

MARRIED TO THE CONFEDERACY:
THE EMOTIONAL POLITICS OF CONFEDERATE WIDOWHOOD

by

ANGELA ESCO ELDER

(Under the Direction of Stephen Berry)

ABSTRACT

Between 1861 and 1865, approximately three million men left for war; the war killed 750,000 of them. In the process, more than 200,000 white women became widows. This dissertation examines the complicated emotional and political relationships between Confederate widows and the Confederate state. Throughout the American Civil War, Confederate newspapers and government officials championed a particular version of white widowhood—the young wife who selflessly transferred her monogamous love from dead husband to the deathless cause for which he fought. Only then would their husbands live forever—as would their Cause. But a closer look at the letters and diaries of widows reveals that these women spent their new cultural capital with great practicality and shrewdness. Indeed, even as their culture created an entire industry in their name, widows played the role on their own terms to forward their own ends. Precisely because society invested widowhood with so much significance, it inadvertently created the stage upon which an unforeseen and unprecedented number of young Confederate women could be seen and heard.

INDEX WORDS: American Civil War, Antebellum South, Confederacy, Death, Emotions History, Gender, Grief, Marriage, Widows, Women

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DEDICATION

To Nathan Elder

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INTRODUCTION

“With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

-Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address¹

When Jefferson Davis completed his book, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* in 1881, he did not dedicate it to “officers and soldiers,” as Confederate Lieutenant-General James Longstreet did. Nor did Davis dedicate his writings to “the memory of the dead,” as Confederate Brigadier-General E. P. Alexander did. Instead, when the former leader of the Confederacy completed his first book, he dedicated it to “The Women of the Confederacy.” In his prolonged tribute, soldiers “died far from the objects of their tenderest love” while women supplied, soothed, and sustained with a “zealous faith in our cause.” Why? Why honor women before his friends who died in battle, or the veterans who survived it? Certainly, Davis recognized that many wives, mothers, and daughters sacrificed to further the Confederate cause, but perhaps there is something more. If Jefferson Davis, ex-president of the Confederate States of America, turned eyes to “the women,” the ones who “shone a guiding star undimmed by the darkest clouds of war,” the nation was not looking at the southern states’ recent rebellious and bloody behaviors. If the nation looked at women “whose annual tribute expresses their enduring grief, love, and reverence for our sacred dead,” the focus shifts from

¹ This dissertation keeps all spelling and phrasing quoted from documents in its original form without including the intrusive [*sic*] notation, except for on occasions when punctuation has been converted to modern-day notations for clarity. Abraham Lincoln, “Second Inaugural Address,” March 4, 1865.

Confederate soldiers who killed to mourners whose loved ones died at the hands of Union soldiers. Here, the South was not a lynch mob, slaver, or threat that almost destroyed America, but a woman who offered “pious ministrations to our wounded soldiers” and “soothed the last hours” of dying men. Rather than a defiant, threatening, and abusive region, this feminized South was a place of healing.²

Between 1861 and 1865, approximately three million men left for war; the war killed 750,000 of them. In the process, more than 200,000 white women became widows. This dissertation examines the complicated emotional and political relationships between Confederate widows and the Confederate state. Throughout the American Civil War, Confederate newspapers and government officials championed a particular version of white widowhood—the young wife who selflessly transferred her monogamous love from dead husband to the deathless cause for which he fought. Widows were to “preserve green by grateful tears the dearest and most brilliant memories” of their hearts. Only then would their husbands live forever—as would their Cause. But a closer look at letters and diaries of widows reveals that these women spent their new cultural capital with great practicality and shrewdness. Indeed, even as their culture created an entire industry in their name, widows played the role on their own terms to forward their own ends. Precisely because society invested widowhood with so much significance, it inadvertently created the stage upon which an unforeseen and unprecedented number of young Confederate women could be seen and heard.³

² James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the Civil War in America* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1896); E. P. Alexander, *Military Memoirs of a Confederate: A Critical Narrative* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1907); Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881).

³ The number of women widowed by the Civil War is difficult to determine. J. David Hacker provides the most recent number, suggesting that approximately 750,000 men lost their lives in the Civil War, and that if 28% of the men who died in the war were married at the time of their death, 200,000 widows would be

This project offers three major takeaways. First, analyzing the experiences of white Confederate widows changes the way we think about the Civil War household; though they shared a gender, women did not wound the same, work the same, nor share the same strengths and weaknesses, and these differences emerged particularly when their relationships were put under stress. Secondly, emotions mattered; for Confederate widows, the political was personal, and the personal political, a fact that left a lasting impression on both Confederate officials and widows' communities. And third, widows existed. This perhaps seems a redundant contribution, but with a historiography that has yet to produce a single published academic monograph devoted to widowhood in the Civil War, it is worth exploring why, and how, tens of thousands of women faded out of the narrative, out of the wartime experience, only to reappear in popular culture as Scarlett O'Hara and "the oldest living Confederate widow."

Before taking each of these insights in turn, let me first lay out this project's parameters. This work focuses on widows whose husbands died between 1861-1865, while soldiering for the Confederacy, and widows who were politically aligned with the Confederacy, not widows who lived in the South but sympathized with the Union cause. I offer some discussion on widowhood in border states and conflicted counties, but the bulk of my sources are from the eleven states that seceded from the Confederacy.

created, North and South. There are no statistics currently available for Union and/or African American widowhood, and little research has been completed on the experience of these widows. J. David Hacker, "A Census-Based Count of the Civil War Dead," *Civil War History*, Vol. LVII No. 4. (2011), 311. A map illustrating the tremendous amounts of widows created by the Civil War can be found in J. David Hacker, Libra Hilde, and James Holland Jones, "The Effect of the Civil War on Southern Marriage Patterns," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. LXXVI, no. 1 (February 2010), 65. Other sources which include detailed discussions of mortality statistics include Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2008) and Maris A. Vinovskis, "Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War? Some Preliminary Demographic Speculations," in *Toward a Social History of the American Civil War: Exploratory Essays*, edited by Maris A. Vinovskis (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); "A Sketch of General Ben Hardin Helm," originally published in *The Land We Love*, June 1867, pp. 163-67; among the clippings in the Helm Papers, Kentucky Historical Society.

Richmond appears as in several chapters, to include the urban experience of some widows, and as an important stage for performative politics as the Confederacy's capital, but the majority of this project's source base is predominately small town and rural in its focus. To the extent source material allows, lower-class widows are included in this discussion, though the majority of written records are from those with the time and financial security to produce them. The role of widows in memorialization efforts, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and other elements of the Reconstruction period will be addressed, but not in depth. Unfortunately, one dissertation cannot encompass all aspects of widowhood with the depth and breadth this topic craves; and yet, this project builds upon and changes the ways historians currently think about nineteenth century womanhood.

First, the way we understand the Civil War household, and even 'women's history' more broadly, changes when we cast a critical eye on the myriad experiences of Confederate widows. Much research has been published on the vast economic, political, and cultural work that women performed during and after the war, from their roles as nurses and in armament manufactories to their critical importance overseeing (effectively) the command and control centers (a.k.a. homes) during the guerrilla conflict, to their dominating presence in the Ladies Memorial Associations and ultimately the United Daughters of the Confederacy. But less attention has been paid to the degree to which, in all of these roles, they often differed from and fought *with each other*. No social work gets done without friction; all human beings have their own (sometimes prickly) sense of the way things ought to be. This was no less true of the work of mourning. The American Civil War was a war grounded in the household with all of its

systems of support and all of its interpersonal tensions. In our appreciation of women's common grievances under patriarchy, we have sometimes massaged away the very natural, very human process by which disputes arose and were settled as they went about their common work.

We have long appreciated that mourning was woman's work; but we have not yet lifted the veil to reveal the complex internal female politics that lay behind the patriotic rhetoric that invoked sacrifice. "Women of the South! Do your spirits faint, or your hands falter? You, who so nobly urged this work, will you sustain it still? Are you not ready, if need be, to fill every possible post at home, and send the last man to the field?" characteristically asked one wartime newspaper, lumping sisters, mothers, and wives into a singular gendered category. Similarly, the *Arkansas True Democrat* newspaper lauded, "Thus it is with the glorious women of the South...the laughing maiden, the busy mother and the mourning widow have vied in their efforts to advance our cause. Day by day and night by night, they have toiled at the work until an army of heroes, clothed by beauty, grace, and worth, stand forth, as did Achilles on the Trojan plain, invincible." In the narrative of the time, and the historical narrative to follow, Confederate "women" sent men to war and Confederate "women" put men back on their feet afterwards. This attempt to put women back into the historical narrative was entirely laudable and produced the essential foundation on which all women's history of the war must be built. But perhaps because a solidarity among women was necessary to produce this feminist wave of scholarship in the first place, we have inadvertently stitched an assumption of solidarity into the treatment of our subjects, in effect reproducing an essentialization of

‘women’ that, while not as problematic as leaving them out of the narrative in the first place, is still a massive oversimplification of their lives and experiences.⁴

Take this example. When a soldier died, who had the greater claim to grief, his wife or his mother? Where should the widow go? Who should go through his things? Who would have what say in the raising of his children? Well-meaning mothers-in-law stuffed envelopes with innumerable pages of advice, writing out their own grief, even as they directed the grief of their daughters-in-law. Consumed with the pain and guilt of outliving their soldiering sons, many Confederate mothers quite naturally shifted their attentions and energies to the lives of their late sons’ wives. They had a common pain; they spoke a common female language. But the very closeness of their situations and relations could sometimes strain what was possible for two people to go through together. To be sure, some widows appreciated, even became dependent upon, the additional assistance, but others dreaded the arrival of another letter, or worse, the mother-in-law herself. Exploring the varied emotional responses of Confederate widows and mothers to the death of their husbands/sons – and their responses to one another – reveals the complicated politics of mourning that lay beneath the official praises to the “ever-living heroism of our women” – and begins a larger process of seeing women both as women and as individuals at the same time.⁵

⁴ The work of many historians, like Caroline Janney and Karen Cox, lays an essential foundation for how women participated in the reconstruction of Southern society after the war. Gender historians have successfully established that women were an essential part in rebuilding the South. Now, we can build upon these works, move beyond the unity, and beyond elite white women, to reveal a fuller, clearer version of history that reflects the variety of female reactions and emotions in the post-war period. *Savannah Republican*, 19 July 1863, published in Andrew S. Coppersmith, *Fighting Words: An Illustrated History of Newspaper Accounts in the Civil War* (New York: The New Press, 2004), 189; *The Arkansas True Democrat*, 25 July 1861, vol 18., no. 43, Arkansas History Commission and State Archives, Little Rock.

⁵ John B. Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1903), 118.

If nothing else, the stories that follow reveal that widows mourned in a variety of ways. At the surface level, we think, of course they did. But by delving in and allowing these women their individualities, we broaden and deepen our understanding of the female world. Additionally, investigating the conflicts that emerged *between* women, and the means they used to try to address and resolve them, takes us at once away from and deeper inside the ‘sisterhoods’ and ‘female worlds of love and ritual’ that have dominated feminist readings of social history since the 1970s. Nineteenth century white women may not have dueled or engaged in drunken fistfights (often), but they will not appear fully whole or human until they are allowed their own competitive codes of honor that governed the social slights, punishments, and penances they doled out on each other. Like the much better understood conflicts among men, such ‘difficulties’ among women were important, and must not be dismissed derisively or misogynistically as ‘cat fights.’ If we grant, as we now do, that women did *critical* cultural work in prosecuting the war and interpreting its meaning, we must pay greater attention to the way they went about their work, including how they resolved intramural disputes. Indeed, historians must consider the way the war continued on as a conflict between generations of women and how the sometimes greater tensions of the war played out within households that were sometimes fractured, cracked, or destroyed by the burdens they placed upon women to hold them together.⁶

A second major takeaway of this project is that the mourning and grieving of widows had real potential political consequences for the Confederacy. Emotion could be felt and manipulated, as it had been for centuries in both fictional and non-fictional

⁶ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America.” *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Autumn, 1975).

worlds. For instance, Deianeira plunged a sword in her side. Hylonome fell upon a spear. Alcyone drowned herself in the sea. Evadne and Oenone threw themselves on their husbands' burning funeral pyres, while Cleite and Polymede hung themselves. Laedameia, Marpessa, and Polydora are also among the ranks of widows in classical mythology who committed suicide after their husbands died. When they became widows, it was their duty to mourn, and they carried this task out to the ultimate expression—death by their own hands, a preferable alternative to life without their husbands. Language reflected this idea of the empty life of a widow. In Greek, “cheroo” means to make desolate. “Chereuo” is to lack. In Homer, a widowed wife is called a “chera.” The masculine form, “cheros,” does not appear until Aristotle applied it to birds. The Old English “widewe” has an Indo-European root, “widh,” meaning to be empty or separated, while the Sanskrit “vidh” also means to lack, or be destitute. Neither Greek vocabulary nor mythology affixed similar meanings or implications to widowers. This ancient notion, that a woman is filled by a marriage, and emptied at her husband's death, persisted through time and across space. Nineteenth century America called children who lost their fathers “orphans,” even though their mothers still lived. Southern etiquette required a mourning period of 2.5 years for widows, and glorified those who mourned longer. Widowers mourned 3 months with an unassuming black armband affixed to their everyday attire. Widows wore elaborate costumes and their communities served as an audience, applauding those who played the role well, ostracizing those who did not.⁷

And all of this was particularly fraught in an age when the state had relatively little power and relied to a heavy degree on emotional resonances to glue the country

⁷ Elisa P. Garrison, “Suicide in Classical Mythology,” Texas A&M University. Accessed October 2014, http://www.stoa.org/diotima/essays/garrison_essay.shtml

together. In his First Inaugural Address, Abraham Lincoln compared secession to divorce. Confederate diarist Mary Boykin Chesnut did the same, “We are divorced, North from South, because we hated each other so.” Familial metaphor dominated nineteenth century politics because, in a still young country, almost without history, patriotism had been planted in the sturdier soil of family love. As Henry Adams said of America in 1860, “The Union was a sentiment, but not much more.” Familial language was not mere rhetoric, then; it was a wellspring of state legitimacy and was deeply political. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, it has been argued, was effective because it attacked slavery on *familied* grounds. Politicians spoke endlessly of “founding fathers” and “sister states.” In cartoons, the nation was still as likely to be embodied by the character of “Brother” Jonathan as the more distant “Uncle” Sam. “The state” as we know it—invasive, protective—did not exist. Government was a union, nationalism a romantic sentiment, both rooted and understood in the language of marriage and family.⁸

Relations between war widows and their communities, then, could not simply be personal; they had political implications. The Confederacy needed widows’ social capital—their emotional endorsement—for the cause. If these devastated women recommitted themselves to the Confederacy and poured their emotional resources into the war that had killed their son or husband, that was a powerful endorsement. If they withdrew their emotional resources, however, or worse, used their new standing to criticize the war, that was a powerful indictment. Women who had sustained such losses,

⁸ Lincoln said, “Physically speaking, we can not separate. We can not remove our respective sections from each other nor build an impassable wall between them. A husband and wife may be divorced and go out of the presence and beyond the reach of each other, but the different parts of our country can not do this. They can not but remain face to face, and intercourse, either amicable or hostile, must continue between them.” C. Van Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 25; Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918), 99.

then, had a staggering amount of social capital, something even Jefferson Davis implicitly recognized when he dedicated his book to the “Women of the Confederacy.”⁹

Stephanie McCurry has argued that, during the Civil War, the Confederacy became for the first time actually answerable to its fictive family, including women and slaves. Similarly, Drew Gilpin Faust noted that “sacrifice and the state became inextricably intertwined” during the Civil War. Laura Edwards and Amy Dru Stanley have also explored what might be called the bleed-through between the new legal categories required by capitalism and the modern state and the more organic and accepted categories of nineteenth century family and community life. Victoria Ott argued that Confederate women had political power during the war, which they used to uphold the Confederacy in an attempt to preserve ideals of the antebellum era for their own futures. I would argue that these opportunities for political engagement were particularly available to the Confederacy’s widows. We are all familiar with Cindy Sheehan, the mother of a U.S. soldier killed in Iraq, who protested the Iraq War by camping outside President Bush’s ranch in Crawford, Texas. Sheehan gained media attention where thousands of other protestors didn’t because she had what we might call cultural *standing*. She had given a son to the state, and now she had some ‘say’ in what the state should do and be. Confederate war widows, though they might be as young as seventeen, had, if anything, *more* cultural standing. Mothers who lost sons in the Civil War still had husbands and thereby, as the culture understood it, protectors. Most also had additional children. But when a husband was killed in the service of the state, the

⁹ Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* (1881), dedication.

state had a moral and rhetorical obligation to fill the husband's role; for better or worse, the Confederacy was married to its widows, and they to it.¹⁰

For decades, historians have left the “phenomenon of human emotion” to psychologists, philosophers, and biologists. In 1994, Peter N. Stearns studied emotional change in a social context and argued that “we short-change our power to explain if we leave out the impact of emotional culture.” He further maintained that “the potential for examining the wider consequences of emotional change—for taking emotions seriously as a source of social behaviors, within families to be sure but also in a variety of other, more public settings—has not been tapped.” Like Stearns, philosopher Jesse J. Prinz argued that “palpitations, pangs, and twinges in the gut” contribute to reasoning and, ultimately, action. Similarly, William Reddy's theoretical defense of emotions history, that there is “a core concept of emotions, universally applicable, that allows one to say what suffering is,” allows for cultural variation without dismissing this tool. Combining psychology, anthropology, and history, he persuasively presents how emotions impacted the French Revolution, as a case study. This theoretical framework championing the importance of emotions as an element of rationalist social history is useful in explaining the importance of widows in nineteenth century southern society.¹¹

¹⁰ Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Faust, *Suffering*, xiii; Laura Edwards, *The People and their Peace: Legal Culture and the Transformation of Inequality in the Post-Revolutionary South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge University Press, 1998); Victoria E. Ott, *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age during the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 36-7.

¹¹ Philosophers, psychologists, biologists, and other scholars have argued over definitions for the term “emotion” for centuries. For the purpose of this dissertation, I define an emotion as a feeling elicited by an external event which in turn affects perception and thoughts, often inspires bodily reactions and/or facial expressions, and often leads to action tendencies. This definition is discussed in more detail in Jesse J. Prinz's *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Rom Harré, “An Outline of the Social Constructionist Viewpoint,” in *The Social Construction of Emotions* ed. Rom Harré (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1986), 2; Stearns' book is an analysis of changing emotional

Karen Lystra's *Searching the Heart: Women, Men and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* persuasively argued that romantic love shaped the contours of American history as surely as technology or finance throughout the 1800s. Emotions had power and affected behavior. Topically organized, this book is an excellent introduction to a number of subjects, like the "sacred" mail of lovers, the quest for parental blessings on relationships, sexuality in Victorian courtship; but the lack of geographic and temporal distinctions is a major issue in the work. This study does not address how the Civil War affected romantic love—in fact, the war appears infrequently throughout the text. This book is an excellent foundation, but the lack of "change over time" in the nineteenth century is problematic. The war did, in fact, change specific elements of romantic love and courtship, while strongly reinforcing other aspects.¹²

Additionally, this dissertation builds on the exciting new work on trauma in the American Civil War. Diane Miller Sommerville's recent article, "A Burden too Heavy to Bear: War Trauma, Suicide, and Confederate Soldiers," asserted that a psychological crisis "remapped the cultural and intellectual contours of the region." In addition to the social impact soldier suicides had on the South, these stories of broken Confederate soldiers also "get us closer to a full accounting of the personal cost of the Civil War."

standards in middle class American culture between World War I's end and the mid-1900s. Peter N. Stearns, *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 14; Daniel M. Gross is another scholar who attempted to bring emotion back into history through an analysis of politics and rhetoric. He argues that emotion has recently emerged in many fields, like history, because "it promises access to the domain of protoreason previously obscured" (pg 9). His theory-heavy book is titled *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle's Rhetoric to Modern Brain Science* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006); Prinz, viii; William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), xi.

¹² Susan J. Matt is another example of a historian who uses emotion as a lens. "The history of homesickness recovers the story of how Americans learned to manage their feelings, but beyond that, it reveals how American learned habits of individualism that supported capitalist activity," she argues. Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). Susan J. Matt, *Homesickness: An American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.

Physicians, chaplains, and even husbands, such as Captain Thyssent who, “shot himself in the head the night he received the news” that his wife had died, experienced emotional distress during the war. Emotional distress was not limited to men, so to build upon her argument, the death of a husband was also a traumatic experience for many wives, and that heightened emotional distress also affected widows. These moments of breakdown allow a better understanding of the depth and expression of widows’ emotional wounds, and the process by which women struggled to recover from them. Like death, the war distributed widowhood unevenly across the South—some towns lost entire companies, and gained entire companies of widows, while other widows found themselves isolated and alone in their positions.¹³

And finally, this dissertation offers a third contribution to the historical field by returning widows to the narrative of the American Civil War. The war created widows, by the tens of thousands, then hundreds of thousands. This project rests on a thin, yet crucial, layer of historiography. Kristen E. Wood’s *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War* includes on chapter on widows in the Confederacy. While the wealthy widows analyzed were mostly women widowed before the war began, Wood’s account nonetheless showed how permanently husbandless women lived as slaveholding elite in the Confederacy. Wood argued that a “slaveholding widow developed a distinctive version of mastery” upon which the Civil War had a “devastating impact.” Wood only briefly mentioned the “initial incapacitating

¹³ Sommerville is building off the work of Eric Dean, who also argued “the Civil War extracted a huge psychological toll on its participants.” See also Diane Miller Sommerville, “Will They Ever Be Able to Forget? Confederate Soldiers and Mental Illness in the Defeated South,” in *Weirding the War: Stories from the Civil War’s Ragged Edges*, ed. Stephen Berry (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 321-39; Diane Miller Sommerville, “A Burden too Heavy to Bear: War Trauma, Suicide, and Confederate Soldiers,” *Civil War History*, vol 59, no. 4 (December 2013): 487, 486, 470; David Silkenat, *Moments of Despair: Suicide, Divorce, and Debt in Civil War Era North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

grief” of losing a husband and argued widows had “little choice” but to deal with the demands of their estates. Widows could easily lose their “dignity, slaves, food stuffs, livestock, furniture, clothes, jewelry, and occasionally their houses to Union troops.” While Wood effectively illustrated the demands of an elite lifestyle on Confederate widows, she did not fully discuss emotions or women widowed as a result of the war.¹⁴

The financial aspects of Confederate widowhood are more thoroughly explored, particularly by Jennifer L. Gross. In 1995, she completed her thesis “You Must Do the Best You Can: The Civil War Widows of Brunswick County, Virginia.” Using quantitative methodology, she compiled a statistical analysis of ages, children, property, and occupations of the 72 widows within this rural county to explore the financial situation of these women. Gross scrutinized the distribution of husbands’ estates and the relationship between personal property and employment. According to Gross, economic considerations guided Confederate widows’ every move, from the decision to reside with family members to the choice of remarriage for their children’s wellbeing. At the end of her final paragraph, Gross added, “obviously, these women faced not only economic hardship as a result of their widowhood, but also the pain and grief associated with losing a loved one.” While she claimed this to be an obvious aspect of widowhood, this is not the focus of her analysis. Gross hinted at something tremendously interesting when she wrote, “the bereavement of these widows was perhaps exacerbated by the Confederate loss of the war, because, in effect, they had given up their husbands for a lost cause” but offered little investigation.¹⁵

¹⁴ Kirsten E. Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 6, 14, 5, 161.

¹⁵ The majority of material discussing widowhood in the North also remains wedded to the pension system. For excellent articles on that topic, consult one of the following: Amy E. Holmes, “Such is the Price We

Continuing to delve into the financial elements of widowhood, in 2005 Gross published an essay entitled “And for the Widow and Orphan: Confederate Widows, Poverty, and Public Assistance.” Gross discussed the financial aspects of a widow’s family wealth, property, and the “shift from a reliance on local resources to a reliance on the state.” Her only reference to the emotional experience of being a widow claimed these women became “increasingly loud and active” because they “believed they were sacrificing too much for the cause.” Another helpful article on the financial implications of widowhood is Robert Kenzer’s 2002 essay “The Uncertainty of Life: A Profile of Virginia’s Civil War Widows.” His study provided numerous examples of Confederate widows responding to financial difficulties. Kenzer’s article examined nearly 3,000 of Virginia’s widows and determined their likelihood to rely on relatives for support. When the Civil War ended, Virginian widows “could not look to a national Confederate government for assistance” and therefore depended on kinship ties during periods of financial difficulty. Kenzer exposed instances of widows interpreting wills, moving into the homes of their in-laws, and remarriage. His research showed that “few of these women” with strong kinship ties “needed to take gainful employment.” While this article revealed the impact of family upon widows’ financial lives, it did not explore the emotional support families surely provided.¹⁶

Pay’: American Widows and the Civil War Pension System,” in *Toward a Social History of the American Civil War: Exploratory Essays*, ed. Maris A. Vinovskis (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Megan J. McClintock, “Civil War Pensions and the Reconstruction of Union Families,” *Journal of American History* 83, no. 2 (September 1996); Richard F. Miller, “For His Wife, His Widow, and His Orphan: Massachusetts and Family Aid during the Civil War,” *Massachusetts Historical Review* 6 (2004); The quotations in this paragraph can be found here: Jennifer Lynn Gross, ““You Must Do The Best You Can’: The Civil War Widows of Brunswick County, Virginia, 1860-1920” (MA thesis, University of Richmond, 1995), 97, 2, 56, 76, 87, 97.

¹⁶ Gross completed her dissertation ““Good Angels’: Confederate Widowhood and the Reassurance of Patriarchy in the Postbellum South” in 2001 at the University of Georgia. The article I discuss in this paragraph is a condensed version of her major arguments within the dissertation. In total, she has published

These works scrutinized the topic of widows' economic survival, but engage as well with the non-financial adjustments and opportunities that accompanied the death of a husband, like the ability to borrow male prerogatives and power more easily, in a limited way. Additionally, little research has been completed on widows' emotional and social survival. Drew Gilpin Faust's work comes closest to addressing this aspect of widowhood. Her book, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, offers the most extensive study of the sentimental and communal experience of Civil War widows. Faust's discussion of the Good Death, condolence letters, and mourning rituals all contribute to an understanding of widowhood as a lived experience apart from financial considerations. While Faust's book engaged with some of the topics and themes this dissertation addresses, her focus is on national death in a broader sense, not on the Confederate widows, or even widows more broadly, and thus it ignored their centrality and impact upon the South.¹⁷

The three insights of this dissertation, related to the nineteenth century household, emotion, and widowhood, are grounded in source material from a variety of places. This project is based on research from the Alabama State Archives (Montgomery), Arkansas

three articles out of her dissertation. Jennifer Lynn Gross, "'Good Angels': Confederate Widowhood in Virginia," in *Southern Families at War: Loyalty and Conflict in the Civil War South*, ed. Catherine Clinton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jennifer Lynn Gross, "'And for the Widow and the Orphan': Confederate Widows, Poverty, and Public Assistance," in *Inside the Confederate Nation: Essays in Honor of Emory M. Thomas*, eds. Lesley J. Gordon and John C. Inscoe (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 213, 214; Jennifer L. Gross, "The United Daughters of the Confederacy, Confederate Widows, and the Lost Cause: 'We Must Not Forget or Neglect the Widows,'" in *Women on Their Own: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Being Single*, eds. Rudolph M. Bell and Virginia Yans (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 180-194; Robert Kenzer served as Jennifer Gross' thesis advisor at the University of Richmond. Robert Kenzer, "The Uncertainty of Life: A Profile of Virginia's Civil War Widows," in *The War Was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War*, ed. Joan E. Cashin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 112, 114, 129.

¹⁷ In addition to Faust, in 2008 Mark S. Schantz published a vital book on religion, death, and the American Civil War. Like Faust, he refers only to widows tangentially. Mark S. Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Faust, 146-7, 148.

State Archives (Little Rock), Duke University (Durham), Filson Historical Society (Louisville), George Tyler Moore Center for the Study of the Civil War (Shepherdstown, WV), Georgia Historical Society (Savannah), Kentucky Historical Society (Frankfort), Library of Virginia (Richmond), Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge), Mississippi State Archives (Jackson), Missouri State Archives (Jefferson City and Columbia), State Historical Society of Missouri (Columbia), Tennessee State Archives (Nashville), University of Florida (Gainesville), University of Georgia (Athens), University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill), and the Virginia Historical Society (Richmond). This research is supplemented with published diary/letter collections, as well as digital collections (particularly newspapers).¹⁸

The chapter structure of this dissertation is thematic and loosely chronological, consisting of six paired body chapters. The titles are inspired by the “Solemnization of Matrimony” vows printed in an 1856 edition of *The Book of Common Prayer*:

“I N. take thee M. to my wedded Husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till death us do part, according to God’s holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my Throth.”¹⁹

The connecting thread of the first section, *To Have and to Hold*, is the nineteenth century desire of men and women to “have” (meet, chase, love, court, and marry) a significant other, followed by the urge to once again physically “have and hold” a significant other after war had separated them. Focusing on marriage and widowhood in

¹⁸ The only Confederate I haven’t travelled to is Texas. To include the Texan perspective in my dissertation, I will use published diaries/letter collections. I also intend to request mailed copies of several collections that are of interest to me.

¹⁹ *The Book of Common Prayer, and the Administration of the Sacraments; and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, according to the use of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the United States of America: Together with The Psalter, or Psalms of David* (New York: Dana and Company, 1856), 336.

the antebellum era, 1820-1860, the first chapter explores emotion, as felt by young courting couples, as a guiding (and sometimes, misguiding) force in their actions. In order to fully understand how the Civil War affected engagements (and changed their timelines), readers must know something about traditional antebellum courtship. To realize how drastically the war, and especially the physical separation of soldiering husbands, affected marriages, it helps to know what daily married life was like before the war began. Similarly, wartime mourning customs found their footing in etiquette books published in the early nineteenth century, and the advice of mothers-in-law often stemmed directly from their own experiences as older widows in the antebellum era. For example, the antebellum idea that, “The true wife, when widowed, remains a widow, till death re-unites her to the being—complementary to herself...perpetual widowhood is alone consistent with our Ideal of woman” would be rejected by some, celebrated by others, and debated by many during the war. Civil War marriages, death, and widowhood have crucial ties to antebellum experiences, so it is important to lay this topical foundation. When widows lost a husband, they lost a future that they expected. The antebellum life they had, and that so many of them loved and hoped to reestablish, would not return after the war. The grief over this loss cannot be full understood without this chapter exploring pre-war life.²⁰

Chapter 2, “‘Prepare for it’: Weddings, War, and Uncertain Futures” begins with the hurried courtships, engagements, and wedding ceremonies that took place both at the beginning and throughout the war. A “perfect mania on the subject of matrimony,” infected the South, with churches “open and lighted almost every night for bridals.” As one lover urged in 1861, just three months into his courtship, “Do not let, oh! do not let,

²⁰ Torrey, 130, 129.

any slight obstacles, or conventionalities, prevent you from being mine as soon as you can. We know not what may happen!” His fiancé found herself persuaded and they married July 9, 1861. In a time when everyone seemed to be claiming independence, she claimed her own, and explained to her brother, “I feared that you all might not approve—but my heart relented.” The chapter transitions to explore relationships between married couples during the war, and how distance and separation, two side effects of the conflict, provided the opportunity for soldiering husbands and waiting wives to express their thoughts, opinions, and emotions on paper as never before, and especially, fears about death.²¹

The second section of paired chapters, *To Love, Cherish, and to Obey*, analyzes widowhood during the war. To love—the reactions of widows to death notifications, the intense grief experienced by many, the love of family/friends in attempting to support widows, and the love widows sought in new relationships. To cherish—the wartime work of cherishing, of remembering, of honoring their husbands’ memory. To obey—a discussion of what the Confederacy hoped widows would be, the compliant widows who gained social capital, and the naughty ones who lost it. Chapter 3 contains an analysis of how death came, how widows learned of the deaths, and how they reacted in the immediate weeks to come. Death notifications also brought with them a slew of expectations for widows, as they assumed a new title. This chapter concludes with an analysis of the “image” of Confederate widows, which widows both affected and were effected by. Throughout the war, newspaper reports, government officials, poets, and literature championed a particular version of Confederate widowhood—the young wife

²¹ McGuire, 329; William Duncan Smith, Savannah, to Georgia Page King, St. Simons, 10 April 1861, King and Wilder Family Papers, 1817-1946, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia; Georgia Page King to Henry Lord Page King, 1 July 1861, K-W Papers, GHS.

who selflessly transferred her monogamous love from dead husband to the deathless cause for which he fought. If a young widow could lose a husband and continue to support the war that killed him, what shouldn't other southerners willingly give?²²

Chapter 4, "Living through 'the Harrows of War,'" explores widowhood as a lived wartime experience, beyond the initial grief. For Confederate wives, the death of a husband had the potential to shatter a life and lifestyle, especially with the loss of financial, physical, and emotional support. It also had the perverse power to free women from bad marriages and set them on a road to financial and psychological independence. During the war, Confederate widows may have donned a black uniform of mourning, but their experiences were far from uniform. This chapter offers a look into the wartime experiences of women widowed, specifically exploring lives lived with lingering grief, the effect of shortages on widowhood, the relationships between widows and their mothers-in-law, the reality of "flirty widows," and the challenges those deviant widows posed to the Confederate cause. Some widows hardly seemed to control their grieving. One widow "tottered to a chancel pew, and threw herself prone upon the cushions, her slight frame racked with sobs," when she found herself at an 1862 wedding, in the same church she had wed her now dead soldier the year before. Likewise, Emma Holmes believed that a grieving widow was "the saddest of sights" and hated to see "a young girl of beauty, talents, refinement & wealth, whose mind is so clouded by melancholy as to be oblivious of the realities of the present." A bigger threat to the Confederacy than the widow who grieved too much was the widow who grieved too little. In the antebellum period, the flirty, even sexually 'knowing' widow had been something of a literary trope.

²² "A Sketch of General Ben Hardin Helm," originally published in *The Land We Love*, June 1867, pp. 163-67; among the clippings in the Helm Papers, Kentucky Historical Society.

During the war, such behavior was scandalous, suggesting that a Confederate soldier was easily replaced and his cause unworthy of honoring. “I was in hopes she would be more dignified than other widows,” lamented one disappointed sister in her diary, while another southerner disapproving reflected that while “gloom reigns in the hearts, and homes, of most of our people, widows and widowers are the only ones who are having a gay time.” Communities did not believe that young widows must remain single forever. But, at a time of war, a hasty remarriage seemed implicitly unpatriotic.²³

The final section, *Till Death us do Part*, explores the lasting implications of a husband’s death on the lives of Confederate widows after the Civil War, as well as the ways in which Confederate widows, in turn, were remembered and memorialized. Chapter 5 is a case study of two sisters, Mary Todd Lincoln and Emilie Todd Helm. This chapter focuses upon Emilie and her post-war “career” as a Confederate widow in Kentucky, and widows’ roles in sectional reconciliation more broadly. While Emilie’s quick tongue, famous family, and stint as a Confederate widow in the White House make her a fascinating figure, her experience with death as a young widow in a war-torn Confederacy is somewhat representative. Directed by etiquette books, literature, and southern society as a whole, Emilie is an example of a Confederate widow who performed her part perfectly. “Mother” to the Orphan Brigade, organizer for the UDC, author of unpublished Lost Cause novels and happy fictions of slavery, unswerving puffer of her husband’s memory, Emilie achieved a kind of professional fame as a widow—and through her we can more clearly see the society that created her role, built

²³ Thomas C. De Leon, *Belles Beaux and Brains of the 60’s* (1909, repr. New York: Arno, 1974), 158; Emma Holmes, July 4, 1862, in *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes 1861-1866*, ed. John F. Marszalek (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 179; Sidney Harding Diary, October 11, 1863, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge; Sarah Kennedy, March 19, 1864, Sarah Kennedy Papers, The Civil War Microfilm Collection, #824, Reel 4, Tennessee Library and State Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

her stage, and applauded her performances. Emilie's experience with grief and death contrasts sharply with that of her infamous sister Mary, who, by her own society's standards, did everything exactly wrong as a widow. Emilie mourned with decorum while Mary became a diva of grief, inconsolable and insufferable. With Mary as an illuminating comparative foil and frame for Emilie, this chapter will not only explore their post-war mourning styles, but also reveal how Emilie Todd Helm became exactly what her society demanded she be. In doing so, she gained social and political power, crafting a version of the Todds to perform a certain kind of cultural work for the nation.

The last chapter of this dissertation, "From Scarlett to Alberta: Confederate Widows Remembered," is a preliminary exploration into the portrayal of widows in popular culture. In 1939, Scarlett O'Hara waltzed across the silver screen and flirted her way into American hearts. When her first husband died, she was just seventeen years old and believed that she was far too young to be a widow, for "widows should be old—so terribly old they didn't want to dance and flirt and be admired." Sixty years later another widow, the real Alberta S. Martin, captured the attention of millions of Americans as "the Oldest Living Confederate Widow." With a "yeah, reckon so," twenty-one-year-old Alberta had kissed William Jasper Martin and married him. The year was 1927. William was eighty-one-years-old and a Confederate veteran. Decades later, when asked about her unusual marriage, Alberta explained that it was "better to be an old man's darlin' than a young man's slave." In 1996, Dr. Kenneth Chancey, a member of the Sons of the Confederacy, discovered the elderly Alberta nestled in Elba, Alabama. Poverty and obscurity may have haunted her past, but becoming "the belle of 21st-century Confederate history buffs" as the last Confederate widow changed her life. "I ain't the

oldest livin' Confederate widow," she exclaimed, "I'm the onliest one. The last of the livin'." Exploring the representations of these two widows, and others, fictional and real, highlight images of widowhood that likely affect American perceptions of history far more than the historical monograph. These characters reveal how many Americans processed and remembered the bloodiest war in American history at different points in the past, and are worth exploration.²⁴

This dissertation is ultimately a story of love, loss, readjustments, and, in some cases, a lack of readjustments. By blending cultural and emotional history, this dissertation not only provides perspective on the emotions of Confederate widowhood, but also on the struggles of families, communities, and white southern society as a whole to cope with both the loss of men and the high number of widows. As war widows, these Confederate women had a moral platform and an opportunity to make a statement. They had social capital, and they could withdraw that capital from the bank of Confederate nationalism or continue to champion the Confederate cause that put their husbands in early graves. By introducing an analysis of emotions, emotional power, and the affect these widows had on antebellum mourning rituals and the war itself, this dissertation

²⁴ Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), 121; Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1998), 340; Alberta Martin, interview by Joe Richman, July 1, 1998., <http://www.radiodiaries.org/transcripts/OtherDocs/civilwar.html> (accessed February 1, 2014); Obituary of Alberta Martin., "Alberta Martin, 97, Confederate Widow, Dies," *New York Times*, June 1, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/01/us/alberta-martin-97-confederate-widow-dies.html> (accessed February 1, 2014); Ibid; Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic*, 341; Obituary of Alberta Martin; *Confederates in the Attic*, 342; Ibid; Obituary of Alberta Martin; Order of the Confederate Rose, "Last Living Civil War Widow(s)," http://www.confederate-rose.org/widow-Alberta_Martin.htm (February 1, 2014); Last Confederate Widow, "Funeral," <http://lastconfederatewidow.com/Funeral.htm> (accessed February 1, 2014); Mark Bullock, "Last Confederate Widow Laid to Rest," WSFA, June 12, 2004, <http://www.wsfa.com/Global/story.asp?S=1907163&nav=0RdENY4p> (accessed February 1, 2014).

gives us the first chapter in a much needed emotional history of widows in the American Civil War.

When Hetty Cary kissed her husband goodbye, she did not expect him to die. She had just kissed him, after all, before her entire community, of friends, family, officials, at the altar. Hetty Cary was pretty, so pretty that one soldier believed her to be “the most beautiful woman of her day and generation...altogether the most beautiful woman I ever saw in any land.” On Thursday, January 19, 1865, the war was almost over (though she did not know it). “Richmond’s belle” walked down the aisle and married a Confederate colonel, John Pegram. In spite of the raging Civil War, “all was bright and beautiful” at their wedding, which took place in Saint Paul’s Episcopal Church. John soon returned to duty and on February 5, he received a shot above his lower rib and died almost instantly in the snow. Exactly three weeks from the date of her wedding, Hetty found herself in the same church, with the same people, the same minister, walking down the same aisle, for the funeral. One female diarist wrote, “Again has St. Paul’s, his own beloved church receive[d] the soldier and his bride—the one coffined for a hero’s grave, the other, pale and trembling, though still by his side, in widow’s garb.” Twenty-nine year old Hetty “was like a flower broken in the stalk,” so heartbroken that earlier she had to be torn from the body “almost by force.” Three weeks a wife, Hetty would remain a widow for over 15 years. This story of Hetty Cary is a story of Confederate widowhood that is quite like, and quite unlike, thousands of others.²⁵

²⁵ This dissertation, keeps all spelling and phrasing quoted from documents in its original form without including the intrusive [sic] notation. On some occasions, punctuation has been converted to modern-day notations for clarity. Henry Kyd Douglas, *I Rode with Stonewall: The War Experiences of the Youngest Member of Jackson’s Staff* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 271, 325; Judith W. McGuire, 12 March 1865, in *Diary of a Southern Refugee during the War by A Lady of Virginia* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 341; Burton Harrison, *Recollections Grave and Gay* (New

CHAPTER 1

“BE MY WIFE”: LOVE AND LOSS IN THE ANTEBELLUM SOUTH

“Tivie if you cant be my wife we must be strangers.”
-Winston Stephens to Octavia Bryant¹

“I do not think I will ever forget that ride and frolic out to the Plantation,” sighed Octavia “Tivie” Bryant to her fiancé in October 1856. Her choice, Winston Stephens, was a twenty-six year old plantation owner of almost 360 acres. “The question you asked me about where the house should stand is rather difficult to answer...I will live wherever you wish,” she concluded, so long as she remained “your Tivy.” With her pale complexion, brunette hair, and “expressive black eyes,” Tivie had captured Winston’s heart so completely that he would later say “you had as well bid the Sun cease to wander the earth with its heat, giving life to vegetation and thereby producing plenty for all Gods creation as to bid the heart of Winston not to commune with the object of its adoration.”²

They fell in love in a little place called Welaka, a town founded by Tivie’s father in 1852, about 70 miles south of Jacksonville, Florida. The sunny town’s warm winters, easy river access, and reputation as a paradise for hunters of game and fish attracted tourists and settlers alike. By 1860, just eight years after its founding, the town boasted 317 white residents, 66 homes and stores, and 137 slaves. Winston owned ten of those slaves, and combined with the acreage he owned and his respectable reputation, he was

¹ Winston will die in the war. Winston Stephens to Octavia Bryant, February 20, 1859, Stephens-Bryant Family Papers, George A. Smathers Special and Area Studies Collections, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida. Stephens-Bryant Family Papers henceforth referred to as S-B Papers, UF.

² Octavia Bryant to Winston Stephens, October 12, 1856, S-B Papers, UF; Winston Stephens to Octavia Bryant, June 27, 1859, S-B Papers.

quite the catch. But, when he asked Tivie's parents for their blessing, her parents vehemently refused. Their daughter, after all, was just fourteen.³

Engaged, married, or widowed – as women of the antebellum South stepped through the various stages and relationships, they navigated a whirl of expectations, ideals, models, principles, rules, standards, and values. Written and unwritten, the etiquette of 1820-1860 seeped through most elements of a woman's public and private life. But even as custom and decorum guided couples, emotion, as felt by young courting couples, played a major role in guiding (and sometimes, misguiding) their actions. Family opinions, neighbors' gossip, popular literature, and weekly sermons influenced those searching for love, but so did feelings, moods, impressions, and instincts. Young couples in the antebellum era sought love, wanted love, craved love, though that exact definition of love differed person to person. And because that definition differed, and because emotions are changeable, couples fell into love and out of love, only to stumble into it again. Some found their marital matches blissful, others hellish, and some blandly tolerable. If and when those husbands died, widows remained, and the choice to love another, or not, could be made again. This emotional world, of antebellum love and loss, and the transitions from childhood to wifehood to motherhood to widowhood, were rarely smooth, and reveal the power of emotion in the antebellum South.

In her mid to late teens, a young southern woman, and her family (if she had one), began to think about her future – a future that included marriage. Certainly, southern women generally married younger than their northern counterparts. By the time a lady,

³ Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Slave Schedule I, Population Schedule, Putnam County, as quoted in *Rose Cottage Chronicles: Civil War Letter of the Bryant-Stephens Families of North Florida*, eds. Arch Fredric Blakey, Ann Smith Lainhart, and Winston Bryant Stephens, Jr. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 14.

living in the South, celebrated her twentieth birthday, strong economic, social, and cultural forces pushed her towards marriage. She had a difficult task, balancing her desires, her family's desires, and her potential husband's desires. The more money a family had, the higher the stakes in this balance. As Tivie discovered, the disapproval of a family could spell disaster for the desires of a young heart. On her fifteenth birthday, Tivie could hardly believe how her life had changed. "A year ago to night I was dressed in a pink muslin dress low necked and short sleeved...to night high necked and long sleeved black dress." Sent away by her parents to her uncle's Massachusetts boarding school, she did not need to reflect long before concluding, "Oh how I would like to be home." On the surface, Winston, as a future son-in-law, was not objectionable. After all, he was respectable, wealthy, and a member of the same political party and religious denomination as the family. But, besides their belief that their daughter was far too young, and they also hoped she would marry someone with a background more similar to hers, perhaps someone in banking or law, who would move her to a city. The idea of their daughter living in the country, caring for a husband, children, and slaves, in sickness and health, 'til death do them part, was out of the question. And so, to boarding school she went, with the hope that she would mature and move on.⁴

The entry into boarding school served as a defining phase for elite girls of the Old South. As school girls in all-female academies, young ladies, often about fourteen-years of age, experienced a new degree of freedom in their home away from home. Intimate friendships, often highly romantic, commonly developed, and offered the opportunity to exchange physical affection, pen lengthy letters of love, and engage in other rituals of

⁴ Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 90; Octavia Bryant Diary, October 21, 1856, S-B Papers.

courtship, from gifting flowers to exchanging rings. “Linda I am almost crazy to see you dearest,” wrote one schoolgirl preparing to return to Wesleyan Female College in Virginia, “I suppose you will not fail to choose our desk and remember we are partners for everything next session.” A Georgia school girl similarly missed her friend, sighing into her diary about desires to “feel [her] breath on my cheek...her hand, (my hand), clasped in mine....her sweet ruby lips pressed to mine.” A third experienced the sorrows of heartbreak, explaining, “I have had many crys about you my darling, last night I sat by my window and the tears trickled down my cheeks, and I do not think my heart ever ached worse and it was all for you Lou.” Through the acts and practices of finding “a single true friend,” young ladies experienced the emotional turmoil of lust and love, jealousy and loneliness – emotions not unlike that of the formalized courtship to come. Graduation marked both an end and a beginning, which most realized all too well. “Today is my last school day! Time is ever rolling onward...the childish heart must be exchanged for a garb of dignity, the hallowed books must be thrown lightly away, and I am to be ushered a mass of whalebone & starch into the fashionable world,” reflected one graduating schoolgirl in 1857.⁵

Upon their return home, many upper class young ladies felt uncertain, and some openly opposed to, the idea of marriage. “Monotony kills me as dead as a door nail,” pronounced one twenty-three year old in 1826, “it will never do for me to be married.” “Two people coming together in holy wedlock always remind me of two Birds in a cage.

⁵ Loula Nannie Nottingham to Olin Davis, August 13, 1858, Beale-Davis Family Papers, SHC, as quoted in Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 74-5; Kendall Rogers Diary, July 21, 1855, Rogers Collection, Emory, as quoted in Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 73; Sallie Collinson to Anna Louisa Norman, 1860, Willis Papers, SHC, as quoted in Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 75-6; Susan McDowall Diary, as quoted in Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 74; Loula Kendall Rogers Journal, July 3, 1857, Rogers Collection, Emory, as quoted in Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 80-1.

Unless they sing in concert, what discord ensues,” agreed the opinionated and wealthy Mary Telfair. Likewise, Ann Reid informed a friend “that I was enjoying the independence of my Spinstership...and I should be very sorry to think, that only those who were to be launched on the sea of Matrimony, were happy.” Others did not object to marriage outright, but simply worried about their own abilities to fall in love, like Mary, who felt “my heart seems made of granite as far as men are concerned.”⁶

These uncertainties over marriage came from a variety of places, from a love of independence to a fear of making a poor choice. “Marriages are said to be made in Heaven,” reflected Martha Richardson, “but surely they are so jumbled together they get terribly mismatched by the time they reach us.” Drunkards, gold diggers, gamblers, adulterers, and the potentially aloof were all to be avoided. Many young ladies confessed something along the lines of, “I see so many unhappy matches it almost discourages me.” In their diaries and letters, young ladies often poked fun at their suitors, deeming them “great bores” and “loafers,” often giving them unflattering nicknames like “Doctor Kill-pill” or “the fat professor.” These nicknames and descriptors hinted at a darker truth, though, in the importance of making the right choice. For all the fun they had in their flirtations, and collection of suitors, most realized marriage was serious business, and not always written about positively. “So Sally is all but on the scaffold,” reflected one friend,

⁶ Laura will marry, quite unhappily, and die eight years and four children later. As quoted in Anya Jabour, “‘It Will Never Do for Me to Be Married’: The Life of Laura Wirt Randall, 1803-1833,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Summer 1997, 193; Mary Telfair to Mary Few, July 24, no year (item 292), William Few Collection, Georgia Archives, Morrow, as quoted in Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South, 1800-1865* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 1; It is hard to determine how many white women remained single in the antebellum South. Some historians believe between one-fifth and one-fourth of adult white women remained unmarried for life, others argue the number hovers around 7.5%. Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness*, 3; Ann Reid to William Moultrie Reid, June 2, 1848, William Moultrie Reid Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, S.C., as quoted in Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness*, 1; Mary Francis Page Cook to Lucy Carter, March 13, n.d., Byrd Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, as quoted in Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 134.

“I hope sincerely she may not find this being noosed, decidedly inconvenient, to say nothing more.”⁷

The marital choice had serious legal implications, for when a woman married in the early 1800s, she surrendered her legal identity, become a “covered woman,” a *feme covert*. As the English judge Sir William Blackstone stated, “By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs everything.” A husband controlled her property, represented her in court, retained custody of her children, and even had the legal responsibility to govern her behavior with physical force, if he thought necessary. When married, an antebellum wife fell under the protections of her husband, without a legal or economic identity. And so, her choice was of paramount importance, for her happiness and survival.⁸

While Mary Telfair believed, “stupid men are often the best matches,” most young white women preferred a well-educated, well-travelled, wealthy suitor, if possible. “I will not give away my heart, and am afraid to exchange it, lest I should not get one in return equally valuable,” explained one young South Carolinian. Southern society expected women to marry, and even though some may have expressed hesitations, most

⁷ Martha Richardson to James Screven, January 21, 1821, Arnold-Screven Papers, Southern Historical Collection, as quoted Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 70; Amanda Jane Cooley's Diary, June 30, 1850, Virginia Historical Society, as quoted in Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 89; Mary Cooke to Martha Hunter, January 19, 1840, Hunter Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society; Laura Margaret Cole Smith Diary, Brumby and Smith Family Papers, Southern Historical Society; Willie to Mary Virginia Early, August 19, 1844, Early Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, as quoted in Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 130-1; Mary Hawes to Virginia Peal, August 26, 1850, Terhune Papers, Duke, as quoted in Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 136.

