.
[59] Hentz, *Eoline; or, Magnolia Vale*, 37.
[60] Hentz, *Eoline; or, Magnolia Vale*, 60.
[61] Hentz, Eoline; or. Magnolia Vale, 204.

Eoline; or, Magnolia Vale is certainly not an attempt by Hentz to overthrow years of southern tradition and start a women's revolution. In fact, in many ways, it is a love story about the Old South. Again and again Eoline pines for home, for her father's large plantation which she describes as "her home…an earthly Eden" where she lived in its "guardian shades."[62] In fact, the lovely descriptions occupy nearly as much space as the plot. Hentz describes the gradual process of the "mild southern winter melting away into vernal softness and bloom" with no place hailing the "awakening nature with such rapture."[63] It seems that it is because of her love of the South that Hentz is appealing to women to reexamine their role in southern society so as to keep it from deteriorating and falling apart. Hentz essentially urged that her novel be considered an alternative source of advice for elite white women to show them they had the power to create a new model of respectable, southern femininity.[64] It was in this way they could save the south from destruction and maintain the traditions they had long upheld, especially as political tensions were coming to a boil and the southern way of life was coming under more and more criticism. In just a few short years the United States and the American South would be deeply entrenched in war and women would, once again, be forced to reexamine the meaning of their contributions to the South and the importance of their roles in the social hierarchy.

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[62] Hentz, *Eoline; or, Magnolia Vale*, 208-9.
[63] Hentz, *Eoline; or, Magnolia Vale*, 78.
[64] Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen*, 25.

Chapter 3: Women as "Pen and Ink Warriors" in the American South

The literary success created by Caroline Howard Gilman and Caroline Lee Hentz cannot be measured through how many readers each had or copies of books they sold. Gilman only sold 2,000 copies of *Recollections of a Southern Matron* in the first six months after its release in 1838.[1] This hardly classified the novel as a bestseller, especially when compared to other nineteenth century novels such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which sold 10,000 copies its first week, or Mark Twain's first novel *Innocents Abroad* (1869), which sold 65,376 copies in its first year, or even Twain's Tom Sawyer (1876), considered a disappointment in its first year sales, sold more than 23,000 copies.[2] Instead, the literary success of antebellum domestic novelists can be measured through the influence domestic novels had on nineteenth century women, both readers and future authors who emulated the example set by authors like Gillman and Hentz. Even though a large number of elite white women were writing during the nineteenth century, few were published professionals, and as a result, women authors were in constant competition with one another.[3] Despite this competition, however, it would be incorrect to assume that women authors were not influencing each other. With female gender roles so marginalized in the American South, and the nation on the verge of total collapse, women authors became "pen and ink warriors," sisters in arms, taking up the cause through writing.[4] Beginning during the antebellum era, but gaining strength once the American Civil War began in 1861, women relished the opportunity to remain useful during the long years of war. Women writers were able to herald and immortalize the South through their words, and

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[1] Sacvan Bercovitch, editor, *The Cambridge History of American Literature Volume II: Prose Writing, 1820-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 68.

[2] Paul Baender, John C. Gerber, and Terry Firkins, editors, *The Works of Mark Twain: The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Tom Sawyer Abroad, Tom Sawyer, Detective, Volume 4* (London, England: The University of California Press, 1980), 29.

[3] Helen Taylor, "Women and Dixie: The Feminization of Southern Women's History and Culture," *American Literary History 18*, no. 4 (Winter 2006), 848.

[4] Taylor, "Women and Dixie: The Feminization of Southern Women's History and Culture," 850.

support the social structure of the Confederacy, while still exploring and redefining what it meant to be a woman in the Civil War South.

The American Civil War began at Fort Sumter, South Carolina on April 12, 1861. Following the secession of seven states after the 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln as President, the new Confederate nation demanded Union forces evacuate the Federal fort because it resided on Confederate soil. After thirty-four hours of Confederate bombardment, the outnumbered and undersupplied Union forces surrendered Fort Sumter. As a result of the standoff at Fort Sumter, President Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to put down the insurrection leading to more states seceding from the Union, until eleven comprised the Confederate States of America. According to historian Michael Perman**,** secession was not intended to be a rebellion, but rather a movement by disappointed Americans to fix the problems they perceived in the current American nation by creating an independent and superior new version.[5] Perman paints the Confederates as extreme believers in the American ideal and not as angry racists demanding their right to slavery. It fuels the idea that southerners were protecting their traditions and way of life. Perhaps the "peculiar institution" of slavery was atrocious and the southern social structure was rigid and repressive, but it was theirs and they wanted to defend it, at least the white men did anyway. Ultimately, elite southern men felt that the unity and the security of their society being jeopardized by a flawed and corrupt interpretation of the United States Constitution. Elite southern men believed that their new nation could return to the "initial intent of the framers" and realize the "ideal of unity and liberty" that the United States was founded upon while protecting their cherished institution of slavery.[6] As the new nation struggled to gain its footing and defend

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[5] Perman, *Pursuit of Unity,* 98.
[6] Perman, *Pursuit of Unity*, 101-102.

their homes against the states remaining in the Union, the burden fell to all southerners to support the Confederacy and the Cause to the fullest extent.

Spanning across five Aprils, from 1861 to 1865, the American Civil War ranks in as the bloodiest and most devastating war in the history of the United States: Brothers fought against brothers; fathers took up arms against their sons; sisters, wives, and mothers became ardent patriots as supporting the Cause became the only honorable option. Choosing sides was not only expected, but demanded of all men and women by both the Union and Confederate governments. By the time General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox Courthouse on April 9, 1865 there were at least 625,000 fatalities of the war, and more than 250,000 of them were from the South.[7] Overall Civil War deaths equaled two percent of the population of the United States at the time, with nearly one in every eight white men of military age dying during the war. This exceeds the death rate of World War II by a factor of six and the Vietnam War by a factor of sixty-five.[8] In fact, the number of Civil War deaths is roughly equal to the number of American deaths from all other American wars from the American Revolution through the Korean War.[9] It is important to note that these were not all glorious battlefield deaths, but many were documented as the result of disease, infection, or unknown causes, many resulting from the war literally taking place on Southern doorsteps. As a result, it is difficult to provide an exact percentage of southern soldiers who perished during the Civil War, especially because many records were destroyed or lost during the war, but estimates put the total number of active

[7] Faust, *Mothers of Invention,* 5

[8] J. David Hacker, "The Human Cost of War: White Population in the United States, 1850-1880," *The Journal of Economic History* Vol. 61, no. 2 (June 2001), 486.

[9] Hacker, "The Cost of Human War," 486.

