

Summer 8-2017

Will You...? I Will..., and I Do: Re-Envisioning Matrimony in Civil War-Era Literature

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WILL YOU...? I WILL... AND I DO: RE-ENVISIONING MATRIMONY IN
CIVIL WAR-ERA LITERATURE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania

August 2017

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This dissertation examines the ramifications that the American Civil War had on the decision to marry--including whether or not to marry, whom to marry, and when, and the role and relationship expectations after vows were said--as reflected or imagined in American fiction from the 1860's and 1870's. The focus is on how Civil War-related fiction written by women such as Rebecca Harding Davis, Lydia Maria Child, Louisa May Alcott, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Augusta Jane Evans, E.D.E.N. Southworth, and others portrayed the decision to marry. These authors were responding to the upheaval in their society created by the war. I will examine the effects of this rupture in cultural attitudes towards marriage through New Historicist and Feminist lenses. As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, women authors of the era took the focal point of women's lives, the decision to marry, and endued the act with immense political implications, making the fulcrum for their hopes for reform. The Civil War started in motion events, forces, and thoughts that would lead to lasting transformation in the lives of women, and these new possibilities were reflected in the decision to marry. This dissertation also examines diaries and letters written by women during the era in order to discover the extent to which the transgressions and transformation are evidenced in the lives of real women. The chapters examine the Southern perspective, the Northern consideration of the feasibility of a woman combining a career with marriage, the decision to marry as portrayed in sensational fiction, and interracial attraction and marriage literature. In the end, I believe that one of the most significant transformations instigated by the war and its aftermath was the beginning of the transition

towards lessening the significance of marriage in the lives of women. Marriage began to no longer be, to the degree that it had been, the overwhelming determiner of a woman's entire adult life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Todd Thompson for his guidance, support, and expertise. I have enjoyed working with him through the years. Dr. Karen Dandurand, who passed away early during this project, was also a great source of inspiration. In addition, during my undergraduate and Master degree years, Professor Susan Hauser first sparked my dream of going to graduate school and teaching. She gave me the confidence to pursue the goal. Also, from those years as well, Dr. Stephen Gurney did much to contribute to my love of literature.

On a personal note, I would like to thank my husband John and my children, John Daniel, Becca, and Remington for their willingness to rearrange their lives for those summers in order to help me realize my dreams. In addition, I would especially like to acknowledge my appreciation for my husband's love and commitment and encouragement. His belief in me never failed. And I would like to thank my children for their continued support through the years.

Embarking upon the PhD journey is like entering a marathon. The end seems almost unreachable at times and the goal almost out of reach, and the number of steps along the way, overwhelming. Daunted, you take your eyes off the ethereal finish line and start concentrating on the first mile marker and then the next, the first class, the next, the candidacy exam, and so on, one step at a time. The race takes years, and some who are with you in the beginning fall away, and at times, it seems as if you'll never reach the end, and you wonder if the finish line is still there-- it has been so long since you started. But you continue to move your feet one after the other, again and again taking that next step, though it seems as if it will never end. You grow weary and stumble along the way. There is another mile to go, and then another. But then one day, just as you're wondering if your legs can really go any further, you round a corner, and then glory of glories—you think you see it in the distance up ahead—the finish line! It's been so long,

and you thought you'd never reach it, but there it is, in the distance, barely visible, but it is there. So you pick up speed. This is it. You can make it. You're almost there. One foot after another. One step hitting the pavement, and then another. You're running now. And there is the chalk line and the ribbon. You break through to the sounds of the cheers of the few who still remain—and then you know—it has been worth every step.

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto your own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” Proverbs 3:5-6.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Ken Burns's documentary, *The Civil War*, this war was the most significant event in the history of the nation:

It saw the end of slavery and the downfall of a southern planter aristocracy. It was the watershed of a new political and economic order, and the beginning of big industry, big business, big government. It was the first modern war and, for Americans, the costliest, yielding the most American fatalities and the greatest domestic suffering, spiritually and physically. It was the most horrible, necessary, intimate, acrimonious, mean-spirited, and heroic conflict the nation has ever known.

The war engulfed both reality and fiction of the era, shaking the foundations of American society. From April 12, 1861 to April 9, 1865, the United States of America was a country at war with itself, leaving over six hundred thousand Americans dead and many others with lifelong wounds and shortened lives.

Answering the call to arms, man after man enlisted. It was considered the patriotic duty of the woman, whether she be wife, mother, sister, or fiancé, to encourage him to do so. Hundreds of thousands of men left their homes and marched off to war. In the South, three out of four men eventually signed up (Faust, "Alters of Sacrifice" 182), and though the percentage of the population enlisted in the North was not as high, it was still between one-third to almost fifty percent of the men of military age (Cott, *Public Vows* 78; Hacker et al. 144). Every level of society on the home front felt the impact.

The Civil War was a woman's war as well. Their lives were disrupted and, for many, at least temporarily altered. The Civil War *mobilized* women in addition to men. Women were called upon to cheerfully give up their men and to wait patiently for their return. It required them

to be “political” in that they should effervesce with patriotism and lend their support both through patience and encouragement, as well as through their needles and thread and other “womanly” skills. In the South, many upper- and middle-class women had to take over the plantation/farm and the agriculture, the raising/disciplining of the children, and the management of the slaves, even though American culture had molded women to expect to be taken care of by men (provided for and protected) in return for submission. Across the divided nation, in many cases, the war necessitated that women go to work in the fields, the classrooms, the factories, and the hospitals, in order to lend assistance to the cause and to help feed their families. In the North, some immigrant and working-class women had worked outside of the home prior to the war in limited labor market, but the war brought many more women into their ranks and on a much more regular basis. Women became involved in public life, and even though it was often unofficially or in official, temporary roles, their involvement was still a step beyond their traditional roles. It complicated their images of themselves and their expectations.

With the advent of the war, the public/political world invaded the home. According to Nina Siber in *Daughters of the Union* (2005), the domestic lost its preeminence in American life, and men were called upon to place nation first, home second. Women had their own battles to fight. Siber’s *Daughters of the Union* (2005), Judith Giesber’s *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (2009), and other works examine the tumult the war caused in Northern women’s lives. However, the war had its greatest effects on the women of the South. Drew Gilpin Faust, in *Mothers of Invention* (1996), Catherine Clinton, in *Southern Families at War* (2000), Victoria Ott in *When the Flower Blooms in Winter: Young Women Coming of Age in the Confederacy* (2003), and others investigate how women of the South dealt with the rupture in various areas of their lives. Courtship and marriage are two of the numerous areas considered

in these works. This dissertation is more comprehensive in scope than these works, covering both the North and South, but it narrows the focus to the decision to marry, rather than investigating all areas of women's lives. I argue that the war initiated long-lasting change in regards to this crucial area in women's lives.

This dissertation examines the ramifications that the American Civil War had on the decision to marry--including whether or not to marry, whom to marry, and when, and the role and relationship expectations after vows were said--as reflected or imagined in American fiction from the 1860's and 1870's. The focus is on how Civil War-related fiction written by women such as Rebecca Harding Davis, Lydia Maria Child, Louisa May Alcott, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Augusta Jane Evans, E.D.E.N. Southworth, and others portrayed the decision to marry. As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, women authors of the era took the focal point of women's lives, the decision to marry, and endued the act with immense political implications, making it the fulcrum for their hopes for reform. The Civil War started in motion events, forces, and thoughts that would lead to lasting transformation in the lives of women, and these new possibilities were reflected in the decision to marry. The Civil War reverberated through women's lives, dislodging the accepted dictates of gender roles, and the war's aftershocks echoed strongly into the decision to marry. Most scholars agree that the war led to significant change in women's lives, at least during the war. But disagreement arises about the long-term ramifications of the war in the lives of women, especially in regards to shifts in gender roles. In *History of Women's Suffrage* (1881), Elizabeth Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage write that "it created a revolution in woman herself, as important in its results as the changed condition of the former slaves, and this silent influence is still busy" (13). However, Lyde Sizer, in *The Political Work of Northern Women Writers* (2000), argues that the idea of any

long-lasting transformation, as advocated by the women writers of the era, is a “myth” (216). She argues that while the war may have altered women’s vision of themselves, it did not alter the “public social conventions of womanhood,” and may have in fact tightened the boundaries (11). I disagree with Sizer. In this dissertation, I argue that transgression of gender roles necessitated by the war demonstrated heretofore unrealized possibilities and capabilities of women. The war awakened women to new possibilities, and this awareness, fueled by women writers, led to resistance and transgression. As a consequence of the changes brought about by the war, factors, such as women’s increased participation in the public domain, increased economic responsibility, and the absence of men during the war (and in some cases after) slowly led to a lessening of the significance of marriage in a woman’s life. The transformation may not have been visibly culture-shaking, but when taken as a whole, minor transgressions of traditional attitudes towards marriage enacted by individual women and propagated in women’s fiction eroded the barriers of the spheres over time and were a significant force that shifted the cultural trajectory.

Some women writers of the era endeavored to fuel this change, and in their advocacy they seized upon marriage as a site of political exploration, a metaphor in which to enact their visions of what “could be.” In such fiction, the decision to marry became the site of experimentation and political expression embodying the authors’ aspirations for cultural change. However, in its politicizing of marriage (with the exception of some of the interracial fiction), women’s fiction tended to deemphasize the importance of romantic love, an icon of nineteenth-century American Victorian culture. This dissertation also explores the effects of this absence of heartfelt connection in the majority of the fiction with political undertones and considers whether this was a failure to establish an emotional connection between the heroine and the lead male

character or an intentional exclusion as a result of the women author's attempts to advocate more agency for women within marriage.

Women writers of the 1860's and 1870's were responding to the upheaval in their society created by the war. I will examine the effects of this rupture in cultural attitudes towards marriage through New Historicist and Feminist lenses, bringing in letters and diaries from the time period in addition to fiction. New Historicist critics argue that those who only read literary texts are leaving out layers of depth and context, merely seeing the black lines and missing the full story. According to Stephen Greenblatt, both literary and historical texts are "fictions," and the "nonfiction" and "fiction" intersect, intermingle, and react creating an uncontrollable ripple through the culture (37). The diaries and letters indicate how separate individuals perceived the world and reacted to their circumstances. However, fiction can blend the separate individual perceptions and experiences with the "not yet" allowing readers to envision new possibilities.

I will investigate the complicated relationship between Civil War-era fiction and life during that time period. The war necessitated changes in women's lives, at least during its duration, and inspired the women writers to seek longer-lasting and further-reaching transformation. In this kinetic interchange, necessity sparked the first movements towards transgression, as in the case of the economic realities of the war that forced women to take on more authority and work outside of the home. This, in turn, inspired the women writers of the time to incorporate the new reality into their fiction along with imaginings that further violated traditional boundaries and spurred further change in women's lives, eventually leading to the consideration of such possibilities in real life, with results expanding exponentially. In conjunction with this, I evaluate how closely the fiction mirrors the realities recorded in diaries and letters.

The decision to marry was usually considered the single most important decision that a nineteenth-century woman in the United States would make in her lifetime. Most saw it as second only to the decision regarding the eternal state of their souls. Women's lives were defined by their husbands. With few exceptions, women did not have the option of building an identity through a career or other achievements. If they worked outside of the home, it was usually seen as a temporary situation to make do until they married. Their class, financial status, where they would live, and how they would be perceived was usually determined by the status of the man they agreed to marry.

It was expected that a woman would marry. Her chance for change, for the freedom to determine her life, lay in her choice of whom to marry. As discussed by Ellen Rothman in *Hands and Hearts: A History of American Courtship* (1987), in the nineteenth century, women often delayed marriage into their twenties, and this was in part because once the vows were said, they were not to be undone; she had chosen her path. Often, even after the proposal was accepted, the woman would delay the wedding date (Rothman 157). Marriage involved giving up her home, her family, and her girlhood to become a mature woman with a home of her own and life-consuming responsibilities.

However, it must be acknowledged that prior to Emancipation this "choice" was too often only a white woman's privilege. Women of color held in slavery often did not have a choice, and even when they were allowed to choose a mate and exercise the decision to "marry," those marriages were not considered legally binding by the law of the land or by many slave masters (Clinton, "Reconstructing Freedwomen" 308). This dissertation's discussion of nineteenth-century marriage, with the exception of Chapter 4, "Integrated Possibilities: Interracial Attraction

and Humanizing the Other,” therefore concentrates on the decision to marry allowed to free women.

Yet free women were drawn to decisions about marriage by much more than intellect and custom. Most of them longed for romantic love. This high regard for romance was fairly new. In the eighteenth century, friendship was considered the most important grounds for building a marriage. In *Hands and Hearts* (1987), Rothman traces this devaluation of friendship and valorization of romantic love through the first few decades of the nineteenth century. By the mid-nineteenth century, it was considered a prerequisite for marriage (Lystra 28, Rothman 103). A woman’s heart often pulled her towards the great decision that would determine the rest of her life.

Courtship and the decision to marry were weighty enough, but they were complicated by the societal divide of the world into the woman’s sphere and the man’s sphere. By the eve of the Civil War, the philosophy of separate spheres had fully inundated the culture. The woman was locked into the realm of the domestic, and the man was expected to charge into the public world of work. They were prepared for these roles from childhood. In the midst of fulfilling their designated duties, men and women lived such separate lives that the odds were against them ever achieving a deep understanding of each other’s lives.

Breaking through the gulf, romance drew men and women together. The most intense intersection of their separate lives occurred during the period of courtship. It was at that time that the divide between spheres became more permeable, under the influence of romantic love. According to critic Karen Lystra in *Searching the Heart* (1992), “the experience of love created a mutual identification between men and women that was so intense that lovers repeatedly claimed to have incorporated a part of their partner’s inner self into their own inner life” (42). Lystra

suggests that this interconnection could carry over into marriage and help facilitate closeness and understanding even after the heated sparks of romance had faded.

Courtship was treated as an occupation by young elite women. However, the war greatly reduced the availability of men to court in both the North and South (Cott, *Public Vows* 78). The call to arms emptied out farms, plantations, towns, and cities of white males. Some chose to hurry and marry due to the war; others postponed their nuptials until after the conflict. Overall, the number of marriages went down, and many young women feared that they would have to give up on their dream of marriage (Faust, *Mothers* 151). For women who were widowed during the war, remarriage was not often possible (Faust, *Mothers* 172; Cott, *Public Vows* 78). Marriage was the foundation of a woman's identity, and to give it up was a grave loss.

Overall, the Civil War meant more power for women, at least during the war. The men were gone off to war. As the women learned to take care of themselves and their families, they began to question the logic of their submission and dependence. On the other hand, in both the North and South, many women longed for the men to return home once again and to *share* the work burden. They were worn out by sacrifice and deprivation, and they wanted an end to suffering.

However, the return of surviving soldiers could not restore the past. Many men returned from war with long-lasting wounds, only some of which were physical. Drinking and psychological repercussions from battle stress were common, along with illness or suffering from physical war wounds (Faust, *Mothers* 252). Most women whose husbands lived to return from the war handed the reins back over to the men, but neither their husbands nor themselves would ever be quite the same as before the shots erupted at Ft. Sumter. For the women who had

been waiting for their fiancés and beaux to return, the world that they were marrying into was not the one they had been prepared for.

The movement of women into the public realm opened the way to a questioning of new possibilities regarding the role of women in marriage and the role of marriage in a woman's life. According to Lystra, "The nineteenth-century woman's movement, from the Civil War on increased middle-class men's and women's awareness of the permeability of women's sex-role boundaries," and "there was more tension over sex roles from the Civil War to the end of the century than in the antebellum period..." (150, 147). Women had stepped into the man's world of work, independence, and decision-making. Many Northern writers, such as Alcott, Davis, and Phelps, sought to forestall the retreat to tradition, while some in the South fought to return to the comfort of the past. Across the divide, they wrote with the aim of refining and restructuring the tomorrow of their culture, especially in regards to women. And the decision to marry was their striking point. Even for some of the male authors of the time period, it seems as if the fate of the nation rested on those crucial words of "Will you...?" "I will..." and "I do." This dissertation will examine the way that the decision becomes a metaphor for other political and cultural possibilities.

In addition to New Historicism and the examination of the role of romantic love, I will utilize the theoretical trajectory of Feminism in this excavation of how the rupture of the Civil War affected the decision to marry. This study delves into the war from a woman's perspective. In "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" (1985), Elaine Showalter stipulates that "women's culture," in addition to being a distinct entity from man's culture, goes beyond the prescribed "women's sphere" (262). It encompasses a woman's whole "lived life" (Showalter 261). As Nina Baym explains in "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude

Women” (1985), in the past too many critics have seen no value in what they consider to be “melodramas of beset womanhood” and “tales of truth” (69). They discount women writers who bring birth, marriage, and the laundry into their narratives. Women participated in the war, even if they never stepped foot on the battlefield. Their lives would never be quite the same. The story of their “lived lives” and their “tales of truth” have been neglected, and I seek to rectify this.

Women writers of the 1860’s, 1870’s, and beyond sought to change their world by calling upon women to defy tradition. According to Jane Tompkins in *Sensational Designs* (1986), in the years before the war, writers of domestic fiction, like Susan Warner in *Wide, Wide World* (1850) and Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), sought to “reorganize culture from the woman’s point of view” and “to effect a radical transformation of [their] society” (124,145). They believed that the nexus of change was not in Congress or in a courthouse, but in the human heart. By effecting a change in the heart of a woman, they believed they could transform homes and families, thereby transforming the world (Tompkins 143). Their “call to arms” did not envision transgressing gender roles.

In *Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870* (1978), Nina Baym concurs. She stipulates that the authors she examines seek to empower women within the parameters of the domestic sphere. Rebellion is not a virtue in the novels that Baym examines. Instead, the authors advocate independence within the woman’s realm and through self-control and power through submission. In her study, she does not recognize the influence of the war or the shift in focus created by that rupture.

But the majority of novels that came to press during the Civil War and the years afterwards do not comply with Tompkins and Baym’s perceptions. The women writers of the

Civil War era and beyond do not concentrate on what a woman can do within her sphere. They instead seek to move women beyond what was considered to be culturally acceptable.

Literary critics such as Susan Harris and Karen Tracey have studied this literary exploration of transgression of gender roles, but not specifically in relation to the Civil War. Literary critic S. Hsu and historian Alice Fahs have examined selections of Civil War literature. Historians Clinton, Faust, Giesber, Ott, Siber, and others have examined the impact of the war on the lives of women of the era, focusing on either the Northern or Southern women. Yet in doing so, these historians mostly have neglected women's fiction. Sizer is the only historian with a strong focus on literature who also considers the impact of the war and literature on the lives of real women. However, no comprehensive work considers the effects of the war upon the decision to marry, in both the North and South, by examining that portrayal in literature. My dissertation seeks to accomplish this task.

The writers of the era, especially women, sought to sort through the emotional and cultural debris of the war and to forge a new, permeable concept of gender roles. They seized upon the decision to marry as a proving ground for their experiments. In doing so, the public/political rose above the intimate/private, deemphasizing romantic love and the connection of hearts considered essential in courtship and the decision to marry in American Victorian culture. Women of the era questioned and dreamed. The war had ignited the spark of possibilities for redefining capabilities of and opportunities for women, and despite any outward motions of retreat to tradition, the ideas lingered. On the other hand, many women, as evidenced in diaries and letters, also sought romantic love and the connection of hearts that could last a lifetime. The fiction of the era does not always accurately portray this struggle between heart and head.

The authors whom I study in this dissertation believed that the war left society pliable. They saw a window of potential, not unlike the first years after the Revolutionary War, in which some people imagined that slavery would end, women would get the vote, and other culture-shaking shifts would take place. Unlike the proponents for change from this earlier period, Civil War-era writers filtered their prescriptions for change through the life-defining decision to marry. In fiction that broaches the subject of interracial attraction, the consideration of interracial marriage and romance provides an analogy for the integration of post-Civil War society. The sensational fiction, with its high adventure and unconventional heroines, and “career-minded” fiction, which explores the possibility of women working outside of the home and of having a career in addition to marriage, both advocate a woman’s ability to perform as a man’s equal in the public realm, providing a blueprint for the blending of gender roles. In the Southern literature, women are equal to the task of equality or even superiority, but in the retreat following the defeat of the South, the woman gives up the public for the man, despite her capabilities.

In conclusion, the contracts that bound society were in flux during and after the Civil War. However, women’s fiction of the era often outpaced reality for the majority of women. It offered a wider expansion of freedom of choice in regards to marriage than in real life. Marrying across class and race lines was slow to gain acceptance, and even legality in the case of the latter. In some stories, the women choose to remain single, as opposed to enduring life alone because there were too few men available after the war. In “career” fiction, the women choose their careers, instead of struggling along, obtaining whatever work they could in order to help support their families. There is freedom and choice in the fiction that were only grasped by the daring and the determined few in real life. However, the fiction acted as a catalyst, allowing the general public to envision the possibilities of transgression.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One, “A Southern Perspective: Advancement and Retreat in Augusta Jane Evans’ *Macaria* and *St. Elmo*,” will examine the ramifications of the Civil War on the decision to marry from the Southern perspective. It will focus on the two novels of Augusta Jane Evans published in the mid 1860’s--*Macaria* (1864) and *St. Elmo* (1866)--and explore how the changing realities of war and defeat created significant differences between the two works. Furthermore, it will analyze the fiction in light of decisions made by real Southern women in the 1860’s as discovered in various diaries and letters and discussed in Faust’s *Mothers of Invention* (1996), Ott’s *When the Flower Blooms in Winter: Young Women Coming of Age in the Confederacy* (2000), Clinton’s *Southern Families at War* (2000), Clinton and Silber’s *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (1992), and other works.