⁸ For an excellent discussion of law and marriage, see Victoria Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 59-87; William Blackstone, as quoted in Marylynn Salmon, “Equality or Submersion? Feme Covert Status in Early Pennsylvania,” in *Women of America: A history*, edited by Carol Ruth Berkin and Mary Beth Norton (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), 94.

young ladies eagerly anticipated the cultural ideal of marriage. “I have long sought for one on whose confidence to rely, to whom I can without restraint, pour out my inmost secrets ‘from out their thousand secret cells,’ one who can love and confide and bear with me through all the various vicissitudes of life; for such a one I long have sought and now I (think) have found. May such be the case,” hoped one love-struck woman. The romantic notion of a true, eternal love, as the key to bliss, spread far beyond her diary pages. Many women sought what John N. Shealy sought, “a grand picture of life to see two rational beings in the glow of youth and hope, which invests life with the hope of happiness, appear together, and openly acknowledge their preference for each other, voluntarily enter into a league of perpetual friendship, and call heaven and earth to witness the sincerity of the solemn vows.” Jennie Burson, John’s beloved in Georgia, worried ceaselessly about a marriage to him, while he remained hopelessly in love. He assured her that “Not can I ever forget you, till my pulse shall cease to beat, and my frail body humbled in the dust shall memory estrange my thoughts from one who stands prominently paramount.” He promised a heart that would “always reflect and beat in union and unerring fidelity with yours.” Even with his oaths, Jennie worried. “I am left now without Father or Mother to keep me from difficulties,” she explained to him, reflecting on her deceased parents. “I may innocently get into with scheming young men, I know I am very young and with but little or no experience and just arrived at a period in life when parents are most needed.” He persisted, and in the end, she yielded, “honored to think I have won such a heart as I believe yours to be,” and married in 1859.⁹

⁹ Mary Telfair to Mary Few, January 7, 1828 (item 28), William Few Collection, Georgia Archives, Morrow, as quoted in Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness*, 1; Laura Margaret Cole Smith Diary, October 1, 1833, Brumby and Smith Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection microfilm, Anya Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters*, 94; Elizabeth Ann Cooley McClure Diary, November 9, 1845,

For the upper class, the process of meeting, courting, and engagement was fairly standardized. A young lady's days and nights were filled with social activities – teas, parties, weddings, balls, concerts, lectures, and picnics. Many young men also attended these events, and when a meeting was made, a spark ignited, the couple would begin their courtship. Young women would invite the potential suitor to escort her to various social events which typically involved a group of people. While arranged marriages were few in the antebellum era, parents nonetheless kept a close eye on their children, ensuring the social events they attended contained a guest list of suitable partners. As superficial flirtations turned serious, young couples sought semi-private and private moments for more personal and serious conversation. In the ritualized and carefully watched courtship process, these moments were rare, so couples often turned to letters as an opportunity for intimacy. Judiciously written and analyzed, these slips of paper were of tremendous importance for courting couples, as explained in the 1858 *Dictionary of Love*. “Love letters, billets-doux, are among the sweetest things which the whole career of love allows,” begins the author, under a pseudonym. “By letters a lover can say a thousand extravagant things which he would blush to utter in the presence of his fair charmer. He heaps up mountains of epithets and hyperboles, expressing the inexpressible heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths of his affection.” It is in these letters that the lover “dissolves into sighs, and spreads himself out, on a sheet of gilt-edged note paper, into transparent thinness.” Kissed, carried around, and cherished, love letters became quite

Virginia Historical Society, as quoted in Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 163; John Shealy to Jennie Burson, March 23, 1859, John Shealy to Jennie Burson, January 17, 1859, Jennie Burson to John N. Shealy, January 14, 1859, Jennie Burson to John Shealy, February 3, 1859, John N. and Eugenia B. Shealy Letters, 1859-1862, Louisiana State University Archives.

sacred to a person in love, and an opportunity for the expression of intimacy without from parental oversight.¹⁰

Certainly, in Tivie's case, and to her parents' dismay, she could not resist the temptation to dive back into old flirtations, especially with Winston. Tivie returned home from boarding school in 1858 as tiny as ever, barely over five feet tall and scarcely 100 pounds. Perhaps a more dutiful daughter, or perhaps having learned her lesson from her last broken engagement, she promised her parents not to entertain any more suitors until she was at least 18 years old. When Winston returned from fighting in the 3rd Seminole War, she informed him that "I was too young, and am now too young to judge for my happiness in my future life." "We all esteem you as a friend, and wish you to visit the house as gentlemen do, but not in any other position as regards myself," she further explained.¹¹

In the following months, Tivie and Winston saw each other often at parties and dinners. Spring blossomed and then another hot Florida summer began, harkening back to the summer they fell in love just two years prior. Despite Tivie's repeated insistence that they were simply friends, she took great pleasure in Winston's continued attention. "While I played [piano] he watched me the whole time and when the melon came he began throwing seeds at me and I at him and we became quite friendly" she wrote into her diary. His letters put "roses to my cheeks" as she read them. Despite all the beautiful and eligible ladies in Welaka, Winston "talked to me most of the evening" at parties and always "danced the first dance with me and the last." It was not long before Winston, or

¹⁰ Theocritus, Jr. (pseud.), *Dictionary of Love* (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1858) 146, as quoted in Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Oxford University, 1989), 12.

¹¹ Winston Stephens to Octavia Bryant, 27 June 1859, S-B Papers, UF; Octavia Bryant to Winston Stephens, 15 February 1858, S-B Papers, UF.

the “Dear Crabid old Bachelor,” as he called himself, began openly expressing his devotion to her once more.¹²

When he proposed again in September, Tivie hesitated. “Forgive my keeping you in such suspense but you know Yes or No are the hardest words in the world to say,” Tivie tried to explain to Winston. After much thought, she attempted both to satisfy her heart and remain a dutiful daughter, deciding “I will agree to be engaged to you secretly until I am 18, then I will ask my parents again and I hope gain their consent.” Winston would continue to press for an earlier wedding date, but Tivie remained resolute. “Dear Old Man I do indeed pity you in your loneliness,” she replied, “but oh I cannot yet give up my single life, you know I did not wish to marry for years yet.”¹³

By February 1859, Winston had grown impatient. He requested a secret meeting with Tivie amongst the haunting stones of a graveyard. There was “no other safe way” to have the discussion he planned. Between graves he attempted to convince her to marry him without parental approval, but his efforts backfired miserably and Tivie broke off their engagement. “I never cried so much in my life,” Tivie wept into her diary. Winston sent her angry letters, claiming, “I have ben led astray by your smiles and sweet words of promises.” He accused Tivie of “an irreparable wrong you have done an innocent and unoffending heart.” He wrote: “go to your parents for forgiveness as it seems they are the only ones you care for.” Unable to stomach her presence, Winston concluded: “Tivie if you cant be my wife we must be strangers.”¹⁴

¹² Octavia Bryant Diary, 5 June 1858, S-B Papers, UF; Octavia Bryant to Winston Stephens, 11 December 1858, S-B Papers, UF; Octavia Bryant Diary, 5 July, 1858, S-B Papers, UF; Octavia Bryant to Winston Stephens, 29 January 1859, S-B Papers, UF.

¹³ Octavia Bryant to Winston Stephens, 2 September 1858, S-B Papers, UF; Octavia Bryant to Winston Stephens, 1 January 1859, S-B Papers, UF.

¹⁴ Octavia Bryant to Winston Stephens, 13 February 1859, S-B Papers, UF; Octavia Bryant Diary, 20 February 1859, S-B Papers, UF; Winston Stephens to Octavia Bryant, 20 February 1859, S-B Papers, UF.

And yet, he could not banish his love and desire for the young girl. After all, her 18th birthday was only getting closer. Winston argued for their marriage as a superior choice to “matches that are formed by parents and friends to suit their wish.” Winston combined both logic and compliments in an attempt to tangle her emotions. By July of 1859, she was back to being his “angel purity of love and Goodness!” Resigned to the fact that she would not budge on her parents’ demands, Winston began signing letters with a countdown to her 18th birthday in October. “Two months and twenty one days,” he would write. Tivie began planning the wedding yet again, but this time gained the confidence of her mother. She wrote a letter to her father, who was traveling, requesting his permission. “I would dislike to marry without [your consent],” she explained, “but if you do not, I will be obliged to for my own happiness.” This time, Winston would come first. Tired of fighting his daughter and perhaps realizing the futility of doing so, Tivie’s father granted his blessing. Happy to have the tumultuous four years of courting behind them, Tivie and Winston finally wed on November 1, 1859. Winston was 30 years old; Tivie was twelve years his junior.¹⁵

While most women had less eventful walks to the aisle than Tivie, the majority of women in the antebellum South would eventually be married. “Were you ever so delighted as to grow dizzy, I have been so often, and to you I am indebted oftenest for that exstatic pleasure,” wrote one woman of her feelings about engagement to her fiancé. The wedding day marked an important shift in a woman’s life, no matter her class. “A mixture of joy and sorrow, the pain of adieus and separation from my home and kindred, the happiness of loving and being loved,” all brought together, reflected one nineteen-

¹⁵ Winston Stephens to Octavia Bryant, 10 April 1859, S-B Papers, UF; Winston Stephens to Octavia Bryant, 31 July 1859, S-B Papers, UF; Octavia Bryant to James W. Bryant, 6 September 1859, S-B Papers, UF.

year old bride. With this marriage, she joined a new family, took on a new set of responsibilities, and moved to a new home. Weddings were typically small, with close family and friends in attendance, a celebration of love and the transition to full womanhood. Young ladies met this transition with various degrees of excitement, but either way, as one young bride commemorated in her diary, “the wedding is over, and I am MARRIED.”¹⁶

Numerous types of prescriptive literature influenced societal expectations and the lives of women in the antebellum South, especially during courtship and marriage. Etiquette books, although primarily read by elite white women, spread ideals and expectations to much of white southern society. Antebellum America did not lack for advice manuals, for “aside from frequent revisions and new editions, twenty-eight different manuals appeared in the 1830s, thirty-six in the 1840s and thirty-eight more in the 1850s—an average of over three new ones annually in the pre-Civil War decades.” In addition to the pricier, bound editions, publishers also released shorter, less expensive manuals, like the 1859 *Beadle’s Dime Book of Practical Etiquette*, 72 pages, and the competing 1860 *Etiquette, and the Usages of Society*, 64 pages. Each cost ten cents. And in addition to the many American-published volumes, these conduct books had a transatlantic air about them, spanning oceans and countries in addition to regions and states. In 1820, British writers authored roughly 70% of the etiquette books published in the United States. By 1850, that number dropped to 30%, as American-born authors

¹⁶ Susan Heiskell McCampbell to William McCampbell, August 14, 1858, Collection of Heiskell, McCampbell, Wilkes, and Steel Family Materials, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, as quoted in Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 95; Anne Eliza Pleasants Gordon Diary, June 22, 1857, Virginia Historical Society, Anya Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters*, 184; Elizabeth Ann Cooley McClure Diary, March 15, 1846, Virginia Historical Society, as quoted in Anya Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters*, 185.

began writing their own codes for behavior. Even so, much of the advice mirrored the English originals.¹⁷

Lydia Maria Child, for instance, penned *American Frugal Housewife*, published in 1828. By 1833, it was in its twelfth edition, sharing admonitions against waste and frivolity. According to Child, a young woman should not enjoy herself “while she is single,” but rather, see the “domestic life as the gathering place of the deepest and purest affections; as the sphere of woman’s enjoyments as well as her duties.” Catherine Beecher, sister of the famous author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, similarly believed that of all female experiences, a woman’s domestic life was most important, and devoted her own life to domestic writing, including the annually reprinted *Treatise on Domestic Economy*. The manual contained advice on everything from early rising to child care to mental health. “So a woman,” she began early in the work, “educated with the tastes and habits of the best New England or Virginia housekeepers, would encounter many deprivations and trials.” She attempted to prevent women from these trials through her advice. Dancing, for instance, was a recreation to be avoided. She described a room “where the young collect, in their tightest dresses, to protract, for several hours, a kind of physical execration, which is not habitual to them.” In this situation, “the blood is made to circulate more swiftly than ordinary,” “the pores of the skin are excited,” “the stomach is loaded with indigestible articles, and the quiet, needful to digestion, withheld,” all while “the music begins, most of the conversation ceases; while the young prepare themselves for future sickness, and the old look smiling on.” She concluded that in fifteen years, she

¹⁷ Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Learning how to Behave: A Historical Study of American Etiquette Books* (New York: Macmillan, 1946) 18; John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 45; Samuel G. Goodrich, *Recollections of a Lifetime* (New York: Miller, Orton, and Mulligan, 1856), 2:388-89, as described in John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 47.

has never seen a situation in which dancing has not had “a bad effect, either on the habits, the intellect, the feelings, or the health” of young ladies.¹⁸

Literary journals and magazines proved similarly influential in the antebellum South, particularly the *Godey's Lady Book* magazine. In 1822, Sarah Josepha Hale began writing and editing to support her family, when she found herself widowed with five children. Her career brought her to the editorship of *Godey's*, a magazine whose circulation reached 150,000 monthly subscribers by 1860. From 1837 to 1877, Hale pulled together issues that included essays, poems, engravings, and music to interest and educate her female readers on topics from dress to dance. Often, the messages came through story, like the January 1851 “The Constant; or, The Anniversary Present.” This tale shares the story of a young and beautiful wife, Catherine, and her husband Willis, a man with a “spirit [that] craves continual excitement, and has not yet learned that it is the love of woman’s purer nature which it needs.” Each night, he left his wife and baby for one of “the most respectable clubs in the city,” a night of friends, alcohol, and gambling. He remained unaware of the “injustice of his conduct” until he overheard a friend of his wife’s urge her to attend a party. “Why, every one’s talking about it, my child, how you are cooped up here, and Willis at the clubhouse night after night,” informed the visitor, before exclaiming, “If he went to the club, I’d flirt, that’s all, and we’d see who would hold out the longer.” Willis’ wife admitted to her loneliness, but reminded her friend that two wrongs “never make a right” and shared she would “try to make his home as pleasant

¹⁸ Famously, Child would edit the memoir of Harriet Jacobs, which would later become *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Sarah A. Leavitt, *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart: A Cultural History of Domestic Advice* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 10; Lydia Maria Child, *The American Frugal Housewife, dedicated to those who are not ashamed of economy*, 12th ed. (Boston: Carter, Hendee, and Co., 1833), 95; Catherine E. Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, For the Use of Young Ladies at Home and At School* (Boston: T. H. Webb, 1842), 39, 246-9.

as possible, and when he is weary of his gay companions he will return to me with more interest.” Her husband stole away with “a little sting of self-reproach.” Catherine did not go to the party that night, he did go to the club, and by the close of the week, and departed for a business trip to Paris. He promised “the most charming present” for their wedding anniversary. “Dear Kate,” he wrote on the gift three months later, “I have searched all over Paris, and could not find anything that I thought would please you than the included, which is my resignation of club membership. Will you please send it to the president, and accept the trust and earnest love of your absent husband.” Upon his return home, he informed her friend, “Kate’s way was the best,” and supposedly, the friend could not help telling the story, and thus, “it is a secret no longer.” The advisory message could not be clearer to young wives, for as the patient young Catherine reflected, “nor would it be wise to annoy my husband with complaints. Nothing provokes a man like an expostulation.”¹⁹

Religion, and religious figures, also contributed to the prescription of ideals for women. Often, the advice of conduct books and Christian ministers overlapped, reinforcing one another and reappearing in sermons and theological study. “Let me say to both, seek, by all proper means, to promote each other’s happiness; and especially remember that the great object of your union is to help each other to heaven,” urged James Andrew, a bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in 1847. This “proper means” came with a slew of expectations for young brides that mimicked etiquette books. She should “keep a pure heart, a bright eye, a kind look, loving words, a clean house, a well-managed pantry and kitchen: be neat and tidy in dress and person;

¹⁹ Leavitt, *From Catherine Beecher to Martha Stewart*, 17; Alice B. Neal, “The Constant; or the Anniversary Present,” in *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, Vol. 42, January 1851.

love your Bible and your prayers” in order to “be certain to deserve your husband’s love.” Reverend E. P. Rogers, of the First Presbyterian Church of Augusta, Georgia, offered advice to unmarried young women, urging them to not “wear the bright apparel of the butterfly” for there “is no beauty like the beauty of goodness.” In his view, a young girl “prostituting” herself “on the altar of vanity” and “running a giddy round of gaiety, frivolity, and dissipation” was a “sad, heart-breaking sight on earth.”²⁰

A powerful message of the superiority of husbands, and men more generally, came through ministers’ admonishments. “The apostle says, ‘Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands,’” chided James Andrew, continuing “there are some wives who seem to me to act very unwisely in this matter.” The Bible was commonly used as a common defense for male superiority, as one plantation mistress simply put to her diary, “Our mother Eve when she transgress’d was told her husband should rule over her—then how dare any of her daughters to dispute that point.” Methodist minister John Bayley likewise believed a true wife cultivated attitudes of “mildness, softness, sweetness of temper” and regarded her husband with “reverence” above all else. James Andrew agreed, “Let your husband see, let him feel, that next to God, he is enthroned in your heart.” That proof would come “in your looks, your words, the neatness of your person, and the arrangement of your household matters...study his peculiar tastes and temperament, and accommodate yourself to them as far as may me.” A proper wife would not chide, guide, or disagree, for “doubtless many husbands, once kind, have been ruined by such management.” And a proper husband would “remember that your wife is

²⁰ James O. Andrew, *Family Government: A Treatise on Conjugal, Parental, and Familial Duties* (Charleston: Jenkins, 1847), 35, 34-5; See Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family*, for an excellent, and more thorough, exploration into religious ideals and realities in antebellum courtship and marriage. E. O. Rogers, “Woman’s Proper Sphere,” in ed. Robert Baird, *The Christian Union, and Religious Memorial*, vol. II (New York: Samuel Hueston, 1849), 676-7.

a fallen and imperfect creature...you will therefore have need to understand well and practise on the maxim bear and forbear.”²¹

Episcopal bishop James Madison joined the conversation, agreeing as well, and advised his daughter to “never to attempt to controul your husband by opposition of any kind.” He believed “a difference with your husband ought to be considered as the greatest calamity” and urged her “to believe that his prudence is his best guide.” This letter, though written in 1811, would be published and republished continually, in the *Richmond Enquirer* in 1818, the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1834, and the *Watchman of the South* in 1839. The *Southern Literary Messenger*, a magazine published monthly in the antebellum South, likewise published pieces that reflected popular expectations for female behavior. “The faithful wife will not refuse to obey her husband, in all matters where he may rightfully claim her subjection,” argued another clergyman in the 1834 edition. Take poetry, as another example, which frequently appeared in these pages. A number of poems centered on the somber topic of an ideal, beautiful young woman’s deathbed. As one modern historian put it, “to the Romantic imagination, there was something compelling about the death of the young and pure, dying in the very fullness of life.” “A Lady of Virginia,” for example, composed the 1847 “Lines on the Death of a Lovely Young Girl,” which read, in part, “Tell of the virtues she possessed, Who on the bier low; With cold clasp’d hands upon that breast, Which ever felt for wo.” In lines like these, poets focused on a woman’s idyllic qualities,

²¹ Andrew, *Family Government*, 31, 34, 30-1; Lund Washington, 1789, Washington Collection, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., as quoted Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 34; John Bayley, *Marriage As It Is and As It Should Be* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1857), 131, as quoted in Thomas E. Buckley, S.J., *The Great Catastrophe of My Life: Divorce in the Old Dominion* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 178.

peaceful acceptance of death, and her still body, sending messages to men and women alike about ideal characteristics of women.²²

Families, too, guided women, especially young brides. “You will have to study housekeeping. You are too young to have learnt much of it; but you have been an apt scholar in other branches and I hope so in this,” directed one father to his recently married daughter. Another father advised his eighteen-year old daughter with “you are now in the most interesting and critical period of life—a young married lady—your own welfare and happiness and that of your husband depend much upon yourself and your early adoption of those rules of conduct that are suited to your situation.” To love a woman who complained, cried, or scolded, in his opinion, “is more than a mortal man can do,” so she should instead seek “kindness and gentleness” as the “natural and proper means of the wife.” Mothers agreed with the advice, hoping their daughters “may be one of those wives whose price is far above rubies,” with a calculated amiability “to increase the esteem and affections of your companion.” At the end of the day, as one mother reminded her daughter, “a single life has fewer troubles; but then it is not one for which our maker designed us.” Agreeing with the more impersonal messages of etiquette books, literature, and sermons, families also encouraged their daughters to behave by listening to husbands and devoting themselves to a keeping house, to bring about a true happiness. As pro-slavery intellectual George Fitzhugh put it more bluntly, “A husband, a lord and master, whom she should love, honor and obey, nature designed for every

²² James Madison, “Advice from a Father to an Only Daughter,” *Watchman of the South*, November 21, 1839, as quoted in Thomas Buckley, *The Great Catastrophe of My Life*, 177; *Southern Literary Magazine*, 1, 1834, as quoted in Buckley, 177; In reading this monthly journal between 1844-1859, historian Mark E. Schantz discovered at least 135 poems with death as a central topic. Mark S. Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America’s Culture of Death* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 101; *Southern Literary Messenger*, 13 (May 1847), 315, as quoted in Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country*, 102.

woman, for the number of males and females is the same. If she be obedient, she is in little danger of mal-treatment.” Even future family, the fiancés, offered advice to their brides to be. “I see married folks get clashing often—this we will not, we cannot,” emphasized one.²³

While these ideals about proper courtships, marriages, and womanhood spread throughout southern society, the practical application of those rituals varied widely. Families that owned land, but not slaves, often aspired to live up to the ideals of the elite. They read their bibles, worked their farms, and encouraged their sons and daughters to select respectable spouses from similarly-aspiring families. But some women, like Anna Cooke, chose not to follow a conventional path. Her family had money and connections, yet she chose not to wed, and in 1820, at age thirty-five, delivered a stillborn baby. The father, she claimed, was a wealthy Kentucky politician, and the baby was conceived while his wife was at church. A reader of romantic literature, and poet herself, Anna transformed her story into a tragic seduction straight from the pages of her well-worn novels. Antebellum women commonly read sentimental books, featuring fallen female characters, like Susana Rowon’s *Charlotte Temple*, which warned young ladies against the dangers of making immoral choices during courtship. According to his confession, eighteen year old Jereboam Orville Beauchamp heard about the politician’s dishonorable behavior, visited Anna, and after which, the woman nearly twice his age “began to haunt

²³ William T. Barry to Susan, August 1, 1824, Barry Papers, University of Virginia, as quoted Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 19; John Crittenden to Ann Coleman, November 18, 1831, Crittenden Collection, Duke University, as quoted Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 68; Nancy Thomas to Sally Gillet, December 5, 1824, Fuller-Thomas Collection, Duke University, as quoted Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 68; Anne Izard to Mary Manigault, Manigault Collection, Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, as quoted Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 59; George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South; or, The Failure of Free Society* (Richmond: A. Morris, Publisher, 1854), 214-5; Susan Heiskell McCampbell to William McCampbell, August 14, 1858, Collection of Heiskell, McCampbell, Wilkes, and Steel Family Materials, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, as quoted in Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family*, 95.

my thoughts and my dreams.” Unable to resist her, he proposed, and she informed him that “she would kiss the hand and adore the person who would avenge her,” desiring that her former lover “die through her instrumentality.” She married him, and in return Jereboam approached the politician, “and muttered in his face, ‘Die you villain!’ And as I said that I plunged the dagger to his heart.”²⁴

Anna stayed with her husband in prison. They attempted a double suicide via laudanum, but botched it. The morning of his execution, she tried again, but could not keep the laudanum down. The third time being the charm, they instead used a knife, smuggled in by Anna, to inflict fatal stab wounds into themselves. Anna’s suicide proved successful shortly afterwards, while a bleeding Jereboam was taken to the gallows to be quickly hung. Their corpses were arranged in an embrace, placed in a single coffin, and buried together, as they requested. One of Anne’s poem’s graced the tombstone, which included the stanza “Daughter of virtue! Moist thy tear, This tomb of love and honor claim; For thy defense the husband here, Laid down in youth his life and fame.” Their story, and their unique take on honor in the South, became infamous overnight, published in newspapers and novels across the nation.²⁵

While Anna and Jereboam clothed their story in the pervasive moral language of the day, some white women, often of the lowest economic class, did not place a priority on following etiquette strictures at all, as the exceptional case of Edward Isham highlights. Through his autobiography, Edward, a poor white laborer who murdered his North Carolina employer, offers insight into the lives of women in one explosive man’s

²⁴ For an excellent book on this story, and its significance, see Matthew G. Schoenbachler, *Murder and Madness: The Myth of the Kentucky Tragedy* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009); Jereboam O. Beauchamp, “The Confession of Jereboam O. Beauchamp,” in *The Beauchamp Tragedy in Kentucky* (New York: Dinsmore & Co., 1858), 12, 14, 33.

²⁵ Ibid.

life. As a miner, lumberjack, herdsman, farmer, gambler, drinker, and fighter, Edward's world was awash with foul language, violence, and sex. In 1848, Mary Brown, of Alabama, abandoned her first husband, married Edward, and moved to Georgia. "I saw her and she and I agreed to run off and we did so...she was 20 yrs old and very pretty," recalled Edward. What Edward and men like him lacked in social prestige and wealth, they overcompensated with flashy exhibits of masculinity. Success in drinking, gambling, and brawling bought a hardened reputation that demanded respect. The poorest of white women, who lacked formal power and legal rights in the antebellum South, often relied on these men for protection. A dark side to this world of brazen action, of course, was the effect it had on those men loved most – themselves and their women. Edward's reckless and relentless thirst for violence would not only bring about his eventual execution, but the loss of Mary. Certainly, she was not the only woman in his life. His mother, three wives, and many lovers provided him with moments of refuge, comfort, adventure, and sex throughout his short thirty-two years of existence. In this male-dominated world of masculine behavior, women often served as prizes to be won from fathers, lovers, or even other husbands. Women manipulated these situations, pitting men against one another, choosing the best situation as it became available, and abandoning that situation when it became necessary. Rather than endure Edward's abusive behavior, when he left for Tennessee, yet again, Mary decided to shape her own circumstances. When Edward returned from Chattanooga, after another stint of carousing, he seemed surprised to find "something wrong with Mary, she did not treat me kindly and I became jealous." He followed her, and at dusk discovered another man

“sitting on a bed with her and his arms around her.” Not surprisingly, Edward tried to shoot him, and when that failed, “jumped off and pursued him with my bowie knife.”²⁶

Prescriptive literature and elite society prized the female practice of patience, politeness, meekness, chastity, self-sacrifice, and loyalty. For women like Mary with a husband like Edward, however, this moral code promised a life of frustration and destitution. Instead, she chose a new path, a new partner, and new marriage, as it suited her. In Edward’s world, marriage appeared informal and fleeting, suggesting that these unions lacked legal sanction, and are perhaps more accurately viewed as common law liaisons. Even so, they reveal a world of relationships quite unlike the ideals of the upper class.²⁷

While experience of courtship and marriage for elite women like Tivie Stephens fell on one side of the spectrum, and poor wives like Mary Brown on the other, the majority of wives did have one eventual commonality – the experience of motherhood. On average, the antebellum southern wife had at least five children, and up to fourteen, numbers which do not account for miscarriages, stillbirths, and infant deaths. Put another way, most women experienced a pregnancy about every two years until menopause. Husbands often announced the happy news of a new baby delivery. Some felt overwhelmed with gratitude, like R. M. Price who described the birth of a son as “an event which caused my heart to overflow with tears of gratitude to our great Preserver.”

²⁶ This autobiography is more of a representation of reality, rather than reality of itself, shaped by both Edward Isham and the lawyer who penned it. The editors of the published edition, after an external and internal review, concluded the autobiography to be “essentially honest and largely true,” with a few caveats. Edward Isham, in *The Confessions of Edward Isham: A Poor White Life of the Old South*, ed. Charles C. Bolton and Scott P. Culclasure (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 4-5. For more on gender roles, and Edward’s relationship with his mother, see Victoria E. Bynum, “Mothers, Lovers, and Wives: Images of Poor White Women in Edward Isham’s Autobiography,” in *The Confessions of Edward Isham*, 83-100.

²⁷ Ibid.

Others chose to boast, “he of course is the finest boy that ever was born, given already strong indications of both eminence and usefulness.” Another bragged of a new baby daughter “fat and lusty” who was “destined doubtless to be the smasher of many hearts.” Some mothers wanted daughters, for “how much less trouble they give than boys” while others hoped for a house of “bustling sons,” over the “prospect of having old maids in the family.”²⁸

But at minimum, most young women simply hoped to survive the whole experience, for all knew that pregnancies and childbirth in the antebellum South was risky business. Each time a wife became pregnant, she also faced the possibility of death. It was not uncommon for pregnant women to be found as physician Charles Hentz discovered his patient, “lying on the floor – cold – almost pulseless and flighty – foetus hanging by the cord.” He saved her life with his “splendid, large linen handkerchief,” checking the hemorrhaging. Newspapers ran a constant stream of obituaries with stories like that of Mary Dale, age nineteen, who died “and left her first child of about two hours and an affectionate husband to lament their loss.” Simple slate tombstones also shared the sad tales of laboring gone wrong, like that of “Mary Adaline Patterson who departed this life on the 9th of May 1825 aged 20 years 6 months 10 days also her infant who lies by her side.” In 1850, the South had twice the maternal mortality rate of New England and the Middle Atlantic states. Bloodletting, opiates, disease, lack of sanitation, and lack

²⁸ Sally G. McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Infant Rearing* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 32-3; R.M. Price to Betsy Blanks, January 5, 1839 in Elizabeth Holmes Blanks Letters; Leonidas Polk to his brother, March 2, 1835, in Leonidas Polk Collection, Southern Historical Collection; Henry Bedinger to his sister Susan, January 22, 1842, in Bedinger-Dandridge Letters, Manuscript Department, William R. Perkins Library; MMLB to Mildred, May 9, 1844, Cameron Family Papers; William Elliott to his mother-in-law, Ann Smith, August 7, 1829, in Elliot-Gonzales Letters, Southern Historical Collection, all quoted in Sally G. McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 108-110.

of general knowledge about pregnancies and childbirth contributed to the high mortality rates.²⁹

Childrearing required a great deal of energy and dedication, met with mixed responses by those who undertook it. Some, like Elizabeth Fischer told her sister “I feel with you that my responsibilities are doubled; and sometimes am almost in despair about every being able to do my duty.” Another sympathized with a friend, “I received your letter of the 21st a few hours ago and read it pretty much as you say it was written, amid the bustle of half dozen children and in the intervals of attending to their wants.” After yet another pause, she continued, “I do everything now and my mode of locomotion is no longer a *walk* but rather a half run a great party of my time.” Others, like Rebecca Turner, embraced motherhood so fully that she could not even imagine ceasing to breastfeed her eighteen-month son. “It will be a trial for me to wean him,” she wrote in her diary, “How am I to relinquish so sweet an office—that of giving nourishment to my darling? Are these foolish tears that dim my eyes when I think of the times, when he will no longer nestle in my bosom through the silent watches of the night?” As the years passed, many women felt tremendous satisfaction in their roles as wives and mothers. “All my anticipations have been more than fully realized,” rejoiced one wife. She assured her friend she was “as much in love as ever and am perfectly happy.” A second found married life to be “far preferable [to single life] & wonder much that we should

²⁹ Charles A. Hentz Obstetrical Records, Case 77, December 2, 1858, Hentz Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, as quoted in Sally G. McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 44; Hillsboro (N.C.) Recorder, October 30, 2842, p. 3, as quoted in Sally G. McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 83; Tombstone in Providence Presbyterian Church Cemetery, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, as quoted in Sally G. McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 82; Sally G. McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 81.

have been so long a time making up our minds concerning it.” For some, reality matched ideals, or at least, came close, as they basked in wedded bliss.³⁰

Of course, not all marriages were of love, or even a physical presence, in the antebellum South. A repetitive loop of desire and disappointment exhausted the emotions of many antebellum plantation mistresses, like Anna Page King. Born in 1798, Anna grew up on St. Simons, an island off the coast of Georgia, in “The Retreat,” a plantation with a raised cottage and more than one hundred varieties of roses. Her world was one of fragrant flowers, education, and parental devotion, but also, a world of persistent heat, perilous mosquitoes, and a long row of slave houses facing the beach. Her siblings all died before they reached adulthood, leaving just Anna. Her father, a wealthy and successful planter, personally invested in her education, training her to be an unusually capable manager of plantation affairs.³¹

This combination of wealth and education made Anna an especially desirable candidate for marriage. In 1824, at twenty-six years of age, she wed Thomas Butler King, a handsome man two years her younger, with piercing gray eyes, a pale complexion, and lips that met in a stern line. Actually, this was her second fiancé, developing after a failed dowry negotiation with an Englishman left Anna with both a broken engagement and heart. But in Thomas, she found an initial happiness. Early in

³⁰ Elizabeth Fischer to Anna Hoskins, June 1, 1839, Higginbotham Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, as quoted in Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 231; Sarah Scott to Elizabeth Lewis, May 2, Scott Papers, Virginia State Library, as quoted Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 46; Rebecca Allen Turner, Little Jesse's Diary, August 29, 1857, Duke University, as quoted in Sally G. McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 111; Lucy Taylor Wickham to Elizabeth Kane, February 2, 1847, Wickham Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, as quoted in Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 204; Penelope Skinner Warren to Thomas Warren, August 28, 1840, Skinner Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, as quoted in Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 205.

³¹ A story similar to Anna Page King can be found in Susana Delfino, “Susan P. Grigsby and the Psychological Dimension of Disease and Death in Antebellum and Civil War Kentucky” in ed. Thomas A. Ervold Bjerre and Beata Zawadka, *The Scourges of the South? Essays on “The Sickly South” in History, Literature, and Popular Culture* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

her marriage, she reflected to a friend, “My dear Husband ever kind and attentive to me is well. Have I not many instances of his divine goodness? Have I not still more blessings than I deserve?” Thomas, too, was pleased, with his improved reputation as a planter of extensive land holdings and over 350 slaves.³²

But by 1843, Thomas’ world had crumbled. “My husband has probably been one of the greatest sufferers from these successive disasters,” Anna explained to a friend of her now-deceased father, who was also a trustee of the property left to her in her father’s will. The collapse of cotton prices, the Panic of 1837, and a variety of elaborate financial schemes left Thomas penniless. Local papers ran notices of the family’s misfortune and attempts to satisfy the debts against Thomas, including the sale of 247 slaves and 20,000 acres across three counties. It wasn’t enough, and Anna worried the creditors would come after her. “I do not impute any blame, or mismanagement to my husband, nor has his misfortunes, in the slightest degree impaired my confidence in his integrity, or his ability to manage property,” she emphasized, but asked permission to call on the trustee “to protect my property, as my husband cannot act.” In the end, the family kept only the Retreat home of Anna’s childhood, and the 50 slaves (and their increase) left to Anna in her father’s will. Thomas would spend the rest of his life on the move—Washington D.C., California, Texas, England—chasing a political and business career, always grasping at opportunities to restore his fortune and reputation, hounded by creditors for nearly twenty years.³³

³² Anna Matilda Page King to Jane, January 27, 1827, *Anna: The Letters of a St. Simons Island Plantation Mistress, 1817-1859*, ed. Melanie Pavich-Lindsay (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002), introduction, 8.

³³ Anna Matilda Page King to “My Dear Sir,” March 3, 1842, in *Anna*, ed. Melanie Pavich-Lindsay, 17.

This left Anna lonely, unhappy, and at home, a fact she reminded Thomas of constantly. Despite being surrounded by the noise and activity that nine children and more than 100 slaves brought into her life, she felt alone. More prison than “Retreat” to Anna, the management of the plantation demanded her constant attention, with “hands full and in the midst of this house full.” Of course, the workload helped with her sorrows, in some ways. “I have more to do than I can attend to – but perhaps it is well that it is so as I am thereby prevented from brooding over the absence of my dear husband,” wrote Anna typically to a friend in 1839. She was not alone in her feelings. Many plantation women, like Anna, did not have the community life offered to women who lived in cities and towns. Large land and slave holdings served as a hedge of protection against poverty, but simultaneously, a barrier to community, and an obligation in need of continual pruning. In this isolated realm, the physical presence of a husband offered necessary companionship. Letters, too, helped, as Anna, like many plantation mistresses, turned to correspondence to create intimacy with those separated. But for Anna, as the children grew, and Thomas remained away, her best option was to look within her world’s walls, and piece together a community out of her sons and daughters. Her daughters provided emotional support, while her eldest son, who preferred plantation life to that of a travelling occupation, took over the management of the plantation as Anna grew older.³⁴

And yet, no matter how disappointing, how remote, or how unsuccessful her husband may be, Anna invested and reinvested her faith in him. Certainly, she chided, begged, and even belittled him at times with barbs like, “Hard—hard have you laboured

³⁴ Anna Matilda Page King to Thomas Butler King, June 2, 1842, in *Anna*, ed. Melanie Pavich-Lindsay, 19; Anna Matilda Page King to Jane, December 2, 1839, in *Anna*, ed. Melanie Pavich-Lindsay, 13.

for a reputation to leave your children but that will not give them bread.” But even as the decades passed, but her pleas for his permanent return never ceased, until her death in 1859. This marriage, with all its financial difficulties and emotional distance, remained a crucial component of Anna’s life.³⁵

Anna’s difficulties paled in comparison to women caught in verbally, physically, or mentally abusive marriages. In 1849, one wife petitioned the North Carolina courts for a divorce after her husband continuously drank too heavily, beat her, locked her out of the house overnight, and committed adultery with a slave, and in one instance, forced her to watch them have sex. The chief justice did not grant the absolute dissolution of the marriage, believing there was reasonable hope for the couple’s reconciliation. Another wife, in Virginia, would flee to the swamps when her husband drank. If he caught her in the kitchen, seeking protection from the weather, he attacked “with his fists and with sticks.” A third husband “stamped” on his wife, after knocking her to the ground with fireplace tongs, until her ribs broke. A fourth “beat her head against the bed post and wall till her sense had nearly left her.” Another forced his wife “to ride a wild and dangerous horse in a violent storm” to cause a miscarriage. Another woman witnessed a William Ball drag his wife “around the house by the hair of her head” while “cursing and threatening to kill” her. This was a potentially violent world for women.³⁶

³⁵ Anna Matilda Page King to Thomas Butler King, June 26, 1849, in *Anna*, ed. Melanie Pavich-Lindsay, 62.

³⁶ In the antebellum South, divorces were incredibly difficult to obtain, for political, religious, and social reasons. For an excellent study on the topic, as well as the social implications of divorce for those women who successfully received them, see Thomas E. Buckley, S.J., *The Great Catastrophe of My Life*, 170; Hansley V. Hansley, 32 N.C. 365 (1849) as described in Victoria Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 71-2; Petition of Jane Godwin, Legislative Petitions, Records Group 78, as quoted in as quoted in Thomas E. Buckley, S.J., *The Great Catastrophe of My Life*, 170; Petition of Rollins, Legislative Petitions, Records Group 78, as quoted in Thomas E. Buckley, S.J., *The Great Catastrophe of My Life*, 171; Petition of Roberts, and Court Order, Legislative Petitions, Records Group 78, as quoted in as quoted in Thomas E. Buckley, S.J., *The Great Catastrophe of My Life*, 171; Court Record, and Petition of Hutchings, , Legislative Petitions,

Some husbands did kill their wives. John Roane Jr. slit his wife's throat "and pulled out the sinews." Newman Roane assaulted his wife with an axe. A third husband with a fondness for alcohol, Alvin Preslar, beat his wife so brutally that she fled with two of her children towards her father's house, dying before she reached it. Three hundred people petitioned against his sentence to hang, arguing his actions were not intentional, but rather, "the result of a drunken frolic." Alcohol seemed to bring out the worse in men with unkind inclinations. "Like a dog returning to his vomit, and the Sow Wallowing in the Mire, he again became more and more intemperate and more and more Morose in disposition, and harsh and unkind," confessed one wife to the court, whose husband was known for giving her "severe and violent blows with his fist." He confessed to nothing more than having "played Roughly with her" because "liquor set me crazy." These extreme cases, of brutality, adultery, and murder, reveal the strength of patriarchy in the antebellum South, and the importance of choosing a husband one could enjoy, or at the very least, survive.³⁷

Another form of adultery, common in the antebellum South, involved the sexual relationships between married planters and their enslaved property. Certainly, some white women did sleep with African American men. Dorothea Bourne, for example, engaged in an extended sexual relationship with a man enslaved on a neighboring

Records Group 78, as quoted in as quoted in Thomas E. Buckley, S.J., *The Great Catastrophe of My Life*, 173; Petition of Ball, , Legislative Petitions, Records Group 78, as quoted in Thomas E. Buckley, S.J., *The Great Catastrophe of My Life*, 171.

³⁷ Eliza Thompson to Sally W. Griffith, n.d., transcript, Randolph Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, as quoted in Thomas E. Buckley, S.J., *The Great Catastrophe of My Life*, 171; Thomas Buckley, ed. "Placed in the Power of Violence": The Divorce Petition of Evelina Gregory Roane, 1824" *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 100 (1992), 50, as quoted in Thomas E. Buckley, S.J., *The Great Catastrophe of My Life*, 171; State v. Preslar, 48 N.C. 417 (1856) as described in Victoria Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 82-3; Statement of Huldah Heiskell, *Heiskell v Heiskell*, and Ferdinand Heiskell to Huldah Heiskell, September 22, 1849, in Petition of Ferdinand S. Heiskell, Legislative Petitions, Records Group 78, as quoted in Thomas E. Buckley, S.J., *The Great Catastrophe of My Life*, 171-2.

plantation. Her husband stated there was “no room to doubt that an illicit intercourse” was “regularly kept up between them, while neighbors testified to her children “by a slave.” In 1831, a different husband, Thomas Culpeper attempted to divorce his wife, claiming she “sacrificed her virtue on the altar of prostitution” and had “carnal intercourse with black men or negroes.” Elizabeth Walters’ husband alleged that she had “lived in illicit carnal cohabitation with a negro slave, become pregnant by him, and had a negro child.”³⁸

While these relationships are notable, far more common were the relationships, often of the coercive sort, between white men and African American women. As Mary Boykin Chesnut famously wrote, “every lady tells you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody’s household, but those in her own she seems to think drop from the clouds, or pretends so to think.” The extent to which slave owners raped and slept with their enslaved property will never be known, but it was common enough that even travelers noted the relationship, as James Davidson wrote of New Orleans in 1836, “Married men in this City are frequently in the habit of keeping quadroons,” who he described as “prostitutes” for “exclusive use.” The fancy trade, or sale of young, attractive female slaves at high prices, became more than just a sex trade, but a platform for planters to display dominance, power, and wealth to other slave owners. Flirting with the edges of respectability, married men purchased young girls far above market prices, described with phrases like, “13 year old Girl, Bright Color, nearly a fancy for \$1135.”

³⁸ Louis Bourne Divorce Petition, Louis County, Virginia, December 16, 1824, #8218, Library of Virginia; Louis Bourne Divorce Petition, Louis County, Virginia, January 20, 1825, #8305, Library of Virginia; Thomas Culpeper Divorce Petition, Norfolk County, Virginia, December 9, 1835, #10943, Library of Virginia; Elizabeth Walters v. Clement Jordan, Person County, State Supreme Court Manuscript Record #6458, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, as quoted in Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 69, 74.

More commonly, though, were slave owners who used female slaves they already owned for their sexual desires, owners like James Norcom, who repeatedly whispered sexual propositions into his slave's ear when she turned fifteen. "If God has bestowed beauty upon her [a female slave] it will prove her greatest curse. That which commands admiration in the white woman only hastens the degradation of the female slave," reflected runaway slave Harriet Jacobs.³⁹

As difficult and emotionally trying as this situation could be for the wife of a philandering husband, the world as she knew it did not come to an end in these cases, as it did for many wives when their husbands died. In this patriarchal society, a widowed wife met an entirely new list of challenges as a single woman once again, including the management of her dower thirds (an automatic inheritance of approximately one-third of a husband's assets, to provide for her in his death), and sometimes, entire estates. Men, often at least a few years older than their wives, met timely and untimely deaths in the antebellum South. While sudden deaths certainly occurred – a fall from a horse, a duel, or more likely, a deadly epidemic, taking young and old alike – most southerners envisioned a death that occurred at the end of life, with the ability to share valuable last words, and at the very least, die at home in one's own bed. And like in courtships and marriages, these ideals, combined with ritual and etiquette, guided death practices.⁴⁰

³⁹ Mary Boykin Chesnut Diary, March 18, 1861, ed. C. Vann Woodward, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 29; Ed. Hervert A. Kellar, "Diary of James D. Davidson," *Journal of Southern History* 1 (1935), 348, as quoted in Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 212; Philip Thomas to William Finney, July 28, 1859, William A. J. Finney Papers, Records of Antebellum Southern Plantation on Microfilm, as quoted in Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 113; Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1861), 27.

⁴⁰ While difficult to determine, most scholars believe that Americans coming of age before the Civil War expected to live into their mid-forties. Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country*, 10.

Ideally, a person's death was a communal ritual of sorts, witnessed by close family and friends. When John C. Calhoun, political defender of slavery as "a positive good," died on March 31, 1850 in Washington D.C., his widow encouraged her daughter, "begin from this hour, to give your children religious instruction. Tell them how calmly and resigned their Grandfather died." Of utmost importance to the white antebellum South was a "Good Death," *ars moriendi*, a ritualistic passing away experience in the home, surrounded by loved ones, culminating in the peaceful acceptance of God's will after a long-lived life. Death did not happen in a sanitized hospital, or office, but at home, in the bed one slept in every night. Women, as central components in the rituals of death and mourning, especially expected this type of death for their loved ones. When Charlotte Verstelle's brother died "amongst strangers," she was furious, and wrote her sister, "I feel as if I dont care whether I live or die when I give up my contemplation of the subject.—I know it is wicked—but my heart almost murmurs against the decrees of Being, of whome we are told that mercy is his darling attribute." Just as important as being surrounded by family was the utterance of special last words, reaffirming a faith in God, a resignation to death, and last words of wisdom for the family. It was at this moment, observers believed, that the true and honest status of a soul could be assessed. When dying of cholera in Kentucky, Methodist bishop Henry B. Bascom was able to reply "Yes! Yes! Yes!" when asked if his faith in God remained firm, but was unable to speak "once more of 'Jesus and the resurrection,'" much to the disappointment of all, including his wife.⁴¹

⁴¹ Floride Calhoun to Anna, in Clyde N. Wilson and Shirley Bright Cook, eds., *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 27, 1849-50 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 257, as quoted in Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country*, 33; Charlotte Verstelle to Nancy Verstelle, October 29, 1821, Verstelle Papers, University of South Carolina, as quoted in Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family*,

After a death, certain mourning prescriptions fell upon the family, and especially, the widow. Antebellum custom suggested that husbands mourn the death of a wife three months, with a simple black armband. Mothers should mourn the death of a child one year, siblings mourned the loss of a sibling for six months. Most importantly, widows mourn the death of a husband two and a half years. During this time, male relatives stepped in to help fill the void her late husband left behind, managing property and legal obligations, so her attention could turn to her grief, and the management of its portrayal. Clothing, as an outward expression of inner turmoil, was an important aspect of mourning widows' lives. As the 1856 etiquette book, *How to Behave*, explained, "Dress has its language, which is, or may be, read and understood by all." The authors believed "there should be a harmony between your dress and your circumstances." The color black aimed to remind widows, friends, and strangers alike of her grief. Thus, in the first year of heavy mourning, "the bereaved wore solid black wool garments," a "simple crape bonnet—never a hat—and a long, thick, black crape veil." Her jewelry, too, would be black, and frequently contain a piece of the deceased's hair, often braided. In the second year, a widow could progress to wearing "a silk fabric trimmed with crape and use black lace for her collars and cuffs" and "shorten her veil and make it of tulle or net." Eventually, she "might vary her wardrobe with garments or trim of gray, violet, or

198; For a more extensive discussion of the Good Death, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008); James O. Andrew, *The Cross of Christ; Being a Sermon Preached by the Late H. B. Bascom, D.D., LL.D., before the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in St. Louis, Missouri, May 13th, 1850; to which is added a brief sketch of his Illness and Death* (Louisville: Morton and Griswold, 1951), 74-77, as quoted in as quoted in Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family*, 197.

white.” The subtle shifts in wardrobe reflected a slow transformation of grief, and signaled to the community how they should approach and behave around her.⁴²

Some antebellum etiquette books described mourning costume requirements to an almost comical extreme. Emily Thornwell’s *The Lady’s Guide to Perfect Gentility* devoted an entire paragraph to mourning bonnets. Initial descriptions of the hat appear rather benign and simple. She informed the reader that mourning bonnets ought to be “made of black silk” and “covered in crape.” Thornwell became more particular when describing the hems of the bonnets, that the bow and strings should be “broad-hemmed, the double hem being from half an inch to one inch broad.” Then, she proceeded into descriptions of the bonnet for “deep mourning.” Deep mourning was specifically applied to those drowning in the fiercest waves of grief and therefore was the expected dress of widows. The front of the bonnet should have “a fall or veiling of crape” measuring “half a yard deep, and a yard and a half long.” The ideal and respectable widow, according to this description, walked about with a foot and a half of dark, heavy fabric in front of her face. For petite women, the veil, over three feet in length, would nearly drag on the floor before them. In this mourning bonnet, a community could easily identify, watch, and speak to a widow, but not with. The mourning attire placed her in the world, but not quite interacting with it.⁴³

Etiquette books offered directives for widows’ behavior as well. The idea that “the true wife, when widowed, remains a widow, till death re-unites her to the being—complementary to herself...perpetual widowhood is alone consistent with our Ideal of

⁴² *How to Behave: A Pocket Manual of Republican Etiquette, and Guide to Correct Personal Habits* (New York: Fowler and Wells, Publishers, 1856); Margaret M. Coffin, *Death in Early America: The History and Folklore of Customs and Superstitions of Early Medicine, Funerals, Burials, and Mourning* (New York: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers, 1976), 197-8.

⁴³ Emily Thornwell, *The Lady’s Guide to perfect Gentility*, (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1856), 217.

woman” met mixed reactions. A greater portion of society readily accepted other ideals, like a renewed devotion to religion and children. Lizzie Torrey’s *The Ideal of Womanhood* offered the example of a “beautiful and touching letter” between a widow and son, with “sentiments we cannot but approve.” The widow looked forward to reuniting with her husband in heaven, “and confiding in the grace of God, I am resolved to suffer all the troubles of widowhood, and brave alone the storms and tempests of life.” The widow promised her son “to devote the remaining years of my life to your education, and contemplation of the virtues of your beloved father.” This widow agreed with the notion that she should not remarry, concluding, “preserving the memory of my husband, whom I shall never cease to love, I shall refuse all offers to contract a second marriage.” These commitments, to her God, her son, and her husband’s memory, set a high standard for mourning widows.⁴⁴

Family and friends did not expect recent widows to rely solely on etiquette books, of course, but also attempted to guide recently widowed women. Frances Douglass, for example, struggled when her husband, a minister in North Carolina, died speechless. “I look a round I see many things which he begun that are incomplete,” she reflected, wondering why her Lord “called him home in the midst of his labours,” and leaving her with his heavy financial debts. Her family and friends had much advice for her. One friend of her late husband reminded her “how great his gain. Everlasting rest. Joy unspeakable, a crown of glory” in heaven. Another minister reminded her that she would meet her husband in heaven, for “the separation is but for a season; our dear friend is not lost.” As a widowed pastor’s wife, she should show the world “that the religion you

⁴⁴ Lizzie Torrey, *The Ideal of Womanhood, or, Words to the Women of America* (Boston: Wentworth, Hewes & Co., 1859), 129-132.

profess is a glorious reality, not an empty name,” by using it to “console and strengthen” herself. Receiving all these messages, Frances concluded to her son, “I was too happy for earth, & now I am made to know that this is not my rest.”⁴⁵

Like it did for good wives and mothers, antebellum society held up good widows as an example in a variety of mediums, like the sermon describing “the fond and devoted wife, has just received the dying benediction of the faithful and affectionate husband, and exclaims, with heart-breaking anguish, Oh! what will now become of us? My husband was my all—was my everything—friend, counsellor, nay, was next to God himself; but now I am bereft; my little ones are fatherless; who, Oh! who shall now protect us and care for us?” This level of devotion and grief to the husband deceased, and value placed upon his former role in the household, reflected the ideal relationship between husband and wife. As such, it was appropriate sermon material. Antebellum visual imagery, too, shared messages about the ideal female mourner. Beginning in the 1820s, printed images lifted off carvings made in stone, called lithographs, began to spread across states in large quantities. Printers frequently created and copied various depictions of a neatly-dressed woman, with her head in her hands, leaning against a large, well-kept graveyard monument with the description, “In Memory Of.” In these images, women mourned; it was their task to weep and remember, and they leaned bent, but not broken, over the grave.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Frances Douglass to Henry Taylor, September 15, 1837, E.G. Plumer to Francis Douglass, September 12, 1837, Drury Lacy to Frances Douglass, October 26, 1837, W. M. Atkinson to Frances Douglass, September 13, 1837, Frances Douglass to Henry Taylor, September 15, 1837, all in the Douglass Correspondence, Duke University, as quoted in Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family*, 205-207.