Confederate soldiers who perished between 21% and 34%, or at a rate three times higher than their northern counterparts.[10]

German philosopher and political economist Karl Marx once said, "The writer may very well serve a movement of history as its mouthpiece, but he, of course, cannot create it."[11] Marx's words begin to hint at what was to come for women writers during the Civil War. Women were certainly serving the southern cause by writing newspaper articles, propaganda poetry, or novels, but they certainly did not create the clash between the northern and southern states, nor did they make the choice to secede from the Union, create a new nation, and start a war. Such weighted decisions reigned outside of women's accepted spheres of influence. Without the support of the planter class women, however, the decisions of the patriarchs would not have mattered. "While secessionist men concerned themselves with the particulars of erecting a national structure...the majority of white southerners played a role in the creation of Confederate nationhood," writes historian Victoria E. Ott, which of course, included the support of women. [12] And in this way, women not only documented the Civil War but also played a role in forming history by serving as the mouthpiece to the southern cause. For most elite white women, the Civil War meant self-sacrifice and experiencing the war directly, even on their doorsteps. If the South was to "survive" the war, women had to repress their personal feelings and misgivings and assume a staunch, patriotic identity for the good of the Cause.[13] This meant maintaining the plantations and disciplining the slaves with their husbands away at war. It also meant knitting socks and sewing uniforms to send to the soldiers. It even meant treating

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[10] Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Random House Inc., 2008), 1.

[11] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 1843-44, Vol. 3* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 6.

[12] Victoria E. Ott, *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age during the Civil War* (Carbondale, IN: Southern Indiana Press, 2008), 3.

[13] Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 16-17.

wounded soldiers right in their houses, something that would never have been expected of them prior to the war.[14] For many elite women, these events dictated difficult times, since they did not openly embrace change or their privileged existences willingly. Indeed, many elite southern women had to reinvent themselves in an effort to resist the change that was being forced upon them by the war.[15] For women authors, however, the change affected by their wartime contributions is one that rose organically through their words. Women recognized in themselves a difficulty in reconciling the past and the present, the traditional and the modern. It was in this way their words began to usher in a change for women. They formed new identities and came to terms with the war and sectional conflict through their words. By publishing them, they offered other elite women the opportunity to do the same.

Religion played a large role in the lives of southerners, as most of the population embraced religion with a zealous fervor, especially elite southern women.[16] Religious devotion was expected of a southern woman, and ensuring the devotion and spiritual education of her family was one of her primary roles as a wife and mother. As the plantation mistress was supposed to be the "spiritual guardian" of her family and the plantation, it would only be logical upon the outbreak of war for women to become the "virtuous conscious" of the fledgling Confederacy and remain responsible for southern morale.[17] Southern mistress Mary Chestnut laments in her journal, writing, "As a woman, of course, it is easy for me to be brave under the skins of other people," many southern women proved ready and able to take on the task.[18] Two women who staunchly stood up for the southern cause and used their words to support and

[14] Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 24-5.

[15] Giselle Roberts, "The Confederate Belle: The Belle Ideal, Patriotic Womanhood, and Wartime Reality in Louisiana and Mississippi, 1861-1865," 191.

[16] Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett doesn't Live Here Anymore" Southern Women of the Civil War Era* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 19.

[17] Roberts, "The Confederate Belle: The Belle Ideal, Patriotic Womanhood, and Wartime Reality in Louisiana and Mississippi, 1861-1865," 196.

[18] Chestnut, *Mary Chestnut's Civil War*, 23.

defend their nation were Augusta Jane Evans and Mary Virginia Terhune. Contemporaries of previously discussed authors Caroline Howard Gilman and Caroline Lee Hentz, Evans and Terhune held the distinction of publishing novels during the Civil War and early Reconstruction periods. By publishing domestic novels during times of such emotion and strife, it can be argued that these authors were instrumental in engaging other women in discussing the meaning of true womanhood, and how they needed to change to better support the South.

Long considered one of the most influential novels of the Confederate South is Augusta Jane Evans' *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice*.[19] Published in 1864, this novel labored to portray the South as the moral superior of the North while defending slavery and the patriarchical society traditional to southern states. In fact, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice* has often been touted as explicit Confederate propaganda, with the novel being dedicated to the Confederate soldiers fighting for the southern Cause. Evans writes:

> To the army of the southern Confederacy, who have delivered the South from despotism, and who have won for generations yet unborn the precious guerdon of constitutional Republican liberty: to this vast legion of honor, whether limping on crutches through the land they have saved and immortalized, or surviving uninjured to share the blessings their unexamined heroism bought, or sleeping dreamlessly in nameless martyr-graves on hallowed battle-fields whose historic memory shall perish only with the remnants of our language, these pages are gratefully and reverently dedicated to the dangers and deathless glory of the 'tented field,' would offer a woman's inadequate tribute to the noble patriotism and sublime self-abnegation of her dear and devoted countrymen.[20]

As a noted southern propagandist, and already a published author, it is of little surprise that *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice* is clearly a work portraying an idealized South and heralding the Cause for which southerners fought and gave their lives, even without the lengthy dedication.[21] Written after extensive research, correspondence with important Confederate leaders, such as

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[19] Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 175.
[20] Evans, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice*, 4.
[21] Entziminger, *The Belle Gone Bad,* 66.

General Beauregard, and years of traveling among the soldiers and across the battlefields, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice* follows the life of Confederate belle Irene Huntington who sacrifices everything in her upper class existence, including true love, for the good of the Cause. The other heroine in the novel, for Evans employs the "dual heroine" tactic in *Macaria* (a very popular literary device during the nineteenth century) is Electra Grey, a former school friend of Irene's. Electra is a penniless orphan who has nothing for herself and yet still gives herself to the cause. She and Irene provide a necessary contrast to each other, which not only makes the novel a more desirable read, but also provides readers with two characters that they can possibly relate to. Both are defenders of the Cause and the southern way of life and, by allowing female readers the opportunity to relate to Irene or Electra, Evans is able to broaden her audience and better establish her meaning and message of self-sacrifice. While it quickly became a bestselling novel due to its patriotic message and push for self-sacrifice to the Confederacy, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice* also became popular among women because it offered them a model in how to find their place and purpose within the Confederate Cause.[22] Without trying to change the delicate balance of power in the South, but instead loudly and boldly heralding its supremacy, Evans' novel still manages to encourage women to reexamine their place in the Confederacy and explore new possibilities.