I explore to what degree stepping outside of the domestic sphere into new areas of participatory citizenship and belonging in *Macaria*, and then the retreat in *St. Elmo*, reflect the reality of the lives of Southern women in the 1860’s. The beginning of the war ignited a surge of patriotism within the majority of Southern women, and this willingness to sacrifice for the new Confederate nation is reflected in *Macaria*, as is the reality of a shortage of men available for marriage. It was a time to place nation before self. However, by 1866, there was no cause or new nation. There was poverty, devastation, and heartbreak in the South. Despite its advocacy for intellectual equality between men and women, *St. Elmo* harkens back to an early era where there were plenty of men to choose from, and a strong woman was still willing to submit to the patriarchy of a strong man who had proven himself worthy of her heart’s “worship.” The influence of the war on *St. Elmo* has not been fully examined before.

In Chapter Two, “The Northern Response: Widening a Woman’s Choices,” I examine how the involvement of women in the workforce and an expansion of duties during the Civil War led a number of the Northern authors to investigate the possibilities of women managing a career and marriage. Society widely acknowledged that the war necessitated the movement of women into the work world during the war, with so many men away in the ranks. However, the accepted thought was that as men returned, women would slip back into the confines of their traditional sphere. Several women authors, such as Alcott and Phelps, did not welcome the thought of retreat. They sought to redefine the boundaries of the separate spheres as they explored the issue in relation to the decision to marry.

However, there is no smooth juxtaposition of career and marriage in any of these novels. The authors appear to have difficulty even imagining how this balance could work. In Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868), Jo tucks away her possibilities for a literary career as if it is a childhood toy that she has outgrown. In Alcott’s *Work* (1873), Christie marries, but her husband is conveniently disposed of by the war, so that she can get on with her “real” work. Perley and Garth, in Phelps’s *Silent Partner* (1871), opt not to marry, and in Phelps’s *The Story of Avis* (1877), Avis’s career drowns in her marriage despite all of the dreams and promises. Although it was not easy to envision a viable combination of career and marriage, the authors grappled for a solution.

I will investigate their explorations into the terrain and consider the extent to which the war paved the way for these considerations. I will also examine the reality of women working outside of the home after the war and to what extent the women’s lives are mirrored in the fiction. The study will include diaries and letters of the era and other historical research.

Overall, these works deemphasize love, and the characters, for the most part, never achieve a true sense of “shared selves” and intimacy. These stories advocate following the head instead of the heart. In these works, marriage is often portrayed as a luxury that a serious-minded woman with goals to pursue should only indulge in at her own risk. The war demonstrated that women could handle “men’s” work, but it was only supposed to be a temporary apparition. The integration of a career and marriage for a woman was a vast unknown that these women authors sought to fathom.

Chapter Three, “Sensational Battlefield Transgressions and the Re-envisioning of ‘I Do,’” will explore the sensational portrayal of the rupture of the war in women’s lives in regards to romance and the decision to marry. I will examine Southworth’s *Fair Play* (1865) and *How He Won Her: Britomarte—Man-Hater* (1866), Metta Victoria Victor’s *The Unionist’s Daughter* (1864), and stories based on real-life events.

The greatest transgressions of gender boundaries occurs in the sensational literature of the war and beyond, especially in the North. In these sensational war novels, the heroines could become nurses, defend their homes, work as spies, or even go into battle. Although most of the women characters marry in the end, these were not the actions of a domestic heroine. Regardless, these novels were extremely popular. Many of the sensational novels of the war have a radical message: a woman should think for herself and place her convictions before her heart. Critics who only study the literary novels and the domestic novels are missing a chunk of the reality of women’s dreams and aspirations.

The Civil War opened up the consideration of possibilities and inspired transgressions against the traditional boundaries regulating the actions of women. I believe that the energy from such imagined possibilities was not fruitless. While the vast majority of the women may not have

brandished a gun or hopped on a horse to ride off to the rescue, the hope of making a meaningful contribution worked its way into their daily lives, bolstering their confidence and courage and affecting their decisions and actions. In my opinion, it energized decisions to take a stand against home invaders, to carry messages behind enemy lines, to volunteer as nurses, to manage their homes and farms without male supervision, to work outside of the home, to stand up to relief agencies, the government, and more during the war. Furthermore, after the war, it sparked the audacity to seek a voice in managing the family's affairs beyond the hearth and have a greater presence in the public realm. The sensational literature of the war and the years that followed had greater worth than has been recognized. It provided fertile ground for dreams and the groundwork for change.

Finally, Chapter Four—"Interracial Attraction and Humanizing the Other"—focuses on integrated possibilities. This chapter takes a look at the potential for interracial relationships between African-Americans and whites as portrayed in the daring works of Louisa May Alcott, Lydia Maria Child, and Rebecca Harding Davis. These radical authors dared contend that interracial attraction and love were legitimate feelings that should not be disdained. The narratives delve into the question of whether attraction and love can overcome the racial barriers sufficiently in order to forge an enduring relationship.

This chapter will explore interracial attraction and love in three of Alcott's Civil War-era short stories, Lydia Maria Child's *Romance of the Rebellion* (1867), and in Davis's *Waiting for the Verdict* (1868). It will examine their treatment of the relationships and the conclusions reached in each work, which range from marriage, to a moving away from the possibilities of developing a relationship, to a deliberate decision to forgo the relationship due to societal

concerns. Finally, the chapter will examine to what extent the Civil War opened or left closed these possibilities in real life during the era.

In addition, I will also seek to historicize the issue through Martha Hodes' "Wartime Dialogues on Illicit Sex: White Women and Black Men" (1992), Catherine Clinton's "Reconstructing Freedwomen" (1992), Joan Cashin's "'Since the War Broke Out': The Marriage of Kate and William McLure" (1992), Susan Elbert's "An Inter-Racial Love Story in Fact and Fiction: William and Mary King Allen's Marriage and Louisa May Alcott's Tale, 'M.L.'" (2012), and other historical studies, in addition to bringing in secondary works to examine historical context.

In the works, the racialized hero/heroine is "Spanishized" (Hsu 63). Instead of portraying the heroine/hero as having strong African-American features, the authors color them "yellow" or olive and give them dark eyes and smooth, dark hair, as if they are of Spanish or Portuguese descent. They are part white, being either mulattos or quadroons. Some of them even pass for white, until their ancestry becomes known. The authors believed that this would be more palatable for their audience.

These authors seek to expose the characters and readers to the humanity of the racialized Other. In the three stories that involve the possibility of marriage, the authors do not reveal the race of the hero to the heroine or the reader until the audience has already learned to care about the hero as a fellow human being. The fiction sneaks past the overt barrier of prejudice. I argue that these stories privilege love and hold it in higher value than much of the other fiction of the era. The more daring of these stories suggest that love should be allowed to draw hearts and lives together regardless of social dictates, monetary considerations, and political agendas. Marriage in this fiction acts doubly as the ideal culmination of love, when it is not hindered by prejudice, and

as a political metaphor representing the integration of the races, suggesting more than coexistence and tolerance.

In conclusion, the Civil War subverted the hard lines between the imposed dichotomies of male sphere/female sphere, white/black, and others. Additionally, the female authors of the era sought to expand the permeability. However, I propose that the most significant transformation instigated by the war and its aftermath was the beginning of the transition towards lessening the significance of marriage in the lives of women. After the war, a woman had more freedom to not marry. The possibilities and opportunities for her working outside of the home were more prevalent. The choices of work/careers were also wider. In general, she was prepared to have more input on the farm/plantation, and she had more opportunities to meet in associations and organizations. There was more leeway in the degree of her submission/non-submission and dependence/independence. Marriage began to no longer be, to the degree that it had been, the overwhelming determiner of her adult whole life. As this dissertation will demonstrate, postwar women's fiction was the catalyst for the change ignited by the war.

CHAPTER ONE

A SOUTHERN PERSPECTIVE: ADVANCEMENT AND RETREAT IN AUGUSTA JANE EVANS' MACARIA AND ST. ELMO

In the spring of 1866, Augusta Jane Evans, a strong advocate of the Lost Cause, started working on a project dear to her heart. She sought to have a monument installed in Mobile, Alabama, her hometown, to honor the Confederate soldiers who had fallen in battle. Evans was the leader and financier of the project, involving herself in every intricate detail including designing the project, procuring the marble, and lobbying for permission from the city (Sexton 117-119). She took the leadership of the project upon herself, with the encouragement of her community, instead of waiting for a man to lead the way.

However, in her vision, the monument was not just for the men who had died. It was also for the women who had struggled through poverty, hunger, fear, and much more; the monument was for those women who had sacrificed health, property, and loved ones for the Cause. She longed to give her fellow Southern women “the precious consolation of knowing that the Sacrifice was not in vain!” (qtd. in Sexton 118). But was that really within her power? Evans worried that her “bereaved countrywomen who shall stand around their moldering grey-clad darlings—in the day when I shall have their monument raised—must feel that they have laid their all on a crumbling altar” (qtd. in Sexton 118). Their hopes had crumbled with the defeat of the Confederacy. After much difficulty with obtaining materials and lengthy delay from officials who feared Northern displeasure, the memorial was completed and dedicated in 1874, eight years later (Sexton 126-128). It was a symbol of the Lost Cause and a memorial to honor the men who had given their lives; for the women, it provided an opportunity to express their dedication and admiration.

However, Evans's greatest effort and success in giving meaning to the painful, costly sacrifices made by Southern women during the war was her two novels, *Macaria* (1863) and *St. Elmo* (1866), the latter of which she was finishing during the same time that she first started working on the memorial. Evans longed to empower her fellow women. She sought to give their lives a sense of purpose. In *Macaria*, which was written during the war, she called upon women to sacrifice for the new nation. In *St. Elmo*, written a few months after the war had ended, she offered them comfort in the glory of the past and sought to show them that their old world, the Old South, was worth the fight. *St. Elmo* is a call to private sacrifice for the future. Both novels strive to give meaning to sacrifice.

The decision of whether or not to marry plays a key role in this call to sacrifice. This chapter examines the decision to marry in Evans's *Macaria* and *St. Elmo* and explores how the changing realities of war and defeat created significant differences between the two works. The Civil War ignited patriotism within the majority of Southern women, and this fervor kindled their actions and devotion. This willingness to sacrifice for the new Nation is reflected in *Macaria*, as is the reality of a shortage of men available for marriage. In this novel, Evans ventures into new territory, asking her heroines, Irene Huntingdon and Electra Grey, to devote themselves to the cause of developing the new Confederate nation instead of serving a husband. The men, including Russell Aubrey, the common love of both women, are giving their lives for the new nation; women of courage and talent should *live* for the new nation. That was 1863. By the time Evans wrote *St. Elmo* in 1865-66, she had retreated from her bold feminist stance. The South had lost, and there was no more glorious new nation. There was poverty, devastation, and heartbreak. Despite its advocacy for intellectual equality between men and women, *St. Elmo* harkens back to an earlier era when there are plenty of men to choose from, and a strong woman

is still willing to submit to the patriarchy of a strong man who has proven himself worthy of her heart's "worship," sacrificing her public potential in order to be his wife. Edna Earl, unequaled in intelligence by anyone except St. Elmo Murray, seeks fame and desires to be a light in the darkness to her readers, offering them encouragement and guidance. She is dedicated to serving them, but she is unintentionally ruining her health and jeopardizing her life in doing so. When her weak heart is almost completely worn out, she gives in at last to her love for St. Elmo and finds rest in his arms. The public (her readers) can no longer have her. She belongs to her husband and becomes a citizen of the home. I shall explore to what degree this stepping outside of the domestic sphere into new areas of participatory citizenship and belonging in *Macaria*, and then the retreat in *St. Elmo*, reflect the reality of the lives of Southern women in the 1860's.

The war had some of its greatest effects on the women of the South, destroying many tenets of their way of life and throwing their world into turmoil. Drew Gilpin Faust, the premier researcher of the effects of the war on Southern women, in *Mothers of Invention* (1996), and others, such as Catherine Clinton in *Southern Families at War* (2000), Victoria Ott in *When the Flower Blooms in Winter: Young Women Coming of Age in the Confederacy* (2003), Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber in *Divided House* (1992), and Carol Blesser and Heath's *In Joy and Sorrow* (1991) have investigated how women of the South dealt with the rupture in various areas of their lives. Courtship and marriage were two of the most vital areas. Courtship was treated as an occupation by the young elite women. However, the war greatly reduced the availability of men to court (Cott, *Public Vows* 78). In courting, some Southern women lowered their standards (Faust, *Mothers* 148; Hacker 46). With the shortage of potential beaux, they became willing to consider significantly older or younger men. They also started considering men wounded in body and/or mind (Faust, *Mothers* 140). A soldier, no matter what his condition, was considered better

than a man who had not fought. There was an adamant feeling in the South that “half a soldier is worth hundreds of whole men that did not go to war” (Faust, *Mothers* 140). Most women still felt bound to consider only men of their class, but some struck up flirtations and courtships with men beneath their class (Faust, *Mothers*, 147).

On the other hand, for women who were widowed during the war, remarriage was not often possible (Faust, *Mothers* 172; Cott, *Public Vows* 78). The available men were more likely to marry younger, never-married women (Barber 126). Some knew that widowhood might be a lifetime sentence. Some women chose to hurry and marry due to the war; others postponed their nuptials until after the conflict. However, despite the concessions, most of them still wanted to hold out for a love match. Overall, the number of marriages was down, and many young women feared that they would have to give up on their dream of marriage (Faust, *Mothers* 151).

Marriage was the foundation of their identity as women; to give it up was a grave loss.

By 1863, Evans was very much aware of the concerns of many women about whether or not they would ever marry. In *Macaria*, she sought to alleviate their fears by providing them with a higher calling, the possibility of worthiness outside of marriage. In *Macaria*, women’s citizenship is grounded in the new nation, not in marriage. The birth of the Confederacy demands a willingness to sacrifice all. The title refers to Macaria, a woman from ancient Greece who literally sacrificed herself upon the altar in order to save her land of Athens—a woman saved an entire city-state. For the sake of the new Confederate nation, women as well as men must be willing to pay the price. Women cannot follow the men onto the tented field and into the face of battle, but that does not mean that women need to sit idly by.

Macaria responded to the thousands of women who cried out against the feeling of uselessness in the face of the great conflict, women who felt bound and limited by their sphere.

Duty to the Southern Cause demanded nothing less than a willingness, unhampered by complaining and murmuring, for every able-bodied man to enlist in service to the nation and for the women to willingly encourage them in their duty to go. Alice Fahs, in *The Imagined Civil War*, writes of the hundreds of songs, poems, and stories that “revolved around women’s need to learn to sacrifice their men for country, thereby subordinating their own needs to the larger needs of the nation” (129). The momentum of the patriotic print culture was a force that brooked little dissent. *Macaria* was the “culmination” and most “elaborate” portrayal of this ideology (Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice,” 188).

In *Macaria*, Irene Huntingdon sets the standard for other women to follow. She willingly sends the two loves of her life off to war: her austere father and Russell Aubrey. Irene calmly affirms her father’s decision to serve, telling him: “I should be unworthy of my country if I were selfish enough to want to keep you from its defense” (304). She tells him goodbye without a tear. Conversely, in a rare display of emotion, her eyes fill with tears as she sends Russell off to war. However, she willingly relinquishes him, as well, for the sake of the Confederacy, declaring, “Oh, Russell! I can be brave, and strong, and patient; I can bear to see your dear face no more in this world; I can give you up to our country, and not murmur that you died defending her liberties—if I have the conviction that, in that noble death, you found the gate of heaven—that I shall meet you again when my God calls me home” (328). In real life, the hope of reunion in heaven girded the hearts of many women who watched their men depart for the battlefield.

However, Evans breaks from the typical sentimental plot of the age that was partially echoed in the reality of countless homes, as well. According to Fahs, the standard war romance plot focused on two lovers and began with the “heroine initially objecting to a lover’s enlistment” before eventually acquiescing, followed by the agony of hearing that the hero had

been killed in battle, and ended with the hero's miraculous return, followed by a wedding (131). *Macaria* is not a sentimental romance. Irene and Russell do not have a life together before the war; they have no courtship, no letters, and no interaction in their adult lives except for a few stilted nods and smiles, with the exception of two hours. Duty is a harsh taskmaster to whom Irene tenaciously pledges her undying allegiance. Her rigid adherence to duty began years before the war in the story, yet the novel was written during the war, and it was Evans, writing from a war-deluged South, who shaped Irene's character. Irene has already sacrificed any chance of earthly happiness and union for Russell and herself in the name of filial duty. Her duty to her father seems to know no bounds; at age fifteen, when Irene comes to fully understand her father's fervent hate against the Aubrey family, she relinquishes any hope of building upon the friendship that Aubrey and she share. She locks her love away in the vault of her heart.

When Russell and Irene meet as adults, she offers him nothing but the reserved politeness of almost-strangers, and he returns the sentiment. Other than a brief acknowledgement when they meet in the graveyard, they only have two hours of real connection. The first one is in the factory district by the river when Russell acknowledges his feelings for her and begs for a smile or a moment of warmth, pleading, "Be yourself once more—give me one drop from the old overflowing fountain. I am a lonely man; and my proud bitter heart hungers for one of your gentle words, one of your sweet, priceless smiles" (292). She refuses to give either. Duty dictates that she offer him no encouragement. The second hour, which comes a year later, Russell has waited all of his life for, and it is what Irene has fervently refused to allow: the open acknowledgement of her love for him. The day before he goes off to war, Irene summons him to her house. She greets him with open hands and an open countenance. For once in her adult life, the reserve has melted, and her love escapes and overpowers her sense of duty, at least

temporarily. Astounded, Russell takes her into his arms and rejoices, “At last I realize the dream of my life! I hold you to my heart, acknowledged all my own! Who shall dare dispute the right your lips have given me? Hatred is powerless now; none shall come between me and my own. Oh, Irene! ” (323). However, the moment only lasts an hour.

But hatred is not “powerless now,” as Russell initially supposes, because Irene still refuses to defy her father or risk his displeasure. When Irene makes it clear to Russell that she still believes that the “barriers” between them are “insurmountable,” he demands:

If you love me, and the belief is too precious to me to be questioned now, I hold it your duty to me and to your own heart to give yourself to me, to gild our future with the happiness of which the past had been cheated. Your father has no right to bind your life a sacrifice upon the altar of his implacable hate; nor have you a right to doom yourself and me to life-long sorrow, because of a life-long feud.
(324-325)

Unfortunately, Irene is determined that filial duty demands nothing less than such a sacrifice. If there is any duty to oneself or to romantic love, it is cast aside in this novel. The prioritizing of filial obedience, loyalty, and duty in *Macaria* mirrors the public discourse of the era—that an individual’s desires and needs must be subordinated to the greater good. Irene’s submission to her father’s will is symbolic of how a citizen should submit themselves to the cause of the Confederacy. Submitting one’s self in obedience to one’s parents teaches discipline in this context. In the midst of war, desire must be subjugated to duty. The possibility of Russell and Irene being united in Heaven one day is the only hope that she offers him.

Furthermore, she allows her father’s hatred to control her life even after he dies in battle. One might venture that his death would finally release Irene from her self-imposed sentence, but

that is not the case. When Dr. Arnold, a close family friend, finally discovers her love for Russell, he suggests that they should marry. However, she refuses to consider any such proposition, insisting, “The debt of respect I owe to his memory shall be as faithfully discharged” (396). The reader wonders why Dr. Arnold never mentions that Russell actually aided Irene’s dying father on the battlefield, and why Russell never mentions the matter as well. Russell discovers the dying Huntington on the field, brings the doctor to him, disregarding his own wound, and gives Huntington water and comfort in his last moments of life. Amazingly, Huntington asks Russell’s forgiveness. None of this is told to Irene. When Arnold mentions what a comfort it would bring to Irene to know of his Russell’s actions, Russell insists that he is not worthy of praise, that his animosity has not dissipated. He aided Huntington for Irene’s sake. Whether the knowledge would have caused any ripple in Irene’s resolve is not known. Russell did not feel that it would make a difference. Evans does not offer an opportunity for the two to unite in marriage. This is not a story leading to a happy ending. The nation (i.e. Confederate States of America) has priority in this novel, and the nation is at war.