⁴⁶ James O. Andrew, *The Cross of Christ*, 109; Schantz argues that while major lithographic firms were established in the North, his evidence suggests that they were tapping into a national market as early as the 1830s and 1840s. Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country*, 166, 169-171 for three examples of these images.

After an extensive analysis of prescriptive literature for widows in the colonial period, historian Vivian Conger concluded that “within those texts, ministers and others variously labeled widows as sober, grave, temperate, just, honest, faithful, charitable, peaceable, modest, chaste, kind, virtuous, and pious but also as deceptive, wanton, angry, scheming, haughty, sorrowful, pitiful, discontented, odious, and sinful.” These descriptors hold true in the language of the antebellum era as well. While etiquette books championed the well-behaved widow, they also warned of widows of the sexual attraction of widows. Take an advice book published in 1846, which conceded that “there is a peculiar fascination about widows...whether it by sympathy for the weeds of mourning, the interest excited by a lady in distress, or a certain air acquired by experience in matrimony, widows are very commonly the objects of a tender passion.” Their allure stemmed from the fact that “they have more experience than maidens have.” Recognizing this desire, this book included instructions, and a model letter, advising interested men on the proper way to introduce the idea of a second marriage. The formulaic letter reveals that even though remarriage was an option, the idea was still surrounded by a specific set of expectations and requirements, including an address as “dear madam” and an expression of admiration, respect, and sympathy “with your misfortunes.”⁴⁷

In addition to etiquette books, historical precedent and popular antebellum culture also warned of the sexually experienced, and often badly behaved, widow. Sarah

⁴⁷ This study offers a masterful and extensive analysis of widows’ wills in Massachusetts, Maryland, and South Carolina, before 1750. Vivian Bruce Conger, *The Widows’ Might: Widowhood and Gender in Early British America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 10; *The Art of Good Behavior; and Letter Writing on Love, Courtship, and Marriage: A complete guide for ladies and gentlemen, particularly those who have not enjoyed the advantages of fashionable life* (New York: Published by C. P. Huestis, 1846), 108-110.

Stickney, living in the colonies and widowed before the American Revolution even began, called to a passing man, “A you roge, yonder is yor Child under the tree, goe take it up and see it.” She had multiple illegitimate children and little standing in her community. In a different instance, she successfully sued for child support from another married man and father of nine. That man’s wife called her “an impudent baud” and spat in her face. And so, the stereotype of the flirty and hypersexualized widow sprung from old stories like these, and a series of societal fears. By definition, widows were previously married women, who previously enjoyed the activities of married women, including sex. Now, as sexually experienced single women, they appeared without a proper male chaperone. Take Aphra Benn’s popular play “The Widow Ranter, or, The History of Bacon in Virginia.” The central character came to Virginia as an indentured servant, married her rich master, outlived him, inherited his entire plantation, and uttered lines like “Here, Jeffrey, ye drunken dog, set your coach and horses up, I’ll not go till the cool of the evening, I love to ride in fresco,” “You know my humour, madam, I must smoke and drink in a morning, or I am mawkish all day,” “Is he handsome? Does he look like a gentleman? ... Bring him in then!” and “We rich widows are the best commodity this country affords, I’ll tell you that.” As a widow, she drank, smoked, argued, donned male clothing, fought, and lived her life with unfiltered speech and a ravishing sexual appetite. Audiences with traditional leanings likely found comfort in the fact that by the end of this tragi-comedy play, the Widow Ranter was married once more.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts*, VIII, (Salem: Essex Institute, 1911-1975), pages 99, 259-263, 288-9, 296, 308, 433, as quoted in Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 96-7; Aphra Benn, “The Widow Ranter, or, The History of Bacon in Virginia. A Tragi-

Marrying a widow wasn't always such a challenge, as the character Porgy believed in the 1852 novel, *The Sword and the Distaff; or, "Fair, Fat, and Forty."* Porgy, in need of a wife, must decide between two widows. "Widows are, after all, the best materials out of which to make good wives; always assuming that they have been fortunate in the possession of husbands like myself, who have been able to show them the proper paths to follow," he explained to a friend. Widow Griffin was a deferential, domestic, humble, and virtuous middle-class widow. Widow Eveleigh, on the other hand, was a bold, charming, beautiful, intelligent, and upper-class widow. After lengthy speeches weighing the pros and cons of each choice, he ultimately chose Widow Griffin. Even though she "is not wise, nor learned; is really very ignorant; has no manner, no eloquence; is simple, humble and adhesive" in comparison to Widow Eveleigh, Widow Eveleigh ultimately "appeared to him to be quite too masculine," for one "does not want an equal, but an ally in marriage." This play highlighted the tension of widows in society, and the delicate balance of surviving as a *feme sole*, a woman alone, while negotiating gender norms.⁴⁹

Outside of ideals, advice, and stereotypes, and after their mourning period passed, some real widows did seek remarriage, like their literary counterparts. Generally, widows of older ages, with grown children, found life as a single widow to be less troublesome. Having the opportunity to move into an adult daughter or son's household provided companionship, as well as economic and social security. But, being single in

Comedy," (1690) as published in ed. Stephanie Hodgson-Wright, *Women's Writing of the Early Modern Period, 1588-1688: An Anthology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 369-432.

⁴⁹ William Gilmore Simms, *The Sword and the Distaff, or "Fair, Fat, and Forty." A Story of the South at the Close of the Revolution* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, & Co., 1852), as quoted in Susan J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representations of Women, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 126-134.

the antebellum South brought a great deal of stress some younger widows did not want, especially those of a lower economic status, or those with young children. As one widow, while struggling for economic stability, wrote frustratingly, “My only recourse will be a lawsuit. I have authorized him [the lawyer] to act according to his own judgement and I have left everything for him to do and make the best of. Alas! two lawsuits already! What is to become of me! and I with only one quarter of a dollar in my purse!” In 1831, another plantation widow similarly lamented, “I have so much to perplex me at times that I scarcely know how to bear all things as it comes...If I had no children, I would gladly leave this world.” Often, finding someone else to live for, like children, eased the difficulties of widowhood, even as they increased the workload.⁵⁰

Dolly Lewis, who buried three children in addition to her husband, found an empty house to be a tremendous trial. Thirty-two years old, lonely, heartbroken, and working as a teacher in 1849, she accepted a marriage proposal only to quickly regret it. “What have I done? Am I not dreaming? What means it all. Why these heavy forebodings?” she poured into her diary. “I have often joked & laughed about marrying & though I have when asked always refused yet I am caught this time. Is my heart truly interested?” She broke the engagement, mended it, and married “with trembling & fear.” A year after the wedding, she reflected, “O it has been a year of happiness a year of *heartrest* for after striving & toiling alone for years in this cold hearted world thus to find a heart that truly loves & a home full of every comfort—O How my heart expands with love to him that has thus taken me to himself.” After nine years, she found herself

⁵⁰ Laura Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); A. L. to R. Motte, June 11, 1840, George Coffin Taylor Papers, Southern Historical Collection, as quoted Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 77; Mary Poindexter to Jane Clingman, February 10, 1831, Clingman-Puryear Papers, Southern Historical Collection, as quoted Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 170.

widowed once more, when her husband “had a cough” and died. She recorded his last night in her diary, for her baby daughter, sharing that “after preparing himself for the night he solemnly clasped his hands & said, ‘I commit & conjure myself with all that I have & am into the Hands of my Heavenly Father for this night & for all Eternity.’” With his final goodbye, and affairs in order, he died in his sleep, leaving a widow who felt “it was my privillage to wait upon him until the very last moment of his life.”⁵¹

Not all widows found such happiness in a second marriage. In 1839, Martha Trice, formally widowed and then remarried, petitioned the court for a divorce from her second husband. Not only did he beat her, deny her basic necessities, and commit adultery, he squandered the money she brought into the marriage. Unfortunately for her, he was also justice of the peace at the time of the case. She lost the suit, was left penniless, and returned to her father’s home.⁵²

Lucy Harris Price, a widow aged thirty-six, made a similarly poor choice in a subsequent husband. She was anxious for “a life of contentment and happiness” after the death of her wealthy husband. So, in November 1842, rushed to the altar and married a not yet twenty-one year old James Norman. He proved to be a poor choice indeed. Within a year of the nuptials, James informed his wife that he desired she leave. She refused, he responded with verbal and physical abuse. She refused. He began an affair with an enslaved girl named Maria. He brought her into Lucy’s bedroom, “slept” with

⁵¹ While widowers almost always married a woman younger than themselves, and often younger than their first wives, widows often matched with older suitors, increasing the likelihood of being widowed twice. For more on the economics of slaveholding widows prior to the Civil War, see the excellent Kristen E. Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). Dolly Lunt Burge, December 29, 1849, January 22, 1851, January 2, 1859, in *The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge, 1848-1879*, ed. Christine Jacobson Carter (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 46, 59, 95-6.

⁵² Trice v Trice, Fall 1839-Fall 1842, Divorce Records, Orange County, North Carolina, as described in Victoria Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 75-6.

Maria on a nearby cot, and when Lucy protested, he suggested “if she not like it she might look out for other quarters.” To make matters worse, he flaunted his relationship with the woman “not of his own color” before Lucy’s family and friends. “He often embraced and kissed her in my presence” one guest testified in court. Another described how James insisted Maria joined them at dinner and threatened Lucy with “punishment” if she touched the woman. Lucy “burst into tears and asked me if it was not too much for her to stand,” to which James responded “it was nothing to what he intended to inflict upon her.” The state of Virginia did grant Lucy her divorce in 1849, not because of the racial aspects of the case, but rather, the concrete proof of adultery. In a grave understatement, Lucy later described this marriage as “an unfortunate connection.”⁵³

It is not a surprise, then, that many older and wealthier widows chose not to remarry. To be wealthy widow in the antebellum South brought its share of concerns, but also, its share of power. “I cannot allow you to dictate from which friends I shall or shall not receive advice and assistance. As your views and mine of the duties and position of a gardener differ so widely, I shall have no occasion for your services an other year,” Martha Rutledge Kinloch Singleton informed her overseer. When Martha’s husband died in August 1854, he left her with debts owed to fifty-two creditors across multiple states, 281 slaves, five thousand acres of land, and three children under age the age of ten to manage. Well-educated and named “sole executrix” of her husband’s will, Martha inherited the entire South Carolina estate in addition to her late husband’s problems. Martha could have done what many other wealthy widows did, ask a close male relative, perhaps a father, brother, or cousin, to manage the estate on her behalf while she focused

⁵³ Petition of Norman, Legislative Petitions, Records Group 78, Library of Virginia; Extracts from Depositions, Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia (1848-49), chap. 322, 247; *Richmond Whig*, February 2, 1849, as quoted in Thomas E. Buckley, S.J., *The Great Catastrophe of My Life*, 146-147, 169.

on her grief and children. But, she was not alone in the ranks of widows who decided to manage things herself. She began by selling off slaves, furniture, and land to satisfy the debts. From there, she appeared in person to settle business affairs, sign receipts, shop in the same cities as her husband had done. She continued to receive her late husband's numerous subscriptions to agricultural publications like *American Farmer* and *The Horticulturalist*. For decades, she had watched her father, then her husband, manage plantations. Now, it was her turn, and she thrived. The 1860 census, taken six years after her husband's death, revealed that Martha had increased the plantation's cash value by over \$70,000, added sixteen hundred acres of land to her holdings, increased the number of work animals, and diversified the crops to include more wheat, peas, beans, sweet potatoes, hay, and corn. She also switched her mill from water to steam power in 1860, increasing its value, and added nearly two hundred slaves to the plantation holdings. While she dealt with many aspects of daily life and management on her own, she did rely on male relatives and friends for legal assistance, particularly on her brother-in-law, in a land dispute with a neighbor. In the end, as Mary Boykin Chesnut put it, "she is the delight of her friends, the terror of her foes." Martha is an example of a strong, independent, business-minded widow who handed life's twist and turns well.⁵⁴

And she wasn't the only one. "Mama has paid off the heavy land debt which has been due for several years. She has been decreasing the amount ever since Papa's death—this year she paid off every cent—and is now intirely out of debt—she makes fine crops," bragged one daughter in 1835. "Every year has something of all most everything to sell such as corn fodder, bacon, wheat, oats, etc., etc. She is now building an excellent

⁵⁴ Information from this paragraph is from the fantastic biographical essay by Lindsay Crawford, "Mary Rutledge Kinloch Singleton: A Slaveholding Widow in Late Antebellum South Carolina," *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association* (2009), 15-26.

house will have it completed this fall.” When Frances Bumpass’ husband died, leaving his editorship position of a newspaper behind, she decided to carry on her husband’s legacy, and provide for herself financially, by continuing its publication. At first, she lost money and gained resistance as a female editor, but clung to her belief that “I should fear I might do wrong to give up. I believe [God] will succeed my efforts.” Her tenacity won in the end, and she remained editor of the paper, as a widow, for twenty years. Keziah Brevard was another woman who certainly had no desire to remarry. Physicians found her late husband to be “deranged,” imagining “that every one about him as tried to poison him” and that feeling “jealous of his wife & deems himself in honour bound to find out her delinquency & challenge her paramour.” He spent most of their marriage in “the Lunatic Asylum,” and after his death, his widow did pretty well for herself. According to the 1850 census, she managed 2,600 acres of farmland, 180 slaves, 185 swine, 90 cattle, 42 sheep, 20 mules, 6 horses, and produced 7,073 bushels of corn, 1,700 bushels of sweet potatoes, 700 bushels of peas and beans, 525 bushels of oats, 200 pounds of butter, 190 bales of cotton, 45 pounds of wool, and 43 tons of hay. By 1860, raised her holdings to 6,000 acres, 209 slaves, and added 1,200 pounds of rice to her annual harvest. Not all widows sought remarriage, and many did well without it.⁵⁵

As important as the ideals and realities of widowhood were, the fact remained that wives outnumbered widows in the antebellum South. White women across economic classes, in their twenties, thirties, and forties, most typically lived as wives with husbands

⁵⁵ Ann Gray to Ann Thomas, April 22, 1835, Fuller-Thomas Collection, Duke University, as quoted Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 77; Frances Moore Webb Bumpass Diary, November 16, 1854, Bumpas Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, as quoted in Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family*, 209-10; Keziah Brevard, *A Plantation Mistress on the Eve of the Civil War: The Diary of Keziah Goodwyn Hopkins Brevard, 1860-1861*, ed. John Hammond Moore (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 8, 10.

and babies. Their days were busy, semi-consciously managing societal expectations, more intentionally managing husbands, homes, and children. And as they tucked in those children, blew out their candles, and climbed into their beds on April 11, 1861, most wives didn't realize that what they knew, what they expected, and what they depended on was all about to change.

CHAPTER 2

“PREPARE FOR IT”: WEDDINGS, WAR, AND UNCERTAIN FUTURES

“Now prepare for it. I am in earnest. Every day I feel more reluctant to go into an uncertain life without having the consciousness of being yours entirely. I could fight better & I would do everything better. Should I fall, you could have at least the satisfaction to be a soldiers widow who I trust will only die in honor. Besides, though I know you do not want me to tell you this, some pension would insure to you the prospect of a humble but honorable existence.”

-Frank Schaller to his sweetheart¹

“He came in this afternoon & gave me the news from Charleston – Said Ft.

Sumpter had been taken,” wrote Keziah Brevard, a wealthy widow in her fifties, to her diary on April 13, 1861. She lived about ten miles east of Columbia, South Carolina. “I am thankful it [Ft. Sumter] is no longer a terror, but Oh my God we may still tremble for we have enemies in our midst,” she continued. “A few months ago & ‘twas said man could not take Ft. Sumpter unless walking over five or ten thousand dead – it has been taken -- & not one life lost of those who aided in taking it – My God the work is thine.” After describing her desires for a peaceful resolution of the situation, “that they [the North] leave us to ourselves or gra[n]t us privileges & laws that will protect us,” she reflected on what this new turn of events could mean. “My God be with all thy dear Children – Oh how desolate many are now – Husbands & sons gone to the scenes of war – to save their [country].”²

¹ Frank Schaller, *Soldiering For Glory: The Civil War Letters of Colonel Frank Schaller, Twenty-Second Mississippi Infantry*, ed. Mary W. Schaller and Martin N. Schaller (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 44.

² This is the same widow who appears in the previous chapter, whose husband spent the majority of their marriage in a “Lunatic Asylum.” Keziah Goodwyn Hopkins Brevard, April 13, 1861, in *A Plantation*

The war had officially begun. While many husbands left behind wives they had loved for years to fight for the new Confederate nation, others left spouses of mere weeks. The first shots of war carried with them a slew of hurried courtships, engagements, and weddings, as couples made certain of their relationship status, even as they marched into an uncertain future. During the war, many soldiering husbands and wives expressed themselves as never before, with ink and paper, revealing the support of and struggles within wartime married life. Their letters discussed a range of topics, including love, sex, duty, power, slavery, children, flirtations, and finances, and offer a rare look into the thoughts, opinions, and emotions of a variety of couples, spanning age, class, and state. As the war grew long and battles grew bloodier, another topic joined the list, as soldiers reflected home to their wives about death, and about their own mortality. Meanwhile, Confederate wives weighed exactly what this war was worth, and worth sacrificing. Exploring these marriages, the good and the bad, the deep and the superficial, reveal exactly what wives lost when their husbands died at war. But that happened later, after the first battles, after the first casualties. In 1861, when it all was just beginning, the full scope of what was to come was unknown, and the general mood was excitement.

“Onward! Onward!” urged Nettie Fondren, of Thomasville, Georgia, to her fiancé, “until the vile invader is driven from our sunny South!” With this wartime excitement, a flurry of marriages swept up young couples across the region. Later in the war, Confederate women lamented, “if I Can get any Body to have me you Shall get to a weding But there is nobody a Bout here only Some old widiwers for all the young men

has gone to the army,” as Ardella Brown did in 1863, but in 1861, the decision to wed was wrapped up in patriotic statements and eagerness. In Virginia, there existed “a perfect mania on the subject of matrimony” throughout the war, according to Judith McGuire. “Some of the churches may be seen open and lighted almost every night for bridals, and wherever I turn I hear of marriages in prospect.” Another mother worried, “it looks like the girls will marry anybody these days” and warned “my dear daughter keep a strict watch over your affections and don’t be deceived, men are very deceiving.” She should especially watch for “strange soldiers.” One South Carolinian girl reflected, “One looks at a man so differently when you think he may be killed to-morrow. Men whom up to this time I had thought dull and commonplace...seemed charming.” Wedding ceremonies, typically small and attended by close family and friends, did not require extensive planning, and thus, could be put together rather quickly. For white southern women, marriage represented the ideal of womanhood, at most, and in the least, provided a clear societal position in this time of uncertainty. And on many minds, as historian Drew Gilpin Faust elegantly put it, was that “a married women feared the loss of a particular husband; a single women worried about forfeiting the more abstract possibility of any husband at all.” Though they did not know how much it would bring, women well knew that war brought death. And so, wedding bells rang.³

³ Additionally, for elite white women, Confederate loyalty/service replaced many of the other qualifications, like wealth, manners, and family lineage, in evaluating the worth of a suitor, according to Anya Jabour, “Days of Lightly-won and Lightly-held Hearts: Courtship and Coquetry in the Southern Confederacy,” in *Weirding the War: Stories from the Civil War’s Ragged Edges*, ed. Stephen Berry (Athens: University of Georgia Press: 2011); Nettie Fondren to Robert Mitchell, May 14, 1862, Mitchell Fondren Family Civil War Letters, Georgia Department of Archives and History, as quoted in Victoria E. Ott, *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age during the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 44; Certainly, not all women sought marriage during the war. Historian Anya Jabour persuasively argued that many young women also used the war to actively delay marriage. The shortage of marriageable men offered them an acceptable alternative to marriage and an excuse to remain single. Ardella Brown to Cynthia Blair, May 20, 1863, Blair Papers, Duke University, as quoted in Anya

Men too craved the reassurance of wives awaiting their return as they marched toward an undecided future, an emotion that hastened them down the aisle. On July 2, 1861, Frank Schaller wrote his “dearest Sophy” about a conversation he had with a minister. “I do not know how it happened, but we talked about marriage and I told him I would like to marry before going into battle. He strongly advised me and I told him that as soon as I got my commission, I would make a strong effort to get a wife.” Frank would rise to colonel in the Twenty-Second Mississippi Infantry. “Every day I feel more reluctant to go into an uncertain life without having the consciousness of being yours entirely” he reflected, “Now prepare for it. I am in earnest.” Not only did he believe, “I could fight better & do everything better,” he also was thinking about her future. “Should I fall, you could have at least the satisfaction to be a soldiers widow who I trust will only die in honor. Besides, though I know you do not want me to tell you this, some pension would insure you the prospect of a humble but honorable existence.” Frank would be shot, but ultimately survive the war.⁴

Frank was not alone in his urgency – take Georgia Page King and William Duncan Smith’s story. On January 19, 1861, the state of Georgia seceded from the Union. “Oh! How I wish, from my heart, it could have been otherwise—As I tear it all from my heart, I am not ashamed to say, I weep,” William wrote from Milledgeville, the state capital, in 1861. “It was very hard to sever the silver tie which had bound me, willingly, for some many years to my noble commands and to well tried friends,” he

Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters*, 270; McGuire, January 8, 1865, *Diary of a Southern Refugee*, 329; Mother to Jane Sivley, December 5, 1864, Sivley Family Papers, as quoted in Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 114; Esther Alden, quoted in Francis Butler Simkins and James Welch Patton, *The Women of the Confederacy* (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1936), 188; Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 151.

⁴ Schaller, *Soldiering For Glory*, 44.

lamented to Georgia, of St. Simon's Island. When he handed in his resignation from the U.S. Army, "my heart yearned—my brothers, once; now perhaps, my foes." But within these wrenching emotions, his heart also yearned for something, or rather, someone, else. "And now, My dear Miss Georgia, I must beg you to listen to me calmly," he began. "Immediately after my arrival here, I sought your Father—found him—told him what I wished to win—and asked permission to write you," he explained. Upon listening to William's wishes, Georgia's "kind and courteous father (as he always is)...granted the privilege which I desired." And so, their courtship began.⁵

Scarcely three months passed before William was in love. "You cannot imagine, my dear Miss Georgia, how sad, how—very sad I felt at our parting" nor "how profoundly I love you," he explained to her. "But you do love me, do you not?" he asked, seeking reassurance. Though they had only been courting three months, William wanted to be married. "A war is fast approaching. Oh Let me claim you as my own! Let me have the right to protect you, and shield you by my earnest love," he begged. Realizing Georgia would object to this hurried marriage, he urged, "Do not let, oh! do not let, any slight obstacles, or conventionalities, prevent you from being mine as soon as you can. We know not what may happen!" William wanted her as a wife he could protect. And as a wife, she could champion his wartime successes and send him letters to read each night. "How will I be able to manifest my affection, if you are not my wife," he asked.⁶

⁵ William Duncan Smith to Georgia Page King, January 20, 1861, King and Wilder Family Papers, 1817-1946, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia. King and Wilder Family Papers henceforth referred to as K-W Papers, GHS.

⁶ William Duncan Smith, Savannah, to Georgia Page King, St. Simons, April 10, 1861, K-W Papers, GHS.

But Georgia was a dutiful daughter, one who would not make this decision hastily nor without family approval. “Do listen to me!” begged William, struggling to undo decades of her upbringing. When Georgia was a girl, her mother had praised her as “an old fashioned little thing,” raised to be both practical and dutiful. Her mother, the frustrated Anna Page King, whose antebellum marriage was plagued by a distant (and indebted) husband, had died in 1859. Georgia became the family’s matriarch, managing “The Retreat,” their extensive island plantation off the coast of Georgia. But perhaps William did not have so hard a task as he assumed, for even as he begged, she was already explaining to her father that she was “so sick of living in this lonely place with so many cares & so few pleasures.” She did not want her mother’s life; she wanted an adventure. On April 19, William wrote again, declaring “I will not be so formal, when my heart contradicts all formality.” He again pressed her to marry him immediately. Playing on her notions of duty, he asked, “If anything mortal should happen to me who you love, would it not be doubly trying to grieve over him, for whom you would not have a right to grieve except in thee studied retirement of your own feeling heart?” As a widow, she would have the right to publically and lovingly grieve him for years. As a mere sweetheart, that duty was denied.⁷

“I tremble,” Georgia wrote to demonstrate the strength of her conflicting emotions. Though her father and older brothers were absent, in the tenor of the times she decided to seize her own independence and marry William. In July, she anxiously wrote her brother Henry Lord “Lordy” Page King that “the hour has come—the man who...I

⁷ To read more about the family dynamics of the Kings, see Berry, “More Alluring at a Distance”; William Duncan Smith, Savannah, to Georgia Page King, St. Simons, April 10, 1861, K-W Papers, GHS; Anna Page King to Thomas Butler King, August 15, 1842, K-W Papers, GHS, as quoted in Berry, 881; Georgia Page King to Thomas Butler King, April 18, 1861; William Duncan Smith to Georgia Page King, April 19, 1861, K-W Papers, GHS.

have consented to marry...is about to leave for war.” She explained that “I have at length after weight of prayer—after tears and with earnest faith in God’s direction—determined to marry him before he goes to Virginia—and follow him there in a few weeks.” She knew that their short courtship would concern her brother and preemptively replied “I am perfectly satisfied that I love him dearly sufficient to sacrifice a great deal for his sake.” Together, William and Georgia wrote a letter to her brother Floyd. “My deep regret at the absence of our beloved Father—dear Lordy—and yourself—cast a shadow over my happiness,” she assured him. “I feared that you all might not approve—but my heart relented.” William added an addendum to the note thanking him “for your kind consideration and for your unselfish and appreciative consent to the dearest wish of my reason and of my heart.” Not waiting for a response, on July 9, 1861, Georgia married William.⁸

Family members quickly dashed off letters in return. “It is impossible to describe my feelings when I read your letter of the 7th,” Lordy began, “the tumult was so great that I will not attempt to unravel the maze of emotions which oppressed me.” He seemed in shock, surprised his sister would take such radical action without her father or brothers’ consent. “That you, Georgia, should be married and I not present is what I never conceived before to be possible!” he explained. Despite the surprising news, Lordy realized that “whatever I might have thought of the wisdom of the vital step you have taken matter nothing now, for I will stand by you to the last and my hard heart melt in prayers.” He wished her happiness and hoped to love her new husband “as a brother.”⁹

⁸ Georgia Page King to Henry Lord Page King, July 1, 1861, K-W Papers, GHS. Georgia Page King to John Floyd King, 8 July 1861, K-W Papers, GHS.

⁹ Henry Lord Page King to Georgia Page King Smith, July 15, 1861, K-W Papers, GHS.

Lordy's letter to William took a more boisterous tone. "I am half jealous for you taking my dear sister away from me, but you are such a fascinating fellow that I suppose she could not help herself," he teased. He proceeded to give "a regular benediction on you both—May you ever be healthy, wealthy, & wise in peace and happiness." "You will doubly need the rest of my good wishes," he warned, unless William suddenly showed "more wisdom than you do in spending your honeymoon in a camp." Lordy worried about his younger sister and hoped "dear Georgia has not had so rough a time in camp as I fear she had." Still struggling to realize that his dutiful sister was now married, he attempted to reconcile himself to the fact that William was a good man. But no matter his opinions, they were wed and William was thrilled. "Beloved, you are my beautiful fascinating bewitching little wife. I am yours—Altogether yours, in soul, mind, and body, my heaven-given wife."¹⁰

As a result of these wartime weddings, newlyweds who lost their husbands in war found themselves in a situation where they were expected to mourn longer than they had even been married. Georgia would be married fifteen months when William died. Laura Cornelia McGimsey had been married seventeen months at the time she received word of her husband's death. And Ellen "Nellie" Richmond Ramseur lost her husband to a Yankee bullet just eight days shy of their first wedding anniversary. Young brides coming to terms with life as young widows, and sometimes young mothers, would wreak havoc on nineteenth century mourning rituals. But of course, they did not know the future, and instead, turned to getting to know their recently-wed husbands.¹¹

¹⁰ Henry Lord Page King to William Duncan Smith, August 3, 1861, K-W Papers, GHS; William Duncan Smith to Georgia Page King Smith, December 22, 1861, K-W Papers, GHS.

¹¹ For more information about marriage trends in the Civil War, see J. David Hacker, *Libra Hilde*, and James Holland Jones, "The Effect of the Civil War on Southern Marriage Patterns," *The Journal of*

Some wives would travel with their husbands and their armies. Louisiana's Laetitia Lafon Ashmore Nutt crisscrossed the Deep South with three daughters in tow, following her husband and his company of partisan rangers. She wished she had "left the children with my Mother and devoted all my time and energies to our sick and wounded" by the end of it. But for most married couples, soldiers went to war, and wives remained at home. Because distance separated couples, letter-writing became the primary system couples used to communicate to one another, and reveal a level of honesty often eclipsed by etiquette. "Writing what I know your eye will rest on," explained one wife in 1862, "cements me with you more closely than anything else." Letters represent absence, and a writer's attempts to fill that absence. Many aspects of marriages, shrouded by Victorian sensibilities and closed doors, appear with a greater intimacy within letters, and from a wider variety of people – many small farmers did not travel, and thus, did not write letters, before the war. Husbands wrote home candidly. "Old lady, I want to see you mighty bad...I would give lots just to have one pouting smack, and I would give any thing I've got to have you serve me as you did you know when," penned Winston Stephens, who left Tivie to fight with a Florida regiment. He was not the only husband to express this sort of sentiment. "Honey, I feel in a loving mood and if you were here I would hold you in my lap and kiss and kiss you to your hearts content," wrote another husband to his wife in 1863, adding, "Darling, did you think about yesterday being the anniversary of our marriage? Four years how short they seem...We are more violently in

Southern History, Vol. LXXVI, no. 1 (February 2010); Laura Cornelia McGimsey Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Stephen Dodson Ramseur, *The Bravest of the Brave: The Correspondence of Stephen Dodson Ramseur*, ed. George G. Kundahl (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

love by far than the sweethearts.” Unable to speak into their wives’ ears, husbands recognized and articulated their emotions on paper.¹²

The war offered wives the opportunity to write freely as well. “I miss you sleeping with me as much or more than anything else,” Mary Bell informed her husband. Malinda Waller Averett was pregnant when her husband Harris joined the 55th Alabama Infantry in 1863, and likewise missed her husband’s physical presence. “I wish you could come home for I am as fat as a pig in a pen...I would write something which would make you laugh but I am afraid something man would see it” she wrote shortly after he left. Three weeks later, she informed her husband that “I have stayed so long as I can.” She planned to “make my new dress and I am coming.” The separation was hard on the young couple for “It seems like you have been gone a year,” Malinda wrote just months after Harris marched off. Her pregnancy was progressing rapidly, leading her to explain that, “I want to come before I get too big so you can hug me good. I am getting pretty big around. I am afraid you can’t get your arms around me.” Once again fearful that her candidness might be discovered, she asked “my dear Harris do burn up this letter when you read it. I am afraid somebody might get hold of it.” Harris did not follow his wife’s directions, and thus the letter survives as an example of a pretense-free marriage. “How I wish I was with you now,” Malinda had informed her husband, adding “I would eat a piece of you.”¹³

¹² Laetitia LaFon Ashmore Nutt, *Courageous Journey: The Civil War Journal of Laetitia LaFon Ashmore Nutt*, ed. Florence Ashmore Cowles Hamlett Martin (Miami: Seemann, 1975), 82; Emma to Will Crutcher, January 4, 1862, Winston Stephens-Shannon Papers, University of Texas, Austin, as quoted in Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 115; Winston Stephens to Octavia Stephens, 4 May 1863, S-B Papers, UF.; William Pender to Fanny, March 4, 1863, in *The General to his Lady: The Civil War Letters of William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender*, ed. William W. Hassler, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 201.

¹³ Mary Bell to Alfred Bell, July 27, 1862, as quoted in Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 123; Malinda Waller Averett, Reeltown, Alabama, to Harris Hardin Averett, 11 September 1863, Harris Hardin Averett Papers, 1854-1863, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery; Malinda Waller Averett, Reeltown, Alabama, to Harris Hardin Averett, 1 October 1863, *ibid.*

Letters not only allowed couples to express desires, emotional and physical, but also offered an opportunity for a soldier to remember a world left behind, and affirm his marital relationship. “I can imagine your loneliness and measure it by my own. I never was so homesick, restless, and down hearted in my life. Here I am away from all I love, sleeping on the wet ground, my horse poor, nothing to do, nobody to see, nothing to eat and an oven & a pot to cook it in,” reflected William Gaston Delony in March 1862, “I shall miss you all now more than ever & I hardly know what will become of me without the prattle of my precious little children, all alone in my tent, with my poor little wife too all alone at home...Dont give up, it will all turn out right I hope and believe.” The logistics of separation expanded the opportunities for William communicate romantic feelings of love and loneliness.¹⁴

Like William, Stephen Dodson Ramseur professed his love abundantly in his letters. “My Heart’s Most Precious Darling! You are the light and delight of my life. I live for you. And Oh! your love makes life so delightful for me,” he wrote in a characteristically beautiful letter. And yet, Ramseur felt words were insufficient, for while he wished “I could give expression in this letter to the intensity, the deep devotion, of my love to you,” Ramseur simply believed “Dearest little wife, this is impossible.” The separation was tough on the couple, who had married in 1862. And yet, letters were the only way in which he could express his emotional sentiments, and so he wrote it down, penning “my Sweetest Darling, My Heart’s Queen, my Best beloved, My beautiful little wife, how earnestly, increasingly I long to be with you.” Similarly, Ebenezer B. Coggin, a farmer with only \$100 in personal estate in 1860, wrote a steady stream of

¹⁴ William Delony, Camp Hunter, to Rosa Delony, Athens, Georgia, March 16, 8, 1862, William Gaston Deloney Family Papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

letters to his wife Ann until his death. “My deare wife,” he would pen typically, “my heart is fild with greef and my eyes with tears to think that we ar so far apart that I cannot See you and my Sweet little Children.” He died in 1863.¹⁵

For Georgia and William King, who rushed to the altar without the blessing of her father or brothers, letters also served as a tool to keep their passion alive. For his “beloved wife Georgia,” he wrote a lengthy poem to celebrate their first wedding anniversary. He began when their courtship began, when “a nation’s wrong had waked a nation’s ire,” and then likened her to a heavenly angel:

She spoke, and from her pearly mouth did gush
Sweet liquid words, which to my heart did rush
Her lovely eyes, beamed as from Angel’s face
My soul, unsandaled, stood in Holy place.

He traced their courtship and described their wedding day:

Happy the husband who can truly say,
“Hail sweet return of Heav’n-blessed Wedding Day!”
I hail this day! Hea’vn’s blessing o’er us throw
Profusely, as were giv’n one year ago!

William concluded his poem with this stanza:

If virtue e’er can bless a husband’s heart,
And Purity can e’er its charm impart,
My soul will make to purer, better life,
By the sweet teachings of my modest wife.¹⁶

On July 9, 1862, they celebrated, though miles apart, this one year wedding anniversary, not knowing that, soon, they would in fact be together. William would be sick by the end of the month and dead by the end of the year.

¹⁵ Ramseur, 250, 262, 261; Ebenezer B Coggin to Ann E. Coggin, January 20 1862, Ebenezer B. Coggin Papers, 1862-1889, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery.

¹⁶ William Duncan Smith to Georgia Page King Smith, 9 July 1862, K-W Papers, GHS.

For those who did not rush to the altar before the war began, letters were not simply a place to express love, but to fall in love. Elodie Breck Todd, little sister of Mary Todd Lincoln, met Nathaniel Dawson at the inaugural ball of Jefferson Davis. “I fell in love with you in Montgomery,” he later confessed to Elodie, “and tried to restrain my feelings, but they were too powerful.” At night’s end, he said, “I made up my mind to endeavor to make the star mine in whose beams I had wandered.” After they met, he began sending her little presents, while drilling his new company in Selma, Alabama. A few days before he and his men were to depart, to be mustered in as Company C of the Fourth Alabama, Nathaniel asked Elodie for her hand in marriage. She was shocked; Nathaniel was an unlikely suitor. He had been married twice – both wives dying in childbirth – and was twelve years her senior. “Ever since I can remember,” Elodie said, “I have been looked upon and called the ‘old maid’ of the family and Mother seemed to think I was to be depended on to take care of her when all the rest of her handsomer daughters had left her.” And even if her mother could be brought around, what about her older sisters, what about Mary Lincoln? Even with all this, Elodie said yes; some combination of the man and the times made her willing to take a chance. Most of all she wanted to be in charge of her own life. “My family may think I am committing a sin to give a thought to any other than the arrangements they have made for me,” she said, but “as this is the age when Secession, Freedom, and Rights are asserted, I am claiming mine.”¹⁷

Over the following year, Nathaniel and Elodie fell in love by mail. Words were all they had, as they flirted, fought, and fumbled towards one another. Nathaniel was

¹⁷ Nathaniel Dawson to Elodie Todd, June 26, 1861, Nathaniel Henry Rhodes Dawson papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, May 9, 1861, Dawson Papers.

almost ludicrously ardent in his early letters, writing often and vaguely, carried into raptures by the strength of his own affection. “My whole soul seems to swell with love for you,” he wrote Elodie typically, “and if I could die at this moment, all my thoughts would be of you.” Nathaniel was inclined to see Elodie as a glorious abstraction, a vessel for all his hopes and dreams of outliving the war. Elodie tended to correct such rosy excesses, poking holes in his ego and his lavish language, but she loved it too. “I am a troublesome somebody at all times,” she assured him; “I am a Todd, and some of these days you may be unfortunate enough to find out what they are.” Nathaniel seemed gradually to understand that these were not warnings but invitations—to know and love Elodie whole. With each letter, they had an opportunity to bare a bit more of themselves, to fall a bit more in love. The war would break Elodie’s family into smaller and bloodier pieces, damage the reputation of Nathaniel, and delay their wedding month after month. But in 1861, they just wrote.¹⁸

“My loved Elodie,” Nathaniel reflected, “*She is my country*, and without her, I would have no country, to live for, and to die for. I would make a better soldier, if you were now my wife, as you could take publicly an interest in my welfare, and not be subjected to many annoyances that must now disturb you.” Nathaniel was not alone in equating wife and country. In March 1861, the war not even truly begun, one recently enlisted officer explained to his wife, “I cannot feel contented, quiet, or happy away from you. You have become necessary to make me feel all was right. I feel exactly as if some part of me was absent.” And yet, this closeness is why he fought. A farmer from Alabama put it more clearly, in grieving the unexpected news of the “death of our little daughter,” tried to

¹⁸ Nathaniel Dawson to Elodie Todd, August 21, 1861, Dawson Papers; Elodie Todd to Nathaniel Dawson, May 15, 1861, Dawson Papers.

explain why he would not return home. “If it were not for the love of my country and my family and the patriotism that bury in my bosom for them I would bee glad to come home and stay there,” he began, continuing, “but I no I have as much to fite for as any body else but if I were there I no I could not stay.” These loves, to him, were one and the same. His wife responded, “I trouble all most to death about you and our little cricket death it all most breaks my hart to think that you are gone so farr from me and the children.” He would remain at war until May 1865.¹⁹

So when husbands marched off to battle, they did not view their actions as shirking husbandly duty, but fulfilling it. “A man who will not offer up his life for his family when necessary takes a very low view of his Christian duty and does dishonor to his wife and children,” explained one father to his daughter. The question of where a man’s duty belonged, wife or country, was rarely asked at the outset of the war. In a letter written just one week before he received a mortal wound in the Battle of Seven Pines, Sydenham Moore wrote, “I feel that our lives are at the disposal of an over ruling Providence and that if it is his will that I should fall...I feel that I am doing my duty to my wife and children, expelling a foe.” While ideologies certainly bolstered their beliefs, “it was for her that he was fighting; it was for her that he would suffer and die,” she was his reality amid the mass of abstractions. Some wives, however, had trouble accepting this argument, and believed their husbands happier, or at least happy, away at war. “You appear to think that I am more easily weaned off than you thought I would be, from my dear family,” acknowledged one husband, “I really thought that you knew my disposition

¹⁹ Nathaniel Dawson to Elodie Todd, December 18, 1861, Dawson Papers; William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender, March 26, 1861, in *The General to his Lady*, 12; John Cotton to Mariah Hindsman Cotton, August 3, 1862, in *Yours Till Death: Civil War Letters of John W. Cotton*, ed. Lucille Griffith (Birmingham: University of Alabama, 1951), 14; Mariah Hindsman Cotton to John Cotton, August 21, 1862, in *Yours Till Death*, 16.

better than to think that I ever could be weaned off, when my whole thoughts and affections are with you.” Another husband assured, “Catherine, don’t think that I run off on purpose to keep from staying with you. I want to see you mighty bad.” But sometimes, the needs of the two entities, wife and country, conflicted directly. When forced to choose between his wedding and his country’s orders, Ramseur missed his wedding. He immediately wrote a letter to his beloved fiancée, revealing “my disappointment has almost unmanned me. But no, I will perform my duty here & there. I’ll come & claim your love.” Though they would marry just over a month later, on October 28, 1863, the missed wedding highlights which duty Ramseur placed precedence upon. While duty to country and to family did not necessarily conflict in men’s minds, as the war continued, tensions swelled. Food grew scarce, slaves became increasingly rebellious, Union troops marched closer to hometowns, and desertion rates escalated.²⁰

For some men, like Theophilus Perry, absence truly did make the heart grow fonder. Theophilus took his father’s slave, joined Company F of the 28th Texas Cavalry, and rode off to fight for the Confederacy in the summer of 1862, before realizing how important his marriage was to his happiness. Not two months into his life as a soldier, he wrote to his young wife Harriet: “I never knew how much my life is wrapped up in you and daughter, as I now know...All the world is blank and sadness unless your face shines upon it.” His wife was similarly dejected: “You are my life,” she told her husband, “it is all I can do to live separated from you.” She attempted to remain encouraging in her

²⁰ Samuel Sanders, “Letters of Dr. Samuel D. Sanders,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 65 (July 1964): 129-135, as quoted in Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 46; Sydenham Moore to Amanda Moore, 24 May 1862, Sydenham Moore Family Papers, 1833-1873, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery; Stephen W. Berry II, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 183; James J. Nixon, Apalachicola, to Louisa A Nixon, Mt. Pleasant Florida, 19 December 1861, Nixon Letters, UF; Commodore Decatur Epps, Union County, Georgia, to Catherine Epps, 30 December 1862, Epps Papers, UNC; Ramseur, 166.

letters to Theophilus, but to her sister she shared the secrets of her heart. “I am here so lonely and uneasy” she wrote, “it seems to me that Mr. Perry’s being in the army will kill me. I am no better reconciled than I was at first.” She claimed she could not “sleep nor take pleasure or interest in any thing in the world” while he was away. Harriet felt “so low spirited I dont know what to do...I dont know what is to become of us—we are sorely scourged if any people ever were...for I have no idea he will ever return to stay—war makes its widows by the thousand.” And in 1864, war made a widow of her.²¹

Because of this absence of husband, the war required most married couples, whether celebrating their first or fifteenth wedding anniversary, to negotiate a new balance of power and responsibility during the war. “We have a part to perform as well as the rest: we must make our men comfortable, we must encourage them by brave words and keeping stout hearts, we must try to turn their hearts to the guider of all destinies, and we must cry mightily unto Him day and night, and must trust in Him to deliver us,” reflected recently-engaged Lucy Wood to her diary. Even with prayer, many wives, accustomed to leaning on husbands for a variety of daily tasks, found themselves lacking direction. “If you would only tell me to do something, I would like it so much—I should feel like I was your wife, and that you claimed your property,” wrote Emma Crutcher to her husband in 1862, feeling “wearied of acting for myself and deciding for myself” after six months of separation. In this way, the South remained patriarchal throughout the war. Certainly, patriarchy was built “on a male assumption of power and privilege, justified in

²¹ Editor M. Jane Johansson published the letters between Harriet and her husband to document the “intimate and emotional” lives “of one couple and their ultimate tragedy.” Too often, the tale ends as this published narrative does. When Theophilus died in battle, just over four years after his marriage to Harriet, the book ends. Johansson writes a half page informing the reader that Harriet moved to North Carolina and remarried in 1872, but nothing more. Harriet Eliza Person to Mary Temperance Person, Marshall Texas, October 22, 1862, in *Widows by the Thousand: The Civil War Letters of Theophilus and Harriet Perry 1862-1864*, ed. M. Jane Johansson (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), xv, 1-2, 5, 10, 45.

the physics of bone and muscle and biology, policed by courts, churches, fists,” as George Fitzhugh wrote in 1854, but it was also upheld by women who championed and polished this image of manhood. “Your little wife is tired, and wants to give up the reins, and lay her head on your shoulder and rest,” Emma concluded.²²

And many husbands happily provided direction. “I want the rye sowed in the barn lot as soon as the hogs have eat out if there is any seed left let it be sowed down to the woods field” ordered James Nixon. When James Rains heard of his wife’s recent illness, he wrote for her to come to him, believing “you would be so interested in keeping house for me that you would not get sick again.” “You must not be troubled at the news,” directed another husband to his anxious wife, “but like a brave woman as you are bear up, reflect that you are not the only wife whose husband will likely be in the trouble.” He then offered advice on his new baby son. “You must love Dorsey as I said before, for Turner is mine. I raised him and must love him without rival. The Mother always takes to the younger and the father the oldest,” he wrote. Even though he had not met the new baby, he knew “none can ever be so dear to me as that incomparable boy, Turner; the greatest boy in the world.”²³

John W. Cotton, an Alabama farmer, was another husband ready to direct. When he marched to war as a private in 1862, he left behind his wife Mariah, his seven

²² Lucy Wood Diary, May 24, 1861, Lomax Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, as quoted in Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 251-2; Emma Crutcher to Will Crutcher, February 1, April 8, 1862, Neblett Papers, University of Texas, Austin, as quoted in Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 121-2; George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South: Or the failure of Free Society* (Richmond: Morris, 1854), 214 as quoted in Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 6.

²³ James J. Nixon, Camp Retrieve, to Louisa A Nixon, Mt. Pleasant Florida, December 5, 1861, James J. Nixon Letters, 1861-1863, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville; James E. Rains, to [Ida Yeatman Rains], Tennessee, 3 January 1862, Civil War Collection Microfilm, Box 11 Folder 10, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville; William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender, April 11, 1861, in *The General to his Lady*, 14; William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender, June 6, 1861, in *The General to his Lady*, 30; William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender, May 30, 1861, in *The General to his Lady*, 25.

children, his land, and a couple of slaves. Like many husbands, he constantly requested more letters, with lines like “rite I havent got nary letter from you yet.” It seemed to him that he always wrote more letters than he received. In addition to worrying about her not writing enough, he worried about the farm. “I am very sorry that I cant get to come home I no you are at a loss to no what to do with your farm,” he wrote in December 1862.

“You must try to get somebody to tend your land for I dont no what you will do if you don’t get somebody to make some corn for you.” She did find someone to hire, but John still expressed frustration with, “I think you have lost smartly by selling your corn when you did.” The next month, he felt unhappy again, for “I was not very well pleased when I herd what you had to give for salt.” More typically, he tried to direct his wife as clearly as he could in her additional duties. “If your hogs ant all dead you had better have them fed about once a day with green corn give them about one stalk a piece a day I think that meat will bee of more value than corn and you should make your hogs do as well as you can,” he wrote typically. And she sought this counsel, as reflected in his responses.

“You said you wanted to no whether you must kill that steer or sell him,” he wrote in one letter, while also directing, “I want you to hire him,” regarding a slave, “I want you to tell me how much tax you have to pay,” on the brandy, “I reckon you have not forgot where I told you to have wheat soad,” and “I would bee better satisfied if I new what ailded you.” She was pregnant.²⁴

Even as southern society remained tied to its patriarchal structure, the mechanics of war encouraged some soldiers to relinquish power to their wives. C. D. Epps felt quite

²⁴ John Cotton to Mariah Hindsman Cotton, June 17, 1862, in *Yours Till Death*, 6; John Cotton to Mariah Hindsman Cotton, December 26, 1862, in *Yours Till Death*, 40; John Cotton to Mariah Hindsman Cotton, January 19, 1863, in *Yours Till Death*, 45; John Cotton to Mariah Hindsman Cotton, February 2, 1863, in *Yours Till Death*, 47; John Cotton to Mariah Hindsman Cotton, August 18, 1863, in *Yours Till Death*, 79; John Cotton to Mariah Hindsman Cotton, October 5, 1863, in *Yours Till Death*, 87.

confident in his wife's wisdom and ignored her constant pleas for instructions. When he finally addressed her requests, he replied, "you wrote to me to write to you about managing. You know best now. Do the best you can to make something to eat."