As a nineteenth century domestic novel, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice* follows a number of literary trends created and sustained by novelists who wrote books about women for women in the decades prior. One significant way in which Evans creates the idealized image of the southern belle is by rendering both of her heroines motherless. According to Kathryn Lee Seidel, "The fact that the southern belle is often motherless in the novels suggests that authors were inadvertently showing the insignificance of the married woman in terms of her status on the

[22] Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 169.

plantation even though she was probably among the most overworked people on the plantation."[23] While this is not always the case, as previously seen in Recollections of a Southern Matron, which portrays the mother as a worthy example for her daughters to follow, Siedel's observation is accurate in *Macaria*. Electra is not a wealthy belle, but of an elite bloodline, was an orphan whose mother "bequeathed the infant to her brother" upon dying in poverty.[24] Similarly, Irene, while not an orphan as her very wealthy and influential father is still alive, was the only child of Leonard Huntingdon, whose wife died while Irene was an infant.[25] This leaves Irene as the only recipient of her father's lavish affections and she is doted upon with relish.

In many ways Leonard Huntingdon's manner of child rearing is completely characteristic of the accepted social norm during the nineteenth century. Belles were generally expected to have wealthy, affluent families and have been given access to everything necessary to make them desirable young women and future brides.[26] In addition to this lavish attention, Mr. Huntingdon was also of the mind that, as the patriarch, his word was infallible and law and it was the role of Irene as his subordinate daughter to bend to his will. When Irene questions his command that she stay away from Electra Grey, Electra's cousin Russell and her aunt Mrs. Aubrey, he replies, "Reason! My command is sufficient reason. What do you mean by catechizing me in this way? Implicit obedience is your duty."[27] Later, when Irene again questions her father's demand that she stay away from Mrs. Aubrey, he banishes her to a boarding school in New York, solidifying his position as the powerful patriarch. In the Old South, the entire social structure and way of life was built on the existence and absence of power,

[23] Seidel, *The Southern Belle in the American Novel,* 7.
[24] Evans, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice*, 8.
[25] Evans, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice*, 13.
[26] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 60.
[27] Evans, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice*, 14.

with elite white men "animated by desires for authority" and power over everyone else.[28] For this reason, elite southern men were quite sensitive to any attempt by subordinates, or equals for that matter, to overthrow their power, equating it as a blow to their "masculine honor."[29] For Irene to disregard her father's wishes and question his will was against the expected social norm and the role affixed for women during that time.

Irene finds blind obedience difficult. Irene's aunt, Miss Margaret, describes her as "full of strange notions" and as having "always been queer."[30] Irene refused to keep quiet, enjoy her life and status, and develop into a well-mannered, docile southern belle as society expects. This is, perhaps, an attempt by Evans to "assert that the girl's own nature should be carefully controlled, since feminine assertiveness and vanity" had the potential to be very dangerous and detrimental to the southern woman, as seen in previous novels.[31] Evans repeatedly flirts with this notion in *Macaria*. One specific example involves Irene asking for money to pay for eye surgery for Mrs. Aubrey. When her father turns down the request, Irene asks a family friend to give her the money. Ultimately the surgery is unsuccessful; perhaps an insinuation by Evans that Irene's efforts to procure money for Mrs. Aubrey's eye surgery behind her father's back, and the ultimate failure of this surgery is the result of her deceit and failure to yield as she should. Mrs. Aubrey herself asserts that she "regretted having gone since the trip proved so unsuccessful" and within months she dies, blind, penniless, and a fraction of the woman she once was.[32] Indeed even Irene seems to recognize that she stepped outside the boundary of expectations for a woman in the nineteenth century south. She admits to her friend Harvey, a young minister, that she needs "someone to advise me. Very often I am at a loss about my duty, and, having no one to

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[28] Berry, *All that Makes a Man*, 19.
[29] Berry, *All that Makes a Man*, 20.
[30] Evans, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice*, 12.
[31] Seidel, *The Southern Belle in the American Novel*, 7.
[32] Evans, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice*, 24.

consult, either do nothing at all, or that which I should not."[33] That Irene sought this advice about her duty as a woman suggests that Evans herself may have struggled with how to balance being a strong southern woman with the expectations of her gender.

While she may have been endorsing a traditional gender role for her women readers, it is clear Evans was still exploring the notion of expanded roles for women within the traditional southern social structure.[34] Although Irene was expected to learn to stay within her duty and role as a young woman, she did not stop trying to act outside of herself, she just learned more feminine ways to do it. For example, in the latter half of the novel, Irene becomes near obsessed with helping others and especially enamored with children and aiding the poor. She asks a favor of her friend, Dr. Arnold, stating that she wishes him to "aid me in getting a bill passed by the legislature appropriating a school-fund for this county" because the legislators "have forgotten that our poor require educating, and I simply desire some of the constituents to call their attention to the oversight."[35] Irene knows that, as a woman, she has no power or authority to exert any direct effort in getting a bill passed. While certainly not a new problem as southern women had never been afforded political power or public influence, it was still important because it praises the efforts of a woman using the proper channels to secure her goals. Instead of giving up her fight, Irene finds a way to extract what she wants using means available to her by "pushing at the edges of [her] allotted social space, challenging the barriers imposed on [her] from the outside."[36] By doing this, Evans is encouraging women to remain devoted to the South and support the Cause by accepting traditional standards of behavior, such as caring about the

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[33] Evans, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice*, 38.
[34] Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South*, 188.
[35] Evans, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice*, 123.
[36] Edwards, *Scarlett doesn't Live Here*, 13.

welfare of children or remaining outside of the public arena, even as the war was creating opportunities within for women to step outside of their traditional roles.

Electra also faces junctures in her life that require the choice of submission to the patriarch, or else facing alienation for refusing to act within society's accepted framework. Upon the death of her aunt, Electra has to decide whether to train and work as an artist and promise herself to her teacher Mr. Clifton or go live with a little known relative and have the possibility of being reunited with her beloved cousin Russell one day. Even though her heart tells her to choose Russell and move in with the relative, she knows she cannot. While she owes her life to Russell and his mother for taking her in as a child, she does not "intend to live on [their] charity."[37] Electra instead takes an opportunity that offers her the opportunity to work and learn to become more dependent on herself. This might seem counterintuitive, especially because Evans is clearly pushing throughout her novel for women to return to more traditional, feminine roles, and to listen to the men in their lives. In this case, however, the argument is that Electra's actions are justified because they were done for noble and self-sacrificing reasons. As she is telling her cousin that he has no "right to control me and it is worse than useless for you to oppose me," she knows her words and decision are unconventional, but she is doing it because it is what is best for him.[38] Clearly his needs are more important than hers, and it is in cases such as this one that Evans waivers on her general policy of expecting women to submit to expected gender roles because what Electra is doing is in so many ways unselfish and for the good of others. It is here that Evans' novel departs from those that came before and becomes as much an exercise in political commentary as it is a domestic novel. Historian Elizabeth Moss writes, "Repeatedly and relentlessly Evans struggled to imprint the ideal of sacrifice and service upon

[37] Evans, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice*, 33.
[38] Evans, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice*, 34.

the hearts and minds of her readers, enjoining…women throughout the South to follow her example and answer the call of their country."[39] She believed that it was only through sacrifice and service that the South could survive and the way of life that southerners so tightly clung to could remain.