However, Irene’s adamant adherence to duty at all costs almost requires a suspension of disbelief at times. For instance, her tenacious obedience to her father’s will is somewhat puzzling after her earlier stalwart refusal to comply with her father’s demands that she marry her cousin Hugh. Declaring, “I belong to myself, and only I can give myself away,” she “nerv[ed] herself to battle to the death” (114, 116). For this act of disobedience, Huntington disowned her and refused to have any communion with her outside of what was necessary for appearances in social circles. It was not until Irene almost died of typhus that he regretted his actions and reconciled with her. She had disobeyed her father when she felt that his commands went against God’s ordinances; in that she felt that proper affection “alone [could] sanction marriage” and that to

marry under any other terms was “revolting to every true soul” (195, 196). Supposedly that was the only time she felt justified in disobeying her father after she reached adulthood. However, one wonders where her Biblical precepts, such as mercy, love, and grace, were when it came to allowing her father’s all-consuming hate to rob two lives of their chance for happiness.

Did Evans intend for the reader to conclude that Irene was mistaken in her strict adherence to duty? I do not think so. This novel was written during the middle of the war. I propose that this is part of Evans rallying call for Duty, to raise it supreme, the rightful ruler of hearts and wills, except for when that duty clashes with God’s will. Irene demonstrates that duty is more important than earthly happiness and joy. This was the battle cry needed in the South in 1863. While filial loyalty and patriotism are not one and the same, they both require setting aside individual desires and aspirations for the good of the community, whether that be a family or the nation. In addition, learning to obey one’s parent could condition one to obeying other, higher authorities. Adherence to duty and a willingness to sacrifice were essential if the fledgling nation and their way of life were to survive. Happiness and love were secondary pursuits.

In addition to duty to family, there is duty to the new nation. That is the heart of the novel, and that is where women can find their belonging. Macaria from ancient Greece sacrificed herself for her country. Irene longs to do so, as well: “I cannot, like Macaria, by self-immolation, redeem my country; from that great privilege I am debarred; but I yield up more than she ever possessed. I give my all on earth—my father and yourself—to our beloved and suffering country. My God! Accept the sacrifice, and crown the South a sovereign, independent nation!” (329). Duty comes before all, and sacrifice does have an impact. Evans calls upon women to join in the fight behind the lines.

Women were called upon to participate in shaping the new nation, and they were endowed with a sense of belonging beyond the domestic. The future of the Confederacy rested upon these women, in addition to the men: “For upon the purity, the devotion, the patriotism of the women of our land, not less than upon the heroism of our armies, depends our national salvation” (Evans 414). Victory in the war depended upon Southern women as well as men. This perception was one of the major factors that led Sherman to burn his way through Georgia and Sheridan to decimate the Shenandoah Valley. According to Nina Silber, in *Daughters of the Union*, the Northern press blamed the North’s losses on the lukewarm patriotism of Northern women, as opposed to the fervent patriotism of Southern women (15). In “Altars of Sacrifice,” Faust writes of how many blamed the defeat of the Confederacy on the women losing the will to continue the fight.

Evans endows this calling with an even higher level of import. According to Evans, this devotion to the nation is a “consecrated work” that can lead to “life-long usefulness” (414). This was an elixir for those who felt as if their gender allowed them no meaningful influence in the world. Many women ached to be able to make a difference in the battle for their region and their way of life. Evans calls upon women to engage their sweat, intellect, creativity, and hearts in the name of the new nation. In fact, their very thoughts must be subdued and directed into lines conforming to the national agenda. In *Macaria*, Irene is the epitome of resignation. Every feeling is subdued in answer to duty.

Irene even chastises the secondary heroine, Electra Grey, in regards to the content of her art. In this new era, art should serve the nation. Irene cautions Electra: “select only the highest, purest types” and she reminds Electra that the Confederacy has no need of “feeble, sickly sentimentality, nor yet the somber austerity which seems to pervade your mind” (369). This is a

new level of citizenship demanding that the pen and paintbrush serve the nation as well. Art and literature have the power to move and inspire people in ways that mere logic cannot touch. The Confederacy is a new country in need of establishing a separate identity from the United States. Thus, art and literature are a vital part of shaping that new identity. At the end of the novel, Irene donates a large plot of land and secures funding for a “School of Design” where women can learn to earn their livelihood through art and become participating citizens in the formation of a distinctly Southern art culture. Evans is seeking to do the same through her writing.

However, forging this new identity involves painful transitions, as well. Russell Aubrey will not be returning home, and neither will hundreds of thousands of other Southern men. The threat of life-long singleness threatened many women. Irene Huntingdon embraces this state (413). Electra is faced with spinsterhood as well. Russell, her cousin, is also the love of her heart. She would have no other, and with his death, any lingering hopes of marriage dissipate. Irene encourages her to accept singleness as an opportunity to serve, saying, “The head of a household, a wife and mother, is occupied with family cares and affections—can find little time for considering the comfort, or contribution to the enjoyment of any beyond the home-circle,” but to the single woman “belongs the privilege of carrying light and blessing to many firesides—of being the friend and helper of hundreds” (413). It is an opportunity to be a “social evangel of mercy” and to dedicate herself the new nation which depends upon every member, every citizen (413). Love, romance, personal happiness are not priorities in *Macaria*. Evans does not allow her heroines to dedicate themselves to men. They are called upon to serve and sacrifice for the good of all. Instead of calling them to be an “Angel in the House” as described by Coventry Patmore in his poem by the same title (1854), they are called to be angels to the community. It is almost as if Evans beckons them to a consecrated sisterhood of service. The Confederacy needs them,

just as it needs the countless men who have enlisted. In this way, the novel implies that it is a great loss to narrow a woman's focus to one hearth.

Furthermore, Evans decries marrying for the sake of having a spouse. There are actually four suitors in the novel, but none of their proposals are accepted. As mentioned, Irene's cousin, Hugh, demands her hand, and then her close friend Harry, after banishing himself to the missionary field in the West and struggling for years with his feelings for Irene, proposes to her. Both of them are refused, in addition to Russell. The fourth suitor, Mr. Clifton, has his heart set on Electra. Many years her senior, this patron longs to marry his protégé. Hugh, Harry, and Clifton are refused for the same reason: the woman of their dreams does not return their affection. In Evans's fictional world, when love is not mutual, or when there are impediments caused by duty, a woman is better off serving others.

Electra's final painting, "Modern Macaria," epitomizes of the message of the novel. The painting portrays women standing alone. The triumphant "Independence" and the white-robed "Peace" stand victoriously in the foreground, while in the background rows of tents populate the hills. In the middle ground lies the bloody, disheveled battleground, featuring vignettes of women clasping their dead and tearlessly mourning. The painting embodies the sacrifice that all are called upon to be willing to make, and it promises victory in the end. The women are alone, except for their duty and each other. Macaria encourages them to go on "hand in hand" and "to work till evening shades close over" (414): "Thus by different, by devious thorny paths, two sorrowing women emerged upon the broad highway of Duty, and clasping hands, pressed forward to the divinely-appointed goal—Womanly Usefulness" (380). For too long, society had been convincing women that their purpose in life lay in marrying and carrying for a family. Evans portrays a world where women do not need men in order to be useful. Women can support

and comfort each other, and through service and sacrifice for the community and nation, gain a higher sense of purpose than ever found through marriage. In *Macaria*, a woman shapes her own identity. Marriage is a hindrance to God's call to serve.

The novel advocates a new citizenship for women that requires one's all, yielding purpose and hope. The hopes of marriage fade into the past, but these women will not be deterred by the loss. Faust concludes that in *Macaria*, Evans opened up new avenues for women and provided them with a "critical role in the public life of the new nation" (*Mothers* 173). Many readers appreciated Evans's call to "womanly usefulness," but some objected to her idealization of single-blessedness, and some went so far as to say that Evans had violated "gender conventions as to have created an androgynous heroine, to have denaturalized and denatured their southern social world by introducing a new and anomalous gender category" (Faust, *Mothers* 177). Faust's research revealed that a number of critics and readers from the time period felt that Evans had defeminized Irene to the point that she was no longer recognizable as a woman. But perhaps the problem was not her lack of femininity but her lack of vulnerability, her lack of internal struggle. Even the very masculine Russell showed weakness at times. Many female readers appreciated the novel's message of hope—that they could make a difference in the world. But perhaps the impact would have been greater if they could have more readily identified with the heroine.

That was 1863, when there was a new nation to fight for. The message, which resonated through type, ink, and paper, called women to the vanguard of patriotism and called upon them to sacrifice for the cause, declaring the valor and purpose in self-sacrifice (Fahs 129, 131). This message inundated the sporadic journals and newspapers that battled the paper shortage and managed to make it off the press and the home-grown poetry which filled scrapbooks (Fahs 29 -

30). Much of the poetry was written by women, who also created scrapbooks filled with poetry, clippings from newspapers, and other stories of the war (Fahs 29-30). They believed in the war and its call for personal sacrifice. *Macaria* epitomized this message. However, the private and, eventually, the public sentiments of women had begun to shift by 1864, when the novel was published. Faust points out that by mid-1864, the edict of self-sacrifice on the part of women was beginning to be called into question in the daily struggles of real Southern women (“Altars of Sacrifice” 190). With the rising death toll and with the extreme shortages that led women to fear starvation in some cases, some women began to say “enough.” Faust quotes from a letter a woman sent to the Montgomery Daily Advertiser in June 1864: ““Oh what a falling off is there! A change and such a change, has come over the spirit of their dream. The Aid Societies have died away” (qtd. in “Altars of Sacrifice” 190). Women had begun to lose their enthusiasm for supporting the war. Death touched nearly every family. Faust quotes from several diarists, as well, such as Julia Le Grand’s “nothing is worth such sacrifice” and another woman’s “What do I care for patriotism? My husband is my country. What is country to me if he is killed?” (192). As hunger and need mounted, and the death toll from the battlefield and army hospitals rose, sacrifice lost its purpose and nobility. Was any cause worth so much loss? Faust points out that,

By early 1865, countless women of all classes had in effect deserted the ranks. Refusing to accept the economic deprivation further military struggle would have required, resisting additional military service by their husbands and sons, no longer consecrating the dead, but dancing while ambulances rolled by, southern women undermined both objective and ideological foundations for the Confederate effort; they directly subverted the South’s military and economic effectiveness as well as civilian morale (198).

The women became numb to death, and for those women who still had living husbands and sons, many of them wanted the men home, now. There had to be a limit to sacrifice.

Still, others clung to hope that victory could still be theirs or at least that a peace agreement could be reached that would leave them their new country intact. Then came Appomattox and April 9, 1865. Upon hearing of the defeat, Kate Stone, the daughter of an elite planter family, captured the heart cry of many patriotic Southern women, when she wrote in her diary, “Conquered. Submission. Subjugation are words that burn into my heart, and yet I feel we are doomed to know them in all their bitterness. [...] We will be slaves, yes slaves, of the Yankee Government” (Stone 340). There was to be no new country. No freedom. No independence. In Evans’s words, the South was “crushed, mutilated, degraded,” and she felt as if she now had “no country, no house, no hope in coming years” (qtd. in Sexton 109). She was heartbroken. The defeat robbed these women of purpose for all that they had endured. Kate’s words cry out from the diary page: “We could bear the loss of my little brothers when we thought that they’d fallen at the post of duty defending their country, but to know that those glad, bright spirits suffered and toiled in vain, that the end is overwhelming defeat, the thought is unendurable” (Stone 340). The years of sacrifice, the loss of life, all of those deaths seemed to have been for nothing.

In addition to crushing hope and purpose, the war had wrought devastation, destruction, and poverty upon the South. The defeat left them bitter and adrift. One-quarter of the Southern men of military age, aged seventeen to fifty, died in the war, and there was another quarter who were wounded and/or who suffered in prisoner of war camps (Faust, *Mothers* 141; “Altars of Sacrifice” 182). In addition, the devastated economy, in the words of one woman of the era, turned Southern ladies from “social queens” into “mere domestic drudges” (qtd. in Faust,

Mothers 250). Death, through lack of food and medicine and also through overwhelming stress and grief, claimed civilians as well.

Many of the men who survived the war returned home with long-lasting wounds, only some of which were physical. Alcoholism, anger, depression, and other psychological repercussions from battle stress were common, along with illness or suffering from physical war wounds (Faust, *Mothers* 252). Faust writes that the women “had to deal as well with these injured and broken men. For all the pain women had suffered in war, they had not so directly confronted the horrors of four years on the battlefield, nor did they bear the same accountability for failure and defeat. The rehabilitation of southern white men became a central postwar responsibility for Confederate women” (Faust, *Mothers* 254). The Confederacy was broken, and the men who had sacrificed their strength, health, and more for the Cause became the new cause for the women.

The patriarchal system upon which Southern society depended had been rendered dysfunctional. The slave economy was no more. In addition, the provision and protection that women had been raised to expect from men in return for their submission was no longer secure. Women had been left to deal with rebellious slaves and invading Yankees, to try to eek enough subsistence out of the land for survival, and to struggle to clothe and shoe their children. They began to feel that the men were not carrying out their obligations.

As a result, Southern women lost faith in the old system. They, according to Faust, determined to “never be entirely helpless or dependent again” (*Mothers* 251). Gertrude Clanton Thomas was one of these women. She married for romantic love in 1852 to a man “worthy of her love and respect” (Burr 218). However, the war turned her world upside down and exposed weaknesses in her husband and in their relationship. The death of her wealthy, patriarchal father

during the war brought to light the fact that her husband had borrowed large sums of money from her father without her knowledge. This debt, combined with their substantial losses due to war, destroyed their wealth and luxury. Her already-flawed husband never recovered from the war. She learned that “she could no longer depend upon her husband for emotional or financial support” (Burr 228). He drank, gambled, and lost more than they had on bad business deals, while she, the daughter of one of the South’s wealthiest planters, struggled to provide for her family by working as a teacher, writing for the newspaper, and fighting to keep her husband from robbing her children of their future inheritance left in her holding by her father. Raised to be a lady and social belle, she had to apply her intelligence and strength to laboring in order to provide for her family. It was not the life she had imagined for herself, the war changed her husband and her world, and she met the challenge. In her later years, she became a spokeswoman for the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, education reform, prison reform, and women’s suffrage, and she served as president of the Georgia Women Suffrage Association, while her husband played the role of a Confederate veteran, riding his favorite horse in parades (Burr 231). She worked to change the nation while he reenacted patriarchy and entertained crowds. The war and its aftermath helped transform a pampered, charming belle into a strong woman who was more than her husband’s equal. Nevertheless, patriarchy enabled her alcoholic, irresponsible husband to control her money and too much of her future.

However, Faust argues that Southern women were not ready to discard patriarchy. After all, the old order had “defined their importance” and given them “identity and security” (Faust, *Mothers* 247, 122). In addition, there was the “frightening reality of black emancipation” (Faust 247). The “rehabilitation of patriarchy” appeared to be the lesser of evils (Faust, *Mothers* 247). Their post-bellum world was frightening and bleak, and the foundations of their lives had been

shaken. They longed for security. However, analysis of fiction and diaries shows that for some women the support for patriarchy was in show only. In this way, the reality for many Southern women was more convoluted than Faust portrays.

I agree that many women clung to tradition as much as possible and sought to glorify what had been. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, as early as 1866, Augusta Jane Evans was working towards erecting a memorial monument to honor the fallen “noble standard bearers of the Lost Cause!” (Sexton 118). She wanted a place where women could go to pay tribute to those who had paid the ultimate price. Faust concludes, “Female celebrants of the Lost Cause represented women’s effort to make what they regarded as necessary seem once again legitimate. If white men were once again to run the world, southern ladies would struggle to demonstrate the confidence in male superiority that would convince both themselves and others that such a social order was both natural and desirable” (*Mothers* 247). They honored all who had fought for the Confederacy, both the living and the dead, and they wove the story of what had been in to the pattern of the collective culture and glorified the past for generations to come. They sought to persuade themselves, as well as their nation, that the Cause had been glorious and just, the men all honorable and courageous, and the past had been their Eden. This was a political act, a continuation of women’s war work, even as the women simultaneously raised the domestic up as the ideal once again. Evans’s *St. Elmo* epitomized this movement. Women’s war work was not finished, and neither was their conflict. I argue that although many Southern women longed for the past and publicly honored the Cause and the men who had fought, privately many women could not afford to recede back to the confines of the female sphere. They had their families to provide for and broken men with whom to contend. Their post-war support of the Lost Cause was a conflicted stance.

Evans's desire to uphold patriarchy cost her the opportunity to write a Southern history of the Civil War. She was an effective tactician who had discussed battle plans with generals during the war. Writing a history of the war was a project "inexpressibly dear to [her] heart: and one to which she "would gladly have dedicated [her] future years" (Sexton 144). However, she abandoned the plan when she learned that Alexander Stephens, former vice-president of the Confederacy, was working on his own history of the war. Out of respect for patriarchy, she bowed out and "humbly put [her] fingers on the throat of [her] ambitions" (Sexton 144). She had a choice to boldly write a military history, something few if any women had dared before, or to sacrifice her ambition for the sake of honoring the old order and the men who had fought for it. She chose to forsake her dream and ambition for the sake of upholding the code of the Lost Cause.

In *When the Flower Blooms in Winter*, Victoria Ott considers the more personal side of supporting patriarchy and the Lost Cause; this work exemplifies the conflict and sacrifice in women's lives, especially in regards to relationships, beyond the confines of the battlefield and beyond the signing of the treaty at Appomatax. According to Ott, courtship provided another avenue by which "young women could participate in the reconstruction of Southern manhood" (107). Encouraging a lively social atmosphere that resembled past customs worked to bring people's attention back to the continuation of life. Accepting someone as a beau was an act of affirmation. In addition, even after the war, many women realized that they needed to adjust their standards for beaux if they hoped to marry. They came to feel that accepting men who had psychological wounds, such as depression and alcoholism, and physical wounds, such as amputations, was "part of the female burdens of war" (Ott 108). In addition, even after a woman accepted a man as her future husband, a number of couples had to postpone their nuptials out of

economic necessity. The aftermath of war left many men without the means to support a wife (Ott 111).

For some women, their burden would be lifelong spinsterhood or widowhood. There were many Southern women who never married or who did not remarry after the war. According to Susan Barber, in “White Wings of Eros,” by 1870 in Richmond, white women outnumbered white men by 4,600 (126). This reflects the scarcity of potential husbands found throughout the South, leaving a number of women with little choice but to remain a spinster or widow and to work at supporting themselves.

Lucy Buck was one of those women whose marriage prospects were permanently altered by the war. She was nineteen when the war broke out, and her family’s plantation was along a much fought-over corridor between Washington, D.C. and the Shenandoah Valley. Troops and bushwhackers passed through Front Royal, VA on a regular basis, and her family’s home was occupied by the “Yankees” on several occasions. With each occupation, more and more of their structures and supplies disappeared, often within a couple of hours of the soldiers setting up camp. There were a few decent men among the “Yankees” in her opinion, but as a loyal Southerner, she would never consider any of them as a potential beau.

Lucy lavished praise on several Southern men in her diary. One was her cousin, Walter Buck, of whom she writes, “Often we had watched for his coming as for a ray of sunshine and had seen him dash up to the house so fearlessly looking so handsome and graceful, so noble” (203). She expressed her deep sadness over his death in her diary entry for December 31st, 1863:

It seems so lonely—so isolated sitting there waiting for the last few sands to drop from the glass and watching for the burst of another year of trial—even as I watched the advent of the last year—little knowing, little dreaming what that year

the great move of time would sweep from me—how much of life’s brightness it would dim—how it would sweep away to the dim shores of eternity the form of one so dear to us—one of the brightest lights of our darkened days of time (242).

Perhaps this is the man she would have married, if the war had not taken his life.

Many of the young men of her acquaintance did not survive the war, and the last year of the war found her even more distressed. She was too disheartened to write in her diary for months, from September 1864 until February 1865, due to the devastation wrecked up on the valley by the Union troops who were ordered to burn every barn, mill, or semblance of harvest and to confiscate all livestock in order to leave the Shenandoah Valley destitute. A Confederate officer wrote that beneath the cloud of black smoke that permeated the valley, he saw “mothers and maidens tearing their hair and shrieking to heaven in their fright and despair” (Lewis 62). The war ended, but like Irene Huntingdon and Electra Gray, Lucy Buck never married, and neither did her three sisters. This was not the life that they were imagining for themselves at the beginning of war. In April 1862, Lucy wrote, “We shall never any of us be the same as we have been” (50). She wrote that passage before the valley was burned and all hope lost. She had no idea how true her words would prove to be. Unlike Irene and Electra, she did not have a career or public service to replace her loss of the dream of marriage. By April 1865, there was no Confederacy to serve. She had most of her immediate family intact, and she clung to them. The war likely cost her the opportunity to ever marry.

For too many of those who were married, the war robbed them of their spouses. In “Good Angels: Confederate Widowhood in Virginia,” Jennifer Gross found that only a third of the war widows in her study remarried (137). Some chose not to remarry because they could financially afford to be on their own, but many, especially those who had children or who were a

little older, had little choice but to remain single. Gross writes that “A woman’s decision to remarry generally reflected ‘a tangled component of need, opportunity, and desire’” (137). In Barber’s study, as the years passed, widowers were much more likely to marry young, never-married women, sometimes two decades or more younger than themselves, rather than marry widows (127). A woman’s share of the burdens of war could be unending in some cases. In the harsh light of this new order, many women longed for the past and a sense of normalcy. The world of *Macaria* was lost. There was no country for which to sacrifice. They struggled against the fear that their loved ones had died in vain. Glorifying the past and supporting the Lost Cause, despite the realities of the brokenness of the old system, was one way in which to give meaning to those deaths.