Likewise, Edwin Fay told his wife, "You ask me what I think of the trade of the house for the negroes. I don't know what to say to you except that I want you to act just as if you were a widow in your own right. You know I place implicit confidence in your judgement." E. P. Petty told his wife, "I approve anything you do...I am not now the head of the family and dont pretend to dictate," while Morgan Callaway reflected, "Dear me, why should I advise an experienced farmer like yourself?" One war widow, who did not embrace these additional responsibilities during the war, struggled to manage after her husband's death. She recalled in a letter to her brother, "Oh how often Winston has told me that I ought not be so dependent on him, but to learn how to manage." A little management know-how would have gone a long way in his permanent absence.²⁵

Certainly, slavery was something else to be "managed," something else on everyone's mind, as the soldiers fought to defend it away from home, and wives struggled to keep in intact in their absence. The wives of slave owners not only had to manage a house or farm, but people. In a region where power came from violence, and violence fell outside the acceptable range of feminine behaviors, things became tricky. "Is it possible that Congress thinks...our women can control the slaves and oversee the farms? Do they suppose that our patriotic mothers, sisters and daughters can assume and

²⁵ Commodore Decatur Epps to Catherine Epps, 3 August 1862. C.D. Epps Papers, 1862-1915, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Edwin H. Fay to wife, 13 November 1863 as quoted in *This Infernal War; the Confederate Letters of Edwin H. Fay*, eds. Bell Irvin Wiley with the assistance of Lucy E. Fay (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958); Elijah P. Petty, *Journey to Pleasant Hill: The Civil War Letters of Captain Elijah P. Petty, Walker's Texas Division, CSA* (Austin, University of Texas, 1982), 103; Morgan Callaway to Leila Callaway, August 28, December 20, 1863, Morgan Callaway papers, Emory University, as quoted in Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 123; Octavia Stephens to Davis Bryant, June 11, 1864, S-B Papers, UF.

discharge the active duties and drudgery of an overseer? Certainly not. They know better,” concluded one Georgia newspaper in 1862. The image of women whipping slaves, as male masters did, clashed with all accepted gender norms. But men marched off to war and as a result, a wife could find herself struggling to manage enslaved people while maintaining her image as a docile and vulnerable example of her sex. Elite women frequently penned their frustrations to their husbands, such as Mary Bell who complained she often felt “ready to give up and think surely my lot is harder than anyone else.” In 1862, she wrote, “I wish I could be man and woman both until this war ends,” after she discovered their hired slave Tom both stole meat and poisoned her brother-in-law’s dog, while Liza disappeared for days at a time. James J. Nixon, who owned ten slaves in 1860, informed his wife Louisa that “sometimes it appears to me like that it would be better for me to hire out our darkies than to undertake to make another crop under the circumstances.” Lizzie Neblett wrote her husband that, when it came time to pick cotton in 1863, their slaves “are not doing that job...some of them are getting so high in anticipation of their glorious freedom by the Yankees I suppose, that they resist a whipping.” A South Carolina congressman’s wife echoed Lizzie’s sentiments with, “I tell you all this attention to farming is uphill work with me. I can give orders first-rate, but when I am not obeyed, I can’t keep my temper.” The change in household command, along with the events, rumors, and occupying armies of war, provided enslaved people even greater opportunities to push against the system, much to the frustration of their female masters.²⁶

²⁶ *Macon Daily Telegraph*, September 1, 1862, quoted in Clarence L. Mohr, *On the Threshold of Freedom: Masters and Slaves in Civil War Georgia*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 221; Mary Bell to Alfred Bell, January 30, May 22, 29, September 21, December 16, 1862, Bell Papers, Duke University, as quoted in Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 71; James J. Nixon, Apalachicola, to Louisa A Nixon,

Despite wives' failures in slave control, most Confederate women could and would not imagine a life without the institution. In the midst of all her annoyances and difficulties, Lizzie simply wanted "one good negro to wait upon me." Similarly, Mary, though at her wits end with Tom and Liza, desired a "woman that can get up and get breakfast. I am getting tired of having to rise these cold mornings." Though many women agreed with Mary Boykin Chestnut's option of African Americans as "dirty—slatternly—idle—ill smelling by nature," white women realized enslaved people offered valuable labor not just to plantation crops, but the lifestyles many Confederate women epitomized. This was what the war was about, the Constitution that their men fought for had made the issue clear. In March 1861, Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens explained to all that the cornerstone of the new nation "rests upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery—subordination to the superior race—is his natural and normal condition." As such, many women desperately wanted to hold the South's racial hierarchy together via methods of violence or persuasion until their men could come marching home.²⁷

Mt. Pleasant Florida, December 19, 1861, Nixon Letters, UF; Lizzie Neblett to Will Neblett, August 18, 1863, Neblett Papers, University of Texas, Austin, as quoted in Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 66; Mrs. W. W. Boyce to W. W. Boyce, April 12, 1862, quoted in *Letters of Warren Akin, Confederate Congressman*, ed. Bell I. Wiley (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1959), 4-5.

²⁷ Lizzie Neblett to Will Neblett, 1864, as quoted in Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 70; Mary Bell to Alfred Bell, November 24, 1864, as quoted in Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 72; Mary Boykin Chestnut quoted in Elisabeth Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chestnut: A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 109; Alexander Stephens, "Slavery the Cornerstone of the Confederacy" Speech, March 21, 1861, Savannah, Georgia in Marion Mills Miller, ed., *Great Debates in American History: State Rights (1798-1861); Slavery (1858-1861)* vol. 5 of *Great Debates in American History* (New York: Current Literature Publishing Company, 1913), 288-290; The historiography of mistresses and masters is deep. Some essentials include: Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Catherine Clinton, *Tara Revisited: Women, War, and the Plantation Legend* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1995) and Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books,) 1982; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*; Victoria E. Ott, *Confederate Daughters*.

Slaveholding was not the only source of stress; like marriages before the war, marriages during the conflict also had their share of difficulties and trouble. After graduating from West Point, William Dorsey Pender met Fanny Howard, the fourteen-year-old little sister of a friend and classmate. They married March 3, 1859, and had a son by the end of the year. William enjoyed a professional military career, with a commission in the U.S. army, often fighting in the West against Native Americans. “Darling do not trouble yourself about the Indians,” he wrote in 1860, “Fighting is supposed to be my profession, and my wife must get used to the idea.”²⁸

Fighting may have been William’s profession, but it also entered his personal life when his fondness for flirtation brought him to blows with his wife, during the Civil War. Twenty-seven years old, he resigned his commission and joined the Confederacy in March 1861. His steady stream of letters to his wife contained missives of love, notes of encouragement, and compliments amidst the news of war. They also revealed his weakness for pretty girls. “Tell Pamela that her good opinion of me is ten fold returned. I think her the prettiest woman I have yet seen, and the most loveable one,” he wrote of Fanny’s younger, unmarried seventeen year old sister. “There are lots of beautiful girls here, and good many fine horses,” he wrote from Virginia, “so when I have nothing else to do, I can look at something beautiful or fine.” A couple days later he “dined today with the most beautiful girl in Suffolk—and it was [a] great many very pretty ones.” The next week, he let his wife know that “the ladies keep my table covered with flowers and smile on me in the most bewitching manner.” In the same letter, he expressed concern for his wife, who had just given birth. “Honey I hope they have not let your figure be

²⁸ William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender, June 25, 1860, in *The General to his Lady*, ed. William W. Hassler, 5.

spoilt by not keeping your bandage sufficiently tight...do not lose your figure. Later that month, he described a woman who “has intimated once or twice that she has fallen in love with me.” Then in his next, he had “a very nice time dancing and flirting with a very nice girl” who told him she would “do anything for me.” In case the message was somehow muddled, the next letter contained evidence. “To show you what a favorite I am with some of the ladies,” he bragged, “yesterday one of them had two peaches—all the way up from Georgia—given her, she ate the small one and kept the large one for me with the request that I should eat it all...David says everything I do is complimented. They certainly treat me very politely.”²⁹

Fanny had enough. Her infant not yet two months in this world, her husband flirting his way through Virginia, and her health leaving her “weak as a baby,” she decided it was her turn to write a frank letter. She first addressed his scolding about her letter writing. “Remember, Mr. Pender, that I am not quite as strong as I might be, and I have a good many duties to attend to that distract my attention from the sheet before me. I never sit to write a letter that I do not have to get up half a dozen times to perform some little service for the baby or someone else. And often, I attempt to write with both children screaming in my ears.” She then turned to her concerns, easing in by describing her own actions as a wife. “I have never in the whole course of my married [life] done anything deliberately that I knew would pain you—your will has always been my law—and I have ever tried to *obey* to the very letter the commands of my Lord and master,” she

²⁹ William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender, April 3, 1861, in *The General to his Lady*, 14; William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender, May 30, 1861, in *The General to his Lady*, 25; William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender, June 2, 1861, in *The General to his Lady*, 27; William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender, June 9, 1861, in *The General to his Lady*, 31; William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender, June 23, 1861, in *The General to his Lady*, 39; William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender, June 26, 1861, in *The General to his Lady*, 40; William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender, June 30, 1861, in *The General to his Lady*, 42.

began. She then quoted back to him one of his stories of flirtation, and let her true thoughts loose. “Now, I ask you candidly, in your sober sense, why you wrote me such a thing as that? Was it to gratify your vanity by making me jealous, or to make me appreciate your love still more? You are very much mistaken,” she informed him. “I feel indignant that any woman should have dared to make such loose speeches to my husband and that he should have encouraged it by his attentions, for you must have gone pretty far for a woman to attempt such a liberty.” She could not believe he would “stoop to listen to such improper language” nor “admit that you had been *flirting*.” She then turned the tables. “What would you think to hear me use such an expression?” she asked, “And would it be more immoral in me than in you?” This apparently, was a milder response than that she first imagined, for “I have forgotten all the anger I felt at first—but I can never forget that letter—nothing you have ever said—nothing you have ever done, nothing you have ever written in this whole of our married life—ever pained me so acutely or grieved me so deeply.” And off the letter went.³⁰

William returned the letter back to her two days later, adding a notation. “You have torn my heart...brought tears, bitter tears [to] the eyes of one who has loved you and tried to honor you,” he began. “Oh! Fanny, my letter was cruel,” he admitted, “but you have surpassed me.” He found the charges “hard to bear,” nor could he bear “that anyone should know that I had ever received such a letter from my wife.” “I have loved life dearly, but tonight I feel this war has no terrors for me,” he confessed darkly, adding, “I feel the want of support under this greatest blow I have ever received.” This blow, he

³⁰ Fanny Pender to William Dorsey Pender, June 30, 1861, in *The General to his Lady*, 42-4.

believed, was that his wife believed him “not only a tyrant, but a vain unprincipled wretch.”³¹

A few days later William wrote again. “To my great surprise I received a letter from you today...I should not have been surprised if I had not received any more letters from you. I had about made up my mind that we were henceforth to be as strangers,” he began, before again revisiting the pain of Fanny’s accusations and expression of her honest feelings. “If you knew what I have suffered,” he explained, “that letter was in my mind awake and sleeping, again and again would my grief have to be relieved by tears.” “If you had simply said I do not love you I could have stood for it,” he confessed, “but to accuse me of dishonorable acts.” That was too much. Reflecting on the incident a few letters later, he added, “I did not love you the less at any time but felt miserable at the insane notion that I might be losing you. Honey say nothing more about [it].”³²

From there, they set the fight itself aside, and he no longer wrote of his flirtations. “There are no ladies to trouble you this time,” he wrote in December 1862, “I had a pressing invitation yesterday to dine where there were several pretty ladies but did not go.” In February 1863, “Mrs. Walker is considered a great beauty, but I was comparing you last night while there and I came to the conclusion that you were the prettiest, and by far more intelligent than any lady I met,” he attempted to assure her. Even as he tried to ease her worries, he also constantly asked for her prayers, expressing sentiments like, “I know you pray for me and darling I need it for with all my efforts I am a great sinner”

³¹ William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender, July 2, 1861, in *The General to his Lady*, 45.

³² William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender, July 11, 1861, in *The General to his Lady*, 47.

and “help me my wife for you know how hard it is to do right and how many temptations surround me.”³³

William also struggled with the physical side of their own relationship, fearing a pregnancy every time they visited one another. After Fanny became ill (likely of urology issues) in the late summer of 1861, after a visit, he blamed himself, writing, “Oh! Darling, and I have to reproach myself for it. Honey, the same that causes you so much trouble is my stumbling block in this world. When I think I am getting better it rises up and stares me in the face to my great mortification, for I do feel humbled and mortified to that the most dangerous of all our passions and the most sinful when indulged, should be the one that I cannot conquer.” After he saw her again the following spring, he worried once more that she had become pregnant. The following month he received news. “I must say I am heartily glad you had a miscarriage,” he wrote. “My mind was very much relieved to hear that you were not as I had imagined, very ill...surely if you do not want children you will have to remain away from me, and hereafter when you come to me I shall know that you want another baby.” She visited again in late February, so when he died at Gettysburg in 1863, she was just twenty-three years old, and pregnant again. Upon hearing the news of his death, she locked herself in her room, emerging three days later, reportedly with her hair turned white. She never remarried and in 1922, finally laid beside her husband once more, buried after a long 82 years of life.³⁴

³³ William Pender to Fanny, December 5, 1862, *The General to his Lady*, 193; William Pender to Fanny, February 25, 1863, *The General to his Lady*, 197; William Pender to Fanny, August 27, 1861, and October 7, 1861 in *The General to his Lady*, 51, 77.

³⁴ William Pender to Fanny, September 11, 1861, in *The General to his Lady*, 57-8; William Pender to Fanny, March 6, 1862, *The General to his Lady*, 118; Hassler, 262; Many widows had to deal with the loss of other family members, in addition to husbands, during the war. Fanny’s little brother, Jacob Shepperd, was 16 at outbreak of war, became Pender’s aide, and was killed at Fredericksburg.

Fanny and William were not the only ones who fought via the mail during the war. “I received your unkind letter of the 30th,” wrote James Edward Rains to his young wife. Married in 1858, Ida Yeatman was at home in Tennessee with their infant daughter while James fought for the fledgling Confederacy. At the outset of the war, James only reluctantly supported the concept of secession, but he quickly rose through the Confederate ranks to the position of brigadier general in the 11th Tennessee Infantry. “You scold me very severely when I am with you,” James wrote his wife, but “I did not think that you would write me such a letter at a time when I may be called away from you, perhaps forever.” Ida accused her husband of spending their money selfishly, to which he replied, “the single article of caps is the only thing about which I have been extravagant. On this point I plead guilty to the charge.” As an officer, James argued, “I am obliged to support my rank.” Questioning his wife, he asked, “are you unwilling for me to make myself comfortable and support the position I occupy?” James went on to describe the hunger he was currently experiencing, informing Ida that “under all these circumstances I do think your scolding exceedingly unkind and undeserved.” “I will endeavor to live on salt pork and stale bread and you will have all you want,” he concluded sharply.³⁵

James received a shot to the heart and died instantaneously on December 31, 1862 at the battle of Murfreesboro. “What must have been the feelings of the...young wife...enviored by Yankees...in Nashville, unable to come to him,” wondered a funeral attendee, who recalled that “it seems but yesterday since we laid our hands on the cold, dead face of General Rains.” Indeed, what were the feelings of the young widow? Did

³⁵ James E. Rains, to [Ida Yeatman Rains], Tennessee, 1 July 1861, Civil War Collection Microfilm Collection, Nashville.

she miss the man she “scolded so severely” before the war? Or, was she perhaps a touch relieved that she could now manage the money herself? After all, with James’ death, hat purchases would no longer come before her daughter’s needs.³⁶

As the months turned to seasons, and seasons to years, the length of the war brought on a weary heaviness for many women. “Thus we bury, one by one, the dearest, the brightest...O God! help us, for the wail is in the whole land!,” reflected Judith McGuire on January 1, 1864. “Oh how I wish the war never had started,” sighed another wife characteristically to her husband in 1863, “I think we had better give up, and have our husbands with us...[life] will be much harder when we are subdued after our husbands have been killed.” Patriotism no longer outweighed physical presence for her. Mariah Cotton, who wrote in the same style as her husband, rambled with,

“I hope that happy day will soon com when you can com to see me and you little children I hope the war will com to a close and you can com home to me to stay it wood bee a day of joy to see you a com home saft again I think if peace was made it wood be the joyfulest times that ever has ben in wood bee to me if you was to com saft...if I cood see and talk with you won time more I wood bee so glad I cant beegen to tell you any thing about how bad I want to see you I hope that happy day will soon com when I can see you lovely face noth mor I re main you true loving wife till death Mariah Cotton to her dear beloved husband in the war good by my dear husband.”³⁷

As the death tolls rose, wives worried, and mourning began even before husbands died. Couples not only grieved physical separations, but feared unfortunate outcomes. Minerva McClatchey believed she worried ceaselessly because “we hear thousands of rumors—but nothing reliable.” Another future widow, Rosa Delony, told her husband “Faith and hope and every thing else nearly dies out of my fearful heart in view of the

³⁶ James Lee McDonough, *Stones River: Bloody Winter Tennessee* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1980), 211.

³⁷ McGuire, January 1, 1864, 249-50; Octavia Stephens to Winston Stephens, 5 August 1863, S-B Papers, UF; Mariah Hindsman Cotton to John Cotton, July 16, 1863, in *Yours Till Death*, 77.

monstrous fact of our indefinite separation.” She felt “as restive and impatient as a young unbroken colt,” aching for news of her husband and for the day when he could finally return home. Like many women, for Rosa “constant anxiety” seemed to be “tearing out” her very spirit. “I wonder if the time will ever come when you will come home to remain. God grant that it may,” she wistfully penned. Tivie Stephens was blunter. “Give up now while you have life,” she begged. Even wives who bore the separations well in the day could find themselves haunted by night. While dreaming, Emma Crutcher’s “powers of self control” were “somewhat benumbed” by sleep, as she imagined her husband returning to her at night. “I never should have allowed [it] had I been fully roused,” she assured him.³⁸

William Pender scolded his wife for her fears. “Honey, you say you get perfectly desperate. I too get low in spirits and want to see my precious wife worse than ever,” he sympathized, “but we must fight against it. We are only in the same condition as others, and my wife to talk to unpatriotically, I am astonished, after your talking so bravely sometime since. Cheer up.” James J. Nixon, a soldier of the 8th Florida Regiment who would die of wounds he received at the Battle of Brandy Station, told his wife to “enjoy yourself as much as you can” for “it is just as well to live while we are living.” Even so, husbands reflected on the possibilities of death as well. “I have often thought if I have to

³⁸ Union wives, too, worried about their husbands. Septima Collis, after fruitlessly searching a nearby battlefield for her husband, felt overwhelmed by questions. “Was I widowed? Was my husband lying in the trenches suffering from some horrible wound, and I not near him? Oh what an anxious night!” she penned. The next day, Septima gratefully discovered that her husband was alive, though “literally covered from head to foot with cakes of mud.” Septima Maria Levy Collis, *A Woman’s War Record, 1861-1865* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1889), 50-55; Minerva Leah Rowles McClatchey, *A Georgia Woman’s Civil War Diary: The Journal of Minerva Leah Rowles McClatchey*, ed. T. Conn Bryan, *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 51 (1967) 212-213; Rosa Delony, Athens, Georgia, to Will Delony, 15 June 1862, Deloney Papers, UGA; Rosa Delony, Athens, Georgia, to Will Delony, 2 August 1863; Rosa Delony, Athens, Georgia, to Will Delony, 1 January 1862; Octavia Stephens to Winston Stephens, March 19, 1862, Bryant-Stephens Papers, UF; Emma to Will Crutcher, January 22, 1862, Crutcher-Shannon Papers, University of Texas, Austin, as quoted in Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 115.

die on the battlefield, if some kind friend would just lay my Bible under my head and your likeness on my breast with the golden curls of hair in it, that it would be enough,” wrote one soldier to his wife in Georgia.³⁹

Bloody battles, anticipated or experienced, encouraged husbands to recognize their own mortality. Anticipating “a heavy fight” in October of 1862, Commodore Decatur Epps, a private in the 6th Georgia Regiment, Company F, informed his wife that “I will write you the straight of it if I come through. I don’t know whether I will or not, but I am in hopes I will...don’t be uneasy about me.” As with all letters, he signed his name with the phrase “I remains yours truly ‘till death.” Likewise, in January 1863, William Delony reflected on the future with “sink or swim live or die, survive or perish if I know my own heart, I am willing to fight on until the end is accomplished.” His letters reading, professing “my fear is that the worst hasn’t come yet” and “I can see nothing bright in the future” did not bring comfort to his worried wife. E. B. Coggin preferred to express his thoughts on death in poetry. On July 14, 1862, he wrote:

“Remember me tho many miles apart we Be
I shall Remember thee if you on Earth no more I see
If on Earth we meat Nevermore
I hope that we may meat on Heavens happy shore.”⁴⁰

As the death toll rose, and soldiers watched friends, male relatives, commanders, and strangers die in rapid secession, a hardened, almost callous acceptance seemed to

³⁹ William Pender to Fanny, September 26, 1861, *The General to his Lady*, 68; William Stilwell to Molly, September 18, 1862, in Mills Lane, ed. *Dear Mother: Don’t Grieve About Me. If I Get Killed, I’ll Only Be Dead: Letters from Georgia Soldiers in the Civil War* (Savannah: Beehive Press, 1990), 186.

⁴⁰ At the start of the war, most Americans believed the conflict would be short. Commodore Decatur Epps, Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky, to Catherine Epps, 13 October 1862, Epps Papers, UNC; Commodore Decatur Epps to Catherine Epps, 17 August 1862, *Ibid*; Will Delony, Camp at Bunker Hill, to Rosa Delony, 11 October 1862, William Gaston Deloney Family Papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia; Will Delony, Camp at Bunker Hill, to Rosa Delony, 14 October 1862, William Gaston Deloney Family Papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia; Ebenezer B Coggin to Ann E. Coggin, 14 July 1862, Coggin Family Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH).

overcome some soldiers. When a soldier fell dying in the path of Union colonel Charles Wainwright, he reported: "I had no more feeling for him, than if he had tripped over a stump and fallen; nor do I think it would have been different had he been my brother." Similarly, William Delony believed, "the loss of a man makes but little impression upon the Army" while his wife urged him to take "vengeance for our murdered thousands." And yet, the unexpected news of a particular death, or the experience of a particularly bloody battle, could break down the carefully constructed walls in an instant. Though John McCorkle had seen countless men die and experienced many battles, in 1864, he wrote his wife that he still "felt awful as the misels of death was filing in every direction." On that July day he witnessed "men faling on every hand...I feel thankful that the good lorde has sparde my life." John was captured five months later and died of pneumonia in Chicago's Camp Douglas Prison.⁴¹

As they witnessed, heard about, and thought about death, soldiers wrote directives to their wives, just in case the same fate would come to them. "Dear Linda," penned one husband a month before his untimely death, "let nothing change you from the path of faithfulness to me and the children," he cautioned, not wanting to be forgotten, even in death. Similarly, John F. Davenport wrote his wife that "I feal like I will return home to the sweat imbrace of you and our sweat Little Children," but added "if I should fall remember I am fighting for the rites of Liberty for you and our Little ones." Not only did he want Mary Jane to remember that he was fighting for liberty, the fear that she would not remember him also haunted his letters. "Oh my dearest earthlay Jewel...if we should

⁴¹ Charles Wainwright, as quoted in Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 59; Will Delony, Camp Meadow, to Rosa Delony, Athens, Georgia, 23 June 1862, William Gaston Deloney Family Papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia; Rosa Delony, Athens, Georgia, to Will Delony, 4 January 1863; John McCorkle, Atlanta, Georgia, to Martha Stallings McCorkle, 14 July 1864. John McCorkle Correspondence, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah.

never live to see each other again in this life oh let us live so we will be sure to meet in haven thare we will never never parte again,” he penned, desiring an everlasting love. At the bottom of the letter, he wrote “forget me never” and circled the sentiment. A minnie ball ended John’s life on July 9, 1864.⁴²

A different John, John Cotton, took a more practical approach. “Now you need not bee uneasy about me if I get killed,” he wrote, anticipating a battle, “just say I dyed in a good cause ould abe lincon and his cabinet could not daunt me now.” A couple of months later, he added, “if I never come back again I want you to do the best you can for your self and the children lern them to love you and obey you and try to lern them to bee good children and if I never return I want you to keep you land and such things as you need and raise your children the best you can I don’t want you to bee uneasy.” “Pray for me,” he wrote, “thew the war til we have moved the yankeys back from our soil and peace is maid and that I may return safe home to you all again.” “I cant see how we all escaped,” he reflected of Chattanooga in late September, “the grape shot shells fell around us like hail but we got behind trees and places so none of us did not get hurt they shot off three horses lags clost to us and killed one man...if I could tell you all I have seen it would make your heart ache to think of it.” By the end, February 1865, he was longing for peace. “Nothing would do me more good than anything else for themto make peace for I want to come home very bad for I dont want to spend all of the best of my life in this cruel and unholy war but I hope to outlive it.” He returned from the war in May

⁴²Harris Hardin Averett, Camp near Pollard, to Malinda Waller Averett, Reeltown, Alabama, 10 September 1863, Harris Hardin Averett Papers, 1854-1863, ADAH; John F. Davenport to Mary Jane Davenport, 20 August 1862, John F. Davenport Civil War Letters, 1862-1864, ADAH; John F. Davenport to Mary Jane Davenport, 1 June 1864, *ibid*.

1865, and died December 1866, at the age of thirty-five. Family tradition recalls that he came home from the war in the rain, with measles, and never recovered.⁴³

While upper class women could pour their doubts onto the crisp pages of their diaries and letters, a lack of resources, time, and education left many lower class women without this option. In her diary, Judith recorded one unnamed woman's struggle with fears about her husband's life. On February 28, 1864, she and a friend encountered a poor woman who lived in "a small and squalid-looking" home in the "streets and lanes of Butcher Flat." Most of the people living in this section of town were "supplied with meal by the cooperation" and "were supporting themselves with Government work." This lower-class woman "stood at a table cutting out work" when she stopped Judith and her friend, calling "Ladies, will one of you read my husband's letter to me? For you see I can't read writing."⁴⁴

As the women began to read the "badly written but affectionate letter," the poor woman could not contain her emotion. "The tears now poured down her cheeks," Judith penned. The suffering woman explained to her visitors that her husband "always writes to me every chance, and it has been so long since he wrote that, and they tell me that they have been fighting." She was wrestling with her deepest fear: that "may-be something has happened to him." Judith tried to comfort the woman and "assured her that there had been no fighting—not even a skirmish." The unnamed woman appeared calmer and "turned to the mantelpiece, and with evident pride took from a nail an old felt hat,

⁴³ John Cotton to Mariah Hindsman Cotton, August 1, 1862, in *Yours Till Death*, 13; John Cotton to Mariah Hindsman Cotton, October 2, 1862, in *Yours Till Death*, 24; John Cotton to Mariah Hindsman Cotton, October 8, 1862, in *Yours Till Death*, 26; John Cotton to Mariah Hindsman Cotton, September 24, 1863, in *Yours Till Death*, 85; John Cotton to Mariah Hindsman Cotton, February 1, 1865, in *Yours Till Death*, 128; Preface, in *Yours Till Death*, vii.

⁴⁴ McGuire, 28 February 1864, 254-255.

through the crown of which were two bullet-holes.” The tattered hat belonged to her husband. In the battle of Chancellorsville, a bullet had come “very nigh grazing his head,” piercing the hat. Judith “remarked upon its being a proof of his bravery, which gratified her very much.” The woman carefully hung the hat up again, near her bed, for all to see. Judith and her friend endeavored to comfort the poor woman, for despite her immense pride in her husband, she still “felt uneasy, because something told her he would never get back.”⁴⁵

And so, uncertainty weighed heavily on women, as they waited for confirmation of their worst fears with the arrival of each letter. The war allowed wives the opportunity to do many things. They could fall deeper into love with their husbands with each letter, or they could fall out of love with them. They could seize increased political and economic freedoms, or they could falter under the weight of responsibilities. This was a world of many possibilities, both good and bad, and in this uncertain world, one telegram, one letter, one combination of words was all it took to turn them from wife to widow. Even in the courting, marrying, baby-birthing, farming, slave-managing, letter-writing, arguing, sewing, and cooking, this possibility remained ever present in the back of their minds. And, for 200,000 women of the war, this possibility became a reality.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

“THE AGONY IT CONTAINS,” TO BE WIDOWED

“Now I’m a widow. Ah! That mournful word. Little the world think of the agony it contains!”

- Sally Randle Perry, to her diary ¹

In “the dead of the night,” her galloping carriage arrived at the heavy gate and halted. The rider bounded from the coach, cut through the shadows of the evening, and “moved rapidly up the steps.” She was weary, for when the telegraph “brought the dreadful news that he was dangerously wounded, she never waited an instant nor stopped a moment by the way, day or night.” The wounded man was her husband, a Confederate captain who had “lost both legs in a fight below Petersburg.” Throwing open the door and rushing into the hospital hall, she anxiously asked, “Where’s Captain T.?” She had travelled far to arrive in Richmond, Virginia, that night. The guard to whom she directed her query hesitantly replied “Captain T. is dead, madam, and was buried to-day.” The moment the words reached her ears, the woman “fell to the floor as one dead.” The news was like “a thunderbolt at the feet of the poor lady.” At length, she found her voice. The new widow “made the immense building ring with her bitter lamentations!” “What *shall* I do?” she cried.²

¹ Sally, the author of this quote, lost her husband John in the battle of Sharpsburg. She had two young sons. Sally Randle Perry, 30 November, 1867, Sally Randle Perry Diary, 1867-1868, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.

² Judith W. McGuire, 28 October 1864, in *Diary of a Southern Refugee during the War by A Lady of Virginia* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 310-313.

She was just a day too late. When the chaplain went to see her husband that morning, “there was nothing in his room but the chilling signal of the empty hospital bunk.” Surgeons moved on to other patients. The chaplain turned to other weary souls in need. All believed that Captain T.’s story had ended, just like thousands of others, with the burial of his body.³

But his story was not over—not to her—she was his widow. After hearing the news and collapsing, she became “wild with grief” and could “hear no voice of sympathy.” Ignoring those surrounding her, she launched into “the story of her married life as if she were alone.” “I shall never see his face again!” the widow realized abruptly and asked, “where is he buried?” After learning the location of the gravesite, she replied “I must go there; he must be taken up; I must see him!” “But madam,” the guard responded, “you can’t see him; he has been buried some hours.” The widow was resolute. She wanted his body, not for its own moldering sake, but to take it home, put it in the ground, and have a place to mourn him. They dug him up that morning and she “carried him back to his own house and his children.” It was time for her to “seek a grave” for the man she loved.⁴

One sentence was all it took. A combination of words held the power to shatter a woman’s world and in turn change the ways in which the world saw her. While the emotions, actions, and thoughts varied amongst widows, all widows experienced this shift from wife to widow. By definition, she lost a husband. Now, she was a widow and must discover a way to live as one. This chapter explores this emotional transition from wife to widow, in three loose phases. First, how did he die (and how did she know)?

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Second, what did she feel? And finally, how should she behave? The initial reactions of widows was of particular importance to the young Confederacy, and carried even more questions with them. Did she react with too much feeling? Too little? Did she selflessly accept her husband died for a deathless cause? Or was the Confederacy unworthy of her great sacrifice? Analyzing the initial responses and reactions of women who had recently learned of their husbands' deaths, which they recorded in diaries, letters, and newspapers, allows us see reactions which challenged etiquette and stylized propriety. Unwilling or unable to accept the news that their husbands had died, a surprising number of women frantically dug up graves, collapsed on floors, lamented bitterly, clutched bodies, and demanded proof. This, in part, helps explain why widows attracted so much attention during the war, and why, in turn, it is so important to explore the complicated emotional reactions of Confederate wives to the news of their soldiering spouses' deaths.

But, the loud wails of heartsick wives often seems to distract from the wives who experienced their husbands' deaths as a release. A release from passionless marriages. Abusive marriages. Rotten marriages. Marriages plagued with deception, greed, laziness, or promiscuity. A widow in a mourning gown, might, in all actuality, be a woman quietly celebrating a new morning in her life, free from drunken slurs, angry slaps, or a quiet, steady stream of emotional abuse. The war did not simply cloud sunny marriages, but it also quieted stormy ones, washing demons away, and ending domestic battles fought for far longer than four years. The tears of widows were not always tears of sorrow. For some, widowhood was not an obligation, but an opportunity for emotional and financial freedom. But while some women quietly celebrated widowhood as a release from unhappy marriages, a larger number found themselves emotionally and

physically traumatized. Drained by food shortages, housework, marching armies, and fears for the future, Confederate wives often learned of their soldiering husbands' deaths at a precarious time in their own lives. The news led some wives to act uncharacteristically for a few days, some for a few weeks, and left others permanently damaged, all while a heavy load of cultural expectations fell upon them.

But before this work of mourning could begin, by definition, death must first visit a soldier. For more than 250,000 Confederate soldiers, the fears and dread of dying became a reality. Unlike modern bullets, Civil War minnie balls "did not pass directly through tissues," but rather "tumbled, rearing a terrible swath through muscle and bone...bones splintered and shattered into hundreds of spicules, sharp, bony sticks that were driven by the force of the bullet through muscle and skin." Getting shot was no small matter. C. D. Epps was wounded in the Battle of Chickamauga. "Never in any battle I had witnessed was there such a discharge of cannon and musketry," recalled another officer years later. Hurtling through the air, the leaden ball lodged itself into the base of Epps' right knee joint. Before the war, he worked as a farmer in nearby Murray County, Georgia, an occupation that would require his mobility. "Dear wife," Epps calmly wrote from Polk Hospital in Rome, Georgia, "I take the pleasant opportunity to write you a few lines to let you know that I am getting along well at present." He felt encouraged by his doctor, who "told me he thought I would be able to come home by next Sunday week." From his cot he ordered Catherine to "bring one good straw bed and one good feather bed and two pillows so you can carry me...the doctor won't let me go until you come well prepared to carry me good and easy." Catherine received his note and immediately left to retrieve her husband. "I went to the battlefield and brought him

to his home before he died,” she wrote on her pension application, decades later. Her attempts to nurse him back to health failed. Epps passed away on December 20, 1863, just before Christmas. They had been married for less than five years.⁵

While Catherine witnessed her husband’s last breath, most wives did not. In October 1863, Ann Coggin received a letter with unfamiliar handwriting, closed with her husband’s name. Like Epps, E. B. Coggin fought at Chickamauga and fell victim to a Yankee bullet. His bone shattered. The note Ann received was likely transcribed by a concerned nurse or visitor in Atlanta’s Empire Hospital. “I am doing as well as I can be expected for a man with his foot amputated,” the note read, though he wished his friends would “come see me as I am here among strangers and their presence would give me comfort and pleasure.” Coggin informed his “dear wife” that over the past days he had “waited anxiously” in anticipation for a note in her loving hand. Though disappointed, Coggin excused Ann’s silence “thinking probably you did not get my letter.” Six days later, having still not heard from her, he dictated another letter. “Having written you twice and as yet have not received an answer makes me feel quite uneasy,” he told her. “I need someone here. The Doctor told me that he would send me home if any of my people were here to take me.” Coggin then cautioned Ann that “I am not doing as well as I was.” Underneath his plea, Lt. F. L. Boathby added his own note to the wife, writing

⁵ Missing records makes it quite difficult to pinpoint the exact number of Confederate soldiers who died in the Civil War, making 250,000 likely a low estimate. Frank R. Freeman, *Gangrene and Glory: Medical Care during the American Civil War* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1998), 48; Edward Porter Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personal Recollections of Edward Porter Alexander*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 291; Commodore Decatur Epps, Polk Hospital, Rome, Georgia, to Catherine Epps, 13 November 1863, Epps Papers, UNC; Catherine Epps Widow’s Application, 1891, Murray County, Georgia, ancestry.com.

“Madam, I would advise you to come or send some one here to your husband as he is not doing well.” Five days later, still at the Empire Hospital of Atlanta, Coggin died.⁶

On July 7, 1861, Solomon P. Solomon called across the house to inform his daughter Clara that “Charley Dreux is dead; he was shot in the head in a skirmish.” Charley, a Confederate Lt. Colonel from New Orleans, was the “first of the Louisianan Officers who has paid the penalty of his life.” The news shook sixteen-year-old Clara. “I was horrified,” she confided to her diary, and “I immediately thought of his young wife and child.” Clara imagined herself standing alongside the young widow. “In the agony of her grief will she exclaim, ‘Why was he not spared!’ Will this be selfishness?” before rambling on with, “It does seem hard...tis said that officers stand the least chance of being killed. But stop, we are quarrelling with Divine Providence.” She assured herself that when Charley was shot, “thoughts of his dear wife and child must have crossed his mind.” Above all, Clara did not envy the person who would inform the wife of her widowhood. “How painful will be the duty of the one who will unfold to her a tale, which will blight her young life, crush her dearest hopes, and perhaps, forever cast a gloom over her future—who knows what a day may bring forth,” she wrote. The Civil War had just begun, but Clara could not help but wonder “how many heart-rending tales like this, have we yet to hear.”⁷

⁶ Ebenezer B Coggin, Empire Hospital, Atlanta, Georgia to Ann E. Coggin, 17 October 1863, Coggin Family Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History; Ebenezer B Coggin, Empire Hospital, Atlanta, Georgia to Ann E. Coggin, 23 October 1863, *ibid*.

⁷ Southerners often described widows in a romantic/literary way even before the war. When Union troops occupied New Orleans in April 1862, Charles Didier Dreux’s widow left the Confederacy and sought refuge in Havana, Cuba. While there, her only child died. Clara Solomon, 7 July 1861, *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon: Growing up in New Orleans, 1861-1862* ed. Elliott Ashkenazi (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 62; Grace Elizabeth King, *Creole Families of New Orleans* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1921), 66.

Many men died without the opportunity to get final words home. In his diary, Confederate soldier Joseph Mothershead reflected upon the soldiers who died instantaneous battlefield deaths, crumpling lifelessly on the field. The “noble spirits who dashed bravely forth to meet the foe went not far before they fell...weltering in blood.” These were husbands torn “from the embraces of wife and children and the enjoyments of home.” Their voices, the ones that once said I do, “had been forever hushed by the fatal minnie.” On the battlefield they laid “quiet in death, stained with gore.” As the Missouri man witnessed death and walked amongst the bodies of his comrades, he did not write about their honorable deeds or lost potential. Instead, Mothershead dwelled upon the “wailing at distant homes when the news goes swiftly back.” His thoughts returned often to the “loss of husbands slain,” a loss that would cause “many to mourn as widows.” Though June 13, 1862 was a day “won for the young Confederacy,” he could not forget the widows produced by the success. Mothershead did not know that in two years he too would be dead, and his wife would become one of those widows.⁸

Sometimes, a letter from a loving husband would brighten his wife’s hopes, only to have them stormed by dark news. “My dear wife,” James Nixon began on August 8, 1863, “this is to inform you that my wound is still improving slowly...I am under the best medical and surgical treatment and hope to be able to start home in a few days.” James would be dead by Christmas, dying under his wife’s care and leaving her with four sons under the age of ten. Likewise, when the doctor wrote Ann about her husband’s health, he assured her that her husband was “not considered in danger,” though he died by the

⁸ Joseph R. Mothershead, the author of the quotes in this paragraph, was a Confederate soldier from Haynesville, Missouri. It is unclear which battle or skirmish he is writing about on June 13, 1862. He died August 6, 1864 in Atlanta, Georgia. Joseph R. Mothershead Journal, March 7th, 1862, June 13th, 1862, Civil War Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Confederate Collection Box 7, folder, 5.

end of the week. In Arkansas, one Confederate widow, “entirely without other escort,” rode her horse over 300 miles through contested territory in order to reach her wounded husband. She arrived safely but was “left only the mournful consolation of a visit to his grave.” Unfortunately, the difference between minor and mortal wounds could be difficult to determine. On average “each Confederate soldier was disabled by wounds and sickness about six times during the war.” Minor wounds could quickly turn to mortal ones with the help of dirt and disease. The frequency of sickness and injury would leave many with a false sense of security.⁹

When wife sent her husband to war, she expected that should death come, it would come by way of an honorable battle wound. And yet, even if husbands could survive the actual wounding, the battle was not over. Disease often lurked on the next dirty instrument or watery sponge. Lack of food, sleep, and sanitation allowed germs to flourish on wounded soldiers. When William Gaston Delony arrived at a hospital, he had “lost too much blood, and was too weak to rally” for an amputation. Doctors were unable to remove the bullet lodged in his left thigh and gangrene set in. He died October 2, 1863. A huge and terrible threat, gangrene “was black and exuded the terrible odor of putrefaction, similar to spoiled meat.” One surgeon described the infection as a most “fearful and unwelcome guest in any hospital...It claims many victims in its fierce attacks, and often puts to naught all the resources of the most skillful surgeon.” This

⁹ James J. Nixon, Richmond, to Louisa A Nixon, Mt. Pleasant Florida, Nixon Letters, UF; U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1860 United States Federal Census Population Schedule of Chattahoochee, Gadsden, Florida, ancestry.com; Lt. F. L. Boathby, Empire Hospital, Atlanta, Georgia to Ann E. Coggin, 23 October 1863, Coggin Family Papers, ADAH; K. D. Goodbar, “Mrs. Richard Ledbetter,” in *Confederate Women of Arkansas 1861-’65: Memorial Reminiscences* (Little Rock: The United Confederate Veterans of Arkansas, 1907), 36; Richard Boies Stark, “Surgeons and Surgical Care of the Confederate States Army,” *Virginia Medical Monthly* 88 (Oct. 1961), 604, as quoted in Carol C. Green, *Chimborazo: The Confederacy’s Largest Hospital* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2004), ix.

slow, painful, pungent demise was not what widows envisioned for their heroic, soldiering husbands.¹⁰

Some men died, however, without any exposure to either battlefields or bullets. When Nancy Gilliam kissed her husband goodbye at the start of the war, she certainly didn't expect to receive a letter that read "your Beloved husband he Departed this life about 6 o clock this morning after suffering some 3 or 4 Day very horriable with the Brain fever." And yet, letters like this were far more common than wives imagined. Diarrhea, typhoid fever, typhus, malaria, yellow fever, smallpox, measles, and other diseases thrived in the unsanitary camps, battlefields, and hospitals. Unfortunately, an 1865 fire in Richmond destroyed almost all of the Confederate Medical Department's records. Records did survive from Chimborazo Hospital, the largest hospital of the Confederacy and a model for smaller hospitals throughout the South. While operating, the hospital admitted 77,889 patients. 50,350 of these admissions were for "sickness" while only 14,661 fell under the category of "wounded." These statistics demonstrate the rampant nature of disease in the war, which not only seized the bodies of the wounded, but also stalled the hearts of the healthy.¹¹

In 1918, Eliza Jane Kendrick Lewis Walker finished her memoirs, which included memories of how she learned of her husband's illness. Eliza lived in Russell County, Alabama, during the war. One day a "sheet of pale blue paper" arrived at her home, with "penciled words from my husband." Noticing every detail, she remarked that James

¹⁰ Stanton Hospital, Washington D. C. Nov 28, 1863 to Rosa, from W. H. Channing Chaplain of Stanton Hospital Deloney Papers, UGA; Freeman, 50; Surgeon W. W. Keen, quoted in Green, 136.

¹¹ B. B. Oneal, Lynchburg, Va, to Nancy Gilliam, 2 June 1862, Nancy Gilliam Papers, 1850-1904, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery; Ira M. Rutkow, *Bleeding Blue and Gray: Civil War Surgery and the Evolution of American Medicine* (New York: Random House, 2005), xiii; Green, ix.

Cook Lewis had written the note “with a hand that must have been very weak despite the comforting message.” “My darling wife,” he began, “I am getting along just as well as I could...will be up in a day or two. A great many are ill...I slept all day. Am well cared for.” Concerned for his wife’s emotional well-being, he cautioned Eliza “don’t be distressed...telegraph will be resorted to when I get low down.”¹²

Eliza recalled that “the letter had scarcely reached me” when she suddenly “heard the clatter of a horseman” at twilight. “Instinctively I knew that the mission of that rider would be over when he saw me,” she wrote. Eliza received the alarming telegram and left immediately “by slow transportation...carriage and train” in order “to make my way to my husband’s bedside.” Three days after she arrived, her husband was in a “plain pine coffin.” “If only the graves could have given up their dead,” she lamented when reflecting upon the loss of the Confederacy.¹³

Another Alabama woman, Malinda Waller Averett, would also lose her husband to disease. She was pregnant when her husband Harris joined the 55th Alabama Infantry in 1863. In addition to providing a captivating peek into their relationship, Malinda and Harris’ letters also illuminate the rampant nature of disease in camps. “Dear husband,” Malinda penned on October 2, 1863, “I never hird talk of so much sickness in my life, sick an a dying like sheap with chills and feavor. I think it must be dry weather.” Her husband would catch this sickness by the end of the month. Malinda received a letter from P. Zimmerman, who felt “it to be the duty of someone to let you know the condition of your husband.” A “severe chill, which proved to be an attack of pleura-pneumonia” had seized Harris. The sickness “has been running its course unabated,” continued

¹² Eliza Jane Kendrick Walker, *Other Days: Reminiscences*, 1924, pg 94-95, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery.

¹³ Ibid.

Zimmerman. “Should you wish to come and see him, you may probably get here before he dies, should that be the result,” he concluded. But by the time Malinda received the letter, her husband had been dead for days. In fact, Harris died on October 27, 1863, just hours after Zimmerman wrote the ominous letter. Harris never saw combat. He also never met his third little girl, Harriet, who was born in 1864.¹⁴

Likewise, Gertrude Clanton recorded a story, in her diary, of another wife made widow by disease. Like so many others, the widow arrived to the hospital just after her husband’s burial. “She was a plain respectable looking young woman, the mother of three children,” explained Gertrude. The youngest was six weeks old. Unlike other some other widows, though, “she was giving way to no outburst of sorrow. She could not indulge in the luxury of grief.” Feeling for the new widow, Gertrude “seated myself beside her and told her how sorry I was for her – that I too had a husband in the Army. Her lip quivered and shaking her head she replied, ‘You’ll lose him I reckon.’” The widow’s husband had been a Confederate soldier just five weeks, killed by measles. “Oh the desolation of that house when she returns to it,” concluded Gertrude, before moving on to write about the tobacco juice, noise, and lack of privacy in the hospital.¹⁵

Of course, there were other, more unique ways in which soldiers could lose their lives, beyond bullets and disease. “My dear wife and children,” an upset Asa V. Ladd wrote on October 29, 1864, “I take my pen with trembling hand to inform you that I will be shot between 2 and 4 o’clock this evening.” A thirty-four year old farmer, Asa was married with four children. He joined the Confederate forces in early 1861, served as a

¹⁴ Malinda Waller Averett, Reeltown, Alabama, to Harris Hardin Averett, 2 October 1863, *ibid*; Malinda Waller Averett, Reeltown, Alabama, to Harris Hardin Averett, 27 October 1863, *ibid*; U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1870 United States Population Schedules of Reeltown, Tallapoosa, Alabama, ancestry.com.

¹⁵ Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas Papers, 1848-1906, Diary, April 17, 1862, Box 3, Folder 1, Rubenstein Library, Duke University.

private in the 3rd Missouri Calvary, and endured capture on October 16, 1864. Union military authorities in St. Louis, Missouri, had selected Asa, along with five other Confederate soldiers, for execution. “I am condemned to be shot,” he explained to his father, “in retaliation for some men shot by Reeves. I am an innocent man and it is hard to die for an others sins.” To his wife, Asa further explained “there is 6 of us sentenced to die in room of 6 union soldiers.” Colonel Timothy Reves, a Confederate guerrilla leader, had shot Union prisoners earlier in the month, on October 3. Federal authorities did not discover the bodies, which lay in shallow graves forty-five miles west of St. Louis, until October 25. Two of the bodies were “so badly eaten by hogs, they could not be identified.” Authorities of the Gratiot Street Prison inspected the rolls and chose Asa as one of the six men to suffer retaliatory measures. The decision was final. Asa concluded his last letter with words of love, lamenting that “I must bring my letter to a close, leaving you in the hands of God. I send you my best love and respects in the hour of death...good-by Amy.” Escorted by the 10th Kansas Infantry, the prisoners rode “a short distance south of Lafayette Park.” Several hundred spectators surrounded the men. Asa was tied to a post, blindfolded, and shot at 3:00 p.m..¹⁶

Most prisoners did not suffer death in this manner. Certainly, few men knew the exact hour they would die as Asa had. Many prisoners likely assumed that life in a prison, while miserable, would be less deadly than life on a raging battlefield.

Approximately 410,000 men experienced incarceration during the Civil War; 56,000

¹⁶ Acts of retaliation performed on unarmed POWs remains the “most incredulous and least known aspect” of the Civil War, according to Lonnie R. Speer, author of *War of Vengeance: Acts of Retaliation Against Civil War POWs*. The number of men who died in these situations is currently unknown. Asa V. Ladd, Gratiot St. Prison in St. Louis, MO, to wife, 29 October 1864. Asa V. Ladd Papers, 1864, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville. Asa V. Ladd Papers henceforth referred to as Ladd Papers, TSLA; Lonnie R. Speer, *War of Vengeance: Acts of Retaliation Against Civil War POWs* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2002), 7-8.

would not survive their imprisonment. “The horrors of the prison are so grate...if everybody could Know & feel as I do I think there would be nomore Jales built,” wrote William Speer while imprisoned at Johnson’s Island in Ohio. From 1861 to 1865, 12% of all Confederate prisoners in Union prisons died, mostly from disease. Many widows, and society as a whole for that matter, angrily came to believe “the roll of death is fearful—the cruel monster is insatiable” as the death toll rose.¹⁷

Before the war, a wife expected to sit beside a bed, hold her husband’s wrinkled hand, and witness his passing, fulfilling the antebellum “Good Death.” This, in part, explains why many wives so desperately tried to reach their sick and wounded husbands. Wives travelled with or without a companion for protection, through enemy lines, without money, and with little rest, in hopes that they could nurse their husbands to health, or at least, see them one last time. One soldier, like many others, described, “A poor woman” who came “from Alamance County to see her husband who she supposed was in [the] hospital.” It was March, 1862. “Poor creature, she came to find that he had been buried four or five days,” the soldier explained to his wife. “She spent her last cent to get here. She walked out here from town—two miles—through the rain and mud to see his Captain. I sent her back in the ambulance and gave her \$5.” Seemingly reflecting more to himself than his wife, he added, “Wasn’t her case a hard one. Many is the poor

¹⁷ While Andersonville is infamous for the high casualty rates and miserable conditions, other prisons in the North could prove to be just as hazardous to a soldier’s life. New York’s Elmira, for example, recorded a 24% mortality rate, which is not unlike Andersonville’s mortality rate of 29%. However, it is important to note that the majority of Andersonville’s deaths were due to neglect, while Elmira’s was to disease. The Union prison system was more stable and had a lower casualty rate than that of the Confederate prison system. Benjamin G. Cloyd *Haunted by Atrocity: Civil War Prison in American Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 1. William Speer, “A Confederate Soldier’s View of Johnson’s Island Prison,” ed. James B. Murphey, *Ohio History* 79 (Spring 1970), 109, as quoted in Cloyd, 15; Cloyd, 14; Emma Holmes, October 8, 1864, in *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes 1861-1866*, ed. John F. Marszalek (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 375.

heart that will be broken by this war. May God spare yours is my daily prayer.” His own wife’s heart would not be spared; he was killed in 1863.¹⁸

Since most wives would not be beside their husbands at time of death, a well-written letter allowed a widow to place herself next to her husband mentally. For instance, a letter informed Louisa that her husband David was stricken “with yellow fever Monday evening, suddenly, and from the commencement was a very ill man.” The author described the “most alarming symptoms” of her husband, the “human aid” which David received, the fluctuations of his health, who visited him, who was with him when he died, who held his hand, and the final messages he wished to be repeated to his family members. These details would bring comfort to wives like Louisa. She now knew that her husband did not die abruptly on a cold battlefield or in a busy hospital surrounded by strangers. As historian Drew Gilpin Faust explained, chaplains, nurses, doctors, and soldiers tried to keep “as many of the elements of the conventional Good Death as possible” alive in their letters, aiming to soothe faraway wives. The comfort these letters provided, however, was often fleeting, for no letter could bring her husband back to life again.¹⁹

A husband’s final moments were of particular importance to his widow. Widows wanted to know details, as many details as possible, of their husbands’ deaths and would spend weeks attempting to discover them. On November 28, 1863, Rosa Delony received a letter in response to her “enquiries in regard to the death of your husband.” To

¹⁸ William Pender to Fanny, March 30, 1862, in *The General to his Lady: The Civil War Letters of William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender*, ed. William W. Hassler, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 129-30.