Defying the norm of the day, neither Irene nor Electra is married by the time *Macaria* comes to an end. Irene refuses marriage and begs for her father's understanding late in the novel stating, "Don't you think, sir, that you and I could love always happily here without planting a stranger at our fireside? Father, let us understand each other fully. I speak deliberately and solemnly—I shall never marry."[40] Irene's decree that she will never marry is certainly against the accepted social standard of the nineteenth century, and refusing to accept her father's desire that she marry would generally be an inflammatory concept, but in this instance her reasons against marriage are pure and self-sacrificing for the South and the Cause. Irene loves Russell Aubrey, and although he loves her, she knows they can never be together. Russell was needed to defend the South in the war and Irene felt it her duty to likewise do all she could to support her country, even turning down the opportunity for marriage and happiness. She tells Russell upon his deathbed, "To [God] I commit my destiny…I can bear loneliness—I can walk my dreary earthly path uncomplainingly; I can give you up for the sake of my country."[41] It is through her sacrifice and her willingness to give everything to the Cause, regardless of the personal cost or despair that distinguishes Irene from other domestic novel heroines. Through Irene's example, Evans implores other southern women to willingly sacrifice their lives and devotion to the southern Cause.

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[39] Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South*, 190.
[40] Evans, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice*, 125.
[41] Evans, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice*, 178.

Electra Grey and Irene Huntingdon are both smart, independent women who understand their places in society and show confidence and competence in dealing with their "social and economic equals and inferiors" during the war, with Evans endorsing the model set forth decades earlier by both Caroline Howard Gilman and Caroline Lee Hentz.[42] While these are traits worthy of being adopted by southern women, Evans, like her predecessors intends them only as compliments to the elite woman's expected role, not as intense changes. Indeed, Irene states this notion in *Macaria,* and the reader can almost imagine that it is Evans who is actually speaking these words:

> Southern women have no desire to usurp the legislative reins; their appropriate work consists in moulding the manners and morals of the nation; in checking the wild excess of fashionable life, and the dangerous spirit of extravagance; of reckless expenditure in dress, furniture, and equipage, which threatened ruinous results before the declaration of hostilities…Women who so far forget their duties to their homes and husbands, and the respect due to public opinion should be drive from well-bread, refined circles…that wives should constantly endeavor to cultivate social graces and render themselves as fascinating as possible, I hold their sacred duty, but beauty should be preserved, and accomplishments perfected instead of being constantly paraded…from the influence of these few deluded weak libels on our sec may God preserve our age and country."[43]

This statement essentially sums up the entire point of Evans' novel. Elite southern women desired to leave southern tradition and social expectations alone because that was how the South had existed for generations. Evans clearly supported this view in her work. To better serve the South, women needed to preserve the home front, better care for their families, and remember their duties to husband, God, and country. In a letter to her friend Rachel Lyons on June 14, 1864 Evans writes, "I am very glad to hear that you like my Irene. She is the noblest character I ever painted and is my ideal of perfect womanhood."[44] It is through her characters, such as Irene, and

[42] Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South*, 188.
[43] Evans, *Macaria; or Alters of Sacrifice*, 163.
[44] Augusta Jane Evans, *A Southern Woman of Letters: The Correspondence of Augusta Jane Evans Wilson*, edited by Rebecca Grant Sexton (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 104.

her writing that Evans is able to offer her readers this vision of perfect womanhood and explore the necessity of women to adapt to that vision to ensure the salvation of the South.

When the American Civil War ended in April 1865 with General Robert E. Lee surrendering the Army of Northern Virginia to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, the physical fighting may have ended, but the conflict was far from over. With the conclusion of the war, Reconstruction began in an effort to reunite the northern and southern states, enforce the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, freeing the slaves, giving African Americans citizenship, and giving them the right to vote respectively, and rehabilitate the South so that it could rejoin the Union.[45] The North would have to implement changes that ensured the protection of former slaves and their new freedoms, sustained loyal local governments across the region, and limited the ability of former Confederates to create resistance. [46] It was under these circumstances that Mary Virginia Terhune published her novel *Sunnybank* in 1866. Published under her penname, Marion Harland, *Sunnybank*, is considered the last of the southern domestic novels, and it was the only one published after the Civil War. It was part autobiography, part nostalgic prose, and part disillusioned critique of the South, and Terhune struggles throughout *Sunnybank* to "examine what she believed was the senseless violence of four years past."[47] In some ways, Terhune's novel is distinctly different from any that came before since her struggle was not in making sense of a woman's place in serving the Old South, but rather how women could live in the New South and still maintain their traditions and traditional gender roles.

As with other domestic novelists in the nineteenth century, Terhune employed the good belle/bad belle technique to compare savory versus unsavory qualities in ideal southern women.

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[45] Perman, *Pursuit of Unity*, 117.
[46] Perman, *Pursuit of Unity*, 117.
[47] Moss, *Domestic Novelists of the Old South*, 179

In *Sunnybank*, narration duties are shared between Elinor Lacy and Agatha Lamar. Elinor is the classic "good belle" in this novel and is repeatedly described as "possessing a generous and equable temper," and having exquisite skills in both music and arts. Elinor is also devoutly religious and pious; qualities such as these were regarded as essential for an ideal southern woman, and she is repeatedly depicted as praying or discussing her faith in God, despite the difficulties facing her and her loved ones as a result of the Civil War.[48] Towards the beginning of the novel, upon becoming engaged to Harry Wilton, Elinor states, "Yet I feel very humble tonight, oppressed by a sense of my unworthiness of the abundant mercies with which my young life is crowned."[49] This is an interesting statement because it shows that Elinor is such a good and simple young belle and does not become driven by want or desire, but rather marvels at her good fortune and questions whether or not she even deserves it. This humble attitude was an important component in a southern belle's personality, along with purity and spirituality.[50] Since Elinor is the "good belle" and heroine of the novel, the focus on these aspects of her personality show that Terhune considered them necessary character traits for proper southern ladies and she continues to highlight them throughout *Sunnybank*.