It is the past that Evans harkens to in *St. Elmo*, which she began in 1865 and completed in 1866. The war is not directly mentioned in this novel intended for a postbellum audience. However, there is duty, which once again is a strong taskmaster for the heroine, but the setting of this novel is a lush, rich portrait of the antebellum South. The heroine, Edna Earl, is an orphan, adopted into a wealthy Southern family. Her brilliancy is exceeded only by her integrity, and she is determined to make her own way in the world. Consumed with the desire to make a difference in the world, she devotes herself to her writing, eventually becoming a famous, well-respected authoress. Unlike the war-torn *Macaria*, in *St. Elmo* there is no shortage of men (Edna receives marriage offers from three other men in addition to the hero), and the hero, St. Elmo Murray, is a strong, forceful man, the embodiment of patriarchy, who can more than amply provide for and protect the one he loves. He is no Russell Aubrey, who despite struggling with pride, bitterness, and animosity seems to always manage to behave honorably. Bitterness, animosity, and a thirst for vengeance have controlled St. Elmo Murray’s life for two decades. Aubrey was a strong,

capable man who would have taken care of Irene if she would have allowed him to, but he could not overcome the impossible barrier of duty that Irene threw in his way. Like Irene, Edna's sense of duty forbids her to accept the attentions of the man that she loves, St. Elmo. She abhors his dissipated lifestyle and refuses to have anything to do with him, even going so far as fleeing to New York and refusing to return to the South. However, St. Elmo overcomes all barriers. Fully repenting of his sins, he becomes a Christian and eventually a minister, and when he has completed every task, he goes to New York to bring Edna home. In *St. Elmo*, singleness is no longer blessed. The place of an extremely intelligent, talented woman is by the side of her man, supporting, encouraging, and working alongside of him. The public, her adoring fans, can have her no more.

This novel questions duty. Where should a woman's allegiances lie? Should Edna's loyalties lie with the adoring public who begs her to produce more work, or should she devote herself to the man who insists that his very salvation depends on her being his wife? The postwar clash between patriarchy and reality, submission and independence, and adherence to the confines of the female sphere and transgression, lie beneath the pre-war setting and Evans's loyalties to the past.

Edna is a talented woman with few intellectual equals. She delves into ancient languages as easily as if they were sensational novels. She is inordinately ambitious. Her mammoth book, followed by her second, wins her fame and adoration. As her writing career develops, and her influence grows, she seeks to "address herself to the wives, mothers, and daughters of America," declaring their right to be educated and to use their talents and intellect in "woman's divinely limited sphere" (366). She infers that God has ordained a woman's place in the world and set the

boundaries. She, therefore, implies that to transgress the boundaries is much more than violating a social convention or tradition; it is disobeying God.

Edna's desire is to transform her readers' lives, and they inundate her with letters of appreciation. Her words have called husbands back from the "haunts of vice" and mended families in various ways (381). Her ambition drives her on, becoming "necessary for her happiness," and her editor tells her, "The public is a merciless task-master; your own ambition will scourge you on; and having ponce put your hand to the literary plough, you will not be allowed to look back" (434). Her writings make a difference in people's lives. The public needs her, and this deep purpose consumes her.

If this was 1863, the novel could end there, with her singleness and public usefulness established. However, this antebellum-set story was written in 1865, and Evans throws shadows across the horizon of Edna's ambition and devotion to duty, calling her devotion into question. First, there is the problem of her health. She is working herself into an early grave, but she cannot desist. Telling her to "rest was a mockery," writes Evans, because "the tides of thought ebbed and flowed as ceaselessly as those of ocean, and work had become a necessity of her existence" (344). She eventually learns to practice some moderation in her relentless drive to write, yet her heart is still weak, and there are other battles for devotion.

Edna feels betrayed by her emotions. She had always thought that trust and respect were necessary ingredients in love, but she was wrong: "Hitherto she had fancied that she thoroughly understood and sternly governed her heart—that conscience and reason ruled it; but within the past hour it had suddenly risen in dangerous rebellion; thrown off its allegiance to all things else, and insolently proclaimed St. Elmo Murray its king" (167). She prays for the strength to resist St. Elmo's "wicked magnetism" (175), but her love for him cannot be exorcised from her soul.

There is a battle raging within her, but she is determined that duty will win. If she cannot control her inner emotions, she can control their outward display and her behavior.

Like Irene in *Macaria*, Edna claims that she will not marry. She tells her tutor, pastor and close friend Mr. Hammond that “rather than become the wife of a sacrilegious scoffer, such as I know Mr. Murray to be, I will so help me God! Live and work alone, and go down to my grave, Edna Earl!” (262-263). She tells Mrs. Murray that her son is “unworthy of any woman’s confidence and affection” (373). When St. Elmo begs her to be his wife and exclaims that she is his only chance for redemption, she tells him to look to Jesus for his salvation, since she will never be his wife.

She maintains this stance even after St. Elmo begins to follow her advice. Repenting of his past, he finds redemption in his faith in the Lord and in his reconciliation with Mr. Hammond, whom he had so greatly wronged. Edna hears of this, but her duty is clear. There is no place for him in her life this side of the grave. When Mrs. Murray and the seriously ill Mr. Hammond write, begging her to come home, she “put[s] the letter out of sight, and gird[s] herself for a desperate battle, with her famishing heart...above all, to see Mr. Murray’s face to hear his voice once more, oh! The temptation was strong indeed, and the cost of resistance bitter beyond precedent... She sternly denied her starving heart, and instead of bread gave it stones and serpents” (352-53). Time and time again, she struggles to resist this “temptation.” Later, she claims that “nothing can draw [her] from the path of duty” (376). Even when she finally hears that St. Elmo has become an ordained minister, she rejoices over the news, but continues to avoid returning home, even though Mr. Hammond is now gravely ill. Total devotion to duty is a negative force in this novel.

Furthermore, as the conclusion of the novel rapidly approaches, the reader is left to wonder, if Edna, like Irene, will go to her grave with her maiden name, living her life dedicated to single-blessedness, pouring herself out for the many who need her. But this novel is not, like *Macaria*, a call to public sacrifice. Duty to the nation is not demanded because the nation, at the time of Evans's writing of the novel, is in ruins. Duty to God is the over-riding directive, and if God says, "Judge not, lest ye be judged," who is Edna Earl to say otherwise (396)? In the post-bellum world, there is duty to God, and then there is the home. An educated, talented woman can make a difference in the world, but her ultimate place is with the man she loves. Ironically, even though it appears that Evans is calling for a return to the prioritizing of the private over the public, in privileging a woman's duty to her husband, Evans is advocating for supporting the public affirmation of patriarchy. Having fulfilled his heroic quest to find salvation, St. Elmo comes to New York, and at last Edna forgives, trusts, and opens her heart. Her new calling will be to serve him. The domestic ideal is upheld.

During the wedding ceremony, Edna's weak heart cannot stand the strain. She loses consciousness in the midst of their vows. Some scholars, such as Karen Tracey and others, contend that this is an indication of her resistance to giving up her career for marriage. But it is after the vows and after St. Elmo proclaims to his frail wife, "Today I snap the fetters of your literary bondage. There shall be no more books written!... And that dear public you love so well, must even help itself, and whistle for a new pet. You belong solely to me now, and I shall take care of the life you have nearly destroyed in your inordinate ambition" (443-444) that Evans writes, "Edna felt as if her heart could not hold all of its measureless joy" (444). Edna willingly sacrifices her career in order to spend her life with the man she loves and who loves her. Hearth and home are the idealized priority in this novel: a woman's duty is to the man she loves.

Evans indicates that Edna's heart has triumphed over her ambition. Her allegiance is to her husband. In the spirit of True Womanhood, she concludes, "To be his companion through all the remaining years of their earthly pilgrimage, to be allowed to help and love him, to walk heavenward with her hand in his; this—this was the crowning glory and richest blessing of her life" (444). It may be difficult for a modern reader to comprehend how an intelligent woman could cast aside her life's work in such a manner, but I contend that our disbelief is an intrusion of post-nineteenth century culture. Evans wrote a fantasy connecting with the dreams of many women in the post-bellum South who had spent the war years carrying the burden of fending for themselves, their families, and in some cases plantations, without assistance from their supposed providers and protectors and who were tired of carrying the burden alone. Through the novel, she transports the reader back to an ideal time when poverty could be overcome with determination and intelligence, when there were plenty of men to choose from, and when a woman could fulfill her domestic ideal with a man worthy of her admiration. It is such a fantasy in which the once-wealthy diarist Gertrude Thomas might wish to indulge even as she scorned the system that left her dissipated husband master over her life and property. Evans offered escape to women who were scraping by, worrying about losing land and home for taxes, women whose husbands and beaux might not have survived the war or who had returned never to be the same again. In some ways, *St. Elmo* was no less political than *Macaria*. It glorified the South as it had been, or at least as it had been in upper-class memory. Whether she realized it or not, *St. Elmo* was very likely Evans's most substantial contribution to shaping the national perception of the antebellum South.

In 1866, many wives in the South, like Gertrude Thomas, had to work the land or work as teachers and other professions outside of the home because in the ruined economy husbands could often not provide for their families on their own. Lush, ornate plantations were gone. Many

single and widowed women wondered if they would go to their graves single. And the men who were left were often broken and in need of forgiveness and redemption. The sacrifices had already been made. Now, it was time to live, to love and marry, to set up a home, to bear children, and to seek normalcy.

This drive to live a normal life and the sense of impermanency created by the war affected the decision to marry during the war, as well, in the lives of real women. *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone* provides an excellent opportunity to examine the marriage decisions and the marriage opportunities of a number of young, upper class, Southern women during the war. In the spring of 1861, when the diary begins, Kate was twenty years old and lived with her family on Brokenburn, a large plantation with 150 slaves near the Mississippi River in northern Louisiana. The plantation was owned and managed by her mother, which was an unusual occurrence before the war. The crop of 1861 was supposed to help them make the last payment on the plantation, and it was to be theirs free and clear, but then war broke out (Stone 11). By 1865, the plantation was flooded, barren and in disrepair, and two of her brothers, one of her uncles, and numerous friends and relatives were dead. The war changed Kate's life forever.

In addition to robbing her of loved ones and of removing her from a life of wealth into a life of poverty, the war affected the courtship patterns and marriage decisions of Kate and other young women of her kin and/or acquaintance. The proximity of troops determined a young lady's courtship opportunity. Kate suffered from a shortage of male callers during the early years of the war, until her family immigrated to Texas as refugees, but she took full advantage of opportunities when they arose. Most of the young women mentioned in the diary reacted to the war by either engaging in numerous, light-hearted courtships, when there were men available, or

by quickly moving into marriage. However, Kate did not marry until 1869, at age twenty-nine, even though many of her friends chose to marry during the war.

There were months during the war when the only available gentlemen callers were much older men or boys too young to fight. This scarcity of men affected much of the South, especially the rural areas. At one point, Kate bemoaned, “It is a strange and lamentable fact that all the bald, middle-aged bachelor doctors take a fancy to me” (333). Kate was of marriageable age, well-educated, and from an elite family. The early 1860’s would have been the golden era of her belle days if it were not for the war. When men came home on leave or when troops were stationed nearby, Kate, along with other young women of the South, learned to savor the opportunities, provided the men were Confederates, not Yankees.

The war, especially in the South, made the impermanency of life all too clear. A soldier home on furlough might be dead within days of returning to the front. A number of young men and women felt that under such circumstances that long, serious courtships were out of place. Kate reacted in surprise when her mother took her flirtations seriously:

I thought she understood the point of view of most girls. One must not distress a soldier by saying No when he is on furlough. They have enough to bear. They may be going back to sudden death. Then they will most probably forget you for a sweetheart at the next camp, or their love will grow cool by the time you meet again. So it is just a piece of amusement on both sides (345).

For Kate and a number of others, “love” during the war took on a new nature, as changeable as the circumstances of their lives. Kate understood that the public war impacted the private arena of courtship and vice versa. Flirtations and easy courtship were seen as ways to boost the morale of the soldiers. In addition, the war affected the depth of feeling between potential lovers. At the

end of the war, Kate and one of her close friends conclude that “girls would all have to change their war customs, stop flirting, and only engage themselves when they really meant something. The days of lightly-won and lightly-held hearts should be over” (354). Kate expected that courtship and thereby the decision to marry would return to traditional constraints and expectations. But would it? By the time Kate returned to her family’s devastated plantation, the full grief and bitterness over defeat left little room in her heart or life any consideration of courtship, light-hearted or otherwise, for an extended period of time.

Kate’s wartime romances left memories, but many of her friends and relatives were left with lifetime consequences, for better or for worse, because they hurried into marriages in the face of the uncertainty of war. For example, Kate’s cousin Titia married her fiancé unexpectedly when he came home on leave (94). Then there was the colonel who fell in love with the girl who had nursed him for three weeks, and Kate’s friend, Mary Gustine, who married a widower whom she had only known for six weeks (140, 222). In addition, Kate tells of a huckster who went from town to town pretending to be a wealthy planter and a colonel and marrying a girl in nearly every town that he visited (117). One of Kate’s friends married a young man several years younger than her, and a couple of Kate’s uncles married young women approximately two decades younger than them (264, 74, 304). Finally, Kate’s friend, Kate Nailor, who had been engaged to Kate’s brother William for several years, regretted her wartime marriage decision. Kate and William had a disagreement, and the distance created by the war only widened the gap between them. Within a few months, Nailor acquiesced to her parent’s wishes that she marry a wealthy man whom she did not love (105). She was not happy and died in childbirth before the end of the war. These examples substantiate the trend noted by Faust and Ott, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. The war spurred some women to hurry into marriage and to consider men significantly

older than them or younger than them, perhaps driven by a combination of the desire to live and love while there was still life and the fear that there would be few available men left by the end of the war.

Kate did eventually marry. She did not have the iron drive towards duty and public sacrifice that Irene Huntington possessed. Kate cared for the South, and she encouraged and supported her brothers in their decisions for fight for the Confederacy. She felt that she had sacrificed them for the Cause, but she was not willing to forgo love and courting in order to dedicate herself to service, as Irene did. And she had no career, as Edna Earl did, to offer her a viable alternative to a husband. Kate met her husband-to-be in in the late winter of 1865 while she was a refugee in Tyler, Texas. He was one of the supposedly light-flirtations of which she wrote. Lt. Holmes was considered to be “fast,” and Kate was warned by others not to allow him to visit, but when he called with someone else, Kate discovered that he was “full of life and fun” (322). He quickly became a regular visitor at the Stone household. However, Kate worried about his drinking and feared that he was too dissipated to be considered as a potential husband. Like St. Elmo, Holmes on several occasions attempted to persuade Kate that she could reform him by marrying him. Like Edna Earl, Kate refused. But this did not prevent her from enjoying his close friendship. When rumors spread of their engagement, she responded, “When two people are as much together, such reports will arise and it does no good to tell them, as we do, that there is no engagement. Have not an idea of marrying him or anyone else. We are friends, nothing more” (338). The end of the war brought an end to their keeping company. Slowly the troops were discharged and sent home. On the day that Holmes left, Kate depersonalized the emotion in her diary entry by using “we” instead of “I,” but her sadness can still be felt in the words:

How quiet and deserted the house is since they all left. . . . Yesterday Lt. Dupre and Lt. Holmes—plain “Mr.” after this—said good-bye to us. How much we miss them. I wonder will it be the same when we meet Lt. Holmes again after five months of separation. He wishes to correspond but it is better not. The only tokens exchanged were geranium leaves. Which will be treasured longest? He has been perfectly sober for two months and has made many good resolutions which we trust he will keep, even though we never meet again. We have seen him every day but three for three months, and we miss him dreadfully now he has gone forever (348).

They did meet again six months later when Kate was visiting near Shreveport. Holmes was handsomer than ever, but he had returned to drinking. Once again he proposed and offered Kate the chance to “reform” him, but she once again refused, referring to it as “[a] dreadful risk for any woman” (367). Nevertheless, seeing Holmes during that visit was a bright spot of Kate’s year. There seems to have been a similar conflicted attraction between Kate and Holmes as there was between Edna and St. Elmo.

That was the last entry in her diary until September 1867, almost two years later. They were years of hard work and hardships. Her family borrowed and invested everything into planting, only to have flooding and worms destroy it all. Many of their neighbors suffered similar hardships, and in the middle of their misery, they started to socialize once more. When Kate refused to participate, her mother forced her: “I would not go at first. I felt like I did not want to see anybody or ever dance again. I felt fully forty years old, but Mamma made me go after a good cry. Once there, I was compelled to exert myself, and soon I was enjoying it all. The burden of the years slipped from my shoulders, and I was young again. It was pleasant to talk

nonsense, to be flattered though one knew it was flattery, and to complimented and fussed over” (369). She slowly learned to enjoy life again, despite the poverty brought on by the war. Her diary ended in 1868 on a positive note that the future looked brighter than it had for three years, but it stopped too soon, before the reader could learn whether or not she married.

The last entry does not include any reference to Holmes. However, records indicate that Kate married Lt. (Mr.) Holmes in December 1869 (Anderson 367), but the reader is left to wonder if he, like St. Elmo, reformed prior to his marriage, or if Kate finally gave in to his pleas to reform him through marriage. However, they were married for over thirty-eight years, until her death in 1907. He managed a plantation for years before becoming a sheriff and eventually owning a plantation again in his later years. She became a community leader and “one of the town’s most esteemed citizens” (Anderson xxviii). In Kate’s case, the war seems to have temporarily altered her courting patterns and most likely delayed her marriage by several years. How her wartime experiences affected her marriage relationship, and her role within that marriage is unknown; however, the plantation-born Holmes and she would not share a world of luxury. Her family lost Brokenburn, and life was a struggle. It was not the lush world of Edna Earl, and Kate did not have a career, but Kate chose to marry her all too human and flawed “St. Elmo.” The newly married couple would have to work together to survive in the post-war South.

Love as a Prerequisite

Kate and Holmes married for love, as did many women of the era. Surprisingly, despite Evans’s strong advocacy for women’s education and independence and ability to make a meaningful contribution to society without marriage and bearing children, she insists that romantic love is an absolute prerequisite for marriage. This places her more in line with Rothman and Lystra’s theories on the role that romantic love played in the decision to marry by the mid-

nineteenth century than with Margaret Fuller's thoughts on equitable marriages expressed in "The Great Lawsuit." Writing twenty years before the war, Fuller championed marriage as a "union of souls," but she contended that this blending of selves is fostered through intellectual or spiritual connections, not necessarily love (762). Romance does not enter into her description of equitable marriages (766).

In *Macaria* and *St. Elmo*, intellectual and spiritual compatibility and connection are not enough basis for forming a marriage. Irene rejects Harry Young's proposal even though she is lonely and lacking purpose and knew that life with him would offer "[t]he strong, holy, manly love, the noble heart and head to guide her, the firm tender hand to support her, the constant, congenial, and delightful companionship" (239). She could not marry him because she did not love him. In the same novel, Electra Gray rejects her benefactor and mentor, Mr. Clifton, because she does not love him and common interests, talents, and gratitude are not sufficient grounds for forming a marriage. In *St. Elmo*, Edna turns down a fellow student, the amiable Gordon Leigh, her editor, Mr. Manning, and the wealthy and cultured Sir Roger Percival. All three of these men admire her greatly, but Mr. Manning is her intellectual equal and superior in wisdom and experience. He would best fit the criteria for a Fuller's "union of souls" (762), but Edna declines his offer of marriage despite the fact that "his society had become necessary for her peace of mind" and her "reverence and admiration" of him are "almost boundless" (336, 337). Once again, the protagonist refuses because she does not love the suitor despite their similar pursuits, tastes, and aspirations. According to Evans, a marriage without mutual love is a sacrilege. Romantic love does not always lead to marriage in her novels because, contrary to the preeminence of love found in Lystra and Rothman's studies of the era, duty trumps all in Evans's novels. On the other hand, no marriage should take place without love.

Evans champions romantic love as an essential element in the decision to marry despite her politicization of this personal decision. Women can be competent and useful outside of marriage. They do not need to marry in order to have purpose. But if they do choose to marry it must be a marriage sanctioned by love. However, love is not the final deciding factor in the novels. The heroines may only give into their love and give themselves in matrimony as long as it does not conflict with their moral duty. Irene Huntingdon did not marry Russell Aubrey because it conflicted with her sense of filial duty. Edna Earl could not marry St. Elmo until he reformed because it conflicted with her duty to God. Marriage is not essential, but duty is.