¹⁹ F. Lay, to E. L. Harris, 11 October 1864, David Bullock Harris Papers, 1789-1894, Manuscript Department, William R. Perkins Library, Duke University; For an excellent book on death in the Civil War which includes a lengthy discussion of this notion of a Good Death, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2008), 6-11.

her first question about the religious state of her husband, Chaplain W. H. Channing responded that “the Chaplain who was with your husband has lately died” but he had heard that Will’s “close was peaceful.” Rosa had also asked about Will’s mortal wound, the location of his body, and where they kept his possessions. It was not until December 3, 1863, two months after Will’s death, that Rosa received an official notice from the hospital announcing the death of her husband. “Any further information concerning his death will be most freely given,” the clerk assured her. It would take years to get his body transferred back to Georgia.²⁰

For many widows, a desire to get the body home was nearly instantaneous. Even before the war, a cemetery was more than a place to store bodies, or a formal memorial to the dead, but an intimate link to those who had passed on. Mary Gray often prayed in and contemplated life after death in cemeteries, reflecting, “I often feel as if it would be a privilege to live near the graves of buried love, ‘tis a good & proper place for meditation.” Similarly, Frances Bestor grew to appreciate her mother’s grave, writing “‘Tis a very sad place to visit—yet it always makes me feel so very near to Mother, I feel when I leave it as tho’ I had seen her.” If a Confederate widow could manage to determine the location of the body, she should “seek a grave for the dead” at home, “close by those he loved, among kindred and friends in the fair sunny land he died to defend.” A graveyard, set apart from daily life, offered a place to reflect on and commune with the dead. The word cemetery is derived from a Greek word, *koimētērion*,

²⁰ Major General Early Van Dorn, dubbed “the terror of ugly husbands” by one reporter, provides yet another unique story of how a husband might die at war. Though married, he gained a reputation for adulterous affairs both before and during the war. Dr. James Bodie Peres, who believed that Van Dorn had an affair with his wife in 1863, shot him in the back of the head and killed him. More research needs to be completed to see what widowhood might have looked like for Van Dorn’s wife, Caroline Godbold; W. H. Channing, Chaplain of Stanton Hospital in Washington, D. C., to Rosa E. Delony, Athens, Ga, 28 November 1863, Deloney Papers, UGA.

meaning “sleeping place.” At the dedication of one in 1831, the orator shared his belief that cemeteries “may preach lessons to which none may refuse to listen and which all that live must hear. Truths may be there felt and taught, in the silence of our own meditations, more persuasive and more enduring than ever flowed from human lips.” After spending time by a gravesite, “we return to the world, and we feel ourselves purer and better and wiser from this communion with the dead,” for “what is a grave, to us, but a thin barrier dividing time from eternity and earth from heaven?” Widows, then, wanted their husbands in this type of resting place, close to home, not simply out of ritualistic obligation, but for healing.²¹

In addition to satisfying the emotional needs of family members, getting the body home often fulfilled the requests of the recently-deceased soldiers, too. Soldiers on both sides of the war wanted to be buried at home. William F. Vermilion, of the 36th Iowa, wrote his wife, “You have often asked what I want you to do if I should not get home.” He had come to a conclusion. “Get me home if you can,” he penned, “bury me on some nice loyal spot of ground, plant flowers over the grave.” Most importantly, “don’t forget to go to that spot Dollie.” “I don’t want to sleep in the land of traitors,” he explained, “I couldn’t rest well.” Similarly, a South Carolinian wrote, “some how I have a horror of being thrown out in a neglected place or bee trampled on as I have seen a number of graves here.” During the war, a wife could not control how her husband died, nor would

²¹ For more on Union families’ attempts to bring home their husbands’ bodies during and after the Civil War, see Judith Giesberg, “The Work that Remains,” in *The Civil War Monitor Magazine*, ed. Terry Johnston, vol. I, Number 1, Fall 2011, 39-45; Mary Douglass Gray to Frances Douglass, October 7, 1840, William Boone Douglass Papers, Duke University; Frances Jane Bestor Robertson Journal, September 17, 1854, in *American Women’s Diaries*, segment 2, Southern Women microfilm, reel 2, as quoted in Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 215; McGuire, 28 October 1864, 310-313; Joseph Story, *An Address Delivered on the Dedication of the Cemetery at Mount Auburn* (Joseph T. Edwin Buckingham, 1831), 13, 7, 11, as quoted in Gary Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 65.

she (most likely) have the opportunity to be present at his burial. But by gathering up bits of information about his gravesite in letters from family, friends, and soldiers, she could piece together a plan to get his body home to her, to bury him nearby, to visit, and to mourn. Though they tried, the majority of widows, especially those of lower classes and fewer resources, would be unable to get the bodies home.²²

Because casualty reporting was inconsistent, a woman was often at the mercy of the men who fought alongside her husband to learn not only the details of his death, but even that the death had occurred. The arrival of a rumpled envelope addressed with unfamiliar handwriting might contain a message from a man like William Fields, who wrote “as you in all probability have not heard of the death of your husband and as I was a witness to his death I consider it my duty to write you although I am a stranger to you.” Likewise, Rosa, who was pregnant at the time, learned of her husband’s death not from the hospital or even from a letter addressed to her. Instead, Rosa learned of Will’s passing from two Athens citizens. William Church, a sergeant in Will’s Georgia Troopers, informed Mrs. Pleasant Stovall of Will’s death in a hastily written telegram. He told Mrs. Stovall “on account of her condition break the news to Mrs. Delony as best you can...William Gaston Delony...died on Friday afternoon from the effects of gunshot wounds he received on the left leg. His funeral took place on Saturday afternoon about four o’clock at Stanton Hospital where he died.” Mrs. Stovall and Rosa worked together closely in the Ladies Aid Society. Church was a dear friend of the Delony family and a man who Rosa affectionately called Willie in her letters. They knew that with the arrival

²² For more on the burying of dead in the Civil War, see Faust, *Republic of Suffering*, ch. 3. William Vermilion, Helena, Arkansas, to Mary Vermilion, 30 June 1863 in *Love Amid the Turmoil: The Civil War Letters of William and Mary Vermilion* ed. Donald C. Elder III (Iowa City: Iowa Press, 2005), 150; Daniel E. Sutherland, *Seasons of War: The Ordeal of a Confederate Community, 1861-1865* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 274.

of this slip of paper, Rosa's life would change forever. "Well tomorrow is Williams birth day," wrote another soon-to-be widow typically, "O if we could only know if he be living or dead, if we knew he was still among the living we should hope some time to see him. And if we knew him to be dead than we should give up the last hope, and suspense would be at an end."²³

Widows' initial responses to the news of death were as diverse as the widows themselves. Length of marriage, age of widow, and personality all affected reactions. From shock to denial, depression to acceptance, inconsolable wives came to terms with their new identity as widows in different ways. The amount of time this process took varied tremendously. Octavia Stephens, for example, felt utterly disoriented by the new role, and wrote her brother "I know not how to write I am so bewildered." Though she had been told numerous times that her husband was dead, she felt, "I can not realize the whole truth, it seems dark and mysterious." Her brother reflected, "I can offer no consolation now acceptable to such a grief as Tivie's, at present she can only realize the fact that he is lost to her, and see nothing in his death and the circumstances to console her." After the death of her husband to illness, another widow reflected, "God has seen fit to visit me with the sorest affliction the human heart could know" and believed "God feels a peculiar compassion for the widow—knowing the utter desolation of her heart if her love is such as it should be for the one He has given her for a husband." She explained, "I am shut up in a selfish grief," and expressed anger that should could not

²³ William Fields to Mrs. Fitzpatrick, June 8, 1865, Maria Clopton Papers, Medical and Hospital Collection, Eleanor S. Brockenbrough Library, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Va as quoted in Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 15; The Southern Telegraphy Company, telegram from W. L. Church to Pleasant Stovall, 6 October 1863, Deloney Papers, Hargrett Library, University of Georgia; John F. Stegeman, *These Men She Gave: Civil War Diary of Athens, Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1964), 99, 149-50; Eunice Richardson Stone Connolly to Lois Davis, Claremont, New Hampshire, March 8, 1863, as quoted in Martha Hodes, *The Sea Captain's Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 145.

initially accept the loss with a “Thy will be done.” Likewise, widowed Etta Kosnegary wrote, “it seems like I never can become reconciled to my fate.” Her husband had died six weeks prior. “I had his funeral preached last Sunday by our presiding elders,” she continued, but it had not helped, for as she explained to her mother and sisters, “I hadent a relation in [the] world that I loved half as well as I did Lewis.”²⁴

From a quiet shock to a frantic grief, the news brought a variety of reactions. One widow in Florida responded “unnaturally calm and has not shed a tear...poor girl, I fear the reaction when his body arrives—she had a sad and heavy responsibility left upon her and so young.” For this type of widow, shock served as a temporary defense, sheltering the mind from the overwhelming and besieging emotions. Another young wife created such a scene of “frantic grief” that a nurse, Anna Holstein, felt the event was “graven as with an iron pen” upon her memory. “Added to this fatiguing” work of nursing, “there seemed to be no limit to the numbers who came looking after their dead and wounded, the loved and lost.” According to Holstein, this particular wife “came hurriedly, as soon as she knew her husband was in a battle, only to find him dead and buried two days before her arrival.” The young woman refused to believe that her husband had been laid “beside his comrades in the orchard.” She “insisted upon seeing him” and could not contain herself as the shovels of earth slowly uncovered the grave. Consumed with “agonizing grief,” the woman “clutched the earth by handfuls where it lay upon the quiet sleeper’s form” unable to “wait the slow process of removing the body.” When the

²⁴ Willie Bryant to Rebecca Bryant, 8 March 1864, S-B Papers, UF; Octavia Stephens Diary, 15 March 1864, Stephens-Bryant Family Papers, George A. Smathers Special and Area Studies Collections, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida. Stephens-Bryant Family Papers henceforth referred to as S-B Papers, UF; Georgia Page King Smith to Henry Lord Page King, 30 October 1862, King Wilder Papers, Georgia Historical Society; Etta Kosnegary to Family, 12 November 1862, Etta Kosnegary Letter, Louisiana State University.

“slight covering was removed, and the blanket thrown from off the face, she needed but one glance to assure her it was all too true.” That was her husband’s face. His body lay in a grave. He was dead. She went back to the hospital, “passive and quiet beneath the stern reality of this crushing sorrow.”²⁵

This widow was not the only one who craved the closure irrefutable proof could bring. One widow penned sorrowfully that “the last lingering hopes have all been crushed. None of us could mistake those pieces of cloth. I thank God that he had on clothes that we knew. Otherwise we never would have felt sure that they were his precious remains.” Likewise, Barbara Ellen Huff accepted the death of her husband when her brother-in-law sent her a lock of her husband’s hair. One South Carolinian asked her sister, who had actually received a body, “O Mag you don’t know how sorry I am about Kits dying I cant think of nothing else...did they open the coffin it looks like you all ought to have seen for certain whether it was him or not and how he was put away.” Such evidence provided verification and a confirmation that the wife was now widow, destroying lingering hope and denial.²⁶

Observers often felt unsure of how to handle the reactions of widows, writing things like “I cannot describe the grief of his widow & with sorrow I write these few lines.” Other likened the sight to a physical destruction, often, a “crushing” experience.

²⁵ Octavia Stephens to Davis Bryant, April 4, 1864, in *Rose Cottage Chronicles: Civil War Letter of the Bryant-Stephens Families of North Florida*, eds. Arch Fredric Blakey, Ann Smith Lainhart, and Winston Bryant Stephens, Jr. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 334; Emma Holmes, July 4, 1862, in *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes 1861-1866*, ed. John F. Marszalek (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 179; The widow in this last story is not identified as either a Union or a Confederate soldier, but I do not consider this to be particularly important. Raw, initial, searing emotions are human, not Union or Confederate. Mrs. H [Anna Morris Ellis Holstein], *Three Years in Field Hospitals of the Army of the Potomac* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1867), v, 13.

²⁶ Louis P. Towles, ed., *World Turned Upside Down: The Palmers of South Santee, 1818-1881* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 404, quoted in Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 146; Kenzer, 120; Flora McCabe to Dearest Maggie, January 26, 1862, Flora Morgan McCabe Collection, Library of Congress, as quoted in Faust, 86.

When one mother's only son was mortally wounded, the woman who delivered the news recorded, "a sad task it was, but the poor bereaved old mother seemed to smother her own grief to comfort the poor crushed wife." Men struggled with the thought of denying wives one last look at their husbands. One deceased husband was so "dreadfully mangled in the face" that even though the widow had the body, "it was impossible to allow the family a last look...how harrowing to their feelings to think those loved forms so near and yet unable to obtain one last agonizing look." While some widows knew where their husbands were buried, many women did not even know where their husband's body lay. For Annie O'Hear, the arrival of letters only added to "her overwhelming grief for her husband, whom there can be little doubt was killed in the fatal battle [in Virginia] which left desolation in so many other Charleston homes." Emma Holmes believed that a grieving widow was "the saddest of sights" and hated to see "a young girl of beauty, talents, refinement & wealth, whose mind is so clouded by melancholy as to be oblivious of the realities of the present." But this sight was the reality, and it was everywhere.²⁷

In sum, the varied reactions of wives to this news of death offer a fascinating glimpse, seemingly unfiltered, into felt emotions and thoughts. Before recent widows could live through the war, they first needed to find a way to survive the emotional turmoil within. In the first moments of widowhood, widows were allowed the most

²⁷ David Todd to Emilie Todd Helm, April 15, 1862, Helm Papers, Kentucky Historical Society, quoted in Stephen Berry, *House of Abraham: Lincoln and the Todds, A Family Divided By War* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2007), 116; Cornelia Peake McDonald, *A Woman's Civil War: A Diary with Reminiscences of the War, from March 1862*, ed. Minrose C. Gwin (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 211; Emma Holmes, 26 July 1861, in *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes 1861-1866*, ed. John F. Marszalek (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 70; Augustina Stephens to Octavia Stephens, Welka, March 21, 1864, in *Rose Cottage Chronicles*, 330; Emma Holmes, June 22, 1864, Eolmes, June 22, 1864, *Diary of Miss Emma Holmes*, 356.

flexibility to react, grieve, and mourn. But, as weeks stretched to months and years, pressure to conform mounted.

“Women of the South! Do your spirits faint, or your hands falter?” asked one newspaper typically. “You, who so nobly urged this work, will you sustain it still? Are you not ready, if need be, to fill every possible post at home, and send the last man to the field?” Similarly, the *Arkansas True Democrat* newspaper lauded, “Thus it is with the glorious women of the South...the laughing maiden, the busy mother and the mourning widow have vied in their efforts to advance our cause. Day by day and night by night, they have toiled at the work until an army of heroes, clothed by beauty, grace, and worth, stand forth, as did Achilles on the Trojan plain, invincible.” When a wife received the news that her soldiering husband had died, certain prescriptions accompanied it. Relentlessly termed a sacrifice by newspapers, friends, and family alike, the death was by definition an offering, a gift provided for the greater good of the Confederacy. Once a widow, a war widow could never take the war off, in public. She would wear it, literally and figuratively, and own her own victimization. As one woman penned of the performance in her diary after the war, “Now I’m a widow. Ah! That mournful word. Little the world think of the agony it contains!” Widows became walking embodiments of sacrifice for their communities, often struggling to contain these intense emotions of desperation and grief, emotions which affected their performances.²⁸

Throughout the war, newspapers, magazines, writers, poets, and politicians championed a particular version of Confederate widowhood—the young wife who

²⁸ Faust, *Suffering*, xiii; *Savannah Republican*, July 19, 1863, published in Andrew S. Coppersmith, *Fighting Words: An Illustrated History of Newspaper Accounts in the Civil War* (New York: The New Press, 2004), 189; *The Arkansas True Democrat*, July 25, 1861, vol 18., no. 43, Arkansas History Commission and State Archives, Little Rock; Sally Randle Perry, 30 November, 1867, Sally Randle Perry Diary, 1867-1868, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.

selflessly transferred her monogamous love from dead husband to the deathless cause for which he fought. In the immediate weeks after his death, etiquette books urged her to wear black while families penned advice on a variety of topics in condolence letters. Just beyond her inner circle of support, newspapers and literary works also shared portrayals of ideal widowhood, while soldiers and southern women added their opinions to the conversation. At a time when death was everywhere, so were opinions about death and mourning, manifested in both superficial and substantive ways. A widow should wear black, accept advice, rely on Jesus, keep her eyes fixed on her husband's memory, be a good mother to his children, and most importantly, devote herself to the Confederacy. If a young widow could lose a husband and continue to support the war that killed him, what shouldn't other southerners willingly give?²⁹

As in the antebellum era, mourning dress remained an important standard of public widowhood. Confederate communities expected Confederate widows to wear black dresses, black veils, and progress into lavenders and grays over the course of two and a half years. Judith McGuire felt "it is melancholy to see how many wear mourning" clothes during the war. Similarly, when Lucy Breckinridge found herself surrounded by "14 ladies dressed in black" in December 1862, she remarked "there were so many ladies there, all dressed in deep mourning, that we felt as if we were at a convent and formed a sisterhood." When describing a widow, especially a recent one, family members almost always remarked on her change in wardrobe. As one aunt described of her niece, she "looked so sad in her deep black, so young and pretty, she touched all hearts." Though the pre-war culture certainly wallowed in sentimental death, the rising death tolls of this

²⁹ "A Sketch of General Ben Hardin Helm," originally published in *The Land We Love*, June 1867, pp. 163-67; among the clippings in the Helm Papers, Kentucky Historical Society.

war gave them a real dose of destruction. With supplies running low, and demand growing daily, the South developed a complicated mourning economy, as widows tried to meet this wartime ideal. Even with these difficulties, the standard attire remained an important aspect of ideal widowhood during the war.³⁰

The arrival of condolence letters, which became a powerful source of guidance for young Confederate widows, arrived almost as quickly as the news of a death itself. While antebellum letters also contained religious sentiments, wartime condolence letters took on a more advisory tone in matters of religion. No longer written to similarly aged women, or older aunts and mothers, the letters were written to Confederate widows often much younger than the consolers. Most correspondents genuinely attempted to comfort a widow with the notion of reunion in the hereafter. Dallas Wood, after learning about the death of his brother-in-law, reminded his sister that “we all have the cheering assurance of a blissful home in Heaven where there will be no war and no parting again.” Religious sentiments encouraged widows not to look to the past, for that could not be changed. Instead, widows should try to focus and rely on Jesus in the present. If she had difficulties with this, she could look to the future, as one husband wrote before his death, “I want to meet you all in haven whear woers and fightings will be ore, whear wives and husbands part no more, whear parance and children each other greete, wheare all is joy and pleasure sweat.” The idea that the separation was temporary, and that reunification in heaven was assured, comforted many widows.³¹

³⁰ Stephens-Bryant Family Papers, George A. Smathers Special and Area Studies Collections, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida. Stephens-Bryant Family Papers henceforth referred to as S-B Papers, UF.; McGuire, 3 January 1864, 250; Lucy Breckinridge, *Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill: The Journal of a Virginia Girl, 1862-1864*, ed. Mary D. Robertson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 18 December 1862, 88-89; *Rose Cottage Chronicles*, 336.

³¹ Dallas Wood, Dalton, Georgia, to Louisa A Nixon, Mt. Pleasant Florida, 25 December 1861, Nixon Letters, UF; John F. Davenport to Mary Jane Davenport, 7 September 1862, John F. Davenport Civil War

But living in the hopes of the future or memories of the past was impossible, so consolers urged widows to visit these places sparingly, and instead, look to Jesus as a daily source of strength. A recent widow should “lean you[r] head upon the bosom of your sympathizing Savior” and remember that “our Father reigns and in mercy remembers us.” Consolers sympathized with promises that “God alone can sustain you while passing thru’ these deep, deep waters” and assurances that “God will help you thro’ your troubles.” And yet, letters urged widows to be patient and resigned, with “God love & bless you & bind up your broken, bleeding heart—give you patience under this heart-crushing sorrow, & resignation to His will” and “Now my dear friend, all that remains for us is to try to submit to His will.” In addition to encouraging obedience and passivity in the wake of God’s will, a fair number of letters encouraged widows to be cheerful in their situation. “I rejoice, as I know you do, that it [his death] has pleased our Heavenly Father, as we must believe,” wrote one well-wisher, subtly encouraging a widow to celebrate in her husband’s death. “Look upward, mourners, look above!” called yet another poem, “then trust in thy Redeemer’s love.” This form of religious sentiment could be read as distant and almost unfeeling, for instead of simply taking comfort in religion, a Confederate widow was also asked to rejoice, for her husband was in a better place. In the end, nineteenth century southerners did not understand mourning as a psychological process, exactly, but culturally, they realized that religious sentiments offered a mental comfort for those grieving their husbands, and urged widows to seek that comfort along the path to acceptance of the deaths.³²

Letters, 1862-1864, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama; Martha D. D. to Rosa Delony, Athens, Georgia, October 13, 1863, November 6, 1863, Deloney Papers, UGA.

³²Martha D. D. to Rosa Delony, Athens, Georgia, October 13, 1863, November 6, 1863, Deloney Papers, UGA.; Sister to Nellie Ramseur, Thomasville, Georgia, 8 November 1864, Southern Historical Collection,

Quite unlike the antebellum widow, who was likely to be beyond her childbearing years when becoming a widow, a Confederate widow, often in her twenties or thirties, not only had young children, but was often pregnant at the time of her husband's death. The many new wartime marriages brought many new babies. Condolence letters addressed this topic too, characteristically urging "take care of yourself for your dear children. Who can fill a Mother's place?" A widow's primary duty as a mother should not be overrun by her grief. As one mother-in-law urged, she "must not give up on your feelings my dear child, but think of those precious little ones whose sole dependence is upon you, strive to cheer up." To the same widow, a cousin penned "for the sake of the little ones depending upon you...be calm and trustful." Even poems bestowed advice on grieving mothers, to "not be by passion's tempest driven." Her husband's children must be remembered.³³

Confederate society became increasingly convinced that it was essential for war widows to remember their late husbands both honorably and often, another notion that would appear within condolence letters. The foundations for this idea came from the antebellum period, like the etiquette book which insisted widows, "affections are in heaven, with the companions, whom, on earth they shall see no more." Patriotic Confederates built upon this. A war widow did not just have a dead husband, but a "brave, gallant husband." Soldiering husbands didn't just die, but died "whilst gallantly fighting for his country." "Bless God that you had such a husband whose memory is

as quoted in Ramseur, 299; Ann A Crenshaw, to E. L. Harris, 18 October 1864, David Bullock Harris Papers, 1789-1894, Manuscript Department, William R. Perkins Library, Duke University; F. Lay, to E. L. Harris, 11 October 1864, *ibid*; Ellen Long Daniel's Scrapbook, Ellen Long Daniel Papers, 1848-1918, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Ellen Long Daniel Papers henceforth referred to as Daniel Papers, UNC.

³³ M. D. D. to Rosa Delony, 6 November 1863; Maria Delony to Rosa Delony, 11 August 1864, Deloney Papers, UGA; Martha D. Duncan, to Rosa Delony 25 November 1863, Deloney Papers, UGA; Ellen Long Daniel's Scrapbook, Daniel Papers, UNC.

honored and whose children will feel proud” wrote one condoler to a new widow. The pressure placed on widows to remember husbands stemmed from a fear that amidst soaring death tolls, and flirty widows, deceased soldiers would be forgotten. In a letter to his sister, one soldier wrote that while he hoped she “may enjoy yourself this day and have a merry Christmas,” there was “no doubt you could enjoy your self much more if dear Jimmy was alive.” Ideally, after a husband’s death, a wife’s devotion would not only continue, but increase. Wartime condolence letters also urged widows to remain loyal to the cause that their husbands died defending, for nothing could be worse than to be remembered as “a hero in a broken cause” who was “pouring out his wasted life,” and leaving “the land he loved to darkness and defeat.” After the war, the South wanted and needed someone to “strew the early flowers upon the soldiers’ graves” and make sure that “no grave has been forgotten.” But during the war, the Confederacy needed the support of widows to carry on.³⁴

In addition to the directives of family and friends, wives also had the guidance of their belated husbands to consider. Asa V. Ladd, the Missouri soldier shot in retaliation for the Union men killed by a Confederate guerrilla leader, provided his wife with detailed instructions. “You need have no uneasiness about my future state, for my faith is well founded and I fear no evil. God is my refuge and hiding place,” he assured her. As such, “I want you to teach the children piety, so they can meet me at the right hand of God,” he penned, echoing the sentiment of condolence letters in their religious instruction. He also wanted his wife to devote herself to her children by going “back to

³⁴ Lizzie Torrey, *The Ideal of Womanhood, or, Words to the Women of America* (Boston: Wentworth, Hewes & Co., 1859), 130-2; Martha D. D., 13 October 1863; Maria Delony, 11 August 1864, Deloney Papers, UGA; Sam Adams to Amanda Moore, 27 September 1863, Sydenham Moore Family Papers, 1833-1373, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery; Mary E. Flemming to Octavia “Tivy” Bryant Stephens, S-B Papers, UF, UF; Ellen Long Daniel’s Scrapbook, Daniel Papers, UNC.

the old place and try to make support.” “You are now left to take care of my dear children. Tell them to remember their dear father,” he stressed. He did not want to be forgotten. Asa also included directions about closing up his business affairs and information to tell his friends. But to his wife, he only had assurances of love and a wish, that “I dont want you to let this bear on your mind anymore than you can help...I want you to meet me in heaven.”³⁵

When Stephen Dodson Ramseur died, he too left specific instructions that may have influenced his wife’s decision to grieve all her life. On his deathbed, he ordered Major R. R. Hutchinson “to tell you [Nellie] that he had a firm hope in Christ and trusted to meet you hereafter.” Ramseur hoped Nellie would remain faithful to his beliefs and memory, so that one day they would be reunited in heaven. Nellie chose to obey his wishes and wore black until her own death decades later. Some believed Nellie was a true wife, for “the true wife, when widowed, remains a widow, till death re-unites her to the being—complementary to herself,” as an antebellum etiquette book cautioned. Ramseur was not alone in his request that his wife never remarry. Seizing on antebellum etiquette books which claimed “perpetual widowhood is alone consistent with our Ideal of woman; is alone worthy of a great heart, which love has filled,” many began to urge young widows would remain single and dedicated to their late husbands.³⁶

In addition to condolence letters, newspapers especially reinforced the ideal Confederate widow within the fictional and non-fictional stories they printed. An Arkansas paper described the speech of one Louisiana widow, in which “with melting tones” she addressed her town, sharing that she “wished she were a soldier herself, that

³⁵ Asa V. Ladd, Gratiot St. Prison in St. Louis, MO, to wife, 29 October 1864, Ladd Papers, TSLA.

³⁶ Ramseur, 294; Torrey, 130, 129.

she might prove her devotion to her beloved country on the battlefield.” “May the smile of an approving God rest upon her,” concluded the article. Another reporter spoke favorably of a visit to a widow who “received me with great kindness, and spoke with deep emotion of the generosity of the Southern people towards herself and family.” Poetry also reinforced the image of a selfless widow, like the tale of a Widow Gray’s response to the death of her son. After waking from a faint, she “Slowly recalled the event of the fight; Faintly she murmured, “Killed outright: It has cost the life of my only son; But the battle is fought and the victory won.” In the early months of the war, the entire American public, wives included, learned new terminology to read casualty lists. The constant stream of stories, both fact and creative fiction, likewise used this language, while reinforcing the image of a devoted, doting Confederate widow in the papers.³⁷

Like newspapers, literary works also contributed to the printed ideal of Confederate widowhood. Fictional stories worked readers into a romantic frenzy, while reinforcing the concept of eternal devotion and urging war widows to channel their grief into their husband’s memory. During the war, one newspaper printed the following tale:

“An incident is related which affords a striking but sad illustration of the effects of civil war. The lady in question has resided with an only daughter for many years in Alexandria. About nine months since, a mutual friend introduced a young gentleman of Richmond to the family. The young people soon became intimately acquainted, and, quite naturally, fell in love. The parents on both sides consenting, the parties were betrothed, and the marriage date was fixed for the 4th of July...the

³⁷ During the war, remaining loyal to the Confederacy was not just important for widows, but for most southerners. While prior scholarship suggests that Confederate morale might have plummeted as the war dragged on, historian George Rable believes that “commitment to the Confederacy remained remarkably resilient,” as commitment filled with wishful thinking “helped citizens hang onto hope even in the absence of any tangible reasons to do so.” Likewise, Jason Phillips’ *Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility* describes soldiers who not only “knew they were not conquered, but even more, they thought they were unconquerable.” *The Arkansas True Democrat*, July 25, 1861, vol 18., no. 43, Arkansas History Commission and State Archives, Little Rock; *The Arkansas True Democrat*, August 29, 1861, vol 18., no. 48, Arkansas History Commission and State Archives, Little Rock; *Washington Telegraph*, September 3, 1862, Arkansas History Commission and State Archives, Little Rock.

gentleman joined the forces of his state...matters thus remained till the 4th of July, when, exactly at the hour of the time originally fixed for the marriage, intelligence was received at the residence of the ladies that the young man had been shot by a sentry two days before, while attempting to desert and join his bride. His betrothed did not shed a tear, but, standing erect, smiled, and then remarking to her mother, "I am going to desert too," fell to the floor, while the blood bubbled from her lips, as her soul passed back to Him who gave it."³⁸

While the woman in this story is engaged, not widowed, this tale nonetheless describes the high level of devotion southern culture glamorized in fiction. Similarly, Augusta Jane Evans, author of *Macaria: Altars of Sacrifice*, explored wartime devotion in her immensely popular book. Published in 1864, southern customers bought over twenty thousand copies before the war ended. "Oh, to this consecrated legion, stretching like a wall of flesh along the borders of our land, what a measureless debt we owe," exclaimed one of Evans' main characters, witnessing the death of a young boy "raving with delirium" from a wound received at the Battle of Seven Pines. "May we be constantly reminded of the debt of gratitude we owe to our armies," emphasized the text.³⁹

The pressure for widows to behave in a particular way affected more than the widows themselves, and spread to those who encountered them. Sarah Morgan regretted her behavior around a recently widowed woman, and reflected upon it in her diary. "The thought of that little widow came often and often when we were playing our absurd games; I felt as though we were all doing her an injury. We grew shockingly undignified, playing Crambo...we played too many ridiculous games; I for one am ashamed of myself," she decided. The mourning widow, wearing her black, turning to God, caring

³⁸ Frank Moore, *The Civil War in Song and Story 1860-1865* (New York: P.F. Collier, Publisher, 1892), 76.

³⁹ For a fantastic discussion of antebellum mourning poetry reprinted in the *Southern Literary Magazine* during the war, see Mark Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 97-125); Augusta Jane Evans, *Macaria; or, Altars of Sacrifice*, ed. Drew Gilpin Faust (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992) xvii, 390, 382, 411; Torrey, 130, 132; *Rose Cottage Chronicles*, 334.

for her children, devoting herself to her husband's memory and his cause, should not be bothered with such silly games.⁴⁰

Stories from soldiers also reinforced the image of devoted widows. One soldier, while in Virginia, sat on the porch of a farm house with "a soldier's widow" who noticed that his coat was badly torn. The widow, "kindly offering to mend it," took the jacket and immediately sat down to fix the tear. This form of support, for the soldier and the uniform he wore, represented a continuation of her support for the cause as a whole. Another soldier, Robert Stiles, was so struck by a widow's actions that he felt "it is strange how everything connected with the burial, except the sad scene at the grave, seems to have faded out of my recollection." He described the funeral of James H. Beers, a Confederate soldier who died on May 3, 1863, from wounds he received at the Battle of Chancellorsville. Stiles acted as an escort for the family, riding "in the carriage with the widow and his two little girls." As Beers was laid to rest with military honors, Stiles reflected "that not a muscle of their pale, sweet faces quivered as the three volleys were fired over the low mound that covered him." He believed this incident to be "the most impressive instance I have ever known of trenchant, independent thought and uncalculated, unflinching obedience to the resulting conviction of duty—obedience unto death." Of all the memories, these three women, the widow and her two young daughters, remained fixated in his mind, and made it into his memoirs.⁴¹

White southern women contributed to the creation of the image of the good Confederate widow as well. Upon arriving in Richmond in December 1861, Louise

⁴⁰ Torrey, 129; Sarah Hunt Morgan, *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, Ed. Charles East (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 448.

⁴¹ Robert Stiles, *Four Years Under Marse Robert* 3rd ed. (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1904), 41-43, 322-323.

Wright, the daughter of a Confederate senator, described a Confederate army decimated by “shot and shell and disease.” The “land ran red with blood and the wail of the widow [could be heard] above the roar and din of battle.” And yet she emphasized that no Confederate citizen cried “Hold, it is enough.” Despite the loss of husbands, “ultimate defeat was not contemplated.” Louise went on to champion the plight of women and widows of the South. She described the women as “the most gentle and feminine,” the ones “upon whom the suffering and sorrow of the time pressed most heavily.” “The women of the South,” she continued, “were, if possible, more indomitable in their courage than the men!” Southern women, with “the tender fierceness of the dove,” felt the pain of battle as their husbands did. “Into their own gentle breasts they received each wound by which a hero fell,” she concluded. And yet, they didn’t call for the war to end, as Louise writes it. They did not call for surrender or peace or the return of husbands. This description is typical of the idealized image southerners crafted and pressured their women to embody. Widows who met the ideal were spoken of in this high language and championed as ideal women of the South.⁴²

Similarly, Confederate supporters loved to hear the stories like that of Madam Porter, a “war widow or otherwise” who bested Union officers with her wit and charm. William Wiley, a Union soldier from Peroria, Illinois, recorded the story on October 11, 1863, in his pocket diary. Madam Porter owned a large plantation in Franklin, Louisiana. Seemingly placing her property before her loyalties, she “was in the habit of entertaining some of our officers very nicely” with “fine dinners” in order to receive protection for her property. One night, when a lieutenant and several other young officers “were being

⁴² Louise Wigfall Wright, *A Southern Girl in '61: The War-Time Memories of a Confederate Senator's Daughter* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1905), 215-216.

entertained at supper,” one of Madam Porter’s slaves “came running in and said, scuse me massa colonel but I guess you all had better look out a little I see a lot of fellers acrossing ober de bayou in skifs and I think dey is rebels.” The officers “left the table rather abruptly and mounted their horses and started for camp at the top of their speed supposing that the widdow and the rebs had laid a trap for them.” William was on picket at the time and watched as his esteemed officers “rode for dear life until they reached our picket line.” This tale of a widow who tricked the occupying Union troops likely entertained the town for weeks.⁴³

Widows who supported the Confederacy, in word and action, found themselves supported by the community in turn. Much as a uniform helped to efface class distinctions (however partially) in men, widow’s garb had the potential to lend even lower class women a certain social cache. Judith McGuire describes meeting one Mrs. Brown, a “wretchedly dressed woman, of miserable appearance” in 1864. Mrs. Brown shared that her husband had joined the Confederate army and was killed at the second battle of Manassas. She had left Fredericksburg with her three little children to find work in Richmond. When she could not get enough bread to feed her family, she “got turnip-tops from her piece of a garden, which were now putting up smartly, and she boiled them, with a little salt, and fed them on that.” Judith, shocked by this story, asked “but do they satisfy your hunger?” to which Mrs. Brown replied, “Well, it is something to go upon for awhile...I am afraid to let the children eat them too often, lest they should get sick; so I tries to get them to go to sleep.” Alarmed by this story, McGuire gave meat to the widow and wrote: “Poor thing, I promised her that her case should be known, and that she should

⁴³ William Wiley, *The Civil War Diary of a Common Soldier: William Wiley of the 77th Illinois Infantry*, edited by Terrence J. Windschel (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 79.

not suffer so again. A soldier's widow shall not suffer from hunger in Richmond. It must not be, and will not be when her case is known." Mrs. Brown, as a soldier's widow who continued to speak well of her husband and his cause, gained an elevated place in her community above the other poor in the town.⁴⁴

Even in contested border states and divided Appalachian mountain communities, Confederate widows received and lobbied for support. In Missouri, a Confederate sympathizer recorded a secret party thrown for the support of Confederate widows in her community. She wrote in her diary about "a supper given ostensibly for Fire Co. No. 2, but in reality for the benefit of the Southern widows and orphans, I cannot refuse anything pertaining to an act of charity for those I love." The widows had sacrificed husbands and remained Confederate, and because of this, the community often looked after them. Even rural and politically divided communities, like that of North Carolina's mountainous Caldwell County, widowed neighbors called on those they hardly knew. When Elizabeth Morrow's husband died of disease in 1864, she asked an elite neighbor, Ella Harper, for assistance. Ella's husband commanded Elizabeth's late husband's company. Elizabeth wanted her late husband's personal belongings, and renewed her appeal to Ella again, three months later. Ella passed the requests to her husband, but in a matter-of-fact tone, quite unlike her emotional raptures on other topics. Elizabeth had limited resources, so she called on Ella, and though Ella reacted impersonally, she passed the widow's messages along nonetheless.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ McGuire, 28 February 1864, 254-255; Ella Harper to George W. F. Harper, as described in David H. McGee, "Home and Friends: Kinship, Community, and Elite Women in Caldwell County, North Carolina, during the War.," *The North Carolina Historical Review*, Vol. 74, No. 4, October 1997, 377.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Mildred Powell Diary, January 4, 1862, The State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia;

Some widows also expected Union soldiers to treat them differently, as a result of their position and their performance. In her diary, widowed Jane Chinn described a conversation she supposedly had with a Union soldier. “Well, you have done a very gallant deed today, Sir,” she said, “As you belong to the Federal Army, no doubt you will be promoted for burning the bread of a widow and her little children...Were you ordered to burn all my bread? Could you not have spared some for my little ones? Does the Yankee army make war on widows and babies?” In this writing, Jane implies that widows were something special, something not to make war on. She used her label as a widow to attempt to save her food and farm.⁴⁶

While some would play the role of widowhood well, others would fail to wear the mask, and accept the sacrifice. As widows masked their emotions and wore their uniforms out of pride, and necessity, and that semblance of uniformity hid as much as it revealed. These darker reverberations of the Civil War reveal much about the society that created a role, built a stage, and applauded the performances of widows who played the role appropriately. Gone forever was the “most important character in our little home.” How he died, what she felt, and how she should behave was just the beginning for a recent widow. In the days to come, not all widows would or could be what their societies demanded.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Jane McCausland Chinn Civil War Reminiscence, 1863, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.

⁴⁷ Rosa Delony, Athens, Georgia, to Will Delony, 13 December 1861, Deloney Papers, UGA.

CHAPTER 4

LIVING THROUGH “THE HAROWS OF WAR”

“Redus was kild show Tabithey this and tell hir the very first chanc he was kild last wensday the 31 day of Desember 1862 he was kild barin the flag for our Ridgment he died like a tru solger...he seemed wilen to die he wanted to se his wife and child before he died... one cannot emagen the harows of war unless thay cold see sutch abatle as this.”

-Norman Fields to his wife, Abigail¹

“Kiss me darling—Kiss me again,” William begged his wife, after learning that he was hemorrhaging yet again. William Duncan Smith and Georgia Page King had married just a year ago, in June 1861, pushed to the altar by weighty uncertainties of war and the desires of their hearts. “Oh Let me claim you as my own! Let me have the right to protect you, and shield you by my earnest love,” William had begged,” and as Georgia explained to her family, “I feared that you all might not approve—but my heart relented.” Now, they were in Charleston, South Carolina, he was a Brigadier General within the Confederacy, and it was the summer of 1862. When she discovered more blood, and he requested she kiss him again, they thought surely, surely this would be their final kiss. It was not. He would suffer for sixty-seven days.²

¹ Norman, too, would die during the war. Norman S. Fields, Shelbyville, Tennessee, to Abigail, Carroll County, Mississippi, 5 January 1863. Norman S. Fields Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson.

² Georgia Page King Smith to Henry Lord Page King, 30 October 1862, King and Wilder Family Papers, 1817-1946, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia. King and Wilder Family Papers henceforth referred to as K-W Papers, GHS; William Duncan Smith, Savannah, to Georgia Page King, St. Simons, 10 April 1861, K-W Papers, GHS; Georgia Page King to Henry Lord Page King, 1 July 1861, K-W Papers, GHS. Georgia Page King to John Floyd King, 8 July 1861, K-W Papers, GHS.

William's fate, like thousands of others, "was not sealed amid the shock of battle but in the anguish and gloom of the sick chamber." On July 26, William became ill, and was sent to his uncle's home. He was plagued by dysentery, an inflammatory disorder often caused by an infestation of parasitic worms. For William, the disease, "defying all medical treatment," was both "painful and protracted." Georgia went to him in Charleston and devoted herself to his care. In a letter to her brother, she described this experience in excruciating detail. "About two weeks after the first hemorrhage my darling's appetite began to fail...nothing could check the constant action on his bowels—at least one day—oh God the agony!" she exclaimed. For the next two months, her new husband would remain bedridden, unmanned, leaking blood and bodily fluids. "All night I watched—and by the clock gave the medicine and brandy and nourishment—fanning him all the time," Georgia recalled. William teetered continually on the brink of death.³

"For sixty seven days and nights he suffered—and I never left him night or day—thank God—instead of growing weaker I grew stronger and seldom felt the need of sleep," Georgia explained to her brother. She held William's head in her arms or lap while his body fought the disease. In his sleep, he spoke to Georgia, murmuring "How dearly I love you how dearly I love you," again and again. Finally, after over two months of debilitating pain, William died in the afternoon, on October 4, 1862. "At last—just before the angel came to take him from me...I bent down over him he raised his dying lips and kissed me twice earnestly," wrote Georgia. "I laid my head near his ear, and told him of my eternal love—and he was satisfied—it was what he desired...my head was on

³ "Death of Brig. General Wm. Duncan Smith," unidentified newspaper clipping, K-W Papers, GHS; Georgia Page King Smith to Henry Lord Page King, 30 October 1862, K-W Papers, GHS.

his dear broad breast when the soul went out in a gentle breath.” The first thought that came to her mind? “Oh God why did I not die! I dare not question thee.”⁴

Throughout the Civil War, tears fell, as husbands died and wives received the news. With the tears came a weighty collection of societal expectations, immediately dropped upon the new widows of the Confederacy. While the previous chapter explored the socially-imposed and prescriptive dimensions of widowhood, expressed in condolence letters, by neighbors, newspapers, novels, speeches, sermons, and etiquette books, this chapter cuts through the platitudes. These pages follow the voices of the widows themselves, how they bore and buried their grief, cried into their babes, and soldiered on in the ways they could. For Confederate wives, the death of a husband had the potential to shatter a life, especially with the loss of financial, physical, and emotional support. In rare cases, it also had the perverse power to free women from bad marriages and set them on a road to financial and psychological independence. During the war, Confederate widows may have worn a uniform—the black crepe of mourning, but their experiences were far from uniform. In spite of the pervasive guidance they received, not all widows behaved as many believed they should. Some mourned too much, some too little, and some could not afford the luxury of mourning. Mothers-in-law, moreover, created complicated relationships and some widows were difficult to be around. And some widows managed to play the part of devoted widow to perfection. The reality of wartime widowhood, not surprisingly, deviated from the prescribed rituals, and left many family members and friends without a template for behavior, nor a guide for correction.

Like a storm that couldn’t be stopped, Emma Holmes believed that a desperately grieving widow was “the saddest of sights,” and she hated to see “a young girl of beauty,

⁴ Georgia Page King Smith to Henry Lord Page King, 30 October 1862, K-W Papers, GHS.

talents, refinement & wealth, whose mind is so clouded by melancholy as to be oblivious of the realities of the present.” Take the case of Octavia “Tivie” Stephens, a widow who succumbed to grief, plagued by a “broken, bleeding heart” and “heart-crushing sorrow.” Twenty-two years old, Tivie, was still grieving the recent death of her baby girl when a Union sniper picked off her husband, Winston, in March 1864. “We were side by side and tho’ I was not looking at him when the fatal ball pierced him. I heard it and turned,” her brother-in-law began in a letter to her, describing her husband’s final breaths. “I dismounted and took him up and sit him on my horse...That last look,” the brother relived, carefully penning each word, “that last look was full of love. His lips moved but no word escaped. I see that look now and ever will.”⁵

The tremendous grief Tivie felt after the loss of her daughter was nothing compared to the emotions that seized her after the death of her much-loved husband. Her brother Willie, who was also off soldiering for the Confederacy, knew that Tivie’s grief would be nearly unbearable. He lamented to his mother that “I can offer no consolation now acceptable to such a grief as Tivie’s, at present she can only realize the fact that he is lost to her, and see nothing in his death and the circumstances to console her.” Little did he know that his mother, too, was dead, departing her earthly home just two days after Tivie learned of Winston’s death. But even this does not encompass the whole story. In one week, Tivie became a widow, buried her mother, and gave birth prematurely to a baby boy. Tivie described her trials in her journal:

⁵ Emma Holmes, July 4, 1862, in *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes 1861-1866*, ed. John F. Marszalek (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 179; Swepston Stephens to Octavia Stephens, 20 October 1866, , Stephens-Bryant Family Papers, George A. Smathers Special and Area Studies Collections, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida. Stephens-Bryant Family Papers henceforth referred to as S-B Papers, UF.

March 15, 1864. With what a sad, sad heart I begin another journal. On Sunday Feb 28th, dear Mother was taken with a congestive chill. On Friday, March 4th, Davis came with the news of the death of my dear dear husband, he was killed in a battle near Jacksonville on the 1st of March. Mother grew worse and on Sunday, Mar 6th, she too was taken from us, between 12 and 1 o'clk she passed quietly away from Typhoid Pneumonia. At 7 o'clk p.m. I gave birth to a dear little baby boy, which although three or four weeks before the time, the Lord still spares to me. Mother was buried on the 7th...our relatives and new made friends have been kind in visiting...I have named my baby Winston, the sweet name of that dear lost one my husband, almost my life. God grant that his son whom he longed for but was not spared to see may be like him.⁶

Relatives and friends quickly penned condolence letters to Tivie. "How shall I begin a letter to you, knowing how heart broken you are," asked Tina, a loving relative. "I declare I think about you and cry until my brain seems to be on fire...Many wives have lost her Husband, but not such as yours, how short the time seems to look back when you were both so happy at Rose Cottage." Tivie's sister-in-law assured, "I know that such affliction as yours there is nothing that can comfort but the hope of a reunion here after." An aunt explained, "my heart bleeds for you, dear—when I think of your trial in parting with him so suddenly and at that time," while her brother Willie shared, "I am happy in the belief that there are times when the spirits of those in Heaven hover around those whom they love on earth." Thought they knew not what to say, these letter writers realized how difficult these losses would be for anyone, and especially Tivie.⁷

Of course, the letters also contained their obligatory pieces of advice. "In a dream I had last night I thought you seemed quite reconciled and said you thought he was taken from the evil to come," wrote one cousin, subtly encouraging Tivie to accept Winston's

⁶ Willie Bryant to Rebecca Bryant, 8 March 1864; Octavia Stephens Diary, 15 March 1864, S-B Papers, UF.

⁷ Augustina Stephens to Octavia Stephens, 21 March 1864, S-B Papers, UF; Mary Branning to Octavia Stephens, 4 May 1864, S-B Papers, UF; Catherine Park to Octavia Stephens, 6 June 1864, S-B Papers, UF; Willie Bryant to Octavia Stephens, 19 April 1864, S-B Papers, UF.

death. Like other widows, she received advice to “try to improve your health and spirits for the sake of your little ones.” An aunt urged Tivie to “turn to the bright side and dont give up to grief.” Religious sentiments laced almost every letter, as relatives recommended she “try and bear your afflictions with christian fortitude.” Through these letters, writers hoped to provide emotional support for Tivie, while simultaneously directing her behavior.⁸

Unlike plantation widows and widows in mountainous regions, who lived miles from loved ones, physical proximity of a town provided Tivie with physical support, in addition to the written encouragements. While living near Thomasville, Georgia, Tivie received a multitude of visitors, including Aunt Caroline, Uncle Jared, Aunt Julie, Hattie, Henry, Lilla, Willie, and Lizzie in March 1864. These visitors allowed Tivie to “leave Rosa to make candy” and let her Aunt Julia watch the baby “while I went to the Court House.” Though her family would be a source of annoyance at times, it also was a great support, allowing for free time, and perhaps more importantly, alone time.⁹

Tivie’s family became especially concerned about the ways in which Tivie managed, or rather, mismanaged, her grief. A couple of weeks after Winston’s death, one brother wrote optimistically that “Tivie now is able to come to the table and will soon be around and attending to all the household duties, and before I leave her will be able to take interest in matters around her.” The next week, Tivie described her progress in her journal with, “I walked to the Pond with Willie...and the children, the first time I’ve been out for three weeks.” Brother Willie praised her for her actions, writing “your conduct through it all deserves the highest commendation, and has shown a character superior to

⁸ Loulie to Octavia Stephens, 13 March 1864, S-B Papers, UF; Aunt MSB to Octavia Stephens, 16 March 1864, S-B Papers, UF; Augustina Stephens to Octavia Stephens, 21 March 1864, S-B Papers, UF.

⁹ Octavia Stephens Diary, 22 April, 1864, 2 May 1864, S-B Papers, UF.

most women many years older.” But soon, Tivie seemed to regress. Willie worried “that you may allow yourself to sink into a state of melancholy...let me warn you against this and implore you my dear sister to strive to bear up under your terrible visitation with calmness and resignation.” She needed to perform her “sacred duty to your helpless children.” Willie explained that “I feel confident that after a time your life will not seem so gloomy and objectless to you.” In another letter, Willie continued to advise her, recommending she “bear it with meekness.” In yet another, he implored her to “be patient and content.” Tivie’s aunt jumped to her defense, explaining that she was simply misunderstood by others. She explained that Tivie was “peculiar but not cold, and has a great deal of character under that quiet exterior.” In her aunt’s opinion, Tivie was capable of settling into the appropriate role of a widow. Tivie may have looked sad in black clothing, but she was “so young and pretty, she touched all hearts: she bore it all well.”¹⁰

Despite the disagreeing opinions on her performance as a widow, her family knew that behind the performances, Tivie remained heartbroken. The death of Winston shattered Tivie’s identity. “I know not how to write I am so bewildered...my grief now is almost more than I can bear...I have not the heart to do anything, all the pleasure of my life was wrapt up in Winston, he was almost my life,” she explained. In her diary she described mornings spent “reading some of my journals of the many happy hours spent with my dear husband” and evenings “reading old letters.” While reminiscing about her newlywed years, she wished “oh that they could return.” Her brothers became even more

¹⁰ Willie Bryant to Davis Bryant, 21 March 1864, S-B Papers, UF; Octavia Stephens Diary, 27 March 1864, S-B Papers, UF; Willie Bryant to Octavia Stephens, 31 March 1864, S-B Papers, UF; Willie Bryant to Octavia Stephens, 17 April 1864, S-B Papers, UF; Willie Bryant to Octavia Stephens, 18 April 1864, S-B Papers, UF; Julia Fisher to Davis Bryant, 4 April 1864, S-B Papers, UF; Julia Fisher to Davis Bryant, 3 May 1864, S-B Papers, UF.

worried about her lack of progress as time passed. Willie insinuated that she was becoming “cold, gloomy, suspicious, irritable, and unhappy and making those around us unhappy...I need only refer to you to your own feelings and experience for a confirmation of this.” Tivie needed to learn how to “pay respect” to her husband “without neglecting all else.” Tivie was aware that she was not meeting expectations. In June, she thanked her brother Davis for all his assistance and acknowledged “I know it rests upon your minds, will I ever be able to take care of my children?” She didn’t answer her question, but simply informed him “I always prayed that I might die first, that I might never have to mourn for him, I think I shall never become reconciled to his death.”¹¹

Though her marriage lasted just four years and four months, Tivie would mourn Winston’s death for the rest of her life. To her brothers, it seemed she might finally be improving. Davis was “so much relieved to know that you are again able to attend to and take some interest in your domestic affairs.” But, in her diary, Tivie systematically reminded herself of her losses and continued to record her tremendous grief. With the rolling of each year, she marked anniversaries of both their marriage and his death. Tivie immersed herself in a cycle of everlasting mourning. On October 21, 1864, she wrote “My 23rd birthday, a sad one, so many changes since the last. My dear Husband and Mother both gone, beside many other changes.” On November 1, 1864, “The 5th anniversary of my wedding day, but my dear husband is not with me to celebrate it, he is in a better world and how many years may pass before I meet him there I know not.” Christmas 1864 was “a sad instead of a merry one.” Christmas 1866 was also “a quiet

¹¹ Octavia Stephens to Davis Bryant, 4 April 1864, S-B Papers, UF; Octavia Stephens Diary, 13 March 1866, 25 May 1864, S-B Papers, UF; Willie Bryant to Octavia Stephens, 4 May 1864, S-B Papers, UF; Octavia Stephens to Davis Bryant, 11 June 1864, S-B Papers, UF.

and sad one to me, though the children happy.” March 1, 1867, was “the third anniversary of my dear Husband’s death, a blue day with me.” In 1873, “9th anniversary of Winston’s death—I had a severe blind headache.” Her grief proved immovable even with the coming of a new century. As late as November 1, 1904, she penned “this is the date of my marriage 45 years ago.”¹²

Some joy came to Tivie, through the love of her two children, but with that love came more grief. She named her son, who was born in the days following Winston’s death, after his father. Yet, she struggled to call him by name. Her cousin Tina lectured her, writing, “dont call him Winnie it is a womans name and an ugly one, call him as you did the dear one after whom he is named.” But Tivie could not bring herself to do this and would continue to refer to her son as Winnie well into his adulthood. When her daughter got married in June 1882, Tivie described it as “a real grief” and worried that a pregnancy could harm her “delicate” daughter. When Rosa became pregnant in late 1882, Tivie wrote a friend that “we all must be with her all we could.” Tivie’s motherly intuition proved accurate on February 24, 1883, when Rosa was “fixing her hair” and “had a convulsion.” She died later that afternoon. Tivie’s darling son Winnie also left her, marrying and moving to Massachusetts to practice dentistry in 1894. Tivie visited them often but always returned home to the tiny town in Florida where she had fallen in love decades ago. In 1908, she finally died, ending her “share of the worlds trials,” hoping to be reunited with the man she loved all her life.¹³

¹² Davis Bryant to Octavia Stephens, 10 April 1864, S-B Papers, UF; Octavia Stephens Diary, 21 October 1864, 4 November 1864, 25 December 1864, 25 December 1866, 1 March 1867, 1 March 1873, 1 November 1904, S-B Papers, UF.