In stark contrast, Agatha Lamar, an orphan adopted by Ida Ross Lacy and Morton Lacy, Elinor's parents, after the death of Agatha's mother, is the quintessential "bad belle" with selfish tendencies and a vain need to be the most beautiful and most desired. According to historian Betina Entzminger, the good belle/bad belle dichotomy was a literary technique used to create "a foil to the morally pure heroine (the good belle) of the novels… [The bad] belle is a type of femme fatale—sexually knowing, physically powerful because of her allure, and morally

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[48] Terhune, *Sunnybank*, 26.
[49] Terhune, *Sunnybank*, 40.
[50] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 90.

dangerous."[51] Indeed, Agatha proves herself to be the "bad belle" early on in Sunnybank, even repeatedly describing herself in such terms, stating, "I should be a dull scholar indeed if I had not learned ere now that I am handsome…I had always an unreasonable and presumptuous hankering after diamonds, pearls, and the line…prerequisites to wealth."[52] Evidence piles up against Agatha throughout Terhune's novel as she describes her own thoughts and actions as less than honorable time and time again, reinforcing her status as the "bad belle." One example that showcases Agatha's selfish and cruel nature happens when she finds Elinor in a dead faint clutching a letter. Agatha comments that "most women would have shrieked or dropped in a swoon themselves at the sight. But I am not made of the same stuff as are other women, and my primal act was to try and discover what this all meant."[53] Instead of helping to revive her counterpart, Agatha reads the letter and then, upon realizing that Elinor fainted because her fiancé informed her he was returning to the North to support the war effort in his home state of New York, leaves Elinor unconscious and alone and goes after him.[54] This was not an effort to bring him back to Elinor, but rather an effort to fulfill her own selfish desire to convince him to marry her instead. While this plot fails, it does lead to Agatha's scheming throughout the entire novel as she tries to make him leave Elinor and fall for her.

Unlike Elinor, who is pure and simple, willing to sacrifice and give to those she loves and to her beloved country, Agatha represents the frivolous and scheming woman that domestic novelists had been warning against for decades. By playing the role of a dependent and ornamental woman, Terhune suggests that Agatha was manipulating the patriarchical society of the South. This was not uncommon in the South, as some historians will assert, because, though

[51] Entzminger, *The Belle Gone Bad*, 2.
[52] Terhune, *Sunnybank*, 22-23.
[53] Terhune, *Sunnybank*, 92.
[54] Terhune, *Sunnybank*, 92.

the actions of belles were tightly controlled and monitored, they still had the power to "wield carefully cultivated feminine charms" to convince men to do their bidding.[55] It can thus be argued that this was the main source of a woman's power in the Old South, and by so Agatha did her best to secure a marriage of "wealth and social position" because she believed that marriage would provide her the keys to happiness—social rank, material wealth, companionship, and freedom from her current restrictions.[56] So wrapped up in her own selfish desires and needs, Agatha fails to recognize the devastation around her caused both by her actions and the Civil War. Ultimately, this proves to be Agatha's downfall as her scheming is discovered and she is ostracized from the Lacy's home, but not before Elinor is able to once again prove the importance of acting in accordance with the southern feminine ideal. Elinor states, "[Agatha] was lonely, forsaken, despised—I affluent in blessings. She had wronged me cruelly, and without provocation from me; but I could not dislike her…she had suffered; she was in torment now and direr humiliation awaited her."[57] This comment from Elinor not only represents the difference between the "good belle" and the "bad belle," but it also represents the larger message in Terhune's work about the need for women to grow and change in their expected societal role as Reconstruction began throughout the South. Women had to be more giving, moral, and intelligent because they had to maintain the history and emotion of the Old South.

While Augusta Jane Evans demonstrated her heroines as solely devoted to the South and the Confederate cause, and even Caroline Howard Gilman and Caroline Lee Hentz wrote about the moral superiority of the South and the need for women to remain invested in its future because of this superiority, Terhune did not believe in or agree with secession. Instead, she had

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[55] Entzminger, *The Belle Gone Bad*, 11.

[56] Carol Blesser and Frederick M. Heath, "The Clays of Alabama: The Impact of the Civil War on a Southern Marriage," in *In Joy and Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South, 1830-1900*, edited by Carol Blesser (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 135.

[57] Terhune, *Sunnybank*, 412.

come to view the "fortunes of the South as inextricably tied to those of the country as a whole" and to believe that the "Union was sacred."[58] This is clear throughout *Sunnybank*, with Elinor's father Morton a staunch Unionist, and her fiancé Harry Wilton a native New Yorker who returned to his home state and fought for the Union in the Civil War. Despite this belief that the South should have remained within the Union and that war was the wrong choice, Terhune, and as a result Elinor, still believed in the continued supremacy of the South much like her fellow domestic novelists. The portrayal of the northerners as the primary villains in the novel, with Federal troops being depicted as looters and rabble-rousers during their invasion and occupation of the South, exemplifies Terhune's belief in southern superiority.[59] The villainous northerners present a stark contrast to the virtuous southerners, the women in particular, who needed constant protection from the "intimidating threat" of Yankee men.[60]

With the changing political structure of the South in the years following the Civil War, it makes sense that Terhune's view on how women could fight to maintain their way of life without upsetting the social structure would differ from the point of view in domestic novels before *Sunnybank*. Despite her obvious love for the South, evidenced in the first pages of her novel where she writes, "Oh! Our Virginia is a bonnie state, and Sunnybank is a very gem upon the breast of the dear old mother," Terhune realized that life post-war was going to be different and women would have to react differently in order to aid the survival of southern society.[61] It is clear in her writing that this was a personal struggle that she was facing, too, and her novelization of her struggle was an effort to make some sense of the ensuing chaos and reconcile southern womanhood and southern tradition with the changes that were impossible to ignore.

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[58] Moss, *Domestic Novelists of the Old South*, 168.
[59] Terhune, *Sunnybank*, 347.
[60] Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 198.
[61] Terhune, *Sunnybank*, 8.

Among these changes was the breakdown of the patriarchical social structure that the South had maintained and defended for decades. Even though she was a Unionist and even married a northern minister, Terhune was also a firm believer in the institution of slavery, believing that it was the only way to civilize a "dangerously savage race."[62] Without slavery, however, the social structure of the South was unsustainable. As was stated in previous chapters, the patriarchy upon which the South rested was an interlocking web of gender, race, and class that emphasized the importance of differences between those with power and those without it, with elite white men holding all of the power at the top of the structure. If even one of these pieces was missing the entire structure would be in danger of collapse. In order to combat the crumbling social structure, women had to recognize that the South was no longer superior to the North, but that it was, in fact, "no better or worse than its northern rival."[63] Indeed, Terhune propagates this message in *Sunnybank* with southern belle Elinor Lacy marrying a northern man, Harry Wilton. Their marriage was a "quiet affair" and their focus was more on the "living present…thronged with duties, and Hope ever pointing to the reward of labor done for the love of man and God" than on the past and the devastation of the war.[64] In order to save the South and social structure they had tried so hard to protect during the Civil War, Terhune is telling women that they must accept southern defeat and work together with the North to rebuild the country or risk losing their identity and tradition entirely.