Evans's own personal thoughts about marriage are reflected in her letters. In 1859, Evans was in New York City as a newly established author, not unlike Edna Earl. She met an editor, James Reed Spaulding, fell in love, and agreed to a tentative engagement before she left New York. However, the impending war and the great political divide between North and South intervened, and she broke off the engagement during the fall of 1860 (Sexton 23-24). Duty overruled romantic feelings. Ending her relationship with her fiance was one of her first sacrifices for the Cause. Even before the engagement was broken, she protested to a friend, "I shall live and die, Augusta Evans" (Sexton 14), a declaration repeated by both Irene and Edna, inserting their own names in place of hers. Evans worked through the war, determined to make a substantial contribution to the cause. Her novel *Macaria* was considered to be so subversive that Union General George Thomas called the novel "dangerous" and had any copies in possession by his troops "confiscated and burned" (Hubbell 611). However, after the war ended, the personal once again took precedence over the nation. Evans retreated from her bold stance for autonomy in her novel *St. Elmo*, which according to some sources became the second best-selling novel of the nineteenth century, and despite her words that she would go to her grave as

Augusta Evans, in 1868 she married a wealthy neighbor, Colonel Lorenzo Wilson, who was twenty-seven years her senior (Sexton xxvii). Unlike Edna, she did not cease to write, but her writing productivity definitely decreased significantly. One can hypothesize that she married for love, after her strong declarations in both *Macaria* and *St. Elmo* that to marry without love was a sin against God, but we can only guess at her true feelings. Wilson was wealthy, but so was Evans by this time. She did not need to marry for money. We are left to wonder to what extent she followed in the footsteps of her heroine, Edna Earl.

In the diaries and letters of other women of the time, duty does not usually appear as a hindrance to love as it does for Irene Huntingdon in *Macaria*. All of the women examined in this chapter supported the Southern cause, but for many that was not seen as a deterrent to pursuing marriage. None of the diarists and letter writers, except for Evans herself, purposefully set out not to marry. As the war went on, they struggled with the hardships of survival and the loss of loved ones, but most of them still cherished the thought of marrying someday, and many of them did.

Love seemed to be a necessity for many of the women diarists in making the decision to marry. Anna Greene, a diarist, captured the sentiments of many young women when she wrote, “In courting me, the argument that shall win must be I love you” (qtd. in Ott 93). In Ott’s review of numerous diaries, she concluded that although older women and widows were in a hurry to marry during the war, partially in fear of there not being enough men available, only eight percent of the young women in her study (those who were between the ages of twelve and eighteen at the beginning of the war) married before the end of the war (92). The older single women or widows were also more likely to be willing to settle for less than romantic love in choosing a mate during the war. The younger women were more willing to wait for love, even if

it meant never marrying (93). The percentage of women marrying during the war, as found in Ott's research, does not match the anecdotal results discussed in Kate Stone's diary and other sources. But Ott concentrated on adolescents, and it is likely that they would not have been in as much hurry to marry as twenty-something year-old women who felt that they were on the verge of becoming old maids. According to Susan Barber, in "The White Wings of Eros," historical patterns indicate "a flurry of hastily arranged unions" in areas where the men were getting ready to depart for the battlefield followed by "long periods of marital drought" (120). Her study found that in large war centers, like Richmond, which was flooded with an abundance of men during the war, the marriage age remained steady, despite the impression that there was a "marriage frenzy" (Barber 121, 119). Barber concludes that it only appeared that Richmond was flooded with weddings because of the great number of soldiers and male government workers in the city during the war.

The diary of Kate Sperry of Winchester, VA provides insight into the convoluted mixture of emotions and priorities that often went into the decision to marry during the war. Winchester was a crossroads of war activity, and Kate, who turned eighteen in April 1861, enjoyed a stream of gentleman callers in the early months of the war before the troops marched off for Manassas in July 1861. Among her beau at the time was Dr. E. Newton Hunt, a widowed doctor from Mississippi who was several years older than Kate, of whom she wrote, "I've half a notion to tumble in love with him" (44). However, the contest for Kate's hand had only just begun. Kate was far from deciding whom she really loved and even farther from deciding whom she would marry. She kept a list, and by the middle of the war, she had added almost a dozen names to it.

In June 1862, Kate met John Strurman, another major contender for her heart. By her own admission, he was her first love. Through the end of June and July, the two appeared to become almost inseparable, going on walks, visiting in the parlor, reading poetry, and having fun (52, 53). During the war, a man only had a brief amount of time in which to make an impression up a girl. It is likely that their relationships became intense in a quicker amount of time due to the realities of war, which simultaneously nudged them together and wedged them apart. She pined away for Strurman for two months after his regiment pulled out of the area (54). Meanwhile, Hunt had been conducting a letter-writing campaign to win Kate's affections (54). However, at this point, in Kate's opinion, Hunt was just one of the many flatterers who sought to pass their time by writing to a girl they met on the way to war (56). She was still thinking of Strurman.

However, when Hunt and several other beaux called on her, in 1862, when their units moved through Winchester, Kate's opinion of him improved, and she wrote that she liked Hunt better than any of the new gentlemen. She goes on to say, "He was dressed to kill and had a darkey hold his horse—put on more airs" (56). Displaying his mastery of himself, his slave, and his property (his horse), Hunt appeared to fulfill the patriarchal ideal in Southern culture. In addition, he was a doctor and a plantation owner. His maturity, strength, and power commanded her admiration. This was the last time that she would see him for two years, two years in which he eventually surpassed all of the other contenders for Kate's hand. In the war-torn South, where property, home, family, and life could be lost unexpectedly, a man who offered security would likely outshine all other suitors. The war had a strong impact on the decision of whom to marry, especially in the South.

But Hunt had not won Kate's loyalty yet, and she continued in light-hearted courtships with eligible officers stationed in Winchester. Meanwhile, as the months passed, she wondered if

she would ever find the man for her. On April 30, 1863, she wrote, “Today’s my birthday—20 years old—already begin to feel antiquated—if I keep on I’ll be an old maid.” Kate cared about the Confederate cause. She smuggled messages and letters across enemy lines. She worked to care for the sick. She would not think of even looking at any of the Yankees as a potential beau. However, her primary concern, unlike the fictional Irene and Edna, became increasingly about her future and who and if she would marry.

In September 1863, she informally accepted Hunt as her fiancé (65). It had been almost a year since she had seen him, and that was more than a year since she had previously seen him. All and all, they had spent little time together, but the persuasive power of his letters was strong. The daring young men on horseback could not compete with a steady, intelligent man who knows how to communicate the depth of his feelings with the written word. According to the editorial notes that accompany the diary, by early 1864, “Kate’s greatest comfort had become her correspondence with Dr. Hunt” (67). On February 27th, she received Hunt’s formal proposal. Kate responded, “I’m most afraid to say yes and don’t want to say no—either must be said, and he certainly thinks I love him—I do think of him more than anyone else, but ask myself the question, ‘Wilt it last?’ ” (67). Marriage is a lifetime commitment, and it would change her life forever. She might never see her family again. She would likely move to Mississippi, his home, far away from northern Virginia, and she would become the wife of a doctor. That would be her new identity, her new world, just as St. Elmo’s identity and world became Edna’s. But despite Kate’s uncertainty, she wrote Hunt the next day accepting his offer.

When John Sturman finally made it back to the Shenandoah Valley in June 1864, Kate decided not to visit him. She had made her choice, and she now realized, “It would have been impossible for me to have married him. John is too wild, too dissipated for me—my first love,

whew” (69). Like the fictional Edna Earl and the real life Kate Stone, she had grave concerns about marrying a man who could not or would not control his wild behavior. She chose not to base her life’s fate on rash emotions.

However, in the topsy-turvy world of the war, Kate was not as certain as she proclaimed. She still harbored doubts and was still pursued by others until she traveled to Goldsboro, NC to see Dr. Hunt for the first time in two years. But her uncertainty soon evaporated, and they married within less than two months of her arrival. A month after the wedding, Kate wrote, “I love him so much—sometimes I’m afraid its wicked of me to idolize him as I do—but cannot help it—all the love in my nature is his” (73). Her diary indicated no regrets. After the war, the couple moved to Hunt’s home in Mississippi. A ruined plantation and struggle awaited them there. Yet on their first anniversary, she wrote, “I still think I have the best husband in the world” (75).

In addition to Kate’s marriage, during the course of the diary record, Kate’s sister, Mary Anna, married a widower with several children, and Kate’s friend, Jo, married an older man from a well-established family. Kate’s younger sister, Jennie, eventually joined her in Mississippi and married a doctor. In each of these cases, financial security, in the midst of the insecurity of the war and years that followed, appears to have reinforced a decision made by love and perhaps gave the suitor an edge over those who appeared to be more of a risk, either in regards to behavior, steadfastness, or finances. In the fiction, financial security was not an issue. Evans was creating an antebellum fantasy for her post-bellum readers, readers who knew poverty in the aftermath of war. Russell Aubrey, although poor as a youth, became a successful lawyer and politician, and St. Elmo was wealthy from birth, so the heroines do not have to be concerned if

their lover could provide for them. The heroes, accepted or not, offered both love and security, a rare combination for Evans's readers.

The war created uncertainty in regards to the decision to marry and challenged assumptions. Finding a husband was a far more doubtful proposition, and the decision of whom to marry was suddenly much riskier. How could a man marry if he could not support a wife or provide a home? Some of the young women and couples who chose to wait or who had to wait due to a lack of opportunity until the end of the war had years to wait beyond the return of the troops, until the man in question could establish himself enough to provide support, and some young women, in a break with the past, had to work outside of the home in order to assist their husbands with this task. But unlike the fictional Irene and Edna, the women diarists wanted to marry, despite the difficulties. Finally, unlike *Macaria*, the diarists, who all had a strong sense of patriotism, did not view duty to the nation as an obstruction to marriage. The nation was not their life.

Effects on Existing Marriages

However, the effects of the war in regards to marriage are not limited to the moment and process of the decision to marry. There is also the question of how the war affected the relationships of those who were already married. Many women had had to fend for themselves while the men were away by providing their own support, caring for families, and in a number of cases, dealing with invaders. Did the war-instigated independence and responsibility carve the way for more equitable marriages when the men returned home from the battlefield?

In her fiction, Evans does not directly explore this topic. In *Macaria*, Irene is a strong woman who makes her own decisions. She is in charge of her relationship with every man she meets, except for her father in regards to his hatred for Russell. It is difficult to imagine that she

would really have been a submissive partner to Russell or anyone else if she had chosen to marry. In the case of *St. Elmo*, a postbellum novel written with an antebellum setting, the war has not yet begun within the confines of the fiction, but the war could not help but be an influence on Evans's writing. Anne Sexton argues that by the end of the *St. Elmo*, "the changes in both characters indicate not a dominance of one over another but a mutual need for each other" (xxvi). Sexton concludes that Edna's marriage will be more of a marriage of equals than most nineteenth century marriages (xxvi). Nina Baym concludes in her study of women's fiction, including *St. Elmo*, that marriage to a hero who is a minister provides opportunities for the heroine to participate in a hero's profession and life to a greater degree than the wives of men of other professions (41). However, Drew Gilpin Faust, in *Mothers of Invention*, and Karen Tracey, in *Plots and Proposals*, argue that Evans cuts off Edna's writing career and marries her off to St. Elmo in order to contain the transgression (Faust 175; Tracey 105). In addition, Tracey feels that Evans could not lay the groundwork for an equalitarian marriage without threatening the patriarchal hierarchy of the South (105). Based on my reading of the novel and of Evans's biography, I believe that Edna Earl's marriage to St. Elmo will be companionate and that she will work alongside of him in his vocation. He is a minister by the end of the novel, and Edna will work alongside of him doing God's work. St Elmo "consecrate[es] their lives to the service of Jesus Christ," and Edna rejoices at the opportunity to "be his companion" and to "be allowed to help him" in life (444). However, there is no room for her individual career, and although her intelligence is equal to his, he will be master of the house. Edna is a talented, capable woman who has earned her own wealth, but her independence and mastery must be sacrificed for the sake of the wounded South and the wounded men who defended the Confederacy, sacrificed in Evans's effort to glorify patriarchy in support of the fledgling Lost Cause. In the Civil War and

Reconstruction-era South, the movement towards women's independence and rights was not a uniform, uninterrupted progression. Evans's novels express a convoluted path from bold autonomy to sentimental retreat. As a supporter and an instigator of the Lost Cause, Evans's new cause was to glorify the past and the men who fought for it. She offers a dream-tinted memory, a return to a world of plenty when patriarchy was strong. Edna is a capable woman who sacrificed her career for love and security.

In real women's lives, the public support of patriarchy masked continued transgressions of gender expectations. A number of case studies examine the effects of the war on individual marriages as revealed in diaries and letters of Southern women. In some cases, historians extrapolate the residual effects of the war upon the relationship as the couple moves forward to reclaim some semblance of stability and united life in a post-bellum world, but in other cases there is evidence of a lasting equality and gender role shift.

The marriage of Henry and Virginia Clayton, for instance, provides an excellent example of how the war transformed a marriage. In "Power, Sex, and Gender Roles," Henry Walker offers evidence of a marriage wherein gender roles appear to have been permanently altered by the war. The Claytons were a prominent Alabama family of the planter class. Before the war, Henry and Virginia Clayton's marriage was a "partnership but an unequal one" (178). Virginia deferred to Henry, who in turn was ruled by his autocratic father, Nelson. When war broke out, Henry was appointed colonel and commander of all troops from Alabama and all troops stationed in Pensacola, Florida; by the end of the war he was a major general.

The first alteration that the war brought to their marriage was that it gave Virginia control over their sex life (180). Henry could not leave his post, so he would write imploring Virginia to come visit him at camp. She came on several occasions, but the decision to come or not and how

long to stay ultimately rested in her hands. By 1862, she argued that her time must be devoted to managing the plantation and their five children, regardless of her own desire to see her husband (180-81).

However, at this point, he did not view her as vital to the running of the plantation. He gave her “detailed orders about how to raise the crops” and seemed to view her, in regards to the management, as “little more than a conduit through which his instructions flowed” (181). He relied upon his father, Nelson, to spend extended periods of time at the plantation and to help with the management. This must have been galling to an independent-minded woman like Virginia, who resented her father-in-law’s interference in the life of her family. Steeped in tradition, her husband continued to view her as “incapable of such responsibility” (181).

Henry was just one of many husbands who could not imagine that their wife could manage the plantation or homestead without the supervision of a white male. Kate McClure’s husband, William, had the same difficulty. Joan Cashin’s “Since the War Broke Out: The Marriage of Kate and William McLure” examines the power struggle in their marriage. William McClure was a young South Carolina merchant who eventually inherited wealth and became a planter (201). In 1852, he fell in love with Northern-raised Kate Poulton. The shy, passive young woman did not appear to be enthusiastic about his proposal, but in the end, she accepted it and came to love her husband (Cashin 203). They had been married nine years by the time the war began. The war then transformed their marriage.

After he enlisted, William, like Henry Clayton, attempted to manage his plantation from afar. William attempted to do this through the use of overseers and male relatives. However, the overseers and relatives proved to be inept, and that, combined with William’s habit of writing instructions in his letters to Kate for her to pass on to the overseer, contributed to a power

struggle on the plantation between Kate and the overseers, with Kate partnering with Jim, one of their slaves, in order to keep the plantation productive (Cashin 204). Just like Henry Clayton, William McClure appeared to be “incapable of imagining that his wife could run the plantation unassisted” (Cashin 207). This was the typical patriarchal mindset before the war, and even in the midst of harsh necessity, it was slow to change. As for Virginia and Kate, they were not seeking to transform womanhood or the South; they merely saw their duty to their families and dependents and insisted upon exercising the freedom and authority required to do their duty well. This was incomprehensible to their husbands.

In the case of the Claytons, however, that began to alter in early 1863 when Henry’s only brother and close confidant, Joseph, died from battle wounds. The family’s grief opened simmering wounds which eroded the already strained relationships that Henry had with his parents. He had no one but his wife, his partner of years, in which to turn. Now he, as evidenced in their letters, began to share his “weaknesses and fears” with her (183). He no longer had to or could maintain the façade of the strong patriarch who feared nothing. Virginia became “the person to whom her husband looked for guidance, and together they began to assume joint leadership within the family” (183). She eventually assumed control of the plantation, and Henry began to defer to her wishes in other matters, as well (184).

William McClure, on the other hand, did not readily admit to any limitations of patriarchy and struggled to maintain control of his plantation through his own letters and his overseers. But by 1864, Kate and Jeff were acting independent of the overseer, and Kate was going against her husband’s instructions regarding the plantation (209). By the last few months of the war, she ran the plantation on her own with Jeff’s help. (211). In the power struggle at Oakwood plantation during those years, Kate broke “the ranks of solidarity and allied herself

with her slaves against her white overseers, her white relatives, and when necessary, against her husband” (Cashin 211). She was no longer the meek, shy girl who had given into William’s marriage proposal in 1852. She was a woman who was willing and capable of working hard and of taking action in order to provide for her family and the slaves, whose care was entrusted to her. With the war acting as a catalyst, Kate developed a more assertive personality, not unlike the personality of Irene Huntington. The shift in gender boundaries and power was a much smoother and mutually agreed upon transition in the Clayton marriage than the contested battle that occurred in the McClure marriage.

Eventually the war ended, but the Clayton’s marriage had been permanently altered. Virginia had become Henry’s close friend and confidant, a full partner, in addition to being his wife. Virginia continued managing the plantation, and her doing so enabled Henry to pursue a career as a circuit judge. In addition, as the years passed, they encouraged their two daughters to pursue their education and to be wise managers of their finances. Their goal, as stated to one daughter, was to “see you be a very useful, good woman someday” (Clayton qtd. in Walker 186). There was more to raising a daughter than helping her pursue a good marriage partner. Henry and Virginia learned from their wartime experiences that women were capable of contributions, purpose, and success beyond their designated domestic roles. Despite the postwar renewed glorification of patriarchy, to which Evans’s contributes in the conclusion of *St. Elmo*, the Claytons were not stepping back into the past, neither in their own marriage or in the future for which they were preparing their daughter. The war had taught them that marriage should be about partnership, not dependency and lordship.

In regards to the McClures, one is left to wonder to what extent Kate’s transgressions continued after the return of her husband in the late spring of 1865. Cashin does not take a

position on this issue. However, it is difficult to imagine that their lives could have returned to the patterns that existed prior to 1861. By 1865, Kate knew that she was capable of managing the plantation, and she had proven it, but William seemed to still view her as a girl in need of being protected. By 1865, Kate was a woman who was not afraid to speak her mind to her husband. Her anger in her letters over the renewing of the overseer's contract and her instance upon disregarding her husband's instructions on the management of the plantation prove this. In addition, there were her angry letters over her husband hiring a free black woman as a cook (Cashin 206). It is difficult to believe that her invigorated self-confidence and newly developed ability to assert herself would not alter their marriage. I argue that even if she retreated back across the threshold into the interior of domesticity, the knowledge of her transgressions and what she had accomplished as well as the confidence gained thereby could not be vanquished. The incongruence of William's image of Kate and Kate's image of herself could not have helped but lead to conflict, perhaps erupting in major battles between them or perhaps in a thousand small moments of decision. The war had refined and strengthened Kate's character, just as it had Irene's and Electra's in *Macaria*, and the effects of those war experiences could not have been completely contained by any outward return to tradition.

Another case study indicates that the war clearly shifted the balance of power in the marriage relationship between Clement Claiborne Clay and Virginia Tunstall Clay. Clement, a lawyer from an elite family, held much political promise at the time that he married Virginia. Virginia was a socialite when Clement married her, and she remained a belle for her entire life, relishing in her ability to charm men (Bleser and Heath 136). According to Bleser and Heath in "The Clays of Alabama," the marriage was a love match (138). He appeared to love her deeply despite her flirtatious nature, and they both rejoiced when he won a U.S. Senate seat in 1853

(139, 141). Virginia exulted in the Washington social life, but their lives focused on Clement's career. During most of the war, Clement served in the Confederate Senate, and Virginia continued to do her best to continue living as a social belle.

However, their reactions to the final defeat firmly transformed their roles and relationship within their marriage. Clement was arrested at the end of the war and was accused of treason, inciting raids from Canada, conspiring to assassinate Lincoln, and germ warfare. He slipped into despair as he sat in prison, while his wife borrowed money for a trip to Washington and a new dress and went to petition President Johnson for her husband's release, which she was eventually successful in procuring. She was his "rescuer" (Bleser and Heath 148). This placed her more in the role of the protector than being the protected and set the tone for their remaining years of marriage.

In the years following the war, Clement and Virginia sold most of their property to pay off debt and moved to a cottage. Clement turned to farming. This was a tremendous step down from their previous affluence and power. Clement never fully recovered. In the years following the war, he "retreated to the farm, to the bottle, to ill health, and to gloomy thoughts" (152). Virginia refused to give way to despair and told her husband that "it is not my style to die in advance of death's summons" (150). She refused to accept that they would be forever downtrodden. She persuaded men to loan them money. She also persuaded her husband to fix up a room for her in the office building he owned in Huntsville, so that she could visit the city often, instead of being stuck in the country on the farm, and she managed to visit relatives in distant cities (149). Clement might have been defeated by the war, but Virginia triumphed over all obstacles and made the best of her reduced circumstances. She remained married to him until his

death in 1882, but her marriage and her husband had ceased being the focus of her identity for years before that.