¹³ Augustina Stephens to Octavia Stephens, 8 January 1865, S-B Papers, UF; Winston Stephens, “The Little Boston Rebel,” S-B Papers, UF, 27; Octavia Stephens to Mary Hall, 27 January 1883, as quoted in *Rose Cottage Chronicles: Civil War Letter of the Bryant-Stephens Families of North Florida*, eds. Arch Fredric Blakey, Ann Smith Lainhart, and Winston Bryant Stephens, Jr. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida,

Not all women who mourned heavily did so as openly as Tivie. Ellen Long Daniel managed to process her immense grief in a way that many would have appreciated—privately. She lost her husband in 1864, and filled a scrapbook with poems, pictures, and newspaper clippings related to war and loss. Upper class nineteenth century women often kept scrapbooks, filling them with mementoes that they deemed important. Through this scrapbook, readers gain a tremendous insight into Ellen’s grief. Early in the book appears a poem, which begins “Gone! Yes he’s gone with no word of endearment,” and continues on to discuss elements of widowhood, like the blank life of a broken hearted girl and “the fabric of years was dissolved in an hour.” The poem describes the bitter tears, stifled sighs, and the weariness of grief. The pressure of being a widow is most apparent in the final stanza:

“Gone! Yes he’s gone, and she’ll nourish her sorrow,
 In silence and sharpness ‘twill dwell in her breast;
 Sadness as weary to-day as to-morrow,
 The same mocking dreams ever haunting her rest;
 Man, in his anguish, may publish his sadness,
 And brazen it on by the force of his will.
 To woman ‘ts given to laugh in her gladness;
 To suffer in silence—to weep and be still!”¹⁴

Many widows suffered in silence, embodying acceptance to their war torn communities while internalizing their losses, as Ellen did. In addition to the poetry, Ellen’s scrapbook also included a huge picture of Mary Anna Jackson, the widow of Stonewall Jackson, and a woman to whom she could relate. Through Ellen’s scrapbook a glimpse into the minds of grieving widows is revealed, and the private world of grief shared.

1998), 371; Octavia Stephens Diary, 24 February 1883, S-B Papers, UF; Augustina Stephens to Octavia Stephens, 21 March 1864, S-B Papers, UF.

¹⁴ Ellen Long Daniel’s Scrapbook, Daniel Papers, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

Widows not only wrestled with mental challenges, but they also lived in a physical world, filled with tangible reminders of the husbands they missed. These items triggered feelings of melancholy long after the initial grief dissipated. Inconspicuous reminders haunted widows' homes—a pair of boots, an empty hat hook, a worn bible—unsettling tokens of a man who no longer lived. The smell of firewood, or freshly cut flowers, carried with them memories of the man who used to complete those tasks. The quiet questions of children, about their father, and what life would be without him, weighed heavily on mothers' minds. A lively fiddle tune might be all it took to transport widows to an earlier, happier time. Photographs and letters were not the only material reminders held emotional power, affecting widows, sometimes emotionally, sometimes physically.

Nannie Bierne Parkman's experience at her older sister's wedding illustrates how a place, an event, and a dress could affect a wartime widow. In 1862, Nannie cast "an indefinable feeling of gloom" over her older sister's wedding. Clad "in deepest weeds," Nannie "glided through a side door just before the processional...tottered to a chancel pew, and threw herself prone upon the cushions, her slight frame racked with sobs," according to one contemporary. Another recorded that Nannie "came rapidly up the aisle alone. She dropped upon her knees in the front pew. And there she remained, motionless, during the whole ceremony." Scarcely a year before, Nannie had been the bride floating down the aisle to a joyous wedding march. She had been "one of the gayest and most attractive of society's war brides," as graceful as she was beautiful. Her husband, a second lieutenant in the Seventh South Carolina infantry, died at Antietam, leaving her to sit "in the cold ashes of her desolation" on her sister's special day. Not

only was it in the same church, the wedding dress worn was none other than Nannie's, an "evil omen" that caused one attendee to shudder. These physical reminders brought physical reactions out of Nannie, unable to be hidden behind a frozen smile for her sister. Mary Boykin Chesnut summed her up beautifully, as she often did, describing Nannie as "a mass of black crepe and a dead weight on my heart. She has had experience at war."¹⁵

In addition to the emotional challenges of widowhood, wartime economic shortages affected the mourning of those who lost husbands. The inability to purchase proper mourning garb plagued women of lower classes early in the war, and the majority of Confederate women by the end. Mourning was a luxury many women could not afford. McGuire described "one sad girl" who was "too poor to buy mourning" due to "fallen fortunes." Another who could not afford to buy a mourning wardrobe dyed all of her clothes black in order "to make them suitable." A third widow wrote her sisters, asking how they dyed their dresses. She explained that she had the fabric for two dresses, but "I don't know how to get them black." Her husband had died six weeks earlier. Silk black dresses, heavy veils, and other features of antebellum mourning etiquette were expensive. Though they were priced-out of respectable mourning rituals, it seems many women often did the best they could to mimic these customs, even if it meant dying the only clothes they owned.¹⁶

¹⁵ Nannie Bierne Parkman (1841-1894) married Samuel Breck Parkman. The wedding described is that of Bettie Bierne to William Porcher Miles. Nannie would remarry, to Baron Ahlefeldt, a man who her father (a wealthy Louisiana planter) disliked for his extravagancies and habit of sleeping in. Thomas Cooper De Leon, *Belles, Beaux, and Brains of the 60's* (New York: G.W. Dillingham Company, 1909), 158-9; *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 448.

¹⁶ Etta is a war widow in Columbia, Tennessee. Etta Kosnesgary to Mother and Sisters, November 1862, Louisiana State University; Judith W. McGuire, 3 January 1864, in *Diary of a Southern Refugee during the War by A Lady of Virginia* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 250; Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2008), 150.

With supply low and demand high, an economy of mourning flourished during the war. Southern newspapers, like the *Daily South Carolinian*, announced triumphantly when shipments of mourning cloth arrived, often smuggled through Union lines. Proxy shoppers, often family members and neighbors, shopped for widows in urban areas, bringing back the necessary elements of mourning with them. The Southern Express, which transported bodies from battlefields to hometowns, enjoyed a booming business during the war. Embalming, though rarer in the Confederacy, was nonetheless advertised in Richmond newspapers, promising the return of bodies after the performance of “disinfections,” a process which would preserve a body in as lifelike a state as possible. While many women in the Confederacy could not afford such luxuries, advertisements targeted them in their grief, and promised elements of a Good Death in a time when so much else was changing.¹⁷

Finances, certainly, weighed heavily on the minds of many wartime widows. Antebellum custom and law allowed widows their “dower thirds,” or approximately one-third of her husband’s estate, to support herself and her children. But for families already on the brink of economic disaster, this often was of little help. Certainly, wartime financial hardships were nothing new. “If you could get up a concert in behalf of this poor Regt. it would be a good work for those who need it,” wrote one officer to his wife in September 1861. “They are mostly poor men, some of them with starving wives at home. Wives and children crying to them for bread and they are unable to help them. What agony they must suffer,” he concluded. When one of these wives became a widow, the

¹⁷ Faust, 151, 91, 94.

temporary element of her financial hardships dissipated, replaced with a darker sense that this suffering could be permanent.¹⁸

Sarah Gibbs and Lucy Fletcher found themselves in perhaps the most embarrassing of situations, when they were arrested and investigated as “women of loose morals” in Virginia. In her interview, Sarah claimed her husband had died near Richmond, fighting for the 17th Georgia. Lucy believed her husband died at Gettysburg. The details imply a justification, an argument that they only turned to prostitution for economic reasons, as a result of their new status as widows. Prostitution (and sexually transmitted diseases) flourished during the war, especially in cities like Nashville, New Orleans, and Richmond. Richmond’s *Daily Dispatch* reported women “disporting themselves extensively on sidewalks” with “smirks and smiles, winks and...remark not of a choice kind in a loud voice.” While most widows would not take on this particular occupation, some did, by choice and necessity, highlighting one unexpected consequence of widowhood. The supposed widows, Sarah and Lucy, received releases from custody in Richmond, the report concluding, “I see no reason why they, more than any other...be confined.”¹⁹

For some widows, the shortages in clothing, food, and supplies led to uncharacteristic political activities. White women rarely negotiated or pleaded with government officials before the war, but many, desperate for assistance, took to petitioning secretaries of war and governors of Confederate states. While many women

¹⁸ William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender, September 22, 1861, in in *The General to his Lady: The Civil War Letters of William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender*, ed. William W. Hassler, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 65.

¹⁹ It is unknown whether Sarah and Lucy were actually widows, or simply prostitutes using Confederate widowhood as justification for their turning to this particular occupation. Richmond *Daily Dispatch*, May 18, 1862; National Archives Records Group 153, Records of the Judge Advocate General’s Office (Army), Court Martial Case File, file number MM2388, as quoted in Thomas P. Lowry, *The Story the Soldiers Wouldn’t Tell: Sex in the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1994), 71.

emphasized their positions as soldiers' wives in their letters, widows particularly used their status as a negotiation tool. "The ladies names in this petition are the names of widow ladies and soldiers wives" emphasized a petition from Stanhope, North Carolina, while the women of Upson County, Georgia chose the descriptor, "the wives and widows of deceased soldiers and mothers of soldiers in the Confederate army."²⁰ In individual letters, widows also made their connection to the state clear, signing "wife of deceased soldier," "a poor widow," or "Mary Stilwell soldiers widow 6 children" beside their names. Some widows were more pointed within the text of the letters themselves, like Mary Jones. "Every Body say I must be taken care of by the Confederate States they did not tell my Deare Husband that I should Beg from Door to Door when he went to fight for his country," she informed her Mississippi governor. She was from Natchez, but after her husband's death in the war, she travelled to Yazoo City in search of physical support for her three young children and herself. After being turned down by the officials in Yazoo, she concluded, "You ar all that I can call on for protection."²¹

Emilie Todd Helm, the younger sister of Mary Todd Lincoln, became a widow in 1863, also called for governmental assistance. But instead of reaching out to the Confederacy, she reached out to family, family who just happened to be in the Union White House. When a bullet killed her Confederate husband at Chickamauga, she remained loyal to her husband's memory, and by extension, the Confederacy. Though she was living in Kentucky in 1864, her Georgia cotton had fallen within Union lines.

²⁰ Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 140.

²¹ Historians Victorian Bynum and Stephanie McCurry's analyses of government papers have been a significant contribution towards understanding the political activities of women during times of war. *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (University of North Carolina Press, 1992). McCurry 142-45, 148.

Fearing it would be burned and seized, she visited her sister and brother-in-law in the White House, to request a permit to sell her crop. At this point in the war, cotton was one of the most sought-after commodities in the country. Abraham Lincoln refused to grant her the pass. Of the many reasons for denial, perhaps one of the most pressing issues was that an election was just around the corner, and to the public, she was not “little sister,” but the widow of a Confederate general. How would it look to grant her an exception?²²

On Emilie’s disappointing return to Kentucky, she learned that one of her younger brothers had died of “want and destitution.” Certainly, he had his own slew of issues, but if he, an able-bodied man, could die in such a way, could this also be a possibility for her, a widow with three small children, no significant job skills, and no money? Fueled by this “dreadful lesson,” Emilie wrote Lincoln again, to “beg and pled” for a pass to the South, so she could attend to her cotton. “The last money I have in the world” was gone, she explained, before speaking of “the right which humanity and Justice always give to Widows and Orphans.” Wrapping up her selfish and grief-laden letter, she concluded, “If you think I give way to excess of feeling, I beg you will make some excuse for a woman almost crazed with misfortune.” Emilie, as a Confederate widow, was not alone in this misfortune, especially of the economic sort. The financial realities of a widow’s situation, even those of the upper class, could be quite precarious, as they sought financial security through family, and sometimes, the friends/former business partners of their late husbands. Protections, or rather, connections, could make the difference between security and destitution, especially during the war years.²³

²² For those interested in this fascinating dynamic of Emilie, a Confederate widow, and the Lincoln family, the following chapter offers an extended case study of her story. Emilie Todd Helm to Abraham Lincoln, October 30, 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²³ Emilie Todd Helm to Abraham Lincoln, October 30, 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

Living in a border state, like Emilie in Kentucky, brought its own unique challenges for Confederate widows. In January 1861, Alexander H. H. Stuart believed if Virginia seceded “Brother would be arrayed against brother, and the whole land would be drenched with blood. The border country would be ravaged and laid waste with fire and sword. Firesides and fields would be desolated by invading armies, and the wail of the widow and the orphan would be heard in all our valleys!” Though many states held divided populations during the war, Virginia was the only state so divided that it actually split in two. West Virginia, which rejoined the United States on June 20, 1863, began calling for re-admittance to the North as early as 1861. The war was bloody for all, but for communities in Virginia and West Virginia, the conflict was especially gory. Over 115 battles were fought in the area over the course of the war. Approximately 155,000 Virginia men served in the Confederate forces during the Civil War, 20,000 of which came from the region which would become West Virginia.²⁴

The experience of the men of the 2nd Virginia Infantry and their widows highlights the complicated nature of the Civil War in a contested and divided region. Shepherdstown resident Mary Bedinger Mitchell summed up the emotions of many well when she wrote, “We had been ‘in the Confederacy’ and out of it again, and were now waiting, in an exasperated state of ignorance and suspense, for the next move in the great game.” While women in the deep South could publicly mourn their husbands and safely speak their hatred of the North aloud, most widows of the 2nd Virginia Infantry did not have this luxury. Marching armies, frequent battles, and a divided local population

²⁴ *Staunton Spectator*, January 22, 1861, p. 2, column 3, as quoted in Edward L. Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: The Civil War in the Heart of America, 1859-1863* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 100, 154; Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought: Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 198.

impacted the actions of Confederate widows of the 2nd Virginia Infantry. This regiment was primarily composed of soldiers from the Virginian counties of Jefferson, Berkeley, Clarke, and Frederick. When West Virginia returned to the United States of America as a new state in June 1863, it took the counties of Jefferson and Berkeley with it, while Clarke and Frederick remained Virginian counties. Women of Charles Town, Shepherdstown, Martinsburg, Hedgesville, Duffields, and Harpers Ferry became Confederate widows in a Union state, governed by their husbands' enemy. To the US government and state officials, their late husbands were traitors and their own support for the Confederate cause treasonous.²⁵

To be an outspoken Confederate woman had consequences in contested areas, like Jefferson County. On July 19, 1864, Henrietta Bedinger Lee's Shepherdstown home burned to the ground, as a result of Union general David Hunter's orders. Henrietta was a Confederate supporter, her husband was a cousin of Robert E. Lee, and in her household included "a widowed daughter, just risen from a bed of illness, [with] her three little fatherless children, the eldest not five years old." Furious that her home now lay in ashes, she wrote a fiery letter to Hunter to express her displeasure. "Your name will stand on history's pages," she wrote "as the Hunter of weak women, and innocent children; the Hunter to destroy defenseless villages, and refined and beautiful homes -- to torture afresh the agonized hearts of widows... Oh, Earth, behold the monster!"²⁶

Another relationship fraught with potential for negotiation, support, and rejection for widows was that with their mothers-in-law. In addition to creating an unprecedented

²⁵ Mary Bedinger Mitchell, *A Woman's Recollections of Antietam*, in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 2, (Edison: Castle Publishers, 1985), 686.

²⁶ Henrietta B. Lee to General Hunter, Shepherdstown, VA, July 20, 1864, as printed in Millard Kessler Bushong, *A History of Jefferson County, West Virginia, 1719-1940* (Westminster: Heritage Books, 1941), 174-176.

number of young white widows, the Civil War created a substantial number of mothers who unexpectedly outlived their soldiering sons. The relationship between grieving wives and their grieving mothers-in-law is a fascinating one. Mourning a common man, they still clashed over decisions about burial, religion, money, the (grand)children, and the degree to which the widow remained tied (and obligated) to her dead husband's family. Much has been done on the vast economic, political, and cultural work that women performed during the Civil War, but less attention has been paid to the degree to which, in all of these roles, they often fought *with each other*. The American Civil War was a war grounded in the household with all of its systems of support and all of its interpersonal tensions. In our appreciation of women's common grievances under patriarchy, historians have sometimes massaged away the very natural, very human process by which disputes arose and were settled as they went about their common work. Though they shared a gender, women did not wound the same, work the same, nor share the same strengths and weaknesses, and these differences emerged particularly when their relationships were put under stress.

Of course, in the case of wives and their mothers-in-law, such tensions were even more fraught, particularly under the emotional, financial, and societal pressures of the American Civil War. When a soldier died, who had the greater claim to grief, his wife or his mother? Where should the widow go, who went through his things, where would he be buried, who would have what say in the raising of his children? Well-meaning mothers-in-law stuffed envelopes with innumerable pages of advice, writing out their own grief, even as they directed the grief of their daughters-in-law. Consumed with the pain and guilt of outliving their soldiering sons, many Confederate mothers quite

naturally shifted their attentions and energies to the lives of their late sons' wives. They had a common pain; they spoke a common female language. But the very closeness of their situations and relations could sometimes strain what is possible for two people to go through together. To be sure, some widows appreciated, even became dependent upon, the additional assistance, but others dreaded the arrival of another letter, or worse, the mother-in-law herself. Both supported and suffocated by this relationship, widows responded with gratitude, rehearsed civility, or, quite simply, rejection. Exploring the varied emotional responses of Confederate widows and mothers to the death of their husbands/sons—and their responses to one another—reveals a complicated politics of mourning during the Civil War and beyond.

Like wives who feared the death of a husband, mothers also dreaded the possibility of losing a son, and struggled with the absence of her boy(s), even if he had married and no longer lived at home. "By mother's request I write again to you," began one sister in Mississippi. "Mother's health is delicate, she pines to see her boy, her eldest, her hope stay and comfort, although she bears the separation from you with Christian resignation and fortitude," the sister wrote, with the addendum "[and] Mother says, don't forget to read your bible." Soldiers typically followed letters to their wives with letters to their mothers during the war, creating large family correspondence collections. Even soldiers without mothers reflected on this relationship during the war, like Nathaniel Dawson, who sought a wife to fill a void left by his deceased mother. He reflected to his fiancé, "It is ten years this morning since my good mother died, and I have been thinking of her virtues. I love to think of the dead, those treasures who have

gone before to wean us from this world....I was devoted to my mother and when she died, I felt all alone and yearned for the love of someone to supply her place.”²⁷

Not surprising given the closeness of many mothers to their sons, many mothers often felt emotionally shattered by their sons’ deaths. Mary Patrick captured the emotions of many mothers in her journal entry, after the death of her son in May 1862. “Hush poor heart! Beat not so wildly, stop let me tell it on this quiet page,” she began, trailing on, “My Son. Oh my Son. Beautiful, noble, generous, Mother loving boy! Solace of my widowed years...I would willingly die before the day goes out. Father forgive me,” she grieved. Her entry included a poem, which told of a “mother’s ceaseless moan,” and the memories of teaching a young boy to walk, talk, and pray. Another mother shared her feelings with her son’s wife, lamenting, “my son, my son, my first born, my pride, my hope—oh this wicked war of oppression—I know he died gloriously fighting for the freedom of his country but I can not feel that...the loss of my child, my darling son, how can I out live him?”²⁸

When the war began, many women chose to move in with, or at least closer to, their loved ones, combatting the loneliness, anxiety, and fear that often came when husbands left for war. As Faust argued, many elite women “moved—sometimes long distances—to live with their parents or in-laws or even friends and acquaintances.” Once the husband was dead, some wives were torn about which household they really belonged

²⁷ Sam was imprisoned near Gettysburg. For a look at relationships between Union soldiers and their mothers, see Reid Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Marion Dewoody Nelson to Sam Dewoody, 4 December 1864, Dewoody Family Collection, Arkansas State Archives; Nathaniel Dawson to Elodie Todd, 6 June 1861, Dawson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

²⁸ In the antebellum period, mothers grieved children, too. But, most often, children died before the age of 5, not as young adults. See especially chapter two in Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and their Children, 1800-1860*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984); Mary S. Patrick, 22 May 1862, Mary S. Patrick Diary, Arkansas History Commission; Lucinda Helm to Emilie Todd Helm, 21 October 1863, Helm Papers, Kentucky Historical Society.

to. Those of younger ages, and shorter marriages, especially struggled in decisions between their birth families and their husbands' families. When the war began, Jorantha Semmes moved in with her husband's cousins in Canton, Mississippi. Even though her marriage was not a new one, and she was bringing her five children with her, Jorantha believed she was an unwelcome "nuisance" to the household. Further, she became furious when her host whipped her children alongside his own. Another woman, Emma Crutcher, moved to Vicksburg to live with her in-laws soon after her husband enlisted, but, when her own parents rented a large house in a remote area, to avoid the troops, she struggled with her decision. Ultimately, her desire to be near a railroad or post office, in order to communicate with her husband, won out.²⁹

After a son's death, a desire to be close to the widow—to comfort, mourn with, care for, or direct—increased for many in-laws. The death of a husband damaged a household structure, but it also offered the opportunity for a new kind of household to emerge. When one mother's only son was mortally wounded, the woman who delivered the news recorded, "a sad task it was, but the poor bereaved old mother seemed to smother her own grief to comfort the poor crushed wife." The author remained struck by the mother's desire to place the wife's needs before her own. For others, like Lucinda Helm, the solution was clear and a bit less selfless. Her daughter-in-law must come to her, to assuage her own great grief over her son's death. "I feel that the blow is more than I can bear...come home to us Emilie," Lucinda begged. Others decided to travel to the widow themselves, like Emma Garnett's mother-in-law. Emma received a letter

²⁹ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 33; Jorantha Semmes, Benedict Joseph Semmes Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, as quoted in Faust, 37; Emma Crutcher to Will Crutcher, 1 March 1862, Crutcher-Shannon Papers, Center for American History, University of Texas, as quoted in Faust, 36-7.

explaining, “Mother will go to you very soon. She loved you as her own child, and will do all she can to give your comfort.” As for the desires of widows, not surprisingly, they varied, from those who desperately desired familial support in their time of grief, to those who wanted to be completely alone. Some, like Etta Kosnegary of Tennessee, could not make up their minds. Etta began a letter to family with “I think sometimes if I could be...with some body that loved him [her husband] as well as I did I would feel better.” But, she ended it with “company does me no good I had rather be alone.”³⁰

Beyond sentimental desires, the difficulty of running a household without a husband worried many mothers-in-law. “I know it must have been hard for you to keep up & take that interest in your duties which your children & domestic cares call for, & I don’t wonder that you yielded to these feelings [of grief]” reflected one mother-in-law in 1873. Father-in-laws also shared their opinions, sharing sentiments like how they “often wished that you were near us, that we might aid and encourage you in all your cares & responsibilities.” Alice Harrison’s mother-in-law counseled her to let her brother take care of her affairs after her husband’s death. She explained, “Oh you know not enough of human nature to have such to deal with, and your life will become more and more labourious and miserable.” Intrusive and honest, mothers-in-law often spoke more frankly to grieving widows, especially about their futures, than other members of the

³⁰ In some ways, this is what Charles Frazier’s *Cold Mountain* gets right—that women fought their own wars at home, against each other, with each other, condensing new households that would endure after the man that brought them together was gone. Cornelia Peake McDonald, ed. Minrose C. Gwin (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 211; Lucinda Helm to Emilie Todd Helm, 21 October 1863, Helm Papers, KHS; Letter to Emma S. Garnett, 20 May 1863, Garnett Family Letters, Library of Virginia; Etta Kosnegary to Family, 12 November 1862, Etta Kosnegary Letter, Louisiana State University.

family. Many widows felt a continual pressure to move near, or into, the homes of their in-laws.³¹

If they could not be close physically, mothers-in-law often penned pages upon pages of advice to the new widows, remaining a mental presence. Mothers-in-law gave advice, opinions, directions, and consolations to widows both when they learned of the death, and years afterwards. “We were thankful to see your hand writing,” began one mother-in-law, before chiding “do write often for we seldom receive more than 1 out of 10.” She also instructed the young mother, “You must not give up to your feelings my dear child, but think of those precious ones whose sole dependence is upon you, strive to cheer up.” In addition to messages about motherhood, and grief, many letters contained religious advice, with lines like “God will help you thro’ your troubles.” Clear messages about the proper way live life, while mourning, came through to young widows through this handwritten medium.³²

Without a son to care for, some mothers-in-law transferred their attention to their sons’ children, and desired to play a significant role in their rearing. “My poor child” began Lucinda Helm to Emilie, “my heart has yearned over you and Hardin’s orphaned children.” Contemporaries of the Civil War commonly took this view of children as “orphaned” when their father died, even though their mother lived. Even Abraham Lincoln, in his Second Inaugural Address, called for the nation to care “for his widow and his orphan,” of deceased soldiers. Lucinda assured her daughter-in-law that if she came back to Kentucky, “I will furnish you with a nurse soon as you get here.” Further,

³¹ May Louise Comfort to Charlotte Comfort, 22 December 1873, Comfort Family Papers, 1848-1900, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; David Comfort III to Charlotte Comfort, 3 October 1874, Comfort Family Papers, 1848-1900, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; Janett Harrison to Alice Harrison, 27 January 1862, Harrison Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

³² Maria Delony to Rosa Delony, 11 April 1864, Deloney Papers, UGA.

Lucinda informed Emilie, that if she came, “you shall be as a daughter and his children my children.” In her own way, Lucinda hoped to replace her deceased son with Emilie, as a daughter, and her grandchildren as children. Just to be sure her message came through clearly, she added, “Oh Emilie I wish for you and your children every day” and signed the note “your affectionate Mother.” Emilie would return to Kentucky, but would not remain permanently.³³

Similarly, widowed Cornelia McDonald, who had given birth to nine children and lived as a refugee in Lexington, Virginia, reflected on her own tragic wartime situation with, “All thought that the children ought to be distributed among the older members of the family...I listened, but was resolved no matter what happened not to part with my children; but was often pressed, and reminded how hopeless my condition was.” In the end, Cornelia could not bear to part with her “poor little lonely ones...that thought would nerve me for resistance.” Like many widows, she found comfort in her role as a mother, especially after the loss of her societal position as wife. Though the support from extended family would lessen her load, it was a load she did not want to lose.³⁴

Of course, not all women had mutually supportive relationships that dissolved after the death of a husband/son; some relationships between mothers and daughters-in-law were rocky from the beginning. When Ann Marie Stewart Turner’s husband left to fight, she and her children lived with his family in North Carolina. There, she penned pages upon pages of complaints to her mother, miles away in Texas, about her mother-in-law’s “unhappy temper” and “unruly tongue.” The mother-in-law was not simply upset that Ann married her only son, but accused Ann, “said I had fondled around her husband

³³ Lucinda Helm to Emilie Todd Helm, 21 October 1863, Helm Papers, KHS.

³⁴ Cornelia Peake McDonald, ed. Minrose C. Gwin (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 217-18.

till he cared more for me than any man might for any woman but his wife – that he had a passion for me & I encouraged by combing his hair.” “I can’t remember all the abuse she gave me,” Ann explained to her mother. Ann’s hardships further increased when a ball struck her husband at the Battle of the Crater. Wearing “the same sweet smile he wore in life,” he died. “For your sake and my dear little ones I try to bear my loss as well as I can,” Ann wrote her mother and sister, praying, “I hope that Heaven will after a while give me a spirit of resignation.” Ann believed this final blow was retribution, for both her mother-in-law’s “unkindness to me” and Ann’s own heart. When reflecting again on her mother-in-law’s unhappy treatment of her, Ann explained, “I have often wished to revenge myself and I feel now that I have been punished for this, for now a hand stronger than mine has struck her a blow which falls heavy on us both.”³⁵

For better or worse, widows and mothers-in-law did have a connection like no other, perhaps best illustrated by the final words of a dying soldier. Wounded between the first and second button of his shirt, William Lee would be one of 387 Confederate soldiers killed in the first Battle of Manassas. As he lay suffering, William’s mind remained focused on his wife and mother, a detail not lost on his cousin, Eddie. “He was still forbidden to talk,” Edwin wrote to his aunt, “but he beckoned me to him and said, in a low whisper, ‘Eddie, write to Lil and Mother.’” In his final moments, William’s mind might have recurred to his father, his brothers, or his comrades, but he seemed implicitly to understand that the real work of mourning him properly would belong to women. And yet, even as female hearts reverberated with sorrow together, conflict arose within the work of mourning. Nineteenth century white women may not have dueled or engaged in

³⁵ Ann Marie Stewart Turner to My Dear Mother, September 29, October 17, December 12, 1864, Anne Marie Stewart Turner Collection, Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University, Houston, TX (accessible online).

drunken fistfights (often), but they will not appear fully whole or human until they are allowed their own code of honor. They too had a process by which grievances were made and settled, perhaps not as publicly as men's, but within the "female world of love and ritual."³⁶

A bigger threat to the Confederacy than the widow who fought with her mother-in-law, or struggled to with grief, was the sexually promiscuous widow. In the antebellum period, the flirty, even sexually 'knowing' widow had been something of a literary trope. During the war, such behavior was scandalous, suggesting that a Confederate soldier was easily replaced and his cause unworthy of honoring. "I was in hopes she would be more dignified than other widows," lamented one disappointed sister in her diary, while another southerner disapproving reflected that while "gloom reigns in the hearts, and homes, of most of our people, widows and widowers are the only ones who are having a gay time." Widows were, after all, unmarried women with sexual experience, and when the age of widows dropped dramatically during the war, they became difficult to categorize. At least one former slave reported that his widowed mistress, "ordered him to sleep with her, and he did regularly." Communities did not believe that young widows must remain single forever. But, at a time of war, improper behavior or a hasty remarriage seemed implicitly unpatriotic.³⁷

³⁶ E. Pickett, Maysville, Kentucky, to Emilie Todd Helm, December 31, 1863, Helm Papers, Kentucky Historical Society; "Eddie" is Edwin J. Lee, aide-de-camp of Stonewall Jackson, and William F. Lee is a young cousin of Robert E. Lee. Edwin J. Lee to Aunt, 18 November 1861, William Fitzhugh Lee Papers, State Historical Society of Missouri.

³⁷ Thomas C. De Leon, *Belles Beaux and Brains of the 60's* (1909, repr. New York: Arno, 1974), 158; Sidney Harding Diary, October 11, 1863, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge; Sarah Kennedy, March 19, 1864, Sarah Kennedy Papers, The Civil War Microfilm Collection, #824, Reel 4, Tennessee Library and State Archives, Nashville, Tennessee; Martha Hodes, "Wartime Dialogues on Illicit Sex: White Women and Black Men," in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 235.

While under public pressure to perform their new political roles, some upper class widows could and did manipulate their single status to gain a peculiar attractiveness and power. “Immorality sweeps over the land and religion burns dimly in the misty atmosphere” wrote Abbie Brooks in her diary. Younger widows had a more difficult time acceding to proscriptions on their behavior that were intended for a different age. A reluctance to remain wedded to the memory of their husbands and to the Confederate cause was certainly not purely a phenomenon for widows, but for many people across the South; the burdensome consistency of sorrow was simply too much to bear. As one resident of Richmond observed, “some persons in this beleaguered city seem crazed on the subject of gayety. In the midst of the wounded and dying, the low state of the commissariat, the anxiety of the whole country, the troubles of every kind which we are surrounded, I am mortified to say that there are gay parties in the city.” A number of southerners, including widows, would rather “forget all our troubles,” past and present. Social functions provided a distraction from mourning, death, and the constant supply shortages. Kate Stone wrote “we can live only in the present, only from day to day. We cannot bear to think of the past and so dread the future.” In a time of soaring death rates, Kate also mused that “one grows callous to suffering and death” and therefore people simply didn’t “mourn as they used to.” To many, these parties seemed insensitive while soldiers, just a hundred miles away, risked their lives and struggled to find enough. To others, these events served as critical coping techniques, providing a mental escape when bad news seemed to be lurking around every corner.³⁸

³⁸ For more on the whirl of sociability that happened in the war, see also Anya Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 270-273. Abbie Brooks, February 8, 1865, as quoted in George C. Rable, “Despair, Hope, and Delusion: The Collapse of Confederate Morale Reexamined” in *The Collapse of the Confederacy*, eds. Mark Grimsley and Brooks D.

While it was difficult enough for some people to tolerate the fact that parties occurred during the war, it was even harder to stomach the idea that several widows attended these gatherings. One “gay young widow” shocked bystanders when seen dancing “a few months after the death of her soldier husband, with a long black veil on” and holding a handkerchief that “looked as if it had been dipped in ink.” A disapproving observer remarked, “She should have dipped it in blood.” In March of 1864, a group including widows gathered for an oyster supper and “cleaned [the table] of all refreshments.” When Sarah learned of this, she haughtily remarked that “juveniles always cleared the table,” insulting the maturity of the widows in attendance. While most widows certainly did not want to see their husbands’ names on casualty lists, the finality of death did release them from the anxiety of the unknown that plagued many wives.³⁹

For some men, young Confederate widows seemed to take on a certain peculiar attractiveness. Remarks by observers indicate that a level of sexual magnetism often became associated with young Confederate widows. In September 1863, Mary Bell believed she had discovered “the secret attraction that widows seemed to possess.” She supposed that their allure blossomed from their grief. “How much more the heart is touched by the tender beauty of a woman who has loved and suffered than by the gay shallow pink & white prettiness of a girl,” she reflected to her husband. In Florida, one aunt described a widow who “looked so sad in her deep black, so young and pretty, she touched all hearts.” And when soldiering Ben Coleman wrote letters home to his parents,

Simpson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 138; Kate Stone, *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861-1868*, ed. John Q. Anderson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), 293, 292, 277; McGuire, 8 January 1865, 328; Morgan, 11 October 1862, 300.

³⁹ Mrs. John Sherwood, *Manners and Social Usages* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1899), 193; Sarah Kennedy, 19 March 1864, Sarah Kennedy Papers, The Civil War Microfilm Collection, #824, Reel 4, Tennessee Library and State Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

he casually instructed his parents to “tell that good looking widow (God knows I wish I could see her) to send me some wine.”⁴⁰

While remarking upon the physical attractiveness of a widow was not so scandalous, her supposed irresistibility proved more worrisome. Rapes did occur during the war, and victims included widows, like the unfortunate case of Frances West, a widow living near Morrisville, Virginia. Thomas Dawson, a Union private with the 19th Massachusetts Volunteers, entered her home at night, on September 9, 1863, and “did forcibly and violently and against her will have sexual intercourse.” He was hung. In a less violent and more common case, one Confederate husband informed his wife of a “young widow, real good looking” visiting his camp from St. Louis. “If you do not hear from me again you can guess ‘what is the matter.’ But unfortunately I was simple enough, when asked if I was married, to acknowledge the fact. Perhaps it will make no difference,” he teased. His wife chose not to respond. Other women envied the magnetic draw widows seemed to possess. A “Miss Carrie,” from Tennessee, remarked to a friend, “that she almost wishes she had been born a widow. They are so fascinating and irresistible.” Even James T. Ayers, a chaplain with the 104th Regiment of Colored Troops, struggled to resist the allure of a Tennessee widow. He described her in his diary as a “Little bewitching yong Blue Eyed fairskined widow tidy Enough for one to eat.” “Seldom do I meet her Eaquals anywhere,” he continued, “God bless the Little widow, them Blue Eyes that Little plump Rosy Cheek them Delicate Lilly white hands that Lady Like Smile.” Ayers had visited her with the intention to recruit her slave into

⁴⁰ Mary W. M. Bell to her husband, September 1, 1863, The Civil War Microfilm Collection, #824, Reel 4, Tennessee Library and State Archives, Nashville, Tennessee; *Rose Cottage Chronicles*, 336; Ben W. Coleman to his parents, December 7, 1863, The Civil War Microfilm Collection, #824, Box 8, Tennessee Library and State Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

his regiment. As he rode away however, he realized “that Little woman had Caused me to forget” his purpose. Ayers shrugged off the loss, concluding that a “man would be A monster Could he Deny such an Angel as this” anyway.⁴¹

Public flirting, especially by widowed women who were supposed to be mourning the loss of their husbands, shocked and horrified traditionalists like Mary Boykin Chesnut. On a train in November 1863, a “smartly dressed female” sat beside her and “in plaintive accents began to tell her melancholy tale.” Her husband had died recently in a battle around Richmond. When another man offered her a vacant seat beside him, the young widow left Chesnut and “as straight as an arrow she went in for a flirtation with the polite gentleman.” In “another scandal,” Chesnut spoke with a man who witnessed “girls who kissed the back of horrid men’s necks—faugh! Or widows who brushed with their eyelashes their cousin’s cheeks in the public cars.” These actions did not correlate with the image of the ideal widow, a heartbroken woman who sacrificed her husband to the Confederacy. Such liberties suggested not only a lack of dedication to their late husbands, but also to the cause the husbands died defending.⁴²

While flirting with other southerners was bad enough, flirting with the enemy was simply unacceptable. To choose a northerner over a Confederate soldier represented an abandonment of her family, friends, community, and all her husband had fought to

⁴¹ The prevalence of rape in the war is unknown. A survey of less than 5% of the Federal court martial records yielded more than thirty cases of reported rape. National Archives Record Group 153, Records of the Judge Advocate General’s Office (Army), entry 101, March 15, 1864, as quoted in Lowry, *The Story the Soldiers Wouldn’t Tell*, 123, 125; James Madison Bowler to Elizabeth Caleff Bowler, *Go If You Think It Your Duty: A Minnesota Couple’s Civil War Letters*, ed. Andrea R. Foroughi (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2008), October 23, 1863, pg 162; Kennedy, March 19, 1864; James T. Ayers Journal, May 6th, 1864, in *The Blue and the Gray: The Story of the Civil War as Told by Participants (Volume One: The Nomination of Lincoln to the Eve of Gettysburg)*, edited by Henry Steele Commager (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1973), 82.

⁴² Mary Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 489, 472.

maintain. In Warren County, North Carolina, Mary J. White described one widow who “reaped the contempt of most her friends when she befriended a Federal officer.” Some community members believed that she “had set her cap for the captain.” The lack of respect this widow held for the Confederate cause made White furious. “I wish he would take her off with him, but before she goes, I should like for her to be given a good coat of tar and feathers, for she richly deserves it,” she steamed in her diary. The stereotype of a sexually promiscuous widow did not escape Union soldiers. Writing home from his station in Maryland, Union soldier Charles Johnson asked his wife to “excuse the lewdness of the joke,” and Johnson proceeded to inform her that the poetic line “Oh! for a lodge in some vast wilderness, amidst a contiguity of shade” had been paraphrased to “Oh! for a lodge in some vast widow’s nest, amidst a contiguity of hair.” He then explained that he had merely been trying to remember the poem, but “the two slipped into my idle brain together.” He was not alone, for the joke appears in other wartime journals and letters of other soldiers, such as Willoughby Babcock, who recorded in a letter that a friend of his “tantalizingly” asked: “How would you like a lodge in some vast widow’s nest?”⁴³

A widow’s flirting could lead to yet another impertinence: an early remarriage. Although some saw nothing wrong with a widow finding love once more—provided she fell head over heels after mourning her soldier husband for thirty months—some young widows were unable or unwilling to wait that long. Upon seeing the flirty widow on the

⁴³ Charles F. Johnson to Mary Johnson, 19 June 1864, in Charles F. Johnson, *The Civil War Letters of Colonel Charles F. Johnson: Invalid Corps*, ed. Fred Pelka (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 256; Willoughby Babcock, *Selections from the Letters and Diaries of Brevet-Brigadier General Willoughby Babcock of the Seventy-Fifth New York Volunteers* (New York: The University of the State of New York, 1922), 94; Mary J. White Diary, May 2-4, 1865, in Manly Wade Wellman, *The County of Warren, North Carolina, 1586-1917* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 153.

train, one stranger commented to Chesnut: “Well, look yonder. As soon as she began whining about her dead beaux I knew she was after another one...It won’t be her fault if she don’t have another one soon.” The stranger watched a minute more and then remarked again, “she won’t lose any time.” Likewise, Naomi Hayes believed widows were even more impatient for marriage than maidens, for “those who already knew the pleasures of married life were less willing to live outside it.” In a case study of Virginia, historian Robert Kenzer compiled statistical data suggesting that the younger a widow was, the greater the likelihood that she would remarry. Through an analysis of pension records and census data, Kenzer determined that 1866 was the most common year for remarriage and that widows who remarried had a median age of twenty-four years in 1860. Urban widows also appeared to have greater opportunities for new marriages. Kenzer concluded that “given the tremendous shortage of men after the conflict, the opportunity to remarry was quite restricted except for the youngest and wealthiest southern women.” This shortage helps to explain why some young widows, when presented with an opportunity for marriage, refused to wait out the customary two and a half years of mourning.⁴⁴

The families of widows were not the only ones unhappy about a potential remarriage; often, the family of the new groom-to-be also expressed concerns. “Well I could fill a page,” Emma Holmes, of Charleston, began to her diary, “to express my astonishment at the news which arrived tonight, and which was like a thunderbolt.” Her brother, Willie, wrote “that he is engaged to Mrs. Ben Scriven, a widow with *five* children, & begs mother to please send his wardrobe as he will be married soon.” That

⁴⁴ Chesnut, ed. Woodward, 489-90; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 150; Robert Kenzer, “The Uncertainty of Life: A Profile of Virginia’s Civil War Widows,” in *The War Was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War*, ed. Joan E. Cashin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 125.

was all he said on the subject, leaving Emma “perfectly dumbfounded,” while “Mother burst into tears, frightening us.” “If it was a young lady, we would not have felt it so much – but the idea of marrying a widow, who must be at least five or six years, if not more, older than himself – an idea so repugnant to my feelings – then the five children – such a heavy responsibility for so young a man. She must have some property, for he certainly cannot maintain a family otherwise,” she rambled. In the end, she decided to cheer up the house with laughter, for “indeed it seems preposterous and absurd in the extreme and I can scarcely believe the evidence of my senses. Of all the strange marriages & matches made by war, this takes the lead.” The war made strange marriages, indeed.⁴⁵

Like the perpetually grieving Tivie, another widow, Fannie Franklin Hargrave did not bear her grief well, but unlike Tivie, it was not the result of heartbreak. For Fannie, the war began when her father, Bright Williamson Hargrave, was shot outside of their home in May 1861. Perhaps Fannie was watching the argument, her face pressed against an upstairs window of their expansive plantation home, or perhaps her mother had banished her to the back of the house with the rest of her siblings, thirteen in all. Beard Williams, the man who shot her father, was Fannie’s brother-in-law, the husband of her oldest sister Olivia. Her father had recently returned from the Georgia Secession Convention, where he represented Carroll County and signed the secession ordinance. Why Beard Williams came to the house with a gun that day is unknown. Perhaps it was politically inspired, perhaps it was a culmination of a family quarrel, or perhaps merely a mishap in a heated argument. Either way, her father was dead. Fannie, eighteen years

⁴⁵ Emma Holmes, January 21, 1863, *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes, 1861-1866*, ed. John F. Marszalek (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 224-5.

old and the oldest unmarried daughter, helped her mother gather up the ten younger children and take them to Atlanta. Her mother, while taking care of six children with the measles, contracted pneumonia herself and died in 1862. The family was scattered across the South. Fannie bounced back and forth between two guardians, Judge Long in Carrollton, Georgia and David Clopton in Van Wert, Georgia. She would lose touch with several of her brothers and sisters in this time, unable to locate them again until she was elderly.⁴⁶

In December 1863 or January 1864, twenty-year-old Fannie Franklin Hargrave married James N. Carson. He was the co-owner of Carson-Brannan Cotton Brokerage in Pulaski, Tennessee and a commissariat in the Confederate army. How they met, what their courtship was like, when exactly they married, and other details of their relationship are unknown, though one cousin of James' did exclaim "I admit I was surprised, yes amazed, confounded, and astounded. I never dreamed of you marrying, I am glad indeed." James left his young wife in Carrollton, a town just west of Atlanta, when he returned to the war. Rumors of General William Tecumseh Sherman's plans swirled throughout the South, causing Fannie to become nervous. "You hear all kinds of rumors—none however, in our favor," wrote Fannie to her "dear husband." In June 1864, she became "very uneasy about our falling in the Yankee lines...I beg that you will come—if it is in the range of possibility & move me to a place of safety." Whenever she traveled, Fannie hid the money James left her, \$6,000 in gold, around her waist, afraid to leave it at home. In the midst of all the uneasiness, she informed James "how much I miss you, you

⁴⁶ A biography of the Hargrave Family is included in the family papers, the author's name not recorded. Likely, it was compiled by Julia Graves Ivey, the donor of the collection. Hargrave biography, Hargrave Family Papers, Annie Belle Weaver Special Collections, Ingram Library, University of West Georgia [UWG].

can't imagine." Judge Long, with whom she was staying, told James "do come if possible very soon, and take Fannie away from here—she had been deeply sad for the past few days. I cannot realize that she is the same frolicsome, lively creature that she was when you were with her." Her sadness would only increase in the coming months.⁴⁷

On July 3, 1864, James was in Cedartown, Georgia, purchasing supplies for troops. He was visiting a friend's home when "Yankees dashed into town before any one had any notice of their coming." James raced out the back door of the house and "attempted to get to the Plum orchard but they killed him just as he jumped the fence." James was "shot in the bowels," and brought into the house, "with blood streaming from his wound." For his friends, this was a traumatic experience. "If I live a thousand years I can never get over seeing him shot," Mrs. Darden, a friend, recalled. In a letter to Fannie over a year after the incident, she added "you can imagine how I feel standing here looking at the floor with blood all over it. We have had it scoured three times but it is perfectly plain now and never will come up."⁴⁸

Like Tivie, Fannie not only had to adjust to life as a widow, but also life as a mother. Shortly after James' death, Fannie gave birth to a little boy. She named him James N. Carson Jr., in honor of her late husband and lovingly called him Jimmy. This baby, however, would only bless his mother's world for about nine months before he died, bringing even more sorrow into the twenty-one year old widow's life. "We all loved your sweet little cherub and mourn for him as if he were our own" remarked her

⁴⁷ Mollie Brannan to Jimmie, aka James Carson, June 8, 1864, Hargrave Family Papers, UWG; Fannie Franklin Hargrave Carson to James Carson, 25 May 1864, Hargrave Family Papers, UWG; 4 June 1864, Fannie Franklin Hargrave Carson to James Carson, Hargrave Family Papers, UWG; C. E. Long to James Carson, 8 June 1864, Hargrave Family Papers, UWG.

⁴⁸ Benjamin F. Bigelow, 3 July 1864, Hargrave Family Papers, UWG; Fannie Hargrave Carson to Lou E. Hightower, 6 July 1864, Hargrave Family Papers, UWG; Lou E. Hightower, 13 July 1864, Hargrave Family Papers, UWG. Fannie Darden to Fannie Hargrave Carson, 21 February 1866, Hargrave Family Papers, UWG.

sister. Sympathizing with Fannie, she claimed “I too can never forget his heavenly eyes—his bright sunny face.” Death seemed to be following Fannie, attacking those she loved most and heaping sadness upon the young widow.⁴⁹

And yet, in just one year and seven months after her husband’s death, Fannie was married again. Her choice was Hiram King Brannan, Fannie’s late husband’s business partner in their cotton-brokerage business and his second cousin. In November 1865, Fannie left for Pulaski, Tennessee with the intention of marrying him, despite the fact that she was still in the middle of her mourning period. Fannie wrote her friends: “now don’t go scolding because I didn’t tell in my other letter for I didn’t think then it would come off so soon.” Fannie’s sister, while full of compassion for Fannie, wrote, “I can hardly help from hating Mr. Brannan for stealing you from us. Poor Jule cried for three days and nights after you left.” Her friend Molly remarked “I was quite surprised when I heard you were going to marry.” Another flatly told her, “O I wish you were not married.” In a fleeting moment of introspection, even Fannie doubted her decision, writing “I hope I made my choice with considerable deliberation.” Fannie’s new sister-in-law, however, was happy about the development and felt her brother was “quite fortunate to have him a fine looking, captivating, rich” new wife who could produce “a dozen little Brannans—dear little red headed pug nosed babies they will be.”⁵⁰

Beyond her decision to remarry, it also appears that Fannie was a popular woman while living in Georgia. After she left for Tennessee, her sister complained that “every time I go out, or see anybody ‘have you heard from Miss Carson’ is dinged in my ears.”

⁴⁹ Fannie’s sister, to Fannie Hargrave Carson, 4 November 1865, Hargrave Family Papers, UWG.

⁵⁰ An unnamed sister to Fannie Hargrave Carson Brannan, 4 November 1865, Hargrave Family Papers, UWG. Mollie to Fannie Hargrave Carson Brannan, no date, Hargrave Family Papers, UWG; Bessie Lowe to Fannie Hargrave Carson Brannan, no date, Hargrave Family Papers, UWG; Meta to Fannie Hargrave Carson Brannan, 9 February 1866, Hargrave Family Papers, UWG;

In fact, she explained to Fannie that “I have been questioned by some of your admirers until I have grown almost tired.” To pacify one eager suitor, Fannie’s sister played quite a trick. After days of being “tormented” by a certain Captain, Fannie’s sister went home to get “him a lock of your hair.” Giving a man a lock of hair was a sign of nineteenth-century affection. “I came home and clipped a tress from old yellow oxen tail, perfumed it highly and sent it to him with the request that he should wear it next to his heart and not expose it to the vulgar gaze of anyone. The last time I saw him he drew it out of his breast pocket and pressed it tenderly to his lips,” giggled the trickster sister. Rich, beautiful, and only twenty-one years old, Fannie appears to have made quite an impression on those who knew her.⁵¹

On February 21, 1866, three months into her second marriage, Fannie received an important letter describing “all the particulars of the death of your much loved husband.” This letter did not describe the death of her current husband Hiram, but her late husband James. Unaware of Fannie’s new marriage, the writer of the letter tried “to tell all the messages of love” that James had left her. Additionally, the letter writer remarked that “we have so often thought and talked of you, and wondered where you were or what had become of you.” They likely did not imagine that the young woman was already remarried, and to her late husband’s business partner at that. Could a man who gave his life for the Confederate cause be forgotten so easily? After all, James had not even been in the ground two years before she had married again, and to a man who was not even a soldier. The lack of a family and home, combined with her youth and lively personality,

⁵¹ From unnamed sister, to Fannie Hargrave Carson Brannan, 4 November 1865, Hargrave Family Papers, UWG.

led to a different type of widowhood for Fannie. Community expectations shaped mourning, but so did a variety of other factors.⁵²

Georgia Page King, the wife who cared for her sick and dying husband for sixty-seven days before his death, had a strong community in her early widowhood. Friends and family, aware of William's lingering illness, came to see the grieving widow in Charleston and then in St. Simon's. Among others, Georgia explained to her brother that "Molly had come for me," "the Grants are very near and kind as ever," that Jenny would remain "until after frost," and that she had "heard from Floyd." "God has been wonderfully merciful in sparing you beloved brothers," Georgia pointed out, in an attempt to be grateful for what she still had and discover her purpose. "I do earnestly pray God in mercy to take me as soon as He, in his infinite wisdom, will consent to do it, but I know if I am left it is for some use to others." Though heartbroken, even within these initial days of grief, Georgia tried to see the positive in her predicament.⁵³

Certainly, Georgia felt the sorrow of losing a husband. She believed "God has seen fit to visit me with the sorest affliction the human heart could know." In the early stages of her husband's sickness, she explained, "I did not feel that I could say 'Thy will be done.'" But through his sickness, her faith grew stronger and acceptance became easier. She believed God felt "a peculiar compassion for the widow—knowing the utter desolation of her heart if her love is such as it should be for the one He has given her for a husband." While Georgia sometimes thought, "I could have died with him—this separation is so hard," she finished the sentence with a reassuring, "but I doubt not God's

⁵² Fannie Darden to Fannie Hargrave Carson, 21 February 1866, Hargrave Family Papers, UWG.