As the last major novel of the domestic novel genre, *Sunnybank* straddles two different worlds. Following the formula of the domestic novel set forth by other women authors such as Caroline Howard Gilman and Caroline Lee Hentz, and later made more popular by the works of Evans, Terhune's *Sunnybank* has all of the major characteristics of the genre, including a

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[62] Moss, *Domestic Novelists of the Old South*, 168.
[63] Moss, *Domestic Novelists of the Old South*, 186.
[64] Terhune, *Sunnybank*, 414.

nostalgic southern setting, adherence to Victorian values or morality, and an emphasis on the importance of home and tradition in a woman's life.[65] The heroine is a young belle from an influential and wealthy family and throughout the novel she is forced to confront her place in society with the expectation that she will yield to tradition and patriarchy, even if she is more intelligent or pious or beautiful than the average woman reading the novel. Terhune's novel may be the first to touch upon something else, however, and this is the myth of the Lost Cause. A popular myth in the decades following the surrender of the Confederate army at Appomattox that lasted well into the twentieth and twenty-first century popular culture, the Lost Cause myth attempted to remember the Confederacy, wartime sacrifice, and the Old South in the best possible light as changes wracked the southern countryside.[66] Since Sunnybank was published in 1866, one year after the Civil War had ended, it was not heralding the South in its present state like domestic novels prior, but rather it was remembering the South as it was. Soon many southerners, especially elite white women, would begin commemorating the Old South and the Lost Cause, thus solidifying the importance of the domestic novel and assuring its legacy for future generations.

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[65] Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South: Defenders of Southern Culture*, xix.
[66] Gallagher, "Introduction," 1.

Conclusion: The Legacy of Domestic Novelists in the New South

After a long and costly war, both the North and South were worn out and in need of peace. Most soldiers were ready to return home to their families and pick up their lives where they had left off prior to the war. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, however, returning to life as it had been, especially for plantation owners and the elite planters in the South, was not an option. Life had changed on the plantations, especially after the emancipation of southern slaves.[1] The South was different than it had been four years ago and change appeared unstoppable. Reconstruction was as nearly a trying time in American history as the war itself. While the Reconstruction Congress of 1867 struggled with how to quickly and successfully readmit the Confederate states back into the Union and simultaneously protect the rights of the freed people, the elite South struggled with how to best retain political power and some semblance of self-determination.[2] During the subsequent decades leading up to the twentieth century and beyond, the South continually struggled to redefine itself while still clinging to its patriarchal roots. Elite white women, both authors and those who read nineteenth century domestic novels played a large part in trying to bridge this gap. As the storm of women's suffrage drew closer, and many women, especially in the North, used their wartime experiences to draft new identities and push the boundaries of appropriate behavior. Elite southern women, for better or worse, continued to champion southern tradition. They did so by following the prescribed method of the nineteenth century domestic novel—they worked within the existing social standards and expectations, adapting as necessary for the benefit of the South.

One way in which elite women in the post-Civil War South tried to keep the traditional southern way of life, and ultimately the social hierarchy perpetuated by patriarchy, was through

[1] Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 250.
[2] Perman, *Pursuit of Unity*, 126.

efforts to create and maintain museums and memorials commemorating the valiant struggle of the Confederacy. As the keepers of the southern cause and the cultivators of men's ambition and public greatness, it was simply an extension of their duties to erect permanent and patriotic memorials to commemorate the Confederacy and the old South. In 1896, in response to the Libby Prison Civil War Museum in Chicago, Illinois, a group of elite southern women, all of whom were members of the Confederate Memorial Literary Society (CMLS), created the Confederate Museum in Richmond, Virginia to "document and defend the southern cause."[3] The museum was housed in the former "Confederate White House" and the CMLS used the Confederate Museum as a vehicle to share with the world an alternative version of the Civil War, different from that of the North, in an effort to prove the Confederates were "immortally right" and the conquerors were "eternally wrong."[4] In other words, these women saw it as their duty, to their families and the country, to remind southerners about the importance of their fight against the Union and the happiness that had existed as a result of the ways of the Old South.

During this time, the late 1800s and early 1900s, as commemorating the dead and the Confederacy became important to southern identity, two things became immensely popular. The first is the Lost Cause myth propagated by the second, revisionist history of the Civil War. The rhetoric of the Lost Cause myth varies, but essentially it came about during the Reconstruction era of American history as a way to rationalize the Civil War from the southern perspective.[5] Historians agree that this myth is used to rationalize nearly everything in the South; social issues, such as the repressive patriarchal society and the treatment of women and slaves; political issues,

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[3] Reiko Hillyer, "Relics of Reconstruction: The Confederate Museum and the Civil War Memory in the New South," *The Public Historian* 33, no. 4 (November 2011), 36.

[4] Speech by a Confederate veteran at the Confederate Museum's opening in 1896, quoted in Hillyer, "Relics of Reconstruction: The Confederate Museum and the Civil War Memory in the New South," 43.

[5] Alan T. Nolan, "The Anatomy of the Myth," in *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*, edited by Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010), 14.

such as the right to property and self-determination; and to explain why the South lost the war, which always came back to "overwhelming" advantages in northern supplies and troops.[6] Indeed the Lost Cause myth became very popular in the post-Civil War South, so popular, in fact, that it led to a revised version of Civil War history, or what historian Alan T. Nolan describes as "two independent versions of the war." He writes, "On one hand there is a history of the war the account of what in fact happened. On the other there is…the 'southern interpretation' of the event" which is too often mistaken for actual historical fact, especially in the South."[7]

The revised history of the Civil War created by the elite South may have begun as a way to rationalize secession and four years of brutal, bloody war, but eventually it spread to the North and became a "national phenomenon," recreating the Lost Cause as an American legend.[8] Of the half dozen or so main claims of the revisionist history, four of them dealt directly with slavery and whether or not it was an issue that sparked secession. According to this version of events, slavery was not a sectional issue and therefore the South had not seceded to protect slavery; northern abolitionists had sparked the conflict with their inflammatory grandstanding; the South would have eventually given up slavery on its own; and slaves were happy and faithful because the patriarchal plantation system was beautiful and just, with masters portrayed as benevolent leaders.[9] By downplaying the role of slavery in southern secession, southerners were able to "decontaminate" the peculiar institution of slavery which allows the plantation system on which it was built to remain a cherished fixture of the Old South.[10] Clearly intended to invoke southern