The women in these studies did not indicate the willingness to submit to patriarchy that Edna Earl does at the end of *St. Elmo*. Any outward show of support for the Lost Cause and patriarchy did not reflect the changed reality in their homes. The war propelled changes in both themselves and their husbands that would not allow them to fit neatly back into the pre-war spheres.

However, some women struggled with the transgression and transformation forced upon them by the war, like *St. Elmo*'s Edna Earl, who although self-sufficient and autonomous, chose to submit to patriarchy once more. The war acted as a crucible for Eliza Fain's conceptions of a woman's role, as discussed in David Stowell's "A Family of Women and Children." By the eve of the war, Eliza had been married for twenty-seven years to her husband, Richard, and they had thirteen children. They lived in the northeast part of Tennessee, a land of divided loyalties where Confederate-leaning families had to be wary of their mostly Union neighbors. Eliza's husband and five of her sons served in the Confederate Army. The responsibility for the farm, household, children, and slaves devolved to Eliza, a woman who felt that "the word of my husband is the law to me so I have nothing to do but just go on and do the best I can. I only do hope that I might be enabled to do what is right" (qtd. in Stowell 157). Her husband tried to lead from afar, but the weight of most decisions and much of the work fell upon Eliza herself. She had to oversee the farm production, their few slaves, whose souls she diligently prayed for as she sought to lead them into the Kingdom of Heaven, and her children, in addition to dealing with invading Yankees and Union-supporting neighbors in an area that devolved into "bushwhacking rule" (Fain qtd. in Stowell 163). The duties of providing and protecting fell upon her, and although she

took up the responsibilities reluctantly, she proved herself worthy. As the war went on, she struggled to provide enough food and clothing for those under her care. She often worried: “My ill-clad family filled me with care and trouble” (Fain qtd. in Stowell159), and sometimes November would come without her children having shoes, but she fought on.

However, despite the leadership and responsibility that she assumed out of necessity, she still hesitated to lead the family prayers. Feeling that that was a man’s job, she would ask a male slave to lead, or on more than one occasion, a visiting Yankee, rather than assume the position herself. It is surprising to think that she, a white woman and slave owner, would give leadership of the worship service to a black man, a slave. It was not until April 1865, that the trials of the war had reshaped her conceptions of what was possible for women that she was finally “enabled to bow at the family altar [her]self for the first time in [her]life” (Fain qtd. in Stowell166). Although it may appear to be a very minor undertaking to modern readers, it took four years of war, hardship, and stepping beyond her prescribed role as a wife and mother before Eliza could summon the courage to cross this boundary, even though she was a strong, capable woman.

The division between gender roles was deeply engrained, but the war forced Fain across the barrier between spheres. She, like Irene Huntingdon and Edna Earl, firmly believed in patriarchy, but she, like them, stepped into man’s territory when duty demanded, yet Fain did so much less willingly. Furthermore, considering Fain’s humility in viewing her womanly role, she likely willingly retreated in deference to her husband when he returned from war, similar to Edna’s retreat upon her marriage to St. Elmo.

The diaries show a pattern of women having to transgress the boundaries of the domestic sphere during the war in order to survive and provide for themselves and their families. However, the evidence indicates that many of them did not retreat after the war to their

prescribed duties within the domestic sphere. Their lives do not line up with the example of Edna Earl. For many of them, this was likely the result of a combination of preference and necessity. They did not wish to return to the prewar confines, and many of the husbands were not as capable as they had been prior to the war. Many of the men, especially the ones who saw active military service, were broken: either physically, emotionally, or spiritually wounded.

In Evans's fiction, both Russell Aubrey and St. Elmo Murray experienced traumatic events in their early years and went through a season of brokenness. In Russell's case, his father, in a moment of rage, fought with a creditor and killed him. For that, Mr. Aubrey was sentenced to death, but he committed suicide before the sentence was carried out. Russell had to quit school in order to help provide for his mother and his cousin (Evans, *Macaria* 11-12). He struggled with bitterness and vindictiveness. In the case of St. Elmo, his best friend betrayed him by having an affair with his fiancé, and St. Elmo heard them laughing at him over the matter. Angry, St. Elmo challenged the friend to a duel and killed him. For over two decades, St. Elmo wanders the globe trying to escape his bitterness and guilt. However, both men overcome their brokenness and flourish. Russell's mother's teachings and Irene's kindness inspire him to be an honorable man of good character. St. Elmo repents of his wrongs and begs forgiveness from God and his best friend's father. By the time these two men are seriously considered as marriage partners by the heroines in the fiction, they are strong, well-principled patriarchal figures. In the diaries, many of the men have not overcome their brokenness. The women cannot afford to confine themselves to their domestic duties.

In a number of cases, it appears that the war led to an expansion of a woman's role, her responsibilities and place as defined by society, within marriage. Not all individual households returned to the status quo, despite widespread cultural support for the honoring and

reestablishing the white male as patriarch. Many of the women in these studies championed the Lost Cause, while at the same time engaging in activities and responsibilities that were beyond what they would have considered to be their sphere in 1860. Virginia Clayton became her husband's confidante, trusted advisor, and plantation manager. In the case of Kate McClure, her defiance of some of her husband's orders and her successful battle to eventually manage the plantation without interference make it very difficult to imagine that she would have returned to being the compliant woman of 1860. Virginia Clay emerged as the dominant partner in their marriage after the war, going on to support women's suffrage in her later years. Diarist Gertrude Thomas could not prevent her husband from wasting away what remained of her fortune and inheritance after the war, but she worked in the fields, taught school, wrote for the newspaper, and more, in order to see that her children were provided for and that they had an opportunity for an education. In the years after the war, she became the public figure in their household, going on to be the state leader for women's suffrage and advocating various reforms. Elizabeth Fain may have slipped more readily back into pre-war expectations, but her hard work to feed and clothe her family and to make decisions without her husband's input could not have helped but alter her view of her capabilities. Any of these women seem as if they could have been a match for Irene Huntington's determined, effective leadership style, except that they were married, and therefore, their families and households had first priority over the community and nation.

Conclusions

The war created tremendous upheaval in the lives of Southern women, more so than in the lives of Northern women. The writings of Augusta Jane Evans, the most popular Southern author of the era, reflect the impact of the war. In *Macaria*, she strives to give women purpose in an era where too many women felt that only men could make a difference. It was a usefulness

outside of the home and not dependent upon marriage. Yes, marriage to a worthy man whom one loved was the ideal, but there was no time to wait on dreams. Duty to the new nation called. The importance of marriage is downplayed in this novel, and both heroines survive without it. However, *St. Elmo* is shaped by a different reality. The war was over, the Confederacy had fallen, and the South was crippled in body, soul, and land. Many women longed to restore the security of the past, even as they worked in the reality of the new. *St. Elmo* is shaped by the longing in that new era for the idealized past. But many women after 1865 lived in the reality that men could not always be counted on to provide and protect. Many men were recovering from the war, and too many had not survived the war. A woman did not always still have the choice of her first love or of a man her age or a man unscarred, physically or mentally. A woman's chances of marrying, especially a man whom she loved, decreased. Aware of this, some women rushed into marriage during the war, while others engaged in numerous, often short-lived flirtations while soldiers were in the area. For those who waited until after the war to marry, the wait could be long.

The heroines of *Macaria* and *St. Elmo* do not *need* marriage in order to survive and succeed. Irene Huntingdon is a strong-willed heiress who is an adept manager of her inherited property and a vital humanitarian force in her community with the orphanage that she founds, the art school that she begins, and other projects that she supports. Electra Gray is a recognized and self-supporting artist. Edna Earl is a famous, respected author. Marriage is not a necessity in the two novels, but choosing to live without it, regardless of the autonomy gained, is a sacrifice. The subtitle of *Macaria* is "Altars of Sacrifice." Irene and Electra sacrificed their loved ones and their opportunity to marry for the Cause/the new nation. *St. Elmo* demanded a different type of sacrifice: Edna was forced to choose between sacrificing her opportunity to marry the man she

loved in order to serve her adoring public and maintain her career or giving up her career for love and marriage. She chose marriage, but she came into the marriage with her own wealth and accomplishments. Marriage was a choice, not a necessity. In these two novels, Evans seeks to reduce the importance of marriage in a woman's life. Marriage to someone that one loves is still superior to single-blessedness, but marriage is not the only choice.

In the lives of real women, regardless of whether the women were married before the war, during, or afterwards, or not married at all, their wartime experiences, which necessitated their stepping beyond the dictates of traditional gender roles, infiltrated their perceptions of themselves and their capabilities. Most of them stepped down from the role of plantation manager or full provider, but their level of compliance and their level of assertiveness could not have helped but been permanently affected. Some of the women did not step back completely across the threshold. Some continued to help manage what had previously been entirely their husband's domain; others worked outside of their home in order to assist their husbands in supporting the family. Their roles within marriage were altered to some degree. On the other hand, the vast majority of women worked to support the Lost Cause and reestablish the dominant patriarchy, which conflicted with the reality of their lives. Many of them did not seek a private return to patriarchy. The world of *St. Elmo* was not theirs, even if they longed for such a world and such a man as they struggled to survive and eventually thrive in the devastated, postwar South.

Evans's *St. Elmo* is a retreat from her vanguard *Macaria*, but in my opinion, it is more political than any of her other fiction. She was seeking to transform culture and public opinion. She wanted to embed her memory of the antebellum South into the public memory and to carry that culture as a template into the postwar world. *St. Elmo* created a best-selling image of what

the South had been like before the war, and it did so at a time when even the North was receptive and hungry to hear about it. It was Evans's greatest contribution to the myth of the Lost Cause. Most importantly, it was the dream that she gave to war-weary women who dreamed of a man worthy of their heart's worship and a time of plenty. It also offered a message of encouragement: a woman, with enough determination and intelligence, really could make it on her own in the world. But it sent a different message as well: Edna, with all of her ability and success, chose to retreat to the folds of marriage. When the men returned, many women in the post-war era often had to relinquish some power and control that they had acquired during the war. *St. Elmo* whispered that the retreat was by choice not by necessity, and so was marriage.

Marriage in *St. Elmo* represented a private sacrifice, the loss of Edna's career and autonomy. But Edna had a choice. Neither financial difficulties, nor family, or societal pressures forced her to give in to St. Elmo's proposal. Weary from overwork and success, she chose to marry, to submit, out of love. Evans's Southern readers in 1865 and 1866 were overworked, weary, and struggling with great loss, in a world that seemed to have lost much of its meaning. She offered them a vision to honor, even if it was far from their postwar reality. In their own lives, they had learned that to marry was not necessarily to submit, at least not privately.

Both novels provide vibrant examples of a woman's strength and capabilities. *St. Elmo* was a memorial to the old South and patriarchy and provided an example of what a strong, intelligent woman could accomplish, both in the fiction and in the writer of the fiction. Evans sought to give meaning to the sacrifices made by so many women during the war. And she called upon them, capable as they were, to choose to submit, to make personal, private sacrifices to work towards a return to what had been and to support the men who had fought.

In the real world, some women continued their transgressions of accepted gender roles, some acquiesced in appearance only, and many stepped back into their sphere to begin a more complicated existence of judging which situations and decisions merited transgressing the boundaries temporarily once more. It was a more complex world than Evans portrayed. In the real world, the retreat was only a pause.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NORTHERN RESPONSE: WIDENING A WOMAN'S CHOICE

“The married are hampered in what they can say”

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps in *Chapters from a Life*

Why should household chores and childcare consume a woman's life? To what extent could a woman's life be her own to live, rather than living within her husband's life? Could a woman have a career, not piecework here and there to aid her husband in supporting the family, but work of her choosing and talent, and still marry? Could she have a life of her own and yet share her life with a spouse? Northern women writers in the years following the Civil War sought to address these questions. Louise May Alcott and Susan Elizabeth Phelps were two of the leaders in this exploration. Yet it was difficult for them to imagine a workable integration of these two forces in the life of a woman. The integration of a career and marriage for a woman was a vast unknown that some Northern women authors sought to fathom through fiction in the post-bellum moment. This chapter will examine four novels from the Reconstruction era, two by Phelps, *Silent Partner* (1868) and *The Story of Avis* (1877), and two by Alcott, *Little Women* (1868) and *Work* (1873), that grapple with the possibilities.

Southern writers did not fully delve into the topic of a woman mixing career and marriage. In Evan's *Macaria*, meaningful work arising out of duty was the ultimate goal, and the option of marriage was sacrificed for the sake of duty. Then, in *St. Elmo*, Edna Earl willingly sacrifices her literary career, fame, and independence in order to become the wife of St. Elmo Murray. On their wedding day, he declares that he is rescuing her from the world of work: “Today I snap the fetters of your literary bondage. There shall be no more books written! No more study, no more toil, no more anxiety, no more heartaches! [...] You belong solely to me

now, and I shall take care of the life you have nearly destroyed in your inordinate ambition” (Evans 444). Edna’s response to this is one of “measureless joy,” and she considers the opportunity “to be his companion through all the remaining years of their earthly pilgrimage” as “the crowning glory and richest blessing of her life” (Evans 444). In this example of Southern fiction, the strong, intelligent woman willingly gives up her career in order to support her husband’s work.

A number of Northern women writers in the Reconstruction era did not accept this maxim. They struggled to discover a configuration that could include both career and marriage for a woman. Other Northern and border-state women writers created sensational literature, and still others focused on interracial stories, each inspired by the war and determined to push against the confines of what was socially acceptable; however, for the writers discussed in this chapter and many of their sister authors, the focus was on the possibility of a woman having a career. Society accepted without question that a man’s life could and should contain both work and marriage, but for a woman, marriage had previously been considered to be her profession. In 1820, George Cutler, a young man in love, summarized the significance of marriage for women: “The contract is so much more important in its consequences to females than to males, for besides leaving everything else to unite themselves to one man they subject themselves to his authority—they depend more upon their husband than he does upon the wife for society and for the happiness and enjoyment of their lives—he is their all—their only relative—their only hope” (qtd. in Rothman 67). A female diarist during the Civil War era wrote regarding marriage, “We stake our all and if it is lost our all is gone” (Rothman 94). Some daring Northern women writers, influenced by the war, sought to prove that a husband and marriage did not have to comprise a woman’s entire being.

Cutler's assessment of the significance of marriage in a woman's life was shared by the women writers in the years preceding the Civil War, and it persisted in the general practice within society even after the war. In the golden era of nineteenth century women's literature, Susan Warner's *Wide Wide World* (1852) crafted the demure, self-abdicating Ellen, whose character is cultivated by the pleasantly domineering perfectionist John Humphreys, and who can barely have a thought that is not preapproved by her tutor/minister/future husband. While not every novel of the era required such submission on the part of the heroine or such worship of the hero, Mary Kelley's *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth Century America* (2002) indicates that women writers, like the culture surrounding them, saw marriage as the natural goal of a woman's life.

Kelly reveals that the popular women authors who dominated the market before and during the Civil War saw themselves first as wives and mothers and then as authors. Phelps's mother was one of these women. She wrote popular novels in the early 1850s when she could squeeze in a few words in between her motherly and household duties. These authors felt that their primary responsibilities lay in the home, despite their artistic talents and money-making abilities. They concluded that "it was their traditional and sacred duty to fulfill domestic obligations, rights of the mind were inevitably preempted by duties to the sphere" (Kelly 101). If the authors believed that this is where their own duty lay, how could they expect their characters or their readers to live differently? They wrote of strong women and of women who sometimes had to support themselves because the men in their lives had either failed to support them, deserted them, or were dead, but these works ended in marriage, and marriage to a good man who loved them was the life goal of the heroine's in these novels. Kelly argues that these authors "could write only about the heart's record of domesticity because that was all that they knew. It

was their only subject because that was the only subject of their lives” (221). Forgoing marriage for the sake of independence or a career was not an option in these novels, and if a woman had a career or any work in the outside world, it lost preeminence when marriage entered the picture.

This situation presented a conundrum for the authors who were married while writing and earning money. Their lives could be seen as contradicting their fiction. Most of them did not want to be perceived as having a career while married. Many women authors acted embarrassed and almost ashamed, seeking to stay out of the public eye as much as possible. Despite their act of writing, they saw their domestic duties to their husbands and children as their primary calling. For example, even though Harriet Beecher Stowe was the main breadwinner for her family, she considered herself “retired and domestic” and was astounded when Sara Josephina Hale wrote and asked her for her biographical information for the *Woman’s Record* (1853), an edition intended to recognize women writers (Kelly 185). Stowe wrote back that her life had been “uneventful and uninteresting” and declined to send any information or agree to be in the volume (185). She was uncomfortable with being known as a writer, especially a famous one. Even unmarried antebellum authors, such as Susan Warner and Lydia Maria Child, privileged the domestic in their writings. The heroine’s and the author’s sacred duty was to her new home, the man of the house, and the family that would come.

Not only was it her duty, but it was her opportunity to make a difference in the world. According to Jane Tompkins in *Sensational Designs* (1986), in the years before the war, writers of domestic fiction, like Warner in *Wide, Wide World* and Stowe in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, sought to “reorganize culture from the woman’s point of view” and “to effect a radical transformation of [their] society” (124,145). They believed that the nexus of change was not in Congress or in a courthouse, but in the human heart. By effecting a change in the heart of a woman, they believed

they could transform homes and families, thereby transforming the world (Tompkins 143). Their “call to arms” did not envision transgressing gender roles. Nina Baym concurs. According to Baym, these authors sought to enable their readers to have power in their lives, power to make the most of the sphere in which they were confined. In these works, the heroine discovers that she has no one to rely upon but herself and God. She must change her situation by changing herself. These characters seek independence within their sphere and learn the power within submission.

However, by the Reconstruction Era, domestic fiction was fading in terms of sales and the number of works published. It was no longer the best-selling genre. Baym offers several possible explanations for this loss in popularity: that perhaps women’s experiences became too “heterogeneous and complex,” or that women grew bored or tired of the formulaic patterns, or perhaps women started to believe that their potential expanded beyond the domestic into realms not covered in women’s fiction, or that the idea of the home as a power base was no longer viewed as realistic, or, finally, perhaps in the midst of social change, readers sought escapism (Baym 297). I argue that the Civil War contributed significantly to end the reign of literary domestics, a reign that had eclipsed the popularity of male authors like Melville and Hawthorne, who resented their inability to command the large audience that these women did.¹ The war created a more complex world, showed women their potential beyond the home, and demonstrated that the impact of their influence from their domestic base, the home, was less than had been proposed. The war called into question the prestige and power of domesticity, and it fractured the impermeability of the sphere. This fracture permeated the lives of real women of the era and splintered into the writings of the women writers. While it is true that many of the authors had careers before the war, they were a rare exception, and they, especially the married

ones, hid behind the pretense of having no career and sought to exemplify the domestic in their writings. The vast majority of women, before the war, would never have conceived of the possibility of engaging in a career. The war changed that mindset.

Hardships of War Transform the Lives of Women

First of all, the war led to a perceived devaluing of the domestic sphere. Previously, women had vested themselves in the domestic, which was their assigned realm of influence. The home was the foundation for nineteenth century society and a place of refuge from the harsh and corrupting influence of the outside world. Women were to be the moral beacons, and it was a woman's duty to exert a strong moral influence over their children and husband. Catherine Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and other domestic authors had argued that it was a woman's best opportunity to change the world. Popular author Mary Virginia Terhune wrote in her autobiography that "housewifery" was a "profession that dignifies her who follows it, and contributes, more than any other calling, to the mental, moral, and spiritual sanity of the human race" (qtd. in Kelly 295). But the war invaded the home, taking the men away, and society proclaimed that the nation should take precedence over the home, at least during the war, thus diminishing the women's reign of influence.

The war called for men to enlist and leave their homes in order to defend the nation, placing the needs of the nation before the needs of their families. The nation was at stake, and that called for sacrifice. There were the dangers and terrors of the battlefield, the hardships in camp, and numerous diseases that took many lives. Cooking, housecleaning, sewing, tending the crops, and even child-rearing faded into the background. According to historian Nina Silber in *Daughters of the Union* (2005), the war had "dramatic effects on this sanctified domestic realm, and especially on Northern Women's ability to draw on the domestic sphere as a source of

feminine authority” (88). Men left home, and their removal from the private sphere caused women to lose influence over them. How were women to exert moral influence and authority if the men were far away and engulfed in an environment that offered numerous temptations? Silber writes that the “pull of the home would, of necessity, take on diminished significance” in the lives of the men (88). Many wives, mothers, sisters, and fiancées wrote numerous letters in an attempt to maintain the connections of love, relationship, and influence, but felt inadequate (Silber 100). Silber goes on to say that “the war weakened women’s sense of self and security” (103). I argue that this “weakened sense of self and security” influenced women of the era to rely less heavily on marriage as their identity and source of influence in the years following the war, thus increasing the likelihood of them considering work outside of the domestic realm, in the form of service and/or a career, as more of a need in their lives. This historical moment sparked the beginning of an awakening.