⁵³ Ibid.

wisdom.” When “shut up in a selfish grief,” she typically became increasingly upset and attempted to pull herself from it.⁵⁴

Georgia’s determination to both mourn her husband and accept God’s will was exactly what those around her wanted her to do. Her friend Lizzie Caperton wrote “When I read yr letters, my precious one, I knelt down and offered Praise to god for the example to my simple desponding heart of your submission to His will and your great faith in His love.” She was model to all who mourned. Georgia grieved her loss, but did not dissolve into a melancholy puddle of anguish. Instead, she mourned with grace and championed her husband’s memory. She did not call her brothers home from the war, but instead encouraged them to carry on in the fight. She followed the dictates of the etiquette books and the advice of her family. By mourning gracefully she did not undermine the Confederacy, but accepted that her husband was “a noble husband” called to give his life for a larger cause.⁵⁵

By June 9, 1870, Georgia had found love again. Born in 1844, Joseph J. Wilder was ten years her junior. While William had been fighting, Joseph, still a teenager, was studying in Germany. While Georgia was mourning the death of her husband in January 1865, Joseph’s father informed him that “this day you are twenty one years of age, you are now a full man...the legal term of infancy has expired and you now assume that of manhood...you now have your own name and fortune to make.” After the war, Joseph joined his father as a successful cotton merchant. In Savannah’s Christ Church, Georgia wed Joseph in an event that delighted many. Family and friends celebrated because Georgia, a dutiful widow, had mourned her husband long enough. Two years later,

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Lizzie Caperton to Georgia Page King Smith, 3 November 1862, K-W Papers, GHS; Georgia Page King Smith to Henry Lord Page King, 30 October 1862, K-W Papers, GHS.

Georgia had her first and only child, a little girl. She remained happily married until Joseph died on September 10, 1900. Georgia would live another ten years, as a widow once more.⁵⁶

Exploring the varied emotional responses of Confederate widows, and the expectations placed before them during the war, reveals the complicated politics of mourning that lay beneath official tributes to women performing that work. “Your best earthly treasure has been snatched from you” read one condolence letter typically, “& I know you feel as if there was nothing left worth living for, but you must summon all your fortitude.” Losing a husband was certainly “a great trial” for many Confederate wives. Some widows battled with mothers-in-law, some with the grief within. Some desperately desired to live up to the ideals laid before them, while others rejected them for sexual independence. Marching armies tread through the backyards of widows in border states, while shortages affected families across the Confederacy, and pregnant widows struggled to figure out their futures. On top of it all, her loss was hardly her own. If a widow recommitted herself to the Confederacy and poured her emotional resources into the war, that was a powerful endorsement. If she withdrew her emotional resources, or worse, used her new standing to criticize the war that was a powerful indictment. War widows had a tremendous amount of social capital and the Confederacy was anxious to oversee how they spent it.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Joseph J. Wilder and Georgia P. Smith Marriage Certificate, 9 June 1870, K-W Papers, GHS; John Randolph Wilder to Joseph John Wilder, January 5, 1865, K-W Papers, GHS.

⁵⁷ Mary to Fannie Franklin Hargrave Carson, 17 July 1864, Hargrave Family Papers, UWG.; Lou E. Hightower to Fannie Franklin Hargrave Carson, 13 July 1864, Hargrave Family Papers, UWG.

CHAPTER 5

THE PERFORMANCE OF A LIFETIME

“Mrs. Helm is “Mother of the Orphan Brigade,” and her portrait appeared on the badges of red, white and blue, worn by the veterans of the Brigade. Her husband commanded the Brigade, and after his death they gave Mrs. Helm the honorary title. In the addresses made during the reunion beautiful tributes were paid to her.”
 -1920 Kentucky Newspaper¹

A lifeless slip of paper delivered the news. “Atlanta, Ga.,” the telegram read.

“Mrs. General Helm is in Griffin. Find her and send her up in train today. The General is dead.” After receiving the message, Emilie Todd Helm, wife of Confederate brigadier Benjamin Hardin Helm, felt so heartbroken that, she recalled, the “days and weeks after I scarcely remember at all.” She was a twenty-six-year-old mother of three children under age six. She had been married just seven years, and now, she was a Confederate widow. Eighteen months later, lingering wartime hostilities also made a widow of Emilie’s older sister, Mary Todd Lincoln. Mary’s husband famously died in April 1865, when an actor slipped behind him, raised a gun, and pulled the trigger. In the crowded backroom of a boardinghouse, Mary’s heart broke before a hushed assembly as she wailed for her husband to “take her with him.”²

¹ *Bourbon News*, Paris (Ky.), October 5, 1920.

² The reader may also notice that within some quotations Emilie’s name was spelled differently, and should note that I will refer to her as Emilie for consistency. Despite her lengthy career as a Confederate widow, little has been published about Emilie Helm. Only one biography, just fifty-two pages long, has been published in the eighty years since Emilie’s death, Dorothy Darnell Jones’ *Emilie Pariet Todd Helm: Abraham Lincoln’s “Little Sister.”* Other studies on the Lincolns and the Todds, like Stephen Berry’s *House of Abraham: Lincoln & the Todds, A Family Divided by War* and Jerrold M. Packard’s *The Lincolns in the White House: Four Years That Shattered a Family*, include valuable discussions on Emilie and her relationships with Abraham and Mary. Her widowhood has not been analyzed. Elizabeth Dixon, quoted in Catherine Clinton, *Mrs. Lincoln: A Life* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2009), 245; Emilie Todd,

The Civil War wrecked many American families but made particularly harsh work of the Todds. Of the fourteen children, eight sided with the Confederacy and six with the Union. Two Todd boys were killed, and the rest were left with deep emotional wounds. Two Todd sisters, Emilie and Mary, had to mourn dead husbands *and* dead brothers. In their respective sections, Emilie and Mary were war widows and public figures, having survived the bloodshed to walk as human embodiments of sacrifice. Everyone in the nation had to pick up the pieces and march on, but as famous widows, Emilie and Mary had to don their dark uniforms and perform their roles on a public stage.³

The Todd sisters were but two of two hundred thousand white women widowed by the war. Mary, somewhat infamously, became a diva of grief, inconsolable and insufferable. This chapter focuses upon Emilie and her post-war “career” as a Confederate widow in Kentucky, and widows’ roles in sectional reconciliation more broadly. While her quick tongue, famous family, and stint as a visitor in the Civil War White House make her a fascinating figure, Emilie’s experience as a young widow in a

undated Civil War reminiscence, Emilie Todd Helm Collection, Kentucky Historical Society (KHS), Frankfort. Unless otherwise indicated, all primary source materials, including correspondence, diaries, and newspaper clippings, noted in this essay are contained in the KHS collection.

³ The loyalties of some of the Todds shifted throughout the war; the Copperheadism (if not treason) of Margaret Todd and her husband, Charles Henry Kellogg, being a key example. See Berry, *House of Abraham*. The topic of Civil War pensions is the only aspect of Civil War widowhood that historians have explored in detail. For excellent articles on Civil War widows, the pension system, and financial support, consult one of the following: Jennifer Lynn Gross, “‘Good Angels’: Confederate Widowhood in Virginia,” in *Southern Families at War: Loyalty and Conflict in the Civil War South*, ed. Catherine Clinton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jennifer Lynn Gross, “‘And for the Widow and the Orphan’: Confederate Widows, Poverty, and Public Assistance,” in *Inside the Confederate Nation: Essays in Honor of Emory M. Thomas*, eds. Lesley J. Gordon and John C. Inscoe (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); Jennifer L. Gross, “The United Daughters of the Confederacy, Confederate Widows, and the Lost Cause: ‘We Must Not Forget or Neglect the Widows,’” in *Women on Their Own: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Being Single*, eds. Rudolph M. Bell and Virginia Yans (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 180-94; Robert Kenzer, “The Uncertainty of Life: A Profile of Virginia’s Civil War Widows,” in *The War Was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War*, ed. Joan E. Cashin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

war-torn Confederacy is a broadly typical example of a Confederate widow who performed her part perfectly. “Mother” to her husband’s “Orphan” Brigade, organizer for the United Daughters of the Confederacy, author of unpublished Lost Cause fiction, unswerving puffer of her husband’s memory, Emilie achieved a kind of professional fame as a widow—and through her we can more clearly see the society that created her role, built her stage, and applauded her performances. Ultimately, it was Emilie, not Mary, who became exactly what her society demanded she be. Seven years married, she would be for almost seventy years the public widow of Benjamin Hardin Helm. Suffering like hers would be rewarded, not merely by her region but, ironically, by her nation, who found room not only to pity and thank her for her sacrifice but also to erect on the foundation of such Southern suffering a narrative of *national* reconciliation.

By the early 1830s, a grand brick home on Main Street in Lexington, Kentucky, swarmed with Todd babies, toddlers, and teens. Emilie was the eleventh of fourteen children born into the family, and her birth on November 11, 1836, brought the number of children living within the Todd home to nine. The fourteen-room house was more hive than home, buzzing with the comings and goings of siblings, guests, and slaves. Quick tongues, fiery tempers, and rowdy antics burst forth daily, and in a sea of children attempting to distinguish themselves, Emilie always had her beauty. “I think you were too young to remember it,” Elizabeth Norris wrote, describing the time when Emilie and her good looks “turned the City of Lexington upside down.” While out with her enslaved nurse, a young Emilie strayed into the street and disappeared. “The day dragged slowly with untold agony” for Emilie’s mother, while Emilie’s father, the police, and Lexington’s men made every effort to find her. Late in the afternoon, Emilie’s father

discovered her in the house of a childless couple. “The man and his wife were considered good people,” Norris explained to Emilie, “but your uncommon beauty overcame his sense of right.”⁴

One week before Emilie’s seventh birthday, her older sister married Abraham Lincoln. Mary, a self-described “ruddy pine knot,” was not as pretty as Emilie, but then her betrothed was no looker, either. Abraham’s gangly frame and misshapen face were the subject of common comment; even Mary’s sister Frances called him “the plainest man” in Springfield, Illinois. The couple had met in the Springfield home of eldest sister Elizabeth and over the course of two years they courted, got engaged, got disengaged, courted, and got engaged again. On November 4, 1842, just hours after their most recent decision to wed, they took their vows in Elizabeth’s parlor. In the rush of events, the cake turned out poorly and rain beat loudly against the windows throughout the ceremony, but in spite of it all, Abraham slipped onto Mary’s finger a ring engraved with the words “Love is Eternal.” Together, they made a home in Springfield and immersed themselves in Abe’s political career.⁵

When discussing their marriage, Mary acknowledged their “opposite natures.” Mary had a feisty personality, a penetrating yell, and an ungovernable temper. Abraham had his uncouth appearance and underdeveloped manners. She could be physically and emotionally abusive, he emotionally absent. And yet Mary and Abraham, for all their individual faults, complemented each other in ways few others could. She smoothed out

⁴ Jean H. Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987), 45, 74; Elizabeth L. Norris to Emily Todd Helm, March 7, 1895, in Elizabeth L. Norris Collection, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Illinois.

⁵ An excellent book on the twists and turns of Mary and Abraham’s engagements is Douglas L. Wilson’s *Honor’s Voice: The Transformation of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1998); Carl Sandburg and Paul M. Angle, *Mary Lincoln: Wife and Widow* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1932), 43; Frances Todd, as quoted in Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 83; Catherine Clinton, *Mrs. Lincoln*, 61.

his country appearance and polished his manners. He tolerated her wild moods and unstable emotions. For better or worse, they grew together as a pair. As Abe joked, “My friends, this is the long of it,” he said, pointing to himself. Then, with a hand on Mary’s head, he would add, “And this is the short of it.”⁶

In 1846, four years into the Lincoln marriage, the Prairie State’s voters elected Abraham to the U.S. House of Representatives. Mary and Abraham packed their belongings and their two young sons and began the lengthy trek to the nation’s capital. Along the way, they planned a visit to the Todd home in Lexington. It was a cold November day when they arrived at the brick house, a home Mary had not seen in seven years. For Abe, both the house and the people within it were new. He had met Mary’s father, but none of his other Todd relatives. Then again, Mary had yet to meet her two youngest sisters as well. When she left home, Emilie was the second youngest of the family, just three years old. Now, Emilie was ten and caught up in the excitement of the preparations for the Lincolns’ arrival.

Crowded in the wide hall with the rest of her family, Emilie watched as the door burst open and Mary glided in, carrying her youngest son Eddie. “To my mind she was lovely,” Emilie recalled. With “clear, sparkling, blue eyes, lovely smooth white skin with a fresh, faint wild-rose color in her cheeks; and glossy light brown hair, which fell in soft, short curls behind each ear,” Mary seemed nearly angelic. Despite being awestruck by her older sister, Emilie had quite a different opinion of her new brother-in-law. “I

⁶ The “long of it/short of it” joke is one Abraham would use in many different circumstances, including with fellow politicians and speakers. It was perhaps most amusing, however, with his wife, whose differing heights and shapes made quite an impact. Mary Lincoln to Eliza Stuart Steel, Chicago, May [23, 1871], in Justin Turner and Linda Turner, *Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 200; Abraham Lincoln as quoted by Daniel J. Ryan, *Lincoln and Ohio* (Columbus: Ohio State Archaeological and History Society, 1923).

remember thinking,” Emilie said, “of Jack and the Beanstalk, and feared he might be the hungry giant of the story, he was so tall and looked so big.” With a full black cloak and a fur cap with ear straps, little of his face could be seen. “Expecting to hear the ‘Fee, fi, fo, fum!’ I shrank closer to my mother and tried to hide behind her voluminous skirts,” she explained. Abe, after shaking hands with the adults in the hall, retrieved Emilie from her hiding place, lifted her high into his arms, and exclaimed, “So this is little sister.” His voice and smile banished her fear of the gentle giant. “I was always after that called by him ‘little sister,’” Emilie remembered. Emilie never knew Mary without Abraham, and of all Mary’s many sisters, Abe was especially fond of Emilie.⁷

Over the following decade, Emilie would blossom into adulthood and marry. Once a beautiful child, Emilie grew into “one of the handsomest and loveliest women in the world,” with dark hair, a petite frame, and “happy smile.” Her marital choice, Benjamin Hardin Helm, was a dashing young West Point graduate and rising lawyer-politician. Six feet tall, with brown hair, clear blue eyes, and “an expression of countenance that no single term can describe,” he was handsome. As important, his family was wealthy and well connected. Benjamin’s grandfather had been a United States senator and his father Kentucky’s governor. Benjamin was the first-born child and, at age twenty-five, he fell completely in love with nineteen-year-old Emilie, describing her as “absolutely essential to my very being” eighteen months into their relationship. While few details of their courtship are known, Benjamin would later

⁷ This story comes from Emilie’s daughter’s book on Mary Lincoln. Historians should read this text with a critical eye, as it was written and published decades after the war. Emilie, as I discuss later in this paper, carefully crafted the image of the Todds and Lincolns that she showed the world in the postwar period. Some stories in this book, when compared to other sources and historical fact, ring true; others do not. Katherine Helm, *The True Story of Mary, Wife of Lincoln* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1928), 99-100.

comment upon the profound mystery of falling in love with her. “What a wonderful change we undergo in this world,” he mused to his young wife, “one year we will have nothing particularly to care for or live for—when the next will find us united in the dearest and holiest ties, of which the heart is capable of enjoying—and life is dear for the sake of the lovely being who has linked her fate with yours.”⁸

On March 26, 1856, six months after their first meeting, the couple married in Frankfort, Kentucky. Almost immediately, Benjamin returned to shaking hands and giving speeches across the commonwealth, serving as the district attorney for three counties and stumping for politician Millard Fillmore. “A lawyer’s business is no child’s play if he attends to it properly,” he had explained to his younger sister years earlier, informing her that a lawyer’s “leisure time should be devoted to his profession.” But now, not even three months married, he found the work more trying, writing to Emilie, “I cant keep your image out of my mind, all the time, nearly.” He wrote his letters with her daguerreotype before him, feeling simply “foolish” about his young bride. Benjamin desired to alter the laws of physics for their love, hoping “time will pass off rapidly, untill we meet and then it may linger.” When he traveled, Emilie returned to live with her mother in Lexington. Benjamin loved the “excitement of speaking and the active exercise” of his career, but complete satisfaction eluded him while apart from Emilie. “If I could only see your happy face at the end of each day I would be perfectly contented . .

⁸ Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emilie Helm, July 4, 1856; Edwin Porter Thompson, *History of the First Kentucky Brigade* (Cincinnati: Caxton Publishing House, 1868) 346-47; Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emily Helm, March 15, 1857; Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emily Helm, March 15, 1857.

. . I never wanted to see any body half so bad in my life as I do you,” he sighed.

Wishfully dreaming, Benjamin promised, “I shall fly on the wings of love to see you.”⁹

Emilie’s society not only brought him happiness, Benjamin believed, but also aided his career. “My love for you, dear wife will cause me to be a man of fame if by energy and industry I can ever reach it; it is true that the hill is a high and rugged one to climb, and I may often feel like fainting by the way side,” he wrote, “yet when I have your love to cheer me on, and your smiles to reward my exertions, [I feel] redoubled energy and rigor.” Her love sustained him, encouraged him, and filled him with hope. “Love in married life is as essential to happiness as the congenial rays of the sun,” he believed, “without love in a man’s life he would be enshrouded in utter darkness and misery and selfishness.” In his mind, love and ambition intertwined, for “the love of so pure a wife is enough to urge me on to fame and fortune.” Benjamin, consumed with feelings of affection, believed Emilie could not possibly love him as he loved her. “I think I can hear you say ‘Ah! Man cant love like a woman,’” he wrote, “but you know not the heart of old Kentucky’s son.”¹⁰

Five years later, the Civil War intruded on Emilie’s marriage. Before joining the Confederacy, Benjamin visited the White House and received an offer from Abraham for

⁹ Benjamin Hardin Helm, to Lucinda Helm, October 28, 1855; Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emilie Helm, June 20, 1856 ; Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emilie Helm, July 12, 1856 ; Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emily Helm, March 15, 1857 ; Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emilie Helm, June 18, 1856 ; Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emilie Helm, June 25, 1856.

¹⁰ This degree of lovesickness is one that Abraham and Mary would never experience, or, at the very least, write about. Their marriage was never known for its affection. For more on southern manhood, see Stephen Berry, *All that Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); John Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009); Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, & the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emily Helm, March 15, 1857; Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emilie Helm, June 3, 1857; Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emilie Helm, June 25, 1856.

a high-ranking position within the United States Army. It was all Benjamin ever wanted. “I never had such a struggle,” he told a friend, “and it almost killed me to decline.” The Todd family was tearing in two. Benjamin publicly aligned himself with the Confederacy and by October 1861, wrote Emilie that he was “getting up my regiment very rapidly and think I will soon be in the field again.” Despite his success with his regiment, he worried about the future. “This separation I sincerely hope will not continue long,” he assured Emilie, but “I have gone in for the war and if God spares my life I expect to battle to the end of it.”¹¹

Separation was not something they did well, as Emilie and Benjamin had discovered in their newlywed years. “I wish I was able to live at home all the time or to carry you around with me,” Benjamin wrote typically. During the war years, they chose the latter option. As often as possible, Emilie followed Benjamin to his various posts; whenever they did separate, Benjamin worried constantly. “I have not recd a letter from you for some time. I hope the yankees have not frightened you so that you have lost the power of writing,” he half-jokingly teased in 1863. In addition to being an affectionate husband, Benjamin was a doting father who constantly asked about his children and requested that Emilie “kiss the dear little children for me and tell them Papa is very anxious to see them.” Of his first daughter, he believed her to be “the prettiest baby that was ever born.” When Emilie and the children were close-by, Benjamin would visit as often as his position allowed. The traveling contained potential dangers for Emilie, which she described in her wartime diary. After checking into a hotel in Atlanta, she requested the clerk search her rooms before she was willing to stay in it. She described herself as “not a timid woman” and carried a gun, but would rather be safe than sorry.

¹¹ Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emilie Helm, October 10, 1861, Helm Papers.

Emilie claimed that under one bed, the clerk “drew out by his boots a negro—he pretended to be asleep and was kicked unceremoniously down stairs.” After putting her children to bed, Emilie could not sleep. Thinking about “the peril I had escaped,” Emilie read by candlelight until her “beloved H” arrived “in a new uniform looking so fresh.” His handsome appearance caused her to forget her fright as she enjoyed the “delight to feast my eyes on him” before drawing him into the adjoining room to gaze lovingly on his sleeping children.¹²

On September 20, 1863, Emilie’s husband found himself in a “perfect tornado of bullets” at the Battle of Chickamauga. Amidst the cutting storm of minie balls, dirt, and powder was one small lead mass that punctured his liver, ending his life before sunset and shattering Emilie’s forever. A young captain from Kentucky received news of the Confederate victory and celebrated in his diary with, “It is glorious news. It makes a fellow feel taller, stouter, fatter, better, lighter, heartier, saucier, braver, kinder, richer, and everything good & great. Hurra for hurra!!” He then turned to what the victory meant: “Gen Helm of Ky is killed. So the wail comes up with the shout of victory.”¹³

As the news spread throughout the South, a steady stream of condolence letters came to Emilie, revealing the hopes and expectations placed on widows. Like other widows throughout the South, Emilie was encouraged to find strength in her religion in her trials. “Would that I could offer you some consolation, something for your bitter

¹² This dairy is missing. Most historians believe that Emilie burned it just before she died because it contained “too much bitterness.” Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emilie Helm, October 19, 1856; Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emilie Helm, June 26, 1863; Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emilie Helm, April 20, 1862; Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emilie Helm, June 3, 1857; Emilie Hardin Helm, diary excerpt.

¹³ Nineteenth-century etiquette books also prescribed how a woman should mourn, from her dress to her actions. See *How to Behave: A Pocket Manual of Republican Etiquette, and Guide to Correct Personal Habits* (New York: Fowler and Wells, Publishers, 1856), or Emily Thornwell, *The Lady’s Guide to perfect Gentility* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1856), 217; Edward O. Guerrant, *Bluegrass Confederate: The Headquarters Diary of Edward O. Guerrant*, eds. William C. Davis and Meredith L. Swentor (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 331.

trial,” wrote Mrs. E. Halderman to Emilie, “but I can only pray for you and your dear little ones that God will look in mercy on you and give you strength.” Likewise, Emilie’s friend Virginia Page lamented, “How I wish I could pour some balm into your wounded heart—God comfort you for He alone can.” “The Lord be my strength and help in this my hour of need,” penned Emilie’s mother-in-law, “and may he be a husband to the widow and father to the fatherless is my prayer.” Even strangers like Mrs. Pickett, the wife of the chaplain in Helm’s brigade, provided Emilie with lengthy encouragements and directions. “You have experienced a mighty sorrow and none I know can reach its lonely aching depths” she believed, “save the Father Himself.” She informed Emilie that “every tendril of your anguished heart that reaches unto Him, will be greatly bound and healed....and Jesus—Jesus who knew all sorrow—He too will be with you.” Emilie’s late husband would have agreed with the religious sentiment behind these letters. Before his death, he lectured Emilie that “we should always be prepared to bow ourselves before the will of the Almighty knowing that if he brings trials and affliction upon us, it will be to chasten us, and in proportion to the trials he brings upon us, will he give us the strength to bear them.” These writers urged Emilie to find comfort in faith and trust in her God, in hopes this would bring comfort to her sorrowing heart.¹⁴

In addition to spiritual support, friends also offered physical assistance. “Any thing or all I have would I most cheerfully yield for the relief of yourself or Hardin’s children,” wrote H.M. Bruce. The Haldermans offered “to make our house your home so

¹⁴ This Mrs. Pickett, as she will be referred to in the remainder of the paper, should not be confused with Salle Pickett, George Pickett’s wife. E. Halderman, Madison, Georgia, to Emilie Todd Helm, September 25, 1863, Helm Papers; Virginia Page, Clarksburg, Virginia, to Emilie Todd Helm, October 11, 1863, Helm Papers; Lucinda Helm, Helm Place, to Emilie Todd Helm, October 21, 1863, Helm Papers; Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emilie Helm, March 18, 1857, Helm Papers; Mrs. E. Pickett, Maysville, Kentucky, to Emilie Todd Helm, December 31, 1863, Helm Papers.

long as it was agreeable to yourself.” Described as “a quiet little place,” they kept their home “in a plain way, still we are comfortable.” Encouraging her, Mrs. Halderman wrote “believe me it will give us heartfelt pleasure to welcome you beneath our roof.” Another family friend invited Emilie to “make my house your home,” asking, “Can you not come my afflicted young friend, with your orphan babes and remain with me untill you can return to Kentucky—I will do all I can to make you comfortable and alleviate your sorrow.” “If however you cannot gratify my wish in this,” the friend continued, “will you use me as a friend and allow me to furnish you, if you should need more means than you can command, with what you may require?” Robert Buckner, when returning one of Helm’s books, wrote that “a sister cannot have a higher claim upon a brother than the wife of Hardin upon me,” and assured her that “whatever is in my power to do, to aid you or to alleviate your sorrow will be done not as a favor but as a sacred duty.” “Come home to us Emilie,” wrote her mother-in-law, “and you shall be as a daughter and his children as my children.” Knowing that Emilie would not be allowed to take her slaves with her through federal lines, she instructed “do not be uneasy about not having a nurse,” and promised “I will furnish you with a nurse as soon as you get here.”¹⁵

Many condolence letters also contained empathic language, as the writers conveyed their own pain to Emilie. “How my heart bleeds for the grief and anguish,” sympathized H.M. Bruce. “While my heart bleeds for you,” wrote Mr. Halderman, “I also feel the deepest anguish at the severe loss sustained by the service and the Confederacy in the death of your husband.” Halderman’s wife likewise informed Emilie

¹⁵ H.M. Bruce, Richmond, Virginia, to Emily Todd Helm, September 22, 1863, Helm Papers; E. Halderman, Madison, Georgia, to Emilie Todd Helm, September 25, 1863, Helm Papers; E.H. Tulman Augusta, Georgia, to Emilie Todd Helm, November 13, 1863, Helm Papers; Robert S. Buckner, Montgomery, Alabama, to Emilie Helm, Madison, Georgia, November 21, 1863, Helm Papers; Lucinda Helm, Helm Place, to Emilie Todd Helm, October 21, 1863, Helm Papers.

“my own heart has been very sad ever since the sorrowful tidings were brought to me of Gen. Helm’s death.” “Could I but see you and mingle my tears with yours,” wished another friend. Perhaps more than the other writers, Emilie’s mother-in-law understood the grief best. She wept to Emilie “my son, my son, my first born, my pride, my hope— Oh this wicked war, a war of oppression—I know he died gloriously fighting for the freedom of his country but I can not feel that.” “My darling son,” she cried, “how can I outlive him?” Spiraling into depression, she informed Emilie that “I feel that the blow is more than I can bear.”¹⁶

In addition to describing their own pain, many people conveyed the loss of Helm as a loss not just of Emilie’s, but of Kentucky’s. “The sympathy so far as I can learn awakened in the breath of all Kentuckians,” wrote H.M. Bruce, “is universal. Poor Hardin was a great favorite with the people of his native State; and has left behind a brilliant reputation and an endearing remembrance which will die only with history.” Likewise, Mrs. Halderman believed that all Kentuckians “feel that in the loss of your husband, Kentucky has been bereft of one of her best and bravest men.” Certainly, her status as an officers’ wife impacted this development. Because Benjamin Helm’s name was known by many, Emilie had “the sympathy of hosts of Kentucky friends and the people of the South generally.” Even newspapers described her loss as Kentucky’s loss, printing that “though vacant, he [Helm] still has a piece in our heart of hearts.” Mrs. Pickett put it best. “A great nation will bear on you its struggling heart,” she wrote plainly, “and millions of hearts will vibrate with your sorrow. Your loss has been theirs.”

¹⁶ H.M. Bruce, Richmond, Virginia, to Emily Todd Helm, September 22, 1863, Helm Papers; W.N. Halderman, Madison, Georgia, to Emily Todd Helm, September 25, 1863, Helm Papers; E. Halderman, Madison, Georgia, to Emilie Todd Helm, September 25, 1863, Helm Papers; Virginia Page, Clarksburg, Virginia, to Emilie Todd Helm, October 11, 1863, Helm Papers; Lucinda Helm, Helm Place, to Emilie Todd Helm, October 21, 1863, Helm Papers.

Though her husband had died, as the wife of a Confederate officer, Emilie's loss would not simply be her own.¹⁷

As they did for many widows, letters encouraged Emilie to devote herself to religion, to receive physical assistance, to accept empathy graciously, and to understand that her loss was not her own. An ideal widow did these things. These letters cast Emilie in the role of a widow, and in them she found her script. "What a happy thought it would be to believe that the spirits of those whom we love would, when they have been torn from us by the icy fingers of death, return to be our guardian angels," Helm mused to Emilie in 1856. He believed that notion would "take from us many of the pangs of death, [and] take from the grave much that is desolate and dreary." In the coming decades, Emilie would find happiness again, and prove to be "as good a wife as any man on earth could desire," both "pure and lovely," even without her husband present. But first, she wanted to return to Kentucky.¹⁸

"Maj. Hays writes me you will go home," H.M. Bruce began, before including a list of possible routes for her trip and questions about her travel plans. Helm's father wrote to Emilie's mother asking "could you through friends or by your own relationship secure for Emily a passport home?" Despite his connections, he informed her that "I am totally at a loss of how to begin. Could you or one of your daughters write to Mrs.

¹⁷ H.M. Bruce, Richmond, Virginia, to Emily Todd Helm, September 30, 1863, Helm Papers.; E. Halderman, Madison, Georgia, to Emilie Todd Helm, September 25, 1863, Helm Papers; Undated newspaper clipping, Helm Papers; E. Pickett, Maysville, Kentucky, to Emilie Todd Helm, December 31, 1863, Helm Papers.

¹⁸ Helm used these words to describe her just before their one year wedding anniversary. Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emilie Helm, October 19, 1856, Helm Papers; Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emilie Helm, March 18, 1857; Within Emilie's papers at the KHS are condolence letters from ten different people, and many individuals sent Emilie multiple letters. The quotes included in this paragraph are but a tiny sampling of the themes in these letters. Mrs. E. Pickett, Maysville, Ky., to Emilie Todd Helm, December 31, 1863; H.M. Bruce, Richmond, Va., to Emily Todd Helm, September 22, 1863; E. Pickett, Maysville, Ky., to Emilie Todd Helm, December 31, 1863; Benjamin Hardin Helm to Emilie Helm, March 18, 1857.

Lincoln and through her secure a pass?" Unbeknownst to him, Emilie's mother had already begun the process, making "every exertion to obtain a pass for Emily and children and a permit to return with me to this place on whenever she may wish to leave." The war had already killed two of her sons, and she wanted her daughter home. "The few remaining years of life," Emilie's mother believed, "must pass on hope of being useful to my orphan grandchildren."¹⁹

Not many widows had the connections, both military and familial, that Emilie did, making her unique in this way. General Braxton Bragg assisted Emilie the most in her endeavor to return to Kentucky. He wrote to General Ulysses S. Grant to coordinate Emilie's passage and frankly explained the difficulties ahead of her. If she chose the course through Nashville, he informed her that it would be "a long and tedious route over mountains and desolation." He included with this note a passport for Emilie, her three children, and her "servants" to "pass through our lines at any point she may select." Bragg further informed her that, "I claim the right to consider you under my protection and my guest until you are out of our lines." The general consensus of all who knew Emilie was that this was "the hardest trial of your life."²⁰

Even with her careful planning, connections, and paperwork, as a widow of the Confederacy attempting to re-enter the Union, Emilie did not make it far. After Emilie boarded a boat to Baltimore, Union officials informed her that she would have to take an oath of allegiance to the United States before proceeding. Emilie refused. Her husband

¹⁹ H.M. Bruce, Richmond, Virginia, to Emily Todd Helm, September 30, 1863, Helm Papers.; John J. Helm to Elizabeth "Betsey" Humphreys Todd, October 11, 1863, Helm Papers; Elizabeth "Betsey" Humphreys Todd to Elodie Todd Dawson, October 6, 1863, Helm Papers.

²⁰ Braxton Bragg, Chattanooga, Tennessee, to Emilie Todd Helm, November 9, 1863, Helm Papers; Braxton Bragg, Chattanooga, Tennessee, to Emilie Todd Helm, November 12, 1863, Helm Papers; E. Halderman, Madison, Georgia, to Emilie Todd Helm, September 25, 1863, Helm Papers.

had just sacrificed his life in opposition to the United States, so how could she promise to uphold it? As her daughter would later explain, “it was treason to her dead husband [and] to her beloved Southland.” Unable to persuade her, the Union officers telegraphed the White House for instructions. Abraham Lincoln, her brother-in-law, supposedly responded with one line: “Send her to me.”²¹

When Emilie approached the White House in 1863, she was “a pathetic little figure in her trailing black crepe.” Her trials transformed the once-beautiful and joyous woman into a “sad-faced girl with pallid cheeks, tragic eyes, and tight, unsmiling lips.” Reunited with Abe and Mary, Emilie wrote “we were all too grief-stricken at first for speech . . . we could only embrace each other in silence and tears.” Certainly, the war had not been easy on the Lincolns either. The Todd sisters had lost two brothers, Mary had lost a son, and Emilie’s loss of Benjamin gave them much to grieve over together. “I never saw [Abraham] Lincoln more moved,” recalled Senator David Davis, “than when he heard of the death of his young brother-in-law, Helm, only thirty-two years old, at Chickamauga.” When Davis went to see him on September 22, “I found him in the greatest grief. ‘Davis,’ said he, ‘I feel as David of old did when he was told of the death of Absalom. Would to God that I had died for thee, oh, Absalom, my son, my son?’” Davis did not know how to respond. “I saw how grief-stricken he was...so I closed the door and left him alone.”²²

Emilie and Mary found comfort in each other’s company, but their political differences divided them. “Sister and I cannot open our hearts to each other as freely as we would like,” Emilie wrote, “This frightful war comes between us like a barrier of

²¹ This telegram has not survived, so we have to take Emilie’s word on Abraham’s response. Katherine Helm, *The True Story of Mary, Wife of Lincoln*, 221.

²² Helm, 221; *Washington Sunday Herald*, December 5, 1886, Helm Papers.

granite closing our lips.” Not everyone who encountered Emilie would do so with a tongue thus tied. She was, after all, a widow of the enemy. “Well, we whipped the rebels at Chattanooga and I hear, madam, that the scoundrels ran like scared rabbits,” jabbed Senator Ira Harris of New York when he visited the White House. Answering “with a choking throat,” Emilie retorted, “It was an example, Senator Harris, that you set them at Bull Run and Manassas.” After a failed attempt to get a rise from Mary, Harris returned to prodding Emilie and informed her “if I had twenty sons they should all be fighting the rebels.” Forgetting where she was but not her Confederate loyalties, Emilie retorted, “And if I had twenty sons, Senator Harris, they should all be opposing yours.” When the incident was relayed to Abe, he chuckled that “the child has a tongue like the rest of the Todds.” “You should not have a rebel in your house,” shouted General Daniel Sickles, who had accompanied Harris and overheard the conversation. Drawing himself to his full height, Abraham replied in a quiet voice, “Excuse me, General Sickles, my wife and I are in the habit of choosing our own guests. We do not need from our friends either advice or assistance in the matter.” Longing for home and believing “my being here is more or less an embarrassment,” Emilie decided it was time to complete her journey to Kentucky. “You know Little Sister I tried to have Ben come with me,” Abraham explained to Emilie before she left. Emilie answered that her husband had followed “his conscience and that for weal or woe he felt he must side with his own people.” After embracing Mary and Abe, Emilie returned to Lexington to live with her mother, enjoy her “sweet little brood” of children, and grieve.²³

²³ Helm, 224, 229, 230, 231, 233; John L Helm, Frankfort, Kentucky, to Emily Todd Helm, January 20, 1864, Helm Papers.

Approximately a year and a half later, Abraham Lincoln's death sent Mary into a mental spiral that ended only with her own death seventeen years later. In the days immediately following Abraham's murder, Mary filled the White House with "the wails of a broken heart, the unearthly shrieks, the terrible convulsions." She stayed in bed, refused visitors, and seemed "more dead than alive—broken by the horrors of that dreadful night as well as worn down by bodily sickness." The loss of Abe was one from which she would never recover. Mary did not mourn with grace as Emilie did, but instead dissolved into a puddle of self-pity. Overtaxed and mentally unstable, she felt unable to do anything else. To make matters worse, Mary broadcast her self-pity publicly and demanded sympathy from the world. In the months and years to come, her overwhelming grief, shopping sprees, and constant need for attention would suffocate those around her. Her older sister Elizabeth described Mary best, explaining that she "had much to bear though she don't bear it well; She has acted foolishly—unwisely and made the world hate her." And hate her they did, without sympathy for her loss or her grief, for she was unable to bear her loss as a widow should.²⁴

Meanwhile, her sister Emilie succeeded in playing the part perfectly. She may have lost her husband, but Emilie had a new role, and new opportunities, to enjoy in the latter part of the nineteenth century. And enjoy them she did. As Lincoln's sister-in-law, people watched her closely, hoping to learn the details of Emilie's "peculiar situation during the terrible war which...convulsed our land and robbed our beloved southern

²⁴ Perhaps Mary could not play the part of a perfect widow, given her mental issues. We will never know for certain if her mental health debilitated her to the point where she cannot be held responsible for her actions. Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* (New York: G.W. Carleton and Co., Publishers, 1868), 191; as quoted in Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 249; Elizabeth Todd Edwards in *Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews and Statements about Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 444.

homes of all but its honor.” While the war was fought, people across the South had sympathized with the young widow, including “all your Virginia friends in the sad bereavements it brought to you.” With the war over, people watched, to see what the young widow would do next. Unlike Mary, as a widow Emilie did not retreat to the gloomy confines of her mind or home; she remained active in her community and state. She joined bustling crowds in 1883 for the gubernatorial inauguration, continuously crisscrossed Kentucky visiting friends and family. She stayed busy, which led to an 1867 letter from Helm’s father, sharing “I hope you will spend some time with us and give us the pleasure of seeing much of the children so near to our hearts...kiss all the children and tell them it is for Grandpapa.” Newspapers across the nation reported on her movements, announcing her arrival to various locales. She picked up various hobbies, like music. While living in Madison, Indiana, she performed so well in a class that the principal wrote “I hereby cheerfully recommend her as entirely competent to teach that branch of music, upon the improved system taught in the Madison and Henia Academies.” On October 6, 1890, she even joined the Filson Club to “share in gathering, from original sources, historic matter relating to Kentucky.”²⁵

Emilie remained an integral part of Elizabethtown, Kentucky, too, in her position as a postmistress in the late 1800s. On January 14, 1891, the *Pittsburg Dispatch* reported that Emilie, the “widow of a Confederate General,” was reappointed for yet another term, her third, as postmistress. But then, four years later, she fell under scrutiny in this position for mismanagement of funds in April 1895. “It is now charged by her enemies”

²⁵ T.W.W. Gilkeson, Brownsburg, Virginia, to Elizabeth Todd Helm, February 7, 1867, Helm Papers; *The Frankfort Roundabout*, Frankfort, KY: George A. Lewis, 1883, Volume VI, number 51, September 8, 1883, pg 2; John Helm, Frankfort Kentucky, to Emily Todd Helm, February 23, 1867, Helm Papers; William E. Bates, Madison, Indiana, October 14, 1874, Helm Papers; Filson Club Membership Certificate, for Emilie Todd Helm, October 6, 1890, Helm Papers.

a New York paper reported, “that she has paid her assistant only \$15 a month, for which she received \$25.” Additionally, accusations crackled over the manner in which Emilie stored and transported the coal. Emilie denied the charges and argued that her enemies falsified the claims to remove her from the post to give it to the favorite of a different congressman. Emilie had held the position for 12 years. Ultimately, Emilie failed to douse the accusations and vacated the position.²⁶

Undaunted by this turn of events, in July 1895, she ran unsuccessfully for state librarian. If newspapers are any measure of public opinion, the public still adored her. “Mrs. Emily Todd Helm, the late postmaster of Elizabethtown and widow of the gallant leader of the Orphan Brigade,” reported a paper in Stanford, Kentucky, “is the latest entry and we will wager dollars to doughnuts that in the final count the excellent and deserving lady will be there or thereabouts.” When newspapers reported on Emilie’s activities, not all felt the need to refer to Emilie as Helm’s wife. At times it seemed less important that she was the widow of Helm, and more important that she was a Confederate widow. Newspapers that dropped his name continued to identify Emilie as the “widow of a Confederate General.” As a widow of the Confederacy and not a specific man, she could represent the hopes of the society more broadly, especially as death thinned the aging ranks of Confederate veterans and widows.²⁷

Though many in the public loved Emilie, Benjamin’s Orphan Brigade nearly worshiped her. During the war, she had cared for, camped with, loved, and verbally defended the men. In 1863, her husband not yet two months dead, she wrote a letter to Commander John C. Breckinridge after some Kentuckians felt “hurt” by Breckinridge’s

²⁶ *Pittsburg Dispatch*, PA, January 14, 1891, pg 4; *The Sun*, New York, NY, April 3, 1895.

²⁷ *Semi-Weekly Interior Journal*, Stanford, Ky., July 23, 1895.

reported remark that their brigade “was one of the worst and but a band of thieves and robbers,” prompting him to assure her that “I never uttered such language.” After the war, soldier George W. Quarles, who hoped to become the deputy warden of his county, asked for Emilie’s “aid and influence.” “I don’t want the parties to know I solicited your support,” he explained, so “write as though unsolicited and having known me through your husband.” In addition to recommendations, Emilie also sent pictures of her husband to those who requested them, such as Frank Lyon, who promised, “I shall treasure it very highly and place it among my collection of those other heroes who went down in the lost cause.” In 1868, Edwin Porter Thompson approached Emilie to gather information about her husband for his history of the Orphan Brigade, feeling it a “duty to communicate” with her, vowing that “when I get a copy of the General’s biography, I will take time to transcribe and send you a copy for examination and approval, or suggestions.” He hoped “to please you in my effort to commemorate the deeds and preserve the fair fame of the noble dead.” Additionally, the Elizabethtown Volunteers company changed its name to the Helm Guards, not in honor of her husband, but “in honor of Mrs. E.T. Helm, the widow of the late General Hardin Helm.”²⁸

Veterans formally invited Emilie to reunions of the Orphan Brigade, which began in 1882. While her status as the widow of their general earned her a place on the invitation list, her relationship with the brigade caused men to genuinely desire her attendance, for she was “especially invited.” In 1884, the reunion committee not only consulted Emilie about their plans to move Benjamin’s remains, but forwarded the

²⁸ John C. Breckinridge, before Chattanooga, Tenn., to Emilie Todd Helm, October 31, 1863; George W. Quarles to Emilie Todd Helm, May 8, 1880; Frank G. Lyon, Ala., to Emilie Todd Helm, August 30, 1888; Ed. Porter Thompson, St Stephen, Nebr., to Emilie Todd Helm, February 25, 1868; “Helm Guards,” undated newspaper clipping.

program for her “for approval or amendment.” J.D. Pickett, the chaplain Emilie requested to give the eulogy, also wrote to Emilie for advice, desiring that she write “frankly and fully” because he wanted the eulogy “to be precisely what will gratify you.” He urged her to “employ your ready pen” and tell him “frankly and fully what manner of allusion I should make to you and the dear little fatherless children who were just entwined about my heart near twenty-one years ago.” At a later reunion, Emilie “announced her desire to shake hands with every member of the command,” and the veterans, in turn, voted to bestow on her the title “Mother of the Brigade.” In the 1920 reunion outside of Paris, Kentucky, Emilie’s own portrait “appeared on the badges of red, white and blue, worn by the veterans of the Brigade” and “beautiful tributes were paid to her.” As a part of their yearly ritual, Emilie symbolized all they hoped a wife and woman could be. Never remarrying and faithful to her husband decades after his death, her actions implied that a Confederate soldier was irreplaceable.²⁹

Invitations from the soldiers were not limited to the annual reunions. “I cannot address you as dear Madam,” D. Turney began, “you are the widow of my beloved General under whom I was fighting when he fell. I must say dear friend.” He then described how he felt at the last reunion as he gazed upon her and another widow. “When I looked at you and Mrs. Hanson on the platform at our last re-union how my heart went out to you both. How the whole Brigade loved you both.” Turney then came to the reason for the letter, “I write to remind you of my invitation for you to visit me...I will be disappointed if you cannot come.” The following month he wrote again,

²⁹ Rodger Hanson’s widow was the first “Mother” of the Orphan Brigade, Emilie the second, filling the role after Mrs. Hanson’s death. W.O. Bullock, Lexington, to Emilie Todd Helm, Elizabethtown, Ky., August 30, 1883; John H. Weller, Louisville, to Emilie Todd Helm, September 9, 1884; J.D. Pickett to Emilie Todd Helm, September 14, 1884; “Mrs. Helm Made Mother of the Orphan Brigade,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, unidentified newspaper clipping; Paris (Ky.) *Bourbon News*, October 5, 1920.

providing further detail of his plans for her visit. “I want to drive you over the Blue Sick Battlefield where your honored ancestors fought and fell. I feel that I can almost see your heart beat high and fast when you stand upon that sacred, blood stained land. I will show it to you and tell you all we know of the battle.” Invitations like these highlight the importance of Emilie, as a figurehead and representation, to many veterans.³⁰

Emilie also served within Kentucky’s United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). “We meet in session,” she insisted, “not for the purpose of keeping alive the prejudices, acrimonious feeling and hatred of the past,” but rather to “cherish the memory of our dead heroes, to devise ways and means to make their graves, to re-entomb as many of them as possible in their native state,” and to “prevent a fake record of our heroes deeds being brought down as History.” Emilie called for a “history equally fitted for use North and South, divested of all passion and prejudice” for Kentucky’s schools. Northerners might not approve of her version of the “plain unvarnished truth,” however. Emilie believed and repeatedly wrote that “the men of the South fought for a just cause and that in an unequal struggle they were the bravest of the brave.” Histories that spoke of southern men as “rebels” or a “rebellion” did not please Emilie. Kentucky’s UDC grew rapidly and gained thousands of white, middle and upper-class members across the South, encouraging Emilie in what she believed to be a “sacred duty.”³¹

³⁰ D. Turney, Blue Lick Springs, Kentucky, to Emilie Todd Helm, May 31, 1889, Helm Papers; D. Turney, Blue Lick Springs, Kentucky, to Emilie Todd Helm, July 18, 1889, Helm Papers.

³¹ A better determination of Emilie’s exact role within the UDC will require additional research needs of the organization’s records. While Emilie wrote extensively about the purpose of the organization, her personal papers do not indicate if her main function was as a figurehead invited to speak for publicity, or a more substantial worker within the organization. The most complete history of the UDC is Karen Cox’s *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); Emilie Todd Helm, undated writing that begins with “Ladies and Daughters of the Confederacy.”

To create her version of history, Emilie also urged members to gather up letters and preserve “all [the] war relics” of Confederate soldiers. She hoped “to perpetuate the glorious memories of the most unselfish devotion to home and country.” Additionally, she called for women to conduct interviews with soldiers. Women should be “gathering details now from survivors,” she wrote, for they were the “noblest and bravest people that ever suffered and died for a principle.” Emilie believed that women should be included in this version of American history. “God bless the Confederate women of our dear Southland—They are the pride and the glory of our country and this Kentucky division to all Kentuckians,” she argued. For her work within the UDC, a chapter was named after her beloved husband. When the organization met in 1901 to decorate graves, “a life sized portrait of Gen. Ben Hardin Helm occupied a conspicuous place.” Emilie thus continued to shape the memory of her husband, bringing recognition and honor to him decades after his death.³²

Emilie’s devotion to memorial activities and veteran organizations is unique, when compared to the experiences of many other war widows. In May of 1865, women in Winchester, Virginia began to gather the scattered dead and inter them in a single graveyard. This group of women formed the first Ladies Memorial Association (LMA), and by the end of 1866, the former-Confederacy contained over seventy similar organizations. Historian Caroline Janney contends that women who “had sewn battle flags, volunteered in hospitals, and snubbed Yankee soldiers” joined LMAs to “continue to express their Confederate patriotism” and “deploy gender in the interest of Confederate

³² Emilie Todd Helm, undated writing that begins with “A third of a century”; Emilie Todd Helm, undated writing that begins with “God bless the Confederate women”; Emilie Todd Helm, undated writing that begins with “The duty of a Historian”; Emilie Todd Helm, undated writing that begins with “Ladies and Daughters of the Confederacy”; *Louisville Courier-Journal*, November 22, 1901.

politics.” By honoring the soldiers of the Confederate nation, women “claimed a right to mourn their dead” and began “to engage in civic life as never before.” As women, the threat they posed to the US government and southern white patriarchy appeared minimal in the years immediately following the war. Here, mourning appears as a political response to Reconstruction, memory-making as an active project, and public spectacles as civic participation. Janney concluded that LMAs “were responsible for remaking military defeat into a political, social, and cultural victory for the white South.”³³

But what about the women who lost loved ones in the war? Janney’s extensive research into letters, official minutes, scrapbooks, cemetery records, diaries, memoirs, and periodicals revealed that LMA members “tended not to be widows” and their mourning was “not of a personal nature” but rather “a bereavement for the loss of the Confederacy, for the death of their cause.” She believed the overwhelming participation by women who “did not lose male relatives in the war” supported her assertions that women truly wanted to “venerate the defeated Confederacy” and participate in the South politically. Was it too painful to honor a cause that killed a loved one? Were widows simply too busy caring for young babies and running households to make ends meet? Did mothers of dead sons approve of their neighbors’ memorial activities? Did the members of LMAs feel that they needed to prove their commitment to the cause, since their families remained intact? After all, members of LMAs could decorate a grave or organize a monument dedication, but at the end of the ceremony, they returned home to their fathers, brothers, and husbands, many of whom “did not serve in the Confederate

³³ Karen Cox picks up this thread, exploring the United Daughters of Confederacy, a popular Lost Cause organization that developed after the LMAs. Caroline E. Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies’ Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008) 40, 41, 79, 70, 3.

military.” Alternatively, many widows did not have the money, nor the time, to attend memorialization events. On at least one occasion, the political motivations of the LMAs overshadowed the desires of a grieving family. Jubal A. Early, a former general of the Confederacy, accused members of the Lexington group “of taking advantage of Mary Lee’s grief to secure the burial” of Robert E. Lee, even as Early “continually pressured the widow to reinter her husband’s remains in Richmond.” The emotional and political implications of death and female memorialization in the postwar South is rich for further study. The conflict over the memories/legacies mattered not just to the families of soldiers, but much of white southern society. White women did not seamlessly work together to create a Lost Cause ideology. Perhaps those the war hurt most had the least left to give to it. Recognizing these types of conflicts within the memorialization movement changes the way we understand the legacy of the war, and realize how valuable Emilie was to these organizations.³⁴

The longer Emilie lived, the more organizations clamored for her attendance and participation. The Chickamauga Park Commissioners, the Confederate Veteran Magazine, and the UDC Historian all sought her. In addition to the yearly Kentucky reunions of the Orphan Brigade, Emilie was invited to reunions across the South. In 1898, the Louisiana division of the United Confederate Veterans encouraged her to attend their ceremonies and promised her “a seat upon the platform” and the opportunity to

³⁴ Within the topic of Confederate veterans, historian Brian Craig Miller likewise finds that those who lost the most in the war did not participate in the memorialization of the war. Veterans with amputations often did not have the financial capital or mobility required to attend reunions. Likewise, many Confederate widows appear to be more interested in garnering pensions for themselves from state legislators, than bickering about a Yankee textbook or decorating the grave for anyone other than their dead husbands/brothers/fathers. There are notable exceptions, like Emilie Todd Helm, a Confederate widow who gave countless speeches at reunions across the South. For more on veterans with amputations, see Brian Craig Miller, *Empty Sleeves: Amputation in the Civil War South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015). Janney 57, 68, 56, 110-111.