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[6] H. E. Gulley, "Women and the Lost Cause: Preserving a Confederate Identity in the American Deep South," *Journal of Historical Geography* 19, No. 2 (April 1993), 129.
[7] Nolan, "The Anatomy of the Myth," 12.
[8] Nolan, "The Anatomy of the Myth," 12.
[9] Nolan, "The Anatomy of the Myth," 15-16.
[10] Nolan, "The Anatomy of the Myth," 15.

emotion and pride, this version of events can perhaps be summed up by an excerpt from a Confederate monument in Columbia, South Carolina. It states:

> LET THE SOUTH CAROLINIAN
> OF ANOTHER GENERATION
> REMEMBER
> THAT THE STATE TAUGHT THEM
> HOW TO LIVE AND HOW TO DIE,
> AND THAT FROM HER BROKEN FORTUNES
> SHE HAS PRESERVED FOR HER CHILDREN
> THE PRICELESS TREASURES OF THEIR MEMORIES
> TEACHING ALL WHO MAY CLAIM
> THE SAME BIRTHRIGHT,
> THAT TRUTH, COURAGE, AND PATRIOTISM
> ENDURETH FOREVER.[11]

This dedication to the Confederates who lost their lives during the Civil War is just one example of how revisionist history and the Lost Cause myth became a large part of southern identity in the post-war decades. The idea being, if the South was not able to win the war, somehow they did not lose it, either, because they were a superior culture that had fought hard and valiantly for their freedom.[12] It was here that both southern men and women struggled to find meaning in their loss, and to avoid losing the memory and tradition of the Old South as the nation tried to reconstruct its identity in post-war America.

The CMLS and the Confederate Museum in Richmond represent only a small part of women's post-Civil War accomplishments, as they fought to preserve the Old South and the Lost Cause myth. Among the most popular and easily the most recognizable of these groups, or Ladies Memorial Associations (LMAs) as they were collectively known, was the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). The women in the UDC were mainly upper class white women, as were nearly all of the LMAs, desired to engage in philanthropic, educational, historical, and memorial endeavors. Their driving force, however, was "the divinely commanded

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[11] Gulley, "Women and the Lost Cause," 133.

[12] Nolan, "The Anatomy of the Myth," 17/

imperative its members felt to tell the 'true' story of the Civil War" so that all Americans would know why the South seceded and the importance of their Cause.[13] While most historians agree that there are multiple reasons why the UDC, and other LMAs, perpetuated the myth of southern supremacy, perhaps the biggest and most relevant reason is because they were trying to impose order on a society turned upside down by defeat in the war and the ensuing process of reconstruction. As a result of the Confederate defeat, the "carefully constructed social hierarchy that white southerners had conjured to instill strict order in their world" was not only being threatened, but being rendered obsolete as former slaves gained their freedom and the northern industrial economy lifestyle dominated the nation.[14] In addition, the North blamed the South for beginning and sustaining such a bloody war, so, by commemorating the South and producing romanticized revisionist history, southerners were justifying the war.[15] These women fought to retain the spirit of the Confederacy and the structure of the Old South even as it was slipping from their grasp.

Just as domestic novelists Caroline Howard Gilman, Caroline Lee Hentz, Augusta Jane Evans, and Mary Virginia Terhune urged women to support the social hierarchy of the South by being better women and better southerners, so did women in LMAs. Once again women were supporting and championing the patriarchy that had bound southern society for so many years. Historian Amy Crow writes, "Memorialization of the Lost Cause could simultaneously signify defiance, nostalgia, regret, mourning, and loss, along with more charged impulses, such as racial and gendered hierarchy, political persuasions, or visions of a new social order for the New South…The act of placing a Confederate monument on [a battlefield]…celebrated and promoted

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[13] Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 117.

[14] Amy Crow, "'In Memory of the Confederate Dead': Masculinity and the Politics of Memorial Work in Goldsboro, North Carolina, 1894-1895," *The North Carolina Historical Review* LXXXIII, No. 1 (January 2006), 35.

[15] Gallagher, "Introduction," 1.

white supremacy."[16] In other words, women were struggling to reconcile their traditional ways with the changing times in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By memorializing the Confederate Cause, the dead soldiers, and the Old South, they were doing their part, as the keepers of the home, family, and tradition to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable ideals of the Old South and the developing New South. Women involved in LMAs, especially the UDC, were expected to learn and write down Confederate history; to publish novels; and share their wartime journals, as were men, in order to retain that sense of order and tradition that they wanted so desperately to retain.[17] In the same way that the heroines in the nineteenth century domestic novels struggled to adapt to the changing, politically charged world of the antebellum and Civil War years, while still filling their expected role in the strict southern social structure, elite white women during Reconstruction and beyond struggled to find meaning in their changing worlds while maintaining the ever important role of the perfect southern mistress.

In the final years of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century, the domestic novel may have faded as a popular form of literature, but the desire for fictional and nonfictional works by women that commemorated the South or shared personal memoirs of the Civil War continued to grow. In addition to women who were active members of organizations such as the UDC, other elite white women did their part to ensure that Confederate history was never far from southern, and American, memory, lest it be forgotten.[18] This meant voraciously studying southern history, remaining true to the ideals of the Old South and traditional southern society, and also publishing written materials heralding the South and the meaning of its struggles during the Civil War. In some ways, women who were members of LMAs, and even

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[16] Crow, "In Memory of the Confederate Dead: Masculinity and the Politics of Memorial Work in Goldsboro, North Carolina, 1894-1895," 33-4.

[17] Crow, "In Memory of the Confederate Dead: Masculinity and the Politics of Memorial Work in Goldsboro, North Carolina, 1894-1895," 33.