The war weakened women’s domestic influence. The temptations associated with a soldier’s life far from home took their toll on too many marriages. Samuel and Rachel Cormany’s devotion to each other is well documented in the diaries that each of them kept before and during the war. Countless entries in Samuel’s diary declared his longing to be home with Pet (his nickname for Rachel) and repeated the sentiment, “Oh what a happy man I am being blest with so good and devoted [his wife], and child so precious” (Cormany 495). For three years, Rachel longed to have her husband back by her side, and the two wrote numerous letters to each other. When he returned home at the end of the war, she rejoiced: “Joy to the world—My little world at least. I am no more a war widow—My Precious is home safe from the war” (Cormany 582). That evening after this entry, Samuel decided to reveal the worst of his “misteps” [sic] during the war to his wife. Rachel’s next entry was filled with anguish: “This has been the

saddest week of my life. My heart is almost broken. [...] It takes all the powers of my mind and soul to bear up under this my greatest of sorrows so as to hide the anguish of my heart” (582). In his letters before his return home, he had already asked for forgiveness regarding his drinking and occasional drunkenness in camp. The reader is left to speculate that Samuel had broken his vow of fidelity to his wife. The letters from home were not enough to keep Samuel from going astray far from home, and numerous diaries reflect that this was of grave concern to many women.

In her fiction, Phelps portrays a man, weakened by the war, straying from his wife in *The Story of Avis*, but his failings are rooted more in his own character than the war. The war shattered Rachel’s idealistic views of her husband and of domesticity, but it also revealed her potential to be a fellow worker in the world of work and her potential to influence the great society outside of her small family. According to the diary, the college-educated Rachel Cormany worked as a teacher at times in the years after the war to help supplement the family’s income, and eventually, she shared with her husband the responsibility of heading a boys’ home. She also became actively involved in the Temperance movement and the kindergarten movement, participating in social activism as the heroines in *Silent Partner* and *Work* do. Rachel’s marriage was not her whole world after the war. She sought fulfillment in impacting her society by means outside of her home, beyond her husband and children.

During the war, many women lost confidence in the power of their domestic efforts. At the same time, the war shook their worlds in other ways. With men away at war, all of the household chores often fell upon the women, along with the farming, dealing with vendors, and in some cases even earning an income. Silber writes that “wartime circumstances compelled women to compete for jobs, negotiate wages, manage household accounts and file pension

claims” (86). In *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home front* (2009), historian Amy Giesberg examines the effects of the war on Northern lower- and middle-income women. In the North, in lower-income families and in rural areas, women would occasionally work outside of the home, helping their husbands with the farm work (a practice which had been more widespread during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries), working in textile mills, doing sewing, and performing other such duties during rough financial times. But the war transformed this temporary and occasional work to a full-time burden for many and brought women beyond the farm or local town to government offices, ammunition factories, and beyond. Giesberg states that around fifty percent of northern soldiers were farmers (18). This means that half of the women whose husbands went off to war were farmers’ wives, and many had farms to manage.

When Elizabeth Schwalm’s husband left for war, she had four children under the age of five, and she gave birth to a fifth child three months later. However, she had little time to watch over the children, as she had a seventy-five acre farm to take care of. Her husband, Samuel, arranged for his brother, Peter, to help out on the farm, but that only lasted for the first year. Samuel was gone for three years. Elizabeth hired a farmer helper when she could find one and afford it, but most of the burden of preparing the fields, planting, reaping, bundling, and hauling fell to her, with her young children as helpers. She likely had help from extended family on occasion, but the main burden was upon her (Giesberg 25). As the months and years wore on, she made more of the decisions on her own, reporting them to Samuel after the fact. Giesberg writes that Elizabeth “proudly reported that she could reap as much as any man even though she had a three year old son “toddling beside her, tumbling among the sheaves, getting into mischief every five minutes, and causing more plague than profit”(17). There were financial struggles,

and the sheriff came out once because of unpaid taxes, but Elizabeth held her farm and family together for three years while her husband was away. However, her letters expressed a strong desire for his return and to once again have his help. She could do the work, but it was work meant for two, not one. As to the residual effects of Elizabeth having taken over her husband's work and role as head of the house while he was away, Giesberg writes that after Samuel's return:

Perhaps Elizabeth asserted herself more often into the daily decision making about the purchase and the sale of land or the use of farm animals. With no evidence to the contrary, we might suppose that Elizabeth Schwalm was willing to once again share the responsibilities of farm management and family sustenance with her veteran husband and that she was relieved to have him organize the labor on the family farm (35).

It is difficult to imagine that their lives would have slipped completely back into old patterns. Both Elizabeth and Samuel knew what she was capable of, and she had gained knowledge and experience over the three years.

Mary Livermore, the head of the Chicago office of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, and other activists of the era believed that this engagement of women outside of the domestic sphere would be a catalyst for change. Giesberg writes that Livermore "suspected that the war opened up a space in which gender would be renegotiated and family relations reconstituted for she saw women's farm labor as the beginning of the end for domesticity"(20). However, the war did not generate quick or dramatic change in the ingrained system. The changes were more subtle and individual.

For some women, it showed the danger of relying upon their husbands too heavily. Elizabeth Schwaln had a profitable farm that could produce. Some women in her state, Pennsylvania, were left on subsistence farms that produced little. Others were the wives of laborers or tradesmen. Some had poor health, and others had no extended family to turn to for assistance. Too often their husbands' army wages were slow in coming, and if their husbands died or deserted, then there was no pay. These women often ended up applying to the local county relief agencies or the state for assistance. But if the husband had not been a taxpayer in the county, if he had been drafted, or if the woman had no proof of the marriage, the county was often of little help. In Alcott's *Little Women*, during the war the girls take food to a poor family where the mother has a newborn baby and "six children are huddled in one bed to keep from freezing" (17). Giesberg relates the case of one desperate woman who was refused help by the local relief agency and who decided to write to the governor: "I have worked Day and Night and ceep my children together and I have touck sick and am on able to do enething" (19). She was not alone in writing to the governor. Many women sought assistance from the government who had taken their men off to war. Their domestic expertise was often not sufficient for supporting a family.

Ironically, the war also demonstrated that more traditional women's work had financial value, even if there were not ready avenues to provide income for the individual family. In the North during the war, the U.S. Sanitary Commission, a private war-relief agency established by professional men and ministers from New York, sought to harness and control the volunteer work of women. Their mission was to organize and oversee the home front efforts from households across the North in order to supply the army and assist with medical needs. According to Jeanie Attie in "Warwork and Domesticity in the North" (1992), the men who operated the Sanitary Commission imagined that women would willingly volunteer to give up

some of their supposed *ample leisure* to assist with the war effort under the direction of the commission. After all, according to these men, domestic work wasn't really work, was it? The problem was that women had very little leisure time, and many of them were already volunteering in their local communities. Many women resented the commission seeking to control and direct the voluntary efforts they were already making. The commission sought to nationalize local efforts. In Phelps's hometown as well as in *The Story of Avis* and in Alcott's *Work*, the women gather to roll bandages and do what they can to help the troops. They likely preferred their efforts to aid soldiers from their own area. In addition, many women during the war were struggling under a heavy workload already, especially with their menfolk away at the front. These women wanted the commissioners to understand that taking care of the household was labor, regardless of whether or not it was paid labor, and many of the women had to take on the duties normally left to the men. One woman wrote to the commission: "I am shut in school from 8 ½ until 4 P.M. every day. I have all my own housekeeping to do and we have no baker here... I have an acre and three quarters of land to take care of out of school and in winter all my wood to saw and split ... you must see I have not much leisure" (qtd. in Attie 255). "Women's work" was real work, labor, and they wanted their efforts and labor to be respected. They wanted their patriotism to be valued at its worth, equal to that of men (Attie 255).

However, despite their disagreements with the Commission, women contributed much to the war effort. Summing up the value of the domestic labor contributed by women by the end of the war, a U.S. Sanitary Commission official stated, "the supplies amounting in aggregate value to many millions of dollars—some fifteen millions I should name as a rough estimate...--were almost universally collected, assorted, despatched (sic), and re-collected, re-assorted, and re-despatched (sic), by women, representing with great impartiality, every grade of society in the

Republic” (qtd. in Attie 257). Fifteen million dollars’ worth of supplies, not including the value of the labor in collecting, assorting, and other tasks, were provided through the women’s efforts. This was a major economic, social, and political contribution to the war effort. These women made a difference in the war, and this was just one aspect of Northern women’s contribution to the nation during this time period. Through the Christian Commission, local efforts, the numerous nurses, and countless other avenues women contributed. Overall, women saw that they could make a difference beyond their hearth and beyond their locality. A woman’s ability to make a difference in her world through charitable service and other social avenues is reiterated in post-bellum fiction such as Phelps’s *Silent Partner*, in the social reform efforts of the two heroines, and in Alcott’s *Work*, in the heroine’s charitable service to the disadvantaged and marginalized and to her fellow women of all classes.

The war showed that, for men, the home could set aside when more important, national matters arose. It was not quite the center of the world that it had been portrayed to be, and the moral influence and authority exerted by domesticity had fallen short of expectations. In addition, Northern women had seen that their work could have economic value, and a number of them had taken on the yoke of men’s work and survived. Others struggled to survive and provide in a culture unfairly balanced against a women earning a living wage on her own. Alcott’s *Little Women* illustrates this self-sufficiency. The March family fends for itself, in addition to helping poorer neighbors, while the father is away at war.

When war ended, the men who survived returned, and most sought to take up their yokes and home attachments once more. The war demonstrated that women could handle “men’s” work, though it was only supposed to be a temporary apparition. But the world was not as it had been in 1861. For women, there were sorrows, doubts, new confidences, and possibilities that

had not existed before the nation and their lives were rend in two. According to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Joslyn Gage in their *History of Women's Suffrage, Vol. II* (1882), the war transformed women and “created a revolution in woman herself, as important in its results as the changed condition of the former slaves, and this silent influence is still busy” (21). They echoed Mary Livermore’s sentiment that the war provided the opportunity to renegotiate gender roles. Geisburg argues that Stanton, Anthony, Gage, Livermore, and others are overly optimistic. She does not believe that they take into consideration the “working women’s extra work and worry, their displacement and their loss” (164). In focusing on the changes in the lives of the women during the war, Geisburg does not extend her study into the Reconstruction years, nor does she consider the literature of the era. I argue that the overt changes, such as women of the era having to take care of farms, providing for their families, being separated from their menfolk, were immediate and in many cases temporary; however, the long-term effects in the lives of real women took decades, in some cases, to come into fruition. After the war, women did not retreat from what had been predominately male fields before the war, nursing and teaching, and even though the men who survived the war returned to reassume authority of their farms and factory jobs, women had learned that they were capable. Women, like Elizabeth Schwaln, might have returned official management of the farm to their husbands, but their newly developed knowledge and skills and confidence would not be erased. Additionally, other women, like Rachel Cormany, had husbands who, after the war, could not support their families without assistance from their wives. In some cases the deviation from the domestic was immediate and definitive, but in others it was more subtle with ground gained and lost one decision at a time.

This long-term transformation is what the Northern women writers of the Reconstruction Era were trying to explore and expand. They altered their plots in response. Shifting away from being embarrassed by their careers and glorifying the domestic in their fiction, they, instead, seized the opportunity to use their fiction to push for change in society in regards to the limitations placed on women, limitations that they, in their own personal lives, had already quietly breached. They now sought to exponentially expand this fissure in tradition as a possibility for all women. The novels discussed in this chapter reflect this awakening in their having their heroines consider the possibility of a career instead of or alongside of marriage. All of the heroines long and strive to make a difference in the world beyond the domestic realm. Domestic fiction did not disappear, but it lost market share. The voice for change found its way onto the published page. According to Lyde Sizer, in *The Political Work Northern Women Writers and Civil War, 1850 - 1872*, many postwar novels by women “were clearly written with a goal of documenting the transformative effect of the war on women’s lives” (196). These writers sought to nurture the possibilities and bring them to fruition. Their main site of exploration was marriage. They questioned what role marriage should play in a woman’s life, whether it was necessary, and whether a woman could be married and still have a career. This chapter will investigate how Phelps and Alcott dealt with this issue in four of their Reconstruction era novels.

Silent Partner No More

In *Silent Partner* (1871), Phelps avoids the convoluted struggle of how to juggle a career and marriage by simply responding that they cannot coexist. A woman must choose one or the other. In the novel, both of the female main characters, Perley Kelso and Sip Garth, choose life-long singlehood over life with men who love them and whom they feel the potential to love.

Each feels a calling, and answering that calling and living up to their potential is not compatible with committing themselves to being the helpmeet of another. In *Nineteenth Century American Women Novels*, Susan Harris writes that late-nineteenth-century didactic novels like *Silent Partner* “illustrate a genuinely radical change in women’s attitudes toward themselves and their personal and political capabilities” (201). The novels discussed in this chapter do show radical change. However, Harris views this as the natural progression from the exploratory domestic novels that contained a subversive subplot (women supporting themselves by being artists and pursuing other acceptable female endeavors) before they reached their ultimate goal of marriage and look to the hero to be their all. Harris does not consider the role of the Civil War in this progression. I argue that the war played an essential part in this literary development by destroying the misconception that women could change the world through their influence over their home and family and by forcing women into a man’s world of work in order to survive while the men were away at war. It became more conceivable to write a novel wherein marriage was not the focus of the heroine’s life, and where it might play no role at all.

The role of the war in *Silent Partner* is not obvious at first glance. There are only a couple of brief references to the conflict. A worker, Bejou Mug, mentions that he lost his sons in the war, and later someone refers to the “slaves before the war” (175). The war is in the recent past in the novel, but the lessons of the war that women are capable and can survive without a man at their side reverberates throughout the novel.

At the beginning of this novel, Perley is the pampered daughter of a rich mill owner; she slowly awakens to the needs of the hungry and oppressed around her. The metamorphosis is brought about after she calls a dripping wet Sip Garth, a worker at Perley’s father’s mills, over to her carriage for amusement. That night her father dies, and combined with the traces of insight

gained into the life of the mill workers through Sip, the loss galvanizes Perley to action. Her fiancé Maverick Hale and his father, both senior partners at the mill, will not allow Perley to become an active partner in place of her father, as she desires, but instead regulate her to the status of silent partner. Therefore, she finds her own way into the lives and hearts of the workers at Five Falls Mills through her newly developed friendship with Sip. Perley even goes so far as to open up her home to the workers for concerts, and she invests her money, as well as her time, into the people. Her calling, her career, is to work with and for these people, the masses of hungry, poor, and needy. There is no room for romance in her schedule.

After her awakening, Perley breaks off her engagement to Hale. He has been part of her life for years, a comfortable amusement that had filled her waking moments. But she has grown beyond being fulfilled with polite conversation, gossip, good manners, and operas. She has come to realize that being “fond” of someone is not enough and that “if there is any love in the world ... that ought to be independent of moods and master of all moods, it is the love that people marry on” (164). He tries to blame it on her “foolish furor over a parcel of factory girls” (159). However, it is Hale’s inability to take Perley’s work seriously and his refusal to see the girls as anything more than uneducated workers who contribute to the profit of his enterprise that creates the greatest rift between Perley and him. Helping the workers and their families has become her life’s passion, and that is not compatible with a man who cannot conceive of any consuming interest beyond the bedroom and the boardroom and who prefers to treat his fiancé like a drawing room poodle, a pampered pet to show off for company.

Stephen Garrick, a factor worker who has risen to the position of partner in the mill, is the more appropriate contender for Perley’s hand and heart. He has earned his way to the top through hard work, intelligence, and dedication, but he has not forgotten what it is like to be a

worker. He is Perley's partner in well-doing, standing "heart and soul and hand and hand with her" for over two years after she becomes involved in improving the lives of the workers (255). During those years, "they had met by death-beds and over graves. They had burrowed into mysteries of misery and sin, in God's name, together. Where ever people were cold, hungry, friendless, desolate, in danger, in despair, she had struck across his path" (255). They both have a passion for helping these people, and he has fallen in love with Perley along the way. Garrick wants to spend the rest of his life with her at his side. He needs her, but unfortunately for him, she does not need him.

In Perley's view, marriage is not a necessity. Her response to Garrick's proposal is one of logical self-examination. She is not lonely or in financial need. She is content and fulfilled. To herself, she admits that "she might have loved this man" and that "out of all the world, she would have named him as the knightly soul that hers delighted to honor" (260, 261). If she were to marry, if she were to love someone, this would be the man for her. However, would-be love or almost love is not enough. She does not need romantic love or even a companion's love if it means an entwining of lives, a handing over of lordship to another. Perley is her own woman, and her career is her priority. She answers him, "The fact is... that I have no time to think of love and marriage, Mr. Garrick. That is a business, a trade, by itself to women. [...] I cannot spare the time for it" (260). For men, marriage is a secondary focus. Their lives are not defined by it. They go into the world to interact and earn their way. Too often, they are their work, and their home life is what they come to when their day is done. It is deemed to be a place of rest and comfort, a place where they can be taken care of. For nineteenth-century women, the home and the marriage are their entire identity, according to the culture. Marriage is considered to be their career, but Perley already has a career, and she is willing to forgo ever having a romantic,

intimate relationship in order to maintain her career. In some ways, she appears to mirror a more masculine-gendered approach to marriage, except that she does not expect anyone to be waiting at home to take care of her, and she does not feel that marriage is necessary to her happiness.

In addition, she does not harbor any illusions that somehow life with Garrick will defy tradition. Yes, he is a world different from Maverick Hale. He respects her, admires her, and treats her as an equal in the office, but she does not trust that she would be treated as an equal within the marriage bond. Pledging herself to a man, any man, equates to placing herself under male authority. She concludes, “I do not need you, Stephen Garrick. Besides, I believe I have been a silent partner long enough. If I married you, sir, I should invest in life, and you would conduct it. I suspect that I have a preference for a business of my own” (262). Perley does not want to be led; she wants to lead. Several years after the publication of this novel, Susan B. Anthony, who believed in the transformative effects of the war, expressed a similar conclusion: “If women will not accept marriage with subjection, nor men proffer it without, there is there can be, no alternative. The women who will not be ruled must live without marriage” (Anthony 148). As a single woman, Perley has the freedom to pursue her calling/career as she sees fit, within the confines of the culture. And it was a culture that had been expanded by war-created necessities. Phelps supported a woman’s prerogative to choose a career, but at this point, she considered a career to be incompatible with marriage.

The supporting character, Sip Garth, chooses not to marry either. Dick Burdock has bided his time for years, waiting until he could be promoted and “get on” in the mills before asking Sip to be his bride. He is a watchman at Hale and Kelso, a better position than being on the floor of the mills, and at the beginning of the novel, he has great hopes of being promoted and following in the steps of Stephen Garrick; but by the end of the story, he realizes that he is not “getting on

any in the mills after all” (283). Nevertheless, he loves Sip, and he is determined to ask her to marry him, figuring that they will be able to get by well enough. She loves him, too, as Phelps reveals: “She loved Dirk, and she led a lonely life. She was neither a heroine, nor a saint, nor a fanatic, sitting there in the little woodshed on the chopping block” (290). However, love is not enough. Practicality and conviction outweigh romance and need. She declares, “I’ll not marry you. [...] I’ll not marry anybody. [...] I’ll not bring a child into this world to work in the mills” (287). Sip is not well-off financially like Perley. Instead, she works endless, onerous hours at the mill in order to support herself, but she, too, chooses not to marry. Unlike Perley, Sip feels the need for love and a man, but her conscience will not allow her to act upon that need. She realizes that if Dirk and she were to have children, the odds would be against those children ever escaping the misery of the mills, and that is not a life that she wants to pass on. She is not declining to marry due to any allegiance to or plans for a career. Marriage would not interfere with her work at the mills, but factory work is not a career. It is a mind-numbing existence, scraping to provide the bare necessities. She does not have a profession, but she has a calling that she discovers, a heart to help her fellow workers. By the end of the novel, her heart has led her to become a street preacher, speaking in homes, chapels, street corners, and open fields, with a message declaring Jesus Christ as the answer. She devotes her life to this ministry, and Phelps writes, “She saw clearly enough in time to be a very happy woman” (291). There is no room in either Perley’s or Sip’s life for marriage. Marriage, in this novel, has been dethroned as the primary goal for a woman. On the contrary, it is an encumbrance that a woman can do very well without.

Phelps herself did without it for the majority of her life. Her mother, a popular writer of domestic fiction, had tried to combine a career with marriage, and her health had not withstood

it. She died when Phelps was eight years old. Carol Farley Kessler writes that Phelps believed that her mother “‘fell’ beneath the multiple demands of her roles as wife, mother, and author.” In addition, Phelps felt that her father was not supportive of her mother’s career (Kessler xx). Phelps grew up in a house full of boys, her father, and a stepmother. During the early years of her career, which coincided with the last years of the war, her writing space consisted of an unheated room to which she retreated for privacy and where she would wear an “old fur cape” of her mother’s for warmth as she “curled up on a chilly bed in a cold room” to work (Phelps, *Chapters...* 103). Her family did not view her writing as a serious pursuit at this time and offered little accommodation. A woman’s work outside of her domestic duties was not a priority in the Phelps household or in many other homes of that era. It is no surprise that she doubted the feasibility of a woman trying to have a career and a husband at the same time. She did not want to follow in the same footsteps as her mother and her aunt/step-mother, both literary domestics.

The Civil War helped drive Phelps to that cold, cluttered attic where she wrote, edited, and perfected her first major work beyond Sunday School books and children’s books, *The Gates Ajar*, which propelled her to fame and established her as an author (*Chapters...* 103). Phelps wrote in response to the overwhelming grief that gripped the country, and she wrote specifically in response to the women who had lost their men: fathers, sons, brothers, lovers, and husbands. According to Phelps, the country “was dark with sorrowing women” and “waves of anguish” seemed “to choke the very air” (*Chapters...* 96, 97). The novel painted a picture of a homey, social heaven where families were reunited. The war inspired the novel that propelled her career and gave her the freedom and voice to write *Silent Partner* several years later. In addition, the war showed that women need not be dependent upon men, need not be confined to the domestic, but working to provide does not entail the same level of interest and commitment as a career.

Phelps took up the message of independence and sought to live without marriage, focusing instead upon her writing.

Alcott and *Little Women*

Louisa May Alcott, like Phelps, avoided marriage and did not seek to combine her career with marriage. She wrote, “I’d rather be a free spinster and paddle my own canoe” (Cheney 69). Elaine Showalter concluded that “the spectacle of her [Louisa’s] mother’s difficult married life—eight pregnancies in ten years, poverty, and hard work—made her suspicious of marriage in general” (*Alternate Alcott* xvii). Bronson Alcott, Louisa’s father, was too lost in his philosophy to make a sustained effort at supporting the family, thus creating a hard life for Abba Alcott, Louisa’s mother. By the time Louisa was in her late teens, she was working to support her family and had become the bread winner. She did not have time for her own life. She was too busy working, yet slowly her writing became the work that paid. Her career was born, and her books were her children.

Alcott harbored doubts about the feasibility of combining a career and marriage. She did not want to have her heroine, Jo March, marry in *Little Women*, but the public demanded it. In a letter to a friend in 1869, Alcott wrote, “Jo should have remained a literary spinster but so many enthusiastic young ladies wrote to me clamorously demanding that she should marry Laurie, or somebody, that I didn’t dare refuse and out of perversity went and made a funny match for her” (qtd. in Alderson xxiii). The authors discussed in this chapter were working towards expanding the fissures created in the domestic sphere by the historical moment. However, the general public was not as ready to view marriage as an option to be chosen or not chosen. This does not mean that many of the female readers had not stepped beyond their domestic duties during the war, taking on more authority and more responsibilities, proving their capabilities, and it does not

mean that many of them did not cling to these gains after the war. Rather, it indicates that they were not willing to give up the idea of romance and love. The readers did not demand that Jo give up her writing career. They simply insisted that she marry.

In the serialized novel, Alcott modeled Jo as a writer after herself. Alcott did not picture marriage as a realistic part of her own life, but she bent to pressure from her publisher and her readership. Three of the four March girls marry in *Little Women*. The only one who does not die in her teens. Two of the sisters, Jo and Amy, have artistic aspirations, but both of them willingly give up their “castles in the air” (139) and commit themselves to marriage. Amy appears to be the more dominant partner in her marriage, and Jo vows to be a full partner in finances and work with her husband, Professor Bhaer, but there is no room for an independent career for either of them in the context of their marriages.

However, *Little Women* is not *St. Elmo* or *Macaria*, and it does not follow the pattern of the domestic fiction of the 1850's. The girls/women in *Little Women* are not swept away by romantic love. Though Meg, the most conventional of the three, is distracted and fluttery at times during her initial courtship, the “little” women are reasonable and sensible in regards to marriage and the men they choose. Alcott creates female characters who are not captive to their feelings. The three sisters marry friends, with whom they have slowly fallen in love. Alcott is advocating partnerships, not patriarchy, and in the character of Jo, she demonstrates a woman working alongside her husband as his equal. Despite working in the conventional medium of a “girls” novel, Alcott pushes beyond the traditional boundaries of the domestic sphere in Jo's determination and ability to earn her own way even after her marriage, but the deviation falls short of conceiving of the possibility of Jo combining a career with marriage. Alcott explored the possibility of women having careers, and in real life, she herself supported her entire family with

her career, but in 1868 when she wrote this novel, she could not bring herself to believe that the mixing of a career with marriage was a viable, doable option. A chosen career appears to be on a different level of commitment, requiring more devotion and autonomy than working and earning money after marriage.

The war is in the background during the first half of the novel, exerting a steady influence, and the results of this influence are felt throughout the novel. Sizer contends that *Little Women* “drives much of its energy from its war time context” (255). The patterns of their lives are interrupted. It is Christmas when the novel first opens, and the father of the family is away with the Army. The war has separated the family, and Marmee (the mother) and the three girls must make do as best they can on their own. Jo declares that she is “dying to go and fight with papa” and regrets that she can “only stay at home and knit like a pokey old woman” (7). However, Jo, as a fifteen year-old girl, cannot go fight, and her contributions are more along the lines of earning money for the family and sacrificing her hair. But the war is instrumental in her considering possibilities outside of the female realm. It is also during this time period that she first submits a short story to an editor and has it published in the local paper. She sees this as a way to begin to support herself and help her family.

The Civil War was a strong influence in Alcott’s life as well as in the novel. Bronson Alcott did not serve in the war, but Louisa, like Jo, wanted to do her part, and darning socks and sewing flannel jackets and blankets were not enough. On her thirtieth birthday, November 29th, 1862, she “enlisted” as a nurse. Her experiences working in a Washington hospital are recorded in her slightly fictionalized *Hospital Sketches* (1863), which were based on her letters home. The words of Nurse Tribulation Periwinkle, her fictionalized name in *Hospital Sketches*, captures her enthusiasm: “I turned military at once, called my dinner my rations, and saluted all new comers,

and ordered a dress parade that very afternoon” (5). During her weeks as a nurse, she gave her all to her duty: “The sight of several stretchers, each with its legless, armless, or desperately wounded occupant, entering my ward, admonished me that I was there to work, not to wonder or weep; so I corked up my feelings and returned to the path of duty” (28). Alcott contracted typhoid fever after six weeks of serving and, seriously ill, was taken home by her father. Her health never fully recovered due to the mercury used to treat her during her illness (Alderson xviii). Even though Alcott had published stories prior to this, *Sketches* provided her with her most renowned success until the publication of *Little Women* five years later. Working with the other nurses demonstrated that there were other women besides herself who were willing and capable of going out into the world of work to “manfully” do their duty. On the eve of the war, nursing was still considered a man’s domain, and April 1861 was the first time that female nurses were allowed to serve in hospitals in America (Showalter, *Alternate Alcott* XIX). Women, like Alcott, saw the great medical need and quietly took over, forging a permanent place for women in the field of nursing.

In the novel, Jo is a feisty young woman who refuses to be confined to domestic expectations. Her father’s absence due to the war creates a space and fosters the development of her independent spirit and likely increases her motivation to develop her literary career. In the novel, the war is an external as well as an internal force. In her article, “Little Women,” Judith Fetterly argues that “The Civil War is an obvious metaphor for internal conflict and its invocation as background to *Little Women* suggests the presence in the story of conflict” (376). I disagree with Fetterly. I do not view the war as a metaphor in *Little Women*. In the novel, the war is a real force that impacts the lives of those who live through it. It reorders the realm of the possible for women and spurs Jo and Alcott, in her writing, to imagine new ways to be a woman

in America. While it is true that Jo is “at war” with herself and with societal expectations, it is the Civil War and its removal of patriarchs from the homes that fuels this struggle and that emboldens her dreams and her desire for independence.

The career-minded Jo gives little thought to marriage, and is greatly disturbed when the tutor from next door, Mr. John Brooke, expresses a great interest in marrying her older sister, Meg. At age sixteen, when most young girls would be dreaming of young men and looking forward to a future of marriage, Jo longs to keep her family together forever. The conventional Meg, age seventeen, soon accepts John as a beau. She is won over by his kind heart and refuses to obey her Aunt March, who insists that she marry for money. Instead, she follows the advice of Marmee, who has advocated over the years that “to be loved and chosen by a good man is the best and sweetest thing which can happen to a woman” and that “the possession of a good man’s heart ... is better than a fortune” (95, 200). Marmee acknowledges that marriage is not something to be pursued at all costs, however: “Better [to] be happy old maids than unhappy wives, or unmaidenly girls” (95). A good marriage to a good-hearted man is the ultimate goal in *Little Women*, but spinsterhood is acceptable if such a marriage is not obtainable. A woman can lead a purposeful life without marriage. Marriage is not a requirement.

Amy March, the youngest sister in the family, is not as compliant as Meg. Marrying well for Amy translates into marrying into wealth. She dreams of making her fortune through her artwork and pursues professional training when she travels abroad to Europe. But on her way to discovering her artistic “genius,” she is intrigued by a wealthy young man who expresses great interest in her, and the financial opportunity does not escape her notice. In a letter home, she admits, “I may be mercenary, but I hate poverty, and don’t mean to bear it a minute longer than I can help. One of us must marry well. [...] I wouldn’t marry a man I hated or despised. You may

be sure of that; and, though, Fred's not my model hero, he does very well, and, in time, I should get fond enough of him if he was very fond of me, and let me do just as I liked" (307). However, Amy eventually concludes that fondness and financial security are not enough basis for a lifetime commitment. Her growing relationship with Laurie, the long-time neighbor whom she has always looked upon as a brother, sparks this realization. He is abroad trying to recover from Jo's refusal to marry him. Although both of Amy and Laurie are reluctant to use the word "love," time, heart-sharing letters, and loneliness transforms their friendship into romantic love (411). Their engagement and marriage follow. However, there is no thought of her continuing to pursue an art career after her marriage. Her art becomes a hobby and a means of decorating their house. Their common purpose, aside from loving each other, becomes the act of using their money to help others. Alcott did not perceive the possibility of a woman being both a wife and an artist.

Readers of the first two-thirds of the novel would have never guessed that Laurie would end up marrying Amy instead of Jo. Readers in 1868 wanted Jo to marry, and Laurie was the one they expected to win her heart. After all, Jo and Laurie are inseparable friends from the first few weeks of their meeting when she is fifteen, and he is sixteen. He is ready to help Jo and the March family whenever there is a need. Jo is there to keep him out of trouble. However, when he starts to develop romantic feelings for her, she is resistant and goes away to New York to work as a governess for a few months. To the surprise of the reader, Marmee agrees with Jo's decision: "You are too much alike, and too fond of freedom, not to mention hot tempers and strong wills, to get on happily together, in a relation which needs infinite patience and forbearance, as well as love" (318). Marmee argues that their strong similarities would not translate to compatibility in marriage. Strong friendship is not always a viable basis for a marriage, according to Alcott.

Eventually, Jo must convey this message to Laurie. The following spring, after he graduates from college, he proposes. But nothing he says can change the fact that although Jo is very fond of him and cares for him deeply, she does not love him. She declares, “It’s impossible for people to make themselves love other people if they don’t” (349). When she fully convinces him that there is no hope of her returning his love, he storms off and travels to Europe in order to get as far away as possible. It is there, over the next couple of years, that he slowly gets over Jo and falls for Amy.

The devaluation of friendship as a criterion for marriage and the concept that romantic love is a feeling, not a decision, are in line with Rothman and Lystra’s theories regarding the downgrading of friendship and the reigning conviction that romantic love was outside the control of the rational mind. In *Searching the Heart* (1989), Karen Lystra writes that in nineteenth-century America, “Romantic love was accepted as an essentially uncontrollable consequence of inexplicable forces of attraction” (192). It could not be completely understood or controlled, but it was becoming a widely accepted precept by mid-century that it was “one of the essential ingredients of marital happiness” (225). However, in *Little Women*, Alcott does not completely comply with this “accepted precept.” She adds a strong rational element. Her characters are not carried away with emotion. Their hearts do not overrule their intellects in matters of romance. While it is true that they cannot force themselves to love (Amy cannot make herself love the wealthy Fred, and Jo cannot will herself to love Laurie), all three young women, including Meg, make wise decisions in choosing their marriage partners. They do not allow love alone to rule their decisions. Marriage was a choice, not something to fall into.

Despite Jo’s insistence that she will probably never fall in love and marry, she does. A career is not enough. After a long hiatus from her writing, Jo writes a novel after Beth’s death. It

is published, complimented, and criticized, but it is read, and she continues to send out stories and have them published. However, her fledgling writing career is not enough to fill her life and heart. Her thoughts return to Professor Bhaer, the fortyish, German professor whom she met while in New York: “He was neither rich nor great, young nor handsome,—in no respect what is called fascinating, imposing, or brilliant; and yet he was as attractive as a genial fire, and people seemed to gather about him as naturally as about a warm hearth” (337). He is a fondly remembered friend, but with the passage of time, the death of Beth, and the engagement of Laurie and Amy, loneliness begins to overcome her. On her twenty-fifth birthday, she bemoans, “An old maid—that’s what I’m to be. A literary spinster, with a pen, for a spouse, a family of stories for children, and twenty years hence a morsel of fame” (425). The reader wonders how much of Alcott’s own self can be heard in this cry. So much of *Little Women* is autobiographical. One wonders where the self-portrait stops and the fiction begins. To what extent could Alcott empathize with the loneliness and emptiness that Jo expresses here? In her own life in her later years, Alcott compared herself to her youngest sister, May (Amy in the novel), who was married, living in Europe, and pursuing a painting career: “How different our lives are just now---I so lonely, sad, and sick; she so happy, well and blest. She always had the cream of the things and deserved it. My time is yet to come” (Elbert, Introduction, *Diana and Persis* 33). Alcott appears to have had some regrets regarding her choice of singleness. May managed to combine a career with her marriage, until she died in childbirth, but that was years after *Little Women*, years in which the stirrings of the transformation planted by the war had time in which to take root.

In the fiction, of 1868, Jo’s lament is answered. Her professor does come. He visits her town on business, but his main objective is courtship. Under the guise of friendship, he comes calling; however, he is reluctant to make his intentions known. After all, she is almost twenty

years younger than him. It is her reaction to his announcement that he is leaving town that spurs him to confess. Bhaer sees the tears on her cheeks and asks her why she is crying. When she says it is because he is going away, his joy is boundless:

‘Ah my Gott, that is so good!’... managing to clasp his hands in spite of the umbrella and the bundles. ‘Jo, I haf nothing but much love to gif you; I came to see if you could care for it, and I waited to be sure that I was something more than a friend. Am I?’

She folded both hands over his arm, and looked up at him with an expression that plainly showed how happy she would be to walk through life beside him, even though she had no better shelter than the old umbrella, if he carried it (456-57).

Their friendship has blossomed into love, and Jo is no longer content to go through life single. Writing, a career, is not enough to fulfill her life.

Once the question of love is settled, however, she is not willing to be a compliant wife reforming herself to fit within the domestic sphere. Her independent nature has been nurtured and encouraged by watching her mother lead the family during the war and through her own years earning her way as a writer. Instead, she insists upon working to help him earn money: “I’m to carry my share, Fredrich, and help to earn the home. Make up your mind to that, or I’ll never go” (462). In addition to her work, it is through Jo that they secure a home. Her Aunt March passes away and leaves her large house, Plumfield, to Jo. It is there that Jo and Bhaer decide to begin a school for boys. They marry, and Bhaer and she work together as head master and mistress of the school. She is more than an equal partner in regards to their finances.

She works alongside of her husband, but her literary career is a dust-covered dream. Alcott insists that Jo does not regret this, however: “Jo was a very happy woman there, in spite of

hard work, much anxiety, and a perpetual racket. She enjoyed it heartily, and found the applause of her boys more satisfying than any praise of the world,--for now she told no stories except to her flock of enthusiastic believers and admirers” (468-69). Praise and admiration from her husband and children mean more to her now than the praise of literary circles and public popularity. Her pen has been set aside.

This plot development bears some similarity to *St. Elmo* since Edna also gives up her writing career for marriage, but there are significant differences. Edna hands over the reins of her life to St. Elmo. He says that he will free her from her past work and that he will take care of her and look after her. No one is saying that to Jo. She tells Bhaer up front on the day of his proposal that she is going to work to earn her way along with him. She is going to help earn money on her own so that they will have the funds to start a new life together, and it is her house in which they will live and operate the school that they start. Once Jo and Bhaer are married, they do share the same work, running a school for boys, just as Edna will share in St. Elmo’s ministerial work, but Jo is clearly the co-leader in her family. Edna is shaped by Evans’s desire to reinforce patriarchy and the fantasy of the antebellum world of few worries. Jo is molded by Alcott’s Northern perspective of questioning the dichotomy between career and marriage for women.

As the novel *Little Women* concludes, it is now five years after Jo’s marriage. The girls, women now in their late twenties and early thirties, sit discussing their childhood dreams. Meg had once wanted fine things and a grand house, and Amy had wanted to make her fortune as an artist, and Jo had hungered for literary fame. Meg has the family she had dreamed of; her domain is in a much more humble setting than she had originally imagined, but she is happy all the same. Amy, with her loving husband and wealth, says, “My castle is very different from what I planned, but I would not alter it, though, like Jo, I don’t relinquish all my artistic hopes, or

confine myself to helping others fulfil their dreams of beauty” (473). She is making a sculpture of her young child, who is frail and whose life expectancy is unknown. Recalling her career hopes, Jo states, “Yes, I remember, but the life I wanted then seems selfish, lonely and cold to me now. I haven’t given up the hope that I may write a good book yet, but I can wait, and I’m sure it will be all the better for such experiences and illustrations as these” (472). In *Little Women*, family, preferably in the form of a loving husband and children, is the first priority. A career is a pleasant thought that can too easily get lost in the clutter of daily living. But unlike Edna in *St. Elmo*, Jo is the master of her own priorities. Jo has not completely given up on the idea of one day writing again, but it is a distant possibility.

In Alcott’s *Little Women*, the desire to escape the confines of the domestic sphere is moderated by convention. It is a story for young people, a story to model good character and behavior, written at the suggestion of her publisher. The general public was not ready to suggest that their own daughters forsake marriage. In the novel, the girls who live into adulthood in the story do marry. However, Alcott pushes against the boundaries of the domestic sphere by creating two female characters with career interests. Due to the war, these characters spent several years in a home without a father present. This created a vacuum and an opportunity for female leadership, a role filled by a strong mother, a clear example followed by Jo, with Amy looking up to her older sister. The war created the inspiration and space for growth and independence. This streak of confidence and independence initially leads both Jo and Amy to pursue careers, and Jo, as mentioned above, does go on to be an equal partner in financially supporting her household after marriage. Many of the readers of *Little Women* had themselves lived in a household during the war where some or all of the adult male members were away at war. They had experienced the need for a woman to step beyond the domestic realm and to help

provide financially for their families. They could likely identify with Jo helping with the financial support even if some of them had retreated to more traditional roles after the war. Many of them knew that they were or could grow to be capable like Jo, but a career likely seemed more unfathomable.

Combining a career and marriage is not considered a reasonable option. Not convinced of her ability to make a living with her artistic endeavors and being conventionally minded, Amy regulates her art to a pastime after she marries. She hopes of one day creating a work of beauty, but it is not a career, and it is not a priority. Jo, by the time of her marriage, has published two novels and countless short stories. She is a woman who can negotiate with editors and help provide for her family through her writing. Her independent nature is evident from the beginning of the novel. She is not a character who would fit the mold of traditional domestic fiction from the pre-Civil War era. Even after she marries, she is determined to fully participate in the material support of her newly formed family. Unfortunately, she does this by working with her husband in managing the school and caring for the boys. Her writing is forgotten, except for the verbal creations of bedtime stories. Life is too busy and hectic at this point for anything else. Her life and her husband's are merged; her career and his are one. There is not space in their lives for Jo to have an independent career. It seems that Alcott found it impossible to conceive of a woman being married and maintaining a career. Jo and Amy start on the road towards a career, and Jo even achieves it, but Alcott steps away from proposing that this interest could flourish within marriage. Unlike in Phelps's *Silent Partner*, marriage to a good man is portrayed as the best possible life for a woman in *Little Women*. Singlehood does not bring complete fulfillment. But for Jo, neither would a typical marriage. She marries Bhaer as an equal partner and works alongside of him to financially provide for their household and family illustrating an example

that women who had survived the war could more likely envision as an eventual possible reality in their lives more so that the pursuit of a personal career.

Alcott's *Work*: Marriage as a Subplot

Alcott sought to further expand her reader's vision of the conceivable when she again explored the possibilities of work, career, and marriage several years later in *Work* (1873). The novel downplays the role of marriage in a woman's life. Marriage is treated as an afterthought following the main character's exploration of various careers or work available to women. The protagonist does marry, but Alcott escapes having to deal with the logistics of how combining a career and marriage