“make any remarks you may see fit.” Despite the many invitations, Emilie remained closest with her husband’s command. Forty years after her husband’s death, she still served as a living representation of their general. A letter from her, even in the twentieth century, was “like a message of approval from Gen Ben Hardin Helm.”³⁵

Emilie also devoted time to writing fictional and non-fictional accounts of the war and post-war era. While she would never become a published author, Emilie’s pieces provide insight into her thoughts on a variety of topics, including race and class. One of her pieces, which she entitles “War Reminisces,” tells the story of three incidents within a train station. In the first, she describes a sick soldier searching for a seat on a train. “Put him in this seat,” she said to the men just as the conductor reached her. “Sit down madam,” the conductor ordered, “this man is not able to undergo the journey.” From her window, Emilie watched the soldier lay down on the platform, on his comrade’s coat, and die. “As the shrill whistle proclaimed our departure,” Emilie finished, “I took out [of] my satchel one of my few remaining handkerchiefs and threw it at the men,” as the train slowly chugged along. In her next paragraph, she transitions to a new scene. Emilie walked through a train station and noticed a soldier in the corner “with that peculiar yellow death-like tinge which comes from poor food and illness combined with exposure—several comrades were around him and in their clumsy fashion were trying to minister to his want.” All the sick man requested was an apple from his mother’s yard. Emilie rummaged through her brunch basket and took out her apple. “This is not from your Mother’s yard but it is a southern apple. Won’t this do until you get home,” she offered sweetly. Then, “a gleam of a smile lit up his dying face.” The man soon died,

³⁵ J.Y. Gilmore to Emilie Todd Helm, January 11, 1898; R. Cobb. Wichita Falls, Tex., to Emilie Todd Helm, November 26, 1904.

“the apple still in his cold hand” but a “look of peace and rest on his white face.” In the third paragraph, Emilie describes standing at the Atlanta rail station in September 1863. “I stood waiting that morning,” she wrote, “a widow then, God help me but unconscious of the news.” She felt “very sick and was discouraged and out of heart as I stood there, my dress touching a soldier who seemed sleeping.” Asking what was wrong with the man, she discovered that he was dead, which “added greatly to the depression with which I started on this journey.” The next day, she received the telegram announcing her husband’s death.³⁶

Emilie penned three additional short stories, all which featured a white woman’s interaction with African Americans in the post-war South. The first is about a widow seemingly abandoned by her former enslaved nurse, who later discovers that the newly-freed woman was washing clothes to support them. “Now Old Miss,” said Chloe, the enslaved woman in Emilie’s narrative, “Whar is [it] I got to go—I am gwine to stay right whear I is—my white chillen expects me to stay and tak car of you...I aint gwine to leave you.” The widow, “endeared to her by so many ties,” believed Chloe to be “a member of her family so she gladly allowed Chloe to have her way and remain on her own terms.” This happy slave narrative conformed to the Lost Cause themes developing throughout the South.³⁷

Similarly, in her second story, Emilie describes an African American woman who wanted “an occupation.” “Walking over the white and melancholy snow,” the piece

³⁶ Emilie Todd, undated Civil War reminiscence, Helm Papers.

³⁷ The concept of the Lost Cause has a long and varied history. Books which discuss women’s roles in crafting this ideology include Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), and Caroline E. Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies’ Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Emilie Todd Helm, “The Spirit of 1860,” Helm Papers.

begins, “watching the clear yellow tones of the sunset as they faded into steely blue and slate gray haze I was accosted by a negro girl of about twenty years.” The young girl, Jennie, asked for the white woman to sign her name to a piece of paper as a reference of Jennie’s character. The white woman repeatedly asked which occupation she sought and Jennie repeatedly replied, “Can’t you see, I want an occupation!” unable to describe it further. Comically, they circle round and round in this conversation, until ultimately another African American man walked by and clarified that Jeannie “wanted to sell things around.” The story emphasizes the patience of the white woman and ignorance of the black woman about the ways of the world.³⁸

While the first two tales fall under the more traditional happy slave narratives/Lost Cause formulation, in her third Emilie writes a darker piece. In this story, a white woman widowed by the war, named Emily Phillips, has her name taken by a local African American woman, according to “the custom among the negroes in the South to take the name of the white people to whom they belonged as a surname.” This was a “great annoyance and inconvenience” for white Emily, because black Emily kept getting her mail. White Emily complained, but black Emily “told me that For God she had as much right to her name as I had to mine.” One night, two men knocked on her door and said “Mrs. Phillips...we have very bad news for you...your son has been very badly hurt...a policeman had struck him with his club and they thought his skull was fractured.” The men further informed her that her son had been resisting arrest, to which white Emily cried “my son would never have resisted a lawful arrest, and is the most peaceable young man in the world.” The reader then follows white Emily through an agonizing night of grief. She “sat appalled and dazed as if some one had stuck me a blow on my own head,”

³⁸ Emilie Todd Helm, “Wanting an Occupation,” Helm Papers.

felt “ice at my heart,” endured anguish “so great that my brain seemed on fire,” and felt “too bitter for tears.” Throughout the long night, she recalled all the trials of her life, including her husband’s death, and relived them one by one in her mind. When the morning finally came, white Emily prepared to leave for the train to her son, when a man burst in exclaiming “It is all a mistake, it is old Aunt Em Phillips son that is hurt, not yours!” White Emily “wept long and hysterically,” with relief. For one evening, she experienced the emotions of living in another’s shoes, the black version of herself. This story hints at the darker side of the reunification project, one which does not include equality for African Americans.³⁹

While Emilie’s efforts within the UDC and the yearly reunions attempt to smooth divisions between the North and South, she, like the majority of white southerners, was not interested in seeing African Americans joining their society. Additionally, through her writings, she defended her beliefs about the war, the Confederacy, and the South. She was not alone in doing this either; many young women picked up a pen to write their own histories and memories of the war. As historian Victoria Ott, among others, has argued, “the fictional works of southern female authors played a prominent role in the cultural battle between the North and South to lay claim to the memory of the war.” Even as the nation reunited, Emilie wrote to justify her perspective of things, even if just to herself.⁴⁰

While compiling a genealogy of the Todd family, Emilie also wrote hundreds of letters to relatives and strangers across the nation to gather information. “You must not

³⁹ For those who appreciate the end of a story, black Emily was informed of the news and raced to her son. The boy lived. Emilie Todd Helm, “How Aunt Emily Phillips Changed her Name,” Helm Papers.

⁴⁰ Victoria E. Ott, *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age during the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 132.

be discouraged in your undertaking,” wrote one relative, “it is not characteristic of the Todds, to give up any thing fairly began.” As Emilie became increasingly consumed with her project, her older sister Elizabeth teased, “Do not exhaust yourself in your researches, it will be impossible to trace beyond Adam and Eve.” In documenting the honorable deeds of her ancestors, Emilie perhaps believed she could repair the present reputation of the shattered Todd family. After all, of the fourteen Todd siblings, Emilie stood alone in 1920. In fact, Emilie had been the only Todd alive for nearly sixteen years, surviving her three younger siblings by more than forty years, a lonely fact not lost on the public. “Mrs. Helm is the only member of her family living to-day,” wrote the *Adair County News* when announcing Emilie’s visit to the county in February 1905.⁴¹

As a living relic of the Todds, Emilie both represented them and shaped how they would be remembered. Better yet, Emilie’s wild siblings could not undermine or challenge her efforts from their graves. She worked tirelessly to salvage the image of her sister Mary, who passed away in 1882. In 1898, the *Saint Paul [Minnesota] Globe* reported that Emilie denied that there had ever been two marriage ceremonies arranged for Mary and Abraham and rejected “the existence of that inharmony to which so many allusions have been made.” The paper concluded, “It would be better for the world to accept these statements, bury rank gossip in the dark pit in which it belongs and henceforth regard Mrs. Lincoln only as the honorable and honored helpmeet of the greatest American of the century.” Of course, as Emilie knew, Abraham and Mary had two engagements (but the first ended prior to the choosing of a wedding date) and marital

⁴¹ John Todd to Emilie Todd Helm, December 5, 1880; Elizabeth to Emilie Todd Helm, April 30, 1880; [Columbia] *Adair County News*, February 22, 1905.

discord, but this was not the image of the Todds or the Lincolns that Emilie wanted remembered.⁴²

While Emilie strove to shape the memory of the Todds, another project was taking place. In 1909, “while ten thousand people stood in reverence with bared heads . . . a veiling of the stars and stripes fell gracefully away,” to reveal a statue of Abraham Lincoln in Hodgenville, Kentucky. One paper reported “the canopy that hid the statue from view was drawn away by the hand of Mrs. Ben Hardin Helm, a sister to the wife of Lincoln, and cheer after cheer went up.” “Your Minnie bullets have made us what we are,” Emilie had written bitterly to Abraham in the final years of the war. Now, she honored him before a crowd of ten thousand Americans, as a widow of the war and nation, not simply the South. Instead of rehashing the political divisions of the Todd family, reporters instead emphasized their familial ties. It was as Emilie had written, “we should revive no memories that may embitter the future.” To the nation, the reunification of the Todd family represented the reunification of white America, and Emilie’s suffering had redeemed them all. Union widows had lost a husband but won a war; Confederate widows had lost it all. If a Confederate woman could honor the man responsible for the death of her husband and two brothers, could not the nation also become one again?⁴³

⁴² Newspapers throughout the country, including northern papers such as the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* and New York City’s *Sun*, reported on Emilie’s activities, which speaks to her popularity and national fame. Thanks to the papers, her fame spread, and households far beyond her state and region could read about her beliefs/actions. In many ways Emilie’s postwar actions are similar to those of George Pickett’s widow, LaSalle Corbell. Like Emilie, LaSalle shaped the way her husband would be remembered in history, ignoring and denying facts that did not match the image she desired to create. See the excellent essay by Lesley J. Gordon, “‘Cupid Does not Readily Give Way to Mars:’ The Marriage of LaSalle Corbell and George E. Pickett,” in *Intimate Strategies of the Civil War: Military Commanders and Their Wives*, eds. Carol K. Bleser and Lesley J. Gordon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 69-86; *Saint Paul [Minn.] Globe*, September 4, 1898.

⁴³ Nina Silber argues that a sentimental rubric took hold of the reunion process and that “southern women became the domestic and morally refined exemplars of true womanhood.” Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 23; *Louisville Courier-Journal*, June 1, 1909; Emilie Todd Helm to Abraham Lincoln, October 30, 1864,

As a war widow, Emilie had lost a husband, but gained a powerful role in her society. The Civil War existed as a transformative force in many women's lives, but this was especially true for widows. Both during and after the Civil War, Emilie had a specific role to play—bound not merely to patriarchy but to nationalism—first to Confederate nationalism and then to national reconciliation. Through Emilie, we see how the emotional, human experience of losing a husband could be channeled, contained, and reinvested. Through her loss she earned social capital, which she spent wisely, shaping the terms of reunification. Instead of an embarrassment, the Todd family became a sacrifice; instead of traitors, they became national heroes. Emilie herself became southern pride and American patriotism personified in one little widow. She served as the unelected spokesperson of the Todds and a symbol of reunification, and as the years marched on Emilie increasingly became a living monument to the official American past. In short, she succeeded in doing what the Confederacy failed to do—she survived and shaped the nation, until her heart finally stopped on February 20, 1930, sixty-six years and five months after her husband's. "We ought not to grieve over anyone who has to live until they are feeble and unable to enjoy life," wrote Emilie, adding "I hope every one will feel this if I live to be old." After devoting a lifetime to the cultural politics of mourning, Emilie did not want anyone to grieve over her.⁴⁴

Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress, as quoted in Berry, *House of Abraham*, 174; Emilie Todd Helm, undated writing that begins with "Ladies and Daughters of the Confederacy," Helm Papers.

⁴⁴ Emilie Todd Helm to Albert Edwards, August 15, 1899, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Illinois.

CHAPTER 6

FROM SCARLETT TO ALBERTA, CONFEDERATE WIDOWS REMEMBERED

“Here she sat like a crow with hot taffeta to her wrists and buttoned up to her chin, with not even a hint of lace or braid, not a jewel except Ellen’s onyx mourning brooch, watching tacky-looking girls hanging on the arms of good-looking men. All because Charles Hamilton had had the measles. He didn’t even die in a fine glow of gallantry in battle, so she could brag about him.”
 -Scarlett O’Hara¹

In 1939, Scarlett O’Hara waltzed across the silver screen and flirted her way into American hearts. When her first husband died, she was just seventeen years old and believed that she was far too young to be a widow, for “widows should be old—so terribly old they didn’t want to dance and flirt and be admired.” But the Civil War changed lives, even fictional ones. Scarlett’s mother cautioned her to “never chatter vivaciously” and always “wear hideous black dresses without even a touch of braid to enliven them.” Scarlett felt trapped, forced to “go on making a pretense of enthusiasm and pride in the Cause which she could not feel, acting out her part of the widow of a Confederate officer who bears her grief bravely, whose heart is in the grave, who feels that her husband’s death meant nothing if it aided the Cause to triumph.” Of all the mourning requirements, to Scarlett “the most dreadful of all” was the expectation that she “could in no way indicate an interest in the company of gentlemen.” Under the weight of these expectations, Scarlett discovered “how easily a widow might get herself talked about” and concluded that “widows might as well be dead.”²

¹ Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), 121.

² Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind*, 121, 95, 94, 120, 95, 94.

Sixty years later a real life widow, Alberta S. Martin, captured the attention of millions of Americans as “the Oldest Living Confederate Widow.” With a “yeah, reckon so,” twenty-one-year-old Alberta had kissed William Jasper Martin and married him. The year was 1927. William was eighty-one-years-old and a Confederate veteran. Decades later, when asked about her unusual marriage, Alberta explained that it was “better to be an old man’s darlin’ than a young man’s slave.” In 1996, Dr. Kenneth Chancey, a member of the Sons of the Confederacy, discovered the elderly Alberta nestled in Elba, Alabama. Poverty and obscurity may have haunted her past, but becoming “the belle of 21st-century Confederate history buffs” as the last Confederate widow changed her life. “I ain’t the oldest livin’ Confederate widow,” she exclaimed, “I’m the onliest one. The last of the livin’.” She attended conventions, reenactments, and rallies across the South dressed in the colors of the rebel flag. The Alabama governor’s office bestowed Alberta the title Honorary Lieutenant Colonel Aide-de-Camp in the state militia while another Confederate group named her an honorary cannoneer. Over ninety years of age, she laughed, “and I ain’t never shot a peashooter!” Alberta became the matriarch of a large family, and was surrounded by people who would hold her hand “crying and thinking about their family that suffered greatly in the past.” She would play this part even in death. When Alberta died on May 31, 2004, Memorial Day, planning began for an elaborate 1860’s style funeral and Heritage Confederate Service. Men marched in Confederate uniforms, her casket was draped in a Rebel flag, and people gathered to watch the half mile parade.³

³ After dozens of articles flooded the internet plastered with news of this last Confederate widow’s death, other stories surfaced of older widows still alive and kicking. Currently, it appears Maudie Celia Acklin, holds the title of being the oldest Confederate widow, outliving Alberta by four years. At age 19, she married 87-year-old William M. Cantrell in 1934. See Mark Patterson, “Widow Recalls Marrying Civil

This chapter explores Confederate widows as remembered in popular culture. When the term “Confederate widow” is typed into an internet search, these are the two women who appear. One old, one young, both harkening back to an era lost. As icons, both Scarlett and Alberta represent a much larger population of women, whose contemporaries, in turn, expected them to be icons. Margaret Mitchell produced a piece of fantasy and yet, when it comes to widowhood, she unearths something painfully real. Some young widows, like the fictional Scarlett, felt they had given enough to the cause and refused to be buried with it. The Confederacy was simply asking for too much—too much from the human heart. Alberta, as the last Confederate widow, was neither young nor beautiful like Scarlett, but instead lived as a spectacle, a stately ruin of the Confederacy. Civil War buffs could visit with her for a moment or an afternoon, but at the end of their tour, they returned home safely, family intact. She could be gazed upon, but they did not have to crumble themselves. Cultural phenomena, like Scarlett and Alberta, have been joined by a variety of other book/movie characters, such as the widow in the award-winning *Cold Mountain* (2003). Through these books, films, and stories, the image and legend of the Confederate widow was crafted, likely affecting American

War Veteran,” CNN, June 17, 2004, <http://edition.cnn.com/2004/US/South/06/16/civilwar.widow/> (accessed February 1, 2015); Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1998), 340; Alberta Martin, interview by Joe Richman, July 1, 1998., <http://www.radiodiaries.org/transcripts/OtherDocs/civilwar.html> (accessed February 1, 2014); Obituary of Alberta Martin., “Alberta Martin, 97, Confederate Widow, Dies,” *New York Times*, June 1, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/01/us/alberta-martin-97-confederate-widow-dies.html> (accessed February 1, 2015); Ibid; Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic*, 341; Obituary of Alberta Martin; *Confederates in the Attic*, 342; Ibid; Obituary of Alberta Martin; Order of the Confederate Rose, “Last Living Civil War Widow(s),” http://www.confederate-rose.org/widow-Alberta_Martin.htm (February 1, 2015); Last Confederate Widow, “Funeral,” <http://lastconfederatewidow.com/Funeral.htm> (accessed February 1, 2015); Mark Bullock, “Last Confederate Widow Laid to Rest,” WSFA, June 12, 2004, <http://www.wsfa.com/Global/story.asp?S=1907163&nav=0RdENY4p> (accessed February 1, 2015).

perceptions of history far more than the historical monograph, and revealing how many Americans process and remember the bloodiest war in American history.⁴

Author Margaret Mitchell remembers growing up perched “on the bony knees of veterans and the fat slippery laps of great aunts,” listening to their stories of the American Civil War. “I heard so much when I was little about the fighting and the hard times after the war that...I was about ten years old before I learned the war hadn’t ended shortly before I was born,” she would later recall. Born on November 8, 1900, Mitchell grew up in Atlanta, Georgia, among literal ruins of the conflict. “Sherman’s sentinels,” as southerners called them, were the lone chimneys that “rose above burned ruins” after wartime wooden houses burned. These lingering chimneys captured Mitchell’s

⁴ A 2010 psychological study, titled, “Using Popular Films to Enhance Classroom Learning: The Good, the Bad, and the Interesting” investigated the “effect of watching movie clips from popular history films on the learning and retention of material from associated texts,” choosing movies with both accurate and inaccurate information to see how this affected student memory. 54 undergraduate psychology students from Washington University participated in this study. The study revealed that when information in the film contradicted the historical text, “subjects often (falsely) recalled the misinformation from the film,” even if they had been given a general warning about the inaccuracy of the film. Additionally, subjects were “highly confident in the accuracy of the misinformation they produced and sometimes misattributed it to the text when asked to make a source judgment.” While more research is needed to make a conclusive claim, this study suggests that movies have a tremendous impact on the formation of historical knowledge. Andrew C. Butler, et. al., “Using Popular Films to Enhance Classroom Learning: The Good, the Bad, and the Interesting,” *Psychological Science*, Vol. 20, Issue 9, (Sept 2009), p1161-1168; With regards to historiography, this chapter is in closest dialogue with Gary Gallagher’s *Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten: How Hollywood and Popular Art Shape What We Know about the Civil War* (2008). In Gallagher’s book, he explores 14 movies, including *Cold Mountain*, to determine how each movie fits into four interpretations of the Civil War: Emancipation Cause, the Reconciliation Cause, the Lost Cause, or the Union Cause. While his book does not address widowhood, it does analyze the various ways in which films manipulate the facts of the Civil War to fit a particular interpretation. The following books on Civil War memory also provide useful context, including Tara McPherson’s *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* (2003). This book explores the South more broadly through media and public imagery to explore race and the construction of the white southern belle. Another I explored was *Remixing the Civil War: Meditations on the Sesquicentennial* (2011), edited by Thomas J. Brown. This is a collection of essays addressing the Civil War and modern memory, and is also quite broad in its scope. Additionally, I found Charles Reagan Wilson’s *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (1980) to be useful for conceptualizing memory right after the Civil War. Witnessing the physical destruction, many white southerners feared that there too would be “a decline in the moral and spiritual quality of Southern civilization,” so many white men continued to be preoccupied with “storing the values they hoped to remain inviolate in the frail vessel of a woman” (pg 46). The resultant pressure placed on all women, but especially widows, to epitomize the virtue of this lost Confederacy persuaded many to act in accordance with what Victorian-era traditions, etiquette books, and their community members dictated. In this context, Scarlet’s unconventional actions are shocking. For more on ruins, as a concept, see Megan Kate Nelson, *Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

imagination. But more than the landscape of her backyard, the people inspired Mitchell. As she grew older, Mitchell would spend her leisure time riding horses with Confederate veterans. In 1926, when an ankle injury limited her mobility, twenty-six-year-old Mitchell began work on what would become *Gone with the Wind*. To supplement what she had learned about the war from those she knew, she read old diaries, newspapers, and her grandparents' letters. Mitchell wanted her account of the Civil War to be "air tight so that no grey bearded vet [can] rise up to shake his cane at me and say, 'But I know better.'" On June 30, 1936, over a decade after beginning the project, the book was officially released to the American public. American readers purchased it in droves, breaking publishing records. In six months, over one million copies sold. "A first novel does well if it sells five thousand copies in a lifetime," wrote one *New York Sun* reviewer to emphasize the popularity of this work in his review. The novel won the American Booksellers Association's National Book Award for Most Distinguished Novel in 1936 and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1937. Mitchell could hardly believe her success, confessing "I invited my husband to pinch me so often that he now refuses, saying the black and blue spots on a new author do not look well and may, justifiably, lead to talk."⁵

Mitchell's starring character, Scarlett O'Hara, a young, demanding, and spoiled southern belle, was hardened and transformed by the war. Scarlett played various roles

⁵ The book remains popular. In 2005, critics Lev Grossman and Richard Lacayo picked the best 100 English-language novels published since 1923, publishing the list in *TIME Magazine*. They describe this book as "the definitive telling of one of the basic American mythologies: the passing away, in blood and ashes, of the grand old South." Lev Grossman and Richard Lacayo, "All-TIME 100 Novels," *TIME Magazine*, <http://entertainment.time.com/2005/10/16/all-time-100-novels/#gone-with-the-wind-1936-by-margaret-mitchell> (accessed May 1, 2015); For a detailed analysis of the making of the book and movie, see Ellen F. Brown and John Wiley, Jr., *Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind: A Bestseller's Odyssey from Atlanta to Hollywood* (Lanham: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2011); Margaret Mitchell, as quoted in *Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind*, 5, 6, 28, 87; The Atlanta History Center, "About Gone with the Wind," The Margaret Mitchell House, <http://www.margaretmitchellhouse.com/cms/About+Gone+With+the+Wind+/239.html> (accessed May 2, 2015); Edwin Granberry, as quoted in Alan David Vertrees, *Selznick's Vision: Gone with the Wind and Hollywood Filmmaking* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 23.

throughout her life, include that of a flirty war widow. When Scarlett's first husband died of disease while off fighting for the Confederacy, she believed she was far too young to be a widow, for "Oh, it wasn't fair that she should have to sit here primly and be the acme of widowed dignity and propriety when she was only seventeen." Mourning customs irritated Scarlett, "but she was a widow and she had to watch her behavior." She hated it all, from the "grave and aloof" behavior to the veil that "had to reach her knees." The worst part, of course, was that she could no longer dance, flirt, and be the doted upon by potential suitors. "Oh, yes, thought Scarlett, drearily, some widows do remarry eventually, when they are old and stringy. Though Heaven knows how they manage it, with their neighbors watching." And watch they did, especially the young Scarlett.⁶

With the encouragement of the Rhett Butler, Scarlett decided to ignore southern customs and dance. "I have always thought," Rhett shared with her, "that the system of mourning, of immuring women in crepe for the rest of their lives and forbidding them normal enjoyment is just as barbarous as the Hindu suttee." He explained the custom to Scarlett, of Indian wives climbing on the funeral pyres of their deceased husbands, to burn with the body, as an alternative to life as a widow. "How dreadful," remarked Scarlett, to which Rhett replied, "Personally, I think suttee much more merciful than our charming Southern custom of burying widows alive!" Scarlett balked, Rhett continued, "How closely women clutch the very chains that bind them," and ultimately, Scarlett danced the night away with him. The following morning, she declared to her family, "I'm tired of sitting at home and I'm not going to do it any longer. If they all talked about me last night, then my reputation is already gone and it won't matter what else they say." Of course, when her mother's letter arrived, "greatly disturbed to hear of your

⁶ Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind*, 121, 94, 95.

recent conduct,” and her father’s visited to share how “everybody knows of our disgrace,” she more fully realized the consequences of her actions. Even so, traditional widowhood did not suit Scarlett, for she, like thousands of other women in their teens and twenties, was not a traditional widow.⁷

Why did Mitchell choose to portray Scarlett’s widowhood in this manner? Certainly, flirty widows existed during the war, but as an exception rather than commonality. Loveless marriages abounded, like Scarlett’s, but were most often closely held secrets. Is this portrayal inspired by her conversations with the elderly veterans and neighbors who lived through the conflict? Historian Darden Asbury Pyron, for example, writes “when Mitchell moved to 179 Jackson Street, nothing separated their yard from the oak-dotted property of the Captain’s widow.” It is likely that Mitchell gleaned stories from women such as this, but as Mitchell did not record these conversations, we may never know. Shortly after publishing her book, Mitchell wrote, “If the novel has a theme, the theme is that of survival.” Perhaps Scarlett’s actions as a widow represented an important coping mechanism, through the hardships and the heartbreak of the war. “What makes some people come through catastrophes and others, apparently just as able, strong, and brave, go under? We’ve seen it in the present Depression,” remarked Mitchell, while reflecting on her theme. “I don’t know,” she concluded, “I only know that the survivors used to call that quality ‘gumption.’ So I wrote about the people who had gumption and the people who didn’t.”⁸

Even before the formal release of the book, Mitchell’s publisher began negotiations with Hollywood producers, who hoped to transform the novel into a movie.

⁷ Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind*, 127, 137, 139, 142.

⁸ Darden Asbury Pyron, *Southern Daughter: The Life of Margaret Mitchell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 38; Margaret Mitchell, as quoted in Vertrees, *Selznick’s Vision*, 25.

Though Mitchell did not want to assist in the writing of the screenplay, she did want to have some say in the final version, to be sure that the script did not include outrageous adjustments, like have “Scarlett seduce General Sherman.” On July 30, 1936, just one month after the publication of *Gone with the Wind*, producer David O. Selznick acquired the screen rights for \$50,000, the relative value in 2010 being \$648,000. Sidney Howard received credit for creating the original screenplay, though other writers also assisted in editing the lengthy script. The adaptation closely followed Mitchell’s text, and filming for the movie began and ended in 1939. Clark Gable quickly secured the part of Rhett Butler, and English actress Vivien Leigh eventually earned the role of Scarlett. While the choice surprised some, those who knew Leigh felt she could handle it. British Director Victor Saville, when in Hollywood, called Leigh and said “Vivien, I’ve just read a great story for the movies about the bitchiest of all bitches, and you’re just the person to play the part.”⁹

A highly-anticipated film, the movie premiered in Atlanta, Georgia on December 15, 1939. Georgia’s governor Eurith D. Rivers declared the day a statewide holiday, while William B. Hartsfield, Atlanta’s mayor, proclaimed a three day festival in the city. “To Georgia it was like winning the battle of Atlanta 75 years late,” reported *TIME Magazine*, adding that “Mayor Hartsfield urged every Atlanta woman and maid to put on hoop skirts and pantalets, appealed to every Atlanta male to don tight trousers and a beaver, sprout a goatee, sideburns and Kentucky colonel whiskers.” Confederate flags

⁹ Sidney Howard died in a tractor accident in a garage at the age of 48, before *Gone with the Wind* appeared in theaters. He received an Academy Award posthumous for this screenplay. Mitchell, as quoted in Ellen F. Brown and John Wiley, Jr., *Margaret Mitchell’s Gone with the Wind*, 76; Conversion to modern value statistic from www.measuringworth.com (accessed May 3, 2015); Alan David Vertrees, *Selznick’s Vision*, 23; “Cinema: G with the W,” Monday, December 25, 1939, *Time Magazine*, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,762137-7,00.html> (accessed May 4, 2015)

flapped from “every building” and the Rebel yell echoed through the town. Notably absent from many of the events was Margaret Mitchell, described as “publicity-shy.” After the movie, “Most of them [viewers] were dabbing their eyes, and for those who were not the impact of the picture was too powerful to talk about.” After seeing the film, Margaret Mitchell remarked, “It was a great thing for Georgia to see the Confederates come back.” Despite the film’s success in Atlanta, some realized that “though delighted Georgians clapped, cheered, whistled and wept at the historical sequences, Northerners might not.” Certainly, many African Americans were not pleased with the portrayal of southern enslaved people, including Malcolm X who responded, “I was the only Negro in the theater [in Mason, Michigan], and when Butterfly McQueen went into her act, I felt like crawling under the rug.” Even so, producer Selznick felt he had “a sure fire Rebel-rouser for the South, a sure fire love story for the rest of the country.” He was right. Breaking box office records, the movie was also nominated for 15 Academy Awards, winning 8 of them, including a ‘Best Actress in a Leading Role’ Oscar for Leigh.¹⁰

The movie mimicked Mitchell’s version of Scarlett as a flirty and unconventional widow. Leigh became, as one reviewer wrote in 1939, “the very embodiment of the selfish, hoydenish, slant-eyed miss who tackled life with both claws and a creamy complexion, asked no odds of any one or anything—least of all her conscience.” Perhaps

¹⁰ When earnings are adjusted for inflation, *Gone with the Wind* remains the highest domestic grossing movie in American history, earning \$1,582,009,400 in an adjusted gross amount. *Star Wars* follows in second, with an adjusted gross of 1,394,676,400. Box Office Mojo, “All Time Box Office Domestic Grosses, Adjusted for Ticket Price Inflation,” Box Office Mojo: An IMDB Company, <http://boxofficemojo.com/alltime/adjusted.htm> (accessed April 15, 2015); Likewise, in 2007, *Gone with the Wind* ranked #6 on the American Film Institute’s 100 Movies List, decided by a jury of 1,500 film artists, critics, and historians. “AFI’s 100 Years...100 Movies 10th Anniversary Edition,” <http://www.afi.com/100years/movies10.aspx> (accessed May 3, 2015); “Cinema: G with the W,” Monday, December 25, 1939, *Time Magazine*, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,762137-7,00.html> (accessed May 4, 2015); “Awards for *Gone with the Wind* (1939),” IMDB, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0031381/awards> (accessed April 15, 2012); Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X, with the assistance of Alex Haley* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964), 36.

one of the most memorable scenes from the film is Scarlett's challenge to the etiquette of nineteenth century widowhood. To raise money for the Confederate cause, men who wished to "lead the opening" dance with a lady were urged to bid for her. As he did in the book, in the movie, Rhett bid one hundred and fifty dollars in gold for Scarlett, amidst a number of gasps. "Mrs. Hamilton is in mourning," the auctioneer explained, urging him to make another choice. Rhett refused and the auctioneer informed him "She will not consider it, sir." Gathering up her skirts, Scarlett exclaimed "Oh yes I will!" soliciting another chorus of audible gasps. As they began to dance, Rhett smirked, "We've sort of shocked the Confederacy, Scarlett." "I don't care what you expect or what they think, I'm gonna dance and dance. Tonight I wouldn't mind dancing with Abe Lincoln himself," replied Scarlett. And dance and dance she did, her swirling black dress standing out amidst the mass of colorful costumes. A photograph of the scene appeared in *Life Magazine's* visual spread entitled "High Spots in 'Gone with the Wind.'" In the following scene, Scarlett, still in her mourning attire, nearly kisses Rhett. Holding her face in his hands, he uttered one of the most famous lines of the movie, "No, I don't think I will kiss you. Although you need kissing badly. That's what's wrong with you. You should be kissed, and often, by someone who knows how." In these scenes, the movie upholds Mitchell's portrayal of Scarlett as flirtatious and self-centered, unconcerned with judgmental glances. "For, by any and all standards, Mr. Selznick's film is a handsome, scrupulous and unstinting version of the 1,037-page novel, matching it almost scene for scene with a literalness that not even Shakespeare or Dickens were accorded in Hollywood," reflected one *New York Times* reviewer. "So great a hold has Miss Mitchell

on her public, it might have taken more courage still to have changed a line or scene of it,” the reviewer further explained. The portrayal of a flirty widow remained.¹¹

Decades later, on Christmas Day, 2003, another film, *Cold Mountain*, appeared in theaters and introduced a different version of Civil War widowhood to the American public, a more innocent and lonely figure than Scarlett ever appeared. Based on Charles Frazier’s bestselling book by the same name, the movie features Inman, a wounded Confederate soldier played by actor Jude Law, and his perilous journey home to his wartime sweetheart Ada Monroe. The original Inman was Frazier’s great great uncle, with part of the novel’s character based off his great great grandfather, both of whom fought in the Civil War. “The thing that interested me most—and I think that caught my imagination when my father told me this story—was his [Inman’s] walk home,” Frazier explained when describing his book. Not a “Civil War buff” like Mitchell, he was more interested in writing “about damage and how to live with it.” He spent six years researching and writing the book, exploring the libraries of Duke and Chapel Hill for material. Frazier was particularly taken by the discoveries he made about women in the nineteenth century. “I found journals and letters of women who were very intelligent, headstrong, opinionated, strong women,” he explained, “One of the things I remember is a group of wealthy young women who had gone to a prep school in Charleston. They agreed when they graduated that they would have a reunion ten years later, but they decided that only the unmarried women could come to the reunion, because the married

¹¹ “High Spots in ‘Gone with the Wind,’” *Life Magazine*, December 25, 1939, 12; Frank S. Nugent, “The Screen in Review: David Selznick’s ‘Gone with the Wind’ has its Long-Awaited Premiere at Astor and Capitol, Recalling Civil War and Plantation Days of South—Seen as Treating Book with Great Fidelity,” *The New York Times*, December 20, 1939, <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9807E2DA153EE432A25753C2A9649D946894D6CF> (accessed May 2, 2015); *Gone with the Wind*. DVD. Directed by Victor Fleming, Los Angeles: Warner Brothers, 1939.

ones would by definition be boring. And I'm not sure that that is our view of nineteenth-century Southern womanhood." And so, women, and more specifically widows, played an important role in his text. His book won the 1997 National Book Award for Fiction, spent 61 weeks on *The New York Times*' best-seller list as a hard cover, 33 weeks on the paperback list, and sold more than 4 million copies.¹²

In 1997, Frazier spoke with Anthony Minghella for the first time, the man who would be adapting Frazier's book into a screenplay. Minghella went to North Carolina to visit Frazier for a week, to walk Inman's paths, discuss the novel, and talk about the process of transforming the book into a film. "Sitting with Charles Frazier on the porch where most of his novel was written, the mountains in front of us shrouded in mist, I was conscious of a strange moment, as if I were adopting someone's child," wrote Minghella about this experience. Despite his success in screenplay-writing and filmmaking, Minghella in some ways felt ill prepared for the task, explaining in an interview "I'm an Italian Englishman...I'm trespassing into an important part of American history." And yet, this was a project he felt excited to complete. "What spoke to me was not necessarily the fact that the book was American or about an event in American history, but what was catholic and universal about it which was the notion of walking for atonement, the notion of the impact of a conflict away from the battlefield on people and individuals," he explained. Like Frazier, Minghella felt drawn to the gendered aspects of the story, specifically "this sense that when the men have gone women manage pretty

¹² Charles Frazier, interview with Charlie Rose, August 15, 1997, <http://www.charlierose.com/view/interview/5393> (accessed May 3, 2015); Charles Frazier, Interview by BookBrowse, http://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm/author_number/239/charles-frazier (accessed May 3, 2015); John Marshall, "Life after 'Cold Mountain'" *Seattle PI*, December 11, 2006, <http://www.seattlepi.com/ae/books/article/Life-after-Cold-Mountain-1222093.php> (accessed May 3, 2015).

well together, that they fill up the space that the men have left.” British playwright Howard Barker’s *The Castle* inspired Minghella as he wrote. About the crusades, the play explores how women reconstruct society while the men are at war. Minghella believed “it’s a much much more interesting and pastoral and organic society than the one that the men have created...part of that was in my mind I suppose when I was writing the screenplay of *Cold Mountain*. It’s just how interesting the new dispensation is once the men have gone.”¹³

Eight years after the book first arrived in bookstores, the movie appeared in American theaters. A financial success, *Cold Mountain* secured a spot in the top 30 by grossing \$95,636,509 in United States theaters, beating 476 other movies. Nominated for 7 Academy Awards and 8 Golden Globes, the movie prompted many critics, including David Denby of *The New Yorker*, to compare it to a previous award winner and deem *Cold Mountain* “a much better movie about the South during the Civil War than *Gone with the Wind*.” “For all its sweep and scope and movie-star magic,” chimed another critic, this one of *The New York Times*, “*Cold Mountain* is studded with fine small

¹³ Minghella spent months thinking about adapting the book into a screenplay. He thinks that “For that is what the role of the adapter seems to me to be - the enthusiastic messenger bringing news from somewhere else, remembering the best bits, exaggerating the beauty, relishing the mystery, probing the moral imperative of what he or she has read, its meaning and argument, watching for gasps or tears, orchestrating them and, ideally, prompting the captive audience to make the pilgrimage to the source, while asserting the value of the film in its own right. The adapter must attempt to be the perfect reader. But, as Italo Calvino said of storytelling - the tale is not beautiful if nothing is added to it.” Anthony Minghella to Robert J. Elisberg, “Anthony Minghella: an Interview in Remembrance,” *The Huffington Post*, March 18, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-j-elisberg/anthony-minghella-an-inte_b_92137.html (accessed May 1, 2015); For an interesting discussion on his first discovery of the book see Anthony Minghella, “In his own words: Minghella on Adaptation,” http://aminghella.tripod.com/in_his_own_words.html (accessed May 1, 2015); Anthony Minghella to Karen Grigsby Bates, “Cold Mountain Directory Anthony Minghella: Buzz Surrounds Filmmaker’s Latest During Awards Season,” NPR, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1594840> (accessed May 1, 2015).

moments and deft supporting performances...notably from Ms. Atkins, Ms. Portman and Brendan Gleeson, who plays Ruby's wayward, fiddle-playing father."¹⁴

The star of several scenes, the widowed Sara, played by actress Natalie Portman, meets Inman on a dark and rainy night. "I've got a rifle," shouted Sara through the wooden door as she pulled it open. As Inman attempted to give her his pistol, a sign of his intention to do her no harm, she recoiled. "I don't want it," Sara drawled, "If I had my way, they'd take metal altogether out of this world. Every blade, every gun." Inman settled himself by the fire and her infant son, a babe who had never met his father. "My man's dead. Took his wound at Gettysburg and never saw his boy...it's pretty much what you'll get if you knock on any door of the war—man dead, woman left," explained Sara as she prepared Inman dinner. That night, the depth of her loneliness is revealed as she invited Inman into bed with her. "Would you do somethin' for me?" she haltingly asked. "Do you think you could lie here next to me and not need to go further?" Inman obeyed and the lonely widow dissolved into tears, laying her head on his chest. The following morning, she pushed Inman out the window as three Union soldiers approached. The raiders tied her up outside the cabin and put her sick baby on the cold ground before her, demanding information about her supplies. After they discover Sara's hog, she tells them

¹⁴By comparison, the highest grossing film of the year was *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, which grossed \$377,027,325 in theaters. Box Office Mojo, "2003 Domestic Grosses," Box Office Mojo: An IMDB Company, <http://boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?view=releasedate&view2=domestic&yr=2003&p=.htm> (accessed April 15, 2015); Renée Zellweger won both an Oscar and Golden Globe for Best Actress in a Supporting Role. "Awards for Cold Mountain (2003)," IMDB, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0159365/awards> (accessed April 15, 2015); Before becoming a staff writer and film critic for the *The New Yorker* in 1998, David Denby was *New York* magazine film critic for twenty years. David Denby, "The Current Cinema: Star Season," *The New Yorker*, December 22, 2003, http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2003/12/22/031222crici_cinema?currentPage=1 (accessed April 15, 2015); A.O. Scott, "Cold Mountain (2003) Film Reviews: Lovers Striving for a Reunion, with a War in the Way," *The New York Times*, December 25, 2003, <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9401E7D91F3FF936A15751C1A9659C8B63> (accessed April 15, 2015).

she has nothing else to give, to which one soldier replied “That ain’t necessarily so.” He drags her into the house to rape her, leaving the baby uncovered on the cold ground outside the cabin, much to her horror. Inman kills the man attempting to rape her, and then kills the second man, who exclaimed “Hey, come on, leave some of the rest for us,” as he entered the cabin. Meanwhile, the third soldier remained outside the cabin, showing sympathy for the baby by covering and soothing him. Inman comes to the door, seeing the young soldier’s kindness, and tells him to run off. While he runs, the widow, who just the night before wished for the destruction of all weaponry, comes outside and shoots the young soldier in the back. Even critic Robert Ebert conceded that “there is a true poignancy in Inman’s encounter with the desperate widow Sara (Natalie Portman),” even though he believed “it is a poignancy that belongs in another movie.”¹⁵

Though the movie and the book do differ in some of the details of this scene, many of the main elements are the same. For instance, in the book, Sara also asks Inman “If I was to ask you to come over here and lay in bed with me but not do a thing else, could you do it?” and then sobs through the night. She is also robbed by 3 Union soldiers in the book, but they do not try to rape her. In one significant difference, in the book Inman kills all three of the soldiers, not Sara. Frazier chose to allow Sara to remain uncorrupted by violence, innocence intact. Interestingly, another war widow is mentioned in the book who does not appear in the movie. While describing Ada’s turkey hunting, Frazier writes “Ada knew Ruby to be wrong in saying the worst one could do was miss. Everyone in the community had heard the story of the war widow from down

¹⁵ *Cold Mountain*. DVD. Directed by Anthony Minghella, Los Angeles: Miramax, 2003; Rodger Ebert, “Cold Mountain,” December 24, 2003, Chicago Sun-Times, <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20031224/REVIEWS/312240303/1023> (accessed April 15, 2015).

the river. The winter previous, the woman had climbed a tree into a deer stand and had dropped her gun and it discharged when it hit the ground so that, in effect, she shot herself out of the tree. She was lucky to have lived to be ridiculed for it.” Frazier offers no analysis in this passing story of a widow ill-equipped for hunting, but the story itself adds another element to the struggles of widowhood.¹⁶

Both Anthony Minghella, who directed the film, and actress Natalie Portman attributed much importance to the role she played. “It’s a really beautiful film,” twenty-two-year-old Portman gushed to Conan O’Brien on his late night show. In an interview with Diane Sawyer on “Good Morning America,” Portman further described how she prepared for the role. “I found a couple of letters that soldiers had written to their wives during the Civil War in...antique shops,” Portman explained, adding “and we had a Civil War expert working with us so we got a sort of idea about what kind of lives you would lead, you know, if you were isolated in the mountains somewhere alone and, you know, young and that sort of thing, so you could get the details.” Director Minghella attributed even more importance to the scene. “We talked about this episode more than any thing else in the film,” he explained, “it starts off with a woman who’s full of listening and compassionate characteristics.” The character, however, is “caught up in this virus of violence which the film was looking at. Thematically it was the clearest voicing of something which informed the whole movie, the fact that violence becomes a disease.” Through this portrayal of the lonely and innocent widow, corrupted by the war, Minghella reminds viewers that “this is a war that’s not conducted only on the

¹⁶ Charles Frazier, *Cold Mountain* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997) 243, 318.

battlefield.” A significant departure from a dancing Scarlett, this representation of widowhood suggests a darker message about the consequences of war.¹⁷

Gone with the Wind and *Cold Mountain* are but two of hundreds of pop culture references to Confederate widowhood, since the end of the war. In 1999, *Ride with the Devil* appeared in theaters and built upon Mitchell’s flirty widow character. Starring Tobey Maguire, who played the role of Jake Roedel, and singer Jewel Kilcher, who played the role of Sue Lee, a young widow, this movie takes place in Missouri. Though recently widowed, Sue Lee becomes romantically involved with another Confederate soldier, who soon dies of a wound. She is pregnant with this soldier’s child, but allows her family to believe that Roedel is in fact the father, pressuring him to marry Sue Lee. As one reviewer summarized, “This visually arresting but dramatically flat portrait of a group of pro-Southern bushwhackers waging guerrilla war against Union forces and sympathizers in the fields, farms and backwoods roads along the Kansas-Missouri border veers about as far from the high-romantic flourishes of ‘Gone With the Wind’ as a movie can go.” And yet, though this is world far from stately Southern belles and manicured plantations, southern custom remains in lines like “You better marry her, boy. It ain’t right not to,” and “See, they got a name for kids without daddies. You know, it ain’t a

¹⁷ Jennifer Garner and Faith Hill auditioned for the role of the Confederate widow as well. When describing her disappointment for not landing the job, Faith Hill described it as “a dream part...an amazing, amazing role.” Faith Hill, “Cold Mountain,” NataliePortman.com, http://natalieportman.com/npcom.asp?page_number=62 (accessed April 15, 2015); Natalie Portman to Conan O’Brian, Interview on “Late Night with Conan O’Brian,” December 19, 2003, http://www.natalieportman.com/npcom.php?page_number=24&page=5&category=&sort1=&order1=&view= (accessed April 17, 2015); Natalie Portman to Barbara Walters, Interview on “Good Morning America,” December 17, 2003, http://www.natalieportman.com/npcom.php?page_number=24&page=6&category=&sort1=&order1= (accessed April 16, 2015); “Director’s Commentary, *Cold Mountain*. DVD. Directed by Anthony Minghella, Los Angeles: Miramax, 2003.

good one.” Though it was not his child, the secret remained between them, and they married.¹⁸

Some books and movies interpreted widowhood in entirely different ways. Allan Gurganus wrote *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All*, published in 1989, from the perspective of a 99-year-old widow, Lucy. Though she was born well after the Civil War ended, when Lucy turned 15, she married a 50-year-old Confederate veteran. After his death, she takes on the title of Confederate widow, and shares his stories of the war, along with her life stories. The 1994 film adaptation, by the same name, featured Diane Lane as the widow and Donald Sutherland as her veteran husband. “Been dead for 50 years and I still hear his voice,” she began in the movie, “He was only 13, you know, when the Confederacy called him...I wasn’t even born then. But I’m still dreaming his nightmares.” The movie was nominated for nine Primetime Emmy Awards, and succeeded in winning four. Similarly, the main character in Robert Hicks’ 2005 bestseller *Widow of the South* was not technically a widow of the Confederacy, but rather a woman plagued with grief who re-buries 1,481 Confederate soldiers. The soldiers were casualties of the Battle of Franklin, Tennessee, on her family’s land. These widows, though not traditional women of the Confederacy, captured the imaginations of Americans and broadened the way people thought about widowhood.¹⁹

¹⁸ This movie is based on Daniel Woodrell’s novel, *Woe to Live On*. Stephen Holden, “Ride with the Devil Film Review; Far from Gettysburg, A Heartland Torn Apart,” *The New York Times*, November 24, 1999, <http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9E02E4DB1339F937A15752C1A96F958260>, accessed October 15, 2015; Of 1999 films, *Ride with the Devil* ranks 219 out of 385 movies for box office earnings. It earned \$635, 096. By comparison, the highest grossing film of the year was *Star Wars: Episode I- The Phantom Menace*, which grossed \$431,088,295 in theaters, followed by *The Sixth Sense*, earning \$293,506,292. Box Office Mojo, “1999 Domestic Grosses,” Box Office Mojo, An IMDB Company, <http://boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?page=1&view=releasedate&view2=domestic&yr=1999&p=.htm> (accessed April 14, 2015).

¹⁹ Awards for *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All* (1994),” IMDB, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0110721/awards> (accessed April 15, 2015); Robert Hicks, *The Widow of the*

Not all portrayals of Confederate widows stayed between the pages of books and screenplays. At the turn of the twenty first century, a modern organization of women, called The Order of the Black Rose, came together to reenact war widowhood “as a volunteer order to perpetuate the persona of a War Between the States widow at Sons of Confederate Veterans functions, memorial services, grave dedications.” Suzy Hager, secretary of the organization, estimates that the group contains between 300 and 350 members across the South. When asked about the portrayal of widows in movies, Suzy responded that “most of them are a bit exaggerated...women had it tough back then and they don’t really show a lot of the toughness...but a little bit of crying here and there.” Though the members have attended numerous re-internments and memorial services, like the CSS H.L. Hunley events of 2005, the “ultimate honor and privilege” came at Alberta Martin’s funeral. Though Alberta had not lived through the war, she had married a man who had, and lived as his widow for decades, becoming “the oldest living Confederate widow.” Founder Yvonne Brown explained the emotional experience of her funeral with, “I do not know of any other way we could have shown our grief when our hearts were breaking, but we all found the strength in the gathering of like-minded ladies and find comfort in being Mrs. Alberta Martin’s ladies in mourning.” Together, the ladies dressed in traditional black gowns placed “black silk roses on her coffin atop the Battle Flag.” For Brown, this “was one of the most stirring moments any of us have experienced. A final farewell to our last direct link to the Confederacy.”²⁰

South, (New York: Warner Books, 2005); Bambi Evans, “Author Robert Hicks to Read and Sign this Saturday,” *The Chattanooga*, December 1, 2005 <http://www.chattanooga.com/2005/12/1/76699/Author-Robert-Hicks-To-Read-And-Sign.aspx> (accessed May 3, 2015).

²⁰ Suzy Hager, interview with author, April 25, 2012; Yvonne Brown, documents given to author by Suzy Hager, April 20, 2012; Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1998), 340.

Though the majority of widows died off by the early twentieth century, Confederate widowhood never disappeared from the American cultural scene. Stories like *Gone with the Wind*, more than documents in archives and libraries, shaped the ways thousands of Americans imagined Confederate widowhood, and the late Confederacy as a whole. As Scarlett, the South was not a threat, but a spoiled girl stamping her feet, in need of a good kissing. As Alberta, the South was not a defiant or murderous Confederate slaveholder threatening to dissolve the Union, but an adorable little old lady from a nursing home, giggling at all who kissed her hand. Their Confederate husbands died, but the widows lived beyond them, survived them, and served both as a link to and representation of that former Confederacy, a representation feminizing the South and rendering it practically harmless, and almost humorous, once again. Confederate widows, real and imagined, may have lost husbands, but they gained a tremendous amount of attention.

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