[18] Gardner, *Blood and Irony*, 162.

those who were not members but voraciously studied southern history, believed themselves to be "pioneers of record-keeping" with their work essentially validating the interpretation of the Civil War they continued to push through their work.[19] As keepers of southern tradition, purity, and morality this was a natural transition for these women to make. By fueling the Lost Cause myth and contributing to revisionist history elite southern women were struggling to keep the southern tradition and memory alive while simultaneously combating the northern version of history and their "encroachment on the direction of the future."[20]

In much the same way that domestic authors used sweeping prose to describe their beloved South, so, too, did women writing in the post-war South describe their beloved nation with sweeping statements and beautiful language. Take, for example, Catherine Howard Gilman's beautiful ode to her character's plantation from her 1838 novel. She writes, "The sun glides on cedars with his brightest morning hue…and when the moon rises over the cleared fields showing an ampitheatre of distant woods…I thank thee, Heaven, that I am here and all I love are here."[21] The love and pride Gilman feels for the South are evident in her words. Women who wrote and published after the Civil War still used such descriptive phrases and grand words, however, their prose was aimed at a different target—the men who had fought so valiantly for the Confederacy. The following excerpt from the wartime journal of Eliza Andrews exemplifies this practice. She writes:

> We look back with loving memory upon our past…we glorify the men and the memories of those days and would have the coming generation draw inspiration from them. We teach the children of the South to honor and revere the civilization of their fathers, which we believe has not perished because it was evil or visions in itself, but because, like a good and useful man who has lived out his

[19] Hillyer, "Relics of Reconciliation," 39.
[20] Hillyer, "Relics of Reconciliation," 40.
[21] Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, 10.

> allotted time and gone the way of all earth, it too has served its turn and must not lie in the grave of the dead past.[22]

Even though Andrews' diary was originally published during the war, Andrews, like many other southern women, likely edited her own work prior to it being published so that her words would resound with a "rare degree of prescience and judicious temperament."[23] As a result, despite her original diary being an organic display of her personal thoughts and musings as the Civil War raged on, the version that was published in 1908 was likely edited and changed to reflect the harsh feelings southerners had against the North and the need to continue the myth of the Lost Cause and Confederate nationalism into the twentieth century.

The legacy and influence of the domestic novel continued in other ways, too. While many women chose to publish their wartime journals and memoirs, other women chose to publish fictional and quasi-fictional accounts of the war. These novels, despite being penned during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century proved to be "familiar novels that resonated with their readers" due to their plantation settings and familiar gender stereotypes.[24] Indeed, most early twentieth century Civil War novels, at least those written by women, carried many of the same characteristics of the domestic novel. Women were the main characters, portrayed as wartime heroines, sacrificing for their country. Pure, patriotic, and feminine, these women characters were champions of the home front and the southern spirit.[25] Even as society changed around them and, over time, men and women were found it necessary to reconfigured their definitions of what it meant to be a belle, the writing of post war women reflected the desire and need to maintain old southern traditions and see the women as being able to take on new

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[22] Eliza Frances Andrews, *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl, 1864-1865* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1908), 10-11.
[23] Gardner, *Blood and Irony*, 179.
[24] Gardner, *Blood and Irony*, 180-181.
[25] Gardner, *Blood and Irony*, 182.

tasks while still remaining true to the traditionally accepted sphere.[26] By penning novels featuring more "modern" women set in the traditional antebellum and Civil War South, elite southern women were making sense of the new southern order and the new world thrust upon them as a result of the Confederate defeat and Reconstruction. Some historians, such as Jane Turner Censer, stress the importance of post-War contemporary writing stating that these novels "suggest that the belle was merely a persona of the new woman emerging at a time when elite southern whites were rethinking the notions of womanhood and proper female roles."[27] Just as domestic novelists used their work to help reestablish order as politics and war threatened their way of life so, too, did southern women authors in the Reconstruction era and into the twentieth century in an effort to redefine their role as women without losing what made them distinctly and proudly southern.

It is perhaps this, the importance of novels in helping women redefine and live within their society that is the most important part of the legacy of the domestic novel. Gilman, Hentz, Evans, and Terhune set a precedence that proved to be important beyond their wildest dreams. While their novels cautioned women against excess and stressed the need for women to push back against outside influence against southern society by becoming better, more patriotic southern wives and mothers, post-Civil War novels stressed the importance of women remembering and sticking to their shared past, but also heralded the need for women to become more modern and educated and independent or else risk losing the South to the northern industrial complex and the northern way of life forever. For, "although these white southern female authors who produced heroines brimming with self-confidence and possessing the requisite skills for financial independence, some of these fictionalized young women also tended

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[26] Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, 10.
[27] Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, 10.

to be adept in traditional arts of housewifery. This appears to be a complex depiction of the southern women in regard to models of traditional womanhood and domesticity.[28]

Evidence of this can be seen in the Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Gone with the Wind*. Written by Margaret Mitchell and published in 1936, this novel featured the now well-known character of Scarlett O'Hara who has come to represent, at least in most people's eyes, the quintessential example of an Old Southern belle. Scarlett is described as having learned exquisite manners and grace, but beneath all of that is a "sharp intelligence" and a lack of "inner grace" that she believed was unimportant.[29] A strong and cunning young woman, Scarlett is able to rebuild her life after the Confederates destroyed her childhood home, Tara, her mother died, and her father's mind became "unhinged."[30] Left to feed her family, she is forced to make "modern" decisions and ends up "standing in the sun in cotton rows, her back breaking from eternal bending and her hands roughened by the dry bolls" as she is forced to pick cotton in the remaining, undamaged fields to sell for money.[31] Despite her soft and feminine upbringing and the expectation that a young woman would refrain from such physical and difficult work, Scarlett does what she must to survive the aftermath of the Civil War. This shows Scarlett is a direct juxtaposition of southern women's attempts at reconciling the modern meaning of womanhood with traditional values and societal expectations of the Old South .

Looking back at domestic novels and their authors, it is easy to see that their importance lies not in their plot or what is being said, but rather in how things are being said and why. The authors discussed in this paper, Caroline Howard Gilman, Caroline Lee Hentz, Augusta Jane Evans, and Mary Virginia Terhune, put words to paper in an effort to push forth their opinions

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[28] Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, 48.
[29] Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (New York: MacMillian Publishing Company, 1936), 81-82.
[30] Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind*, 626.
[31] Mitchell, Gone with the Wind, 632.

on how southern women should behave and effect change in their spheres. They did not want a women's revolution, they were not feminists, and they certainly did not want the rigid, patriarchal social system they had grown accustomed to and were protected within to be overturned. Instead they were staunch supporters of the South and what it stood for. So they looked to protect it using the best possible means provided to them, which in this case was the written word, to urge other women to affect change within their accepted sphere, accept the necessity of adapting to the changing times, and fiercely protect their families, the South, and its rich history. Ultimately, elite southern women authors during Reconstruction and the post-War era did the same things, following the pattern set forth by those four domestic novelists, and others. They internalized their personal struggles to define and accept the roles required of them in the New South while remaining true to the traditions and sanctity of the Old South. This internalization manifested in the written word and a new breed of novel began to emerge in southern society. In the same way that domestic novelists set a path to be followed by the women who read their books, so too did these new authors put a path before their readers. They put forth a path intended to help their fellow southern women reconstruct and organize their identity and the identity of the South amidst the chaos that resulted in the decades following the Civil War.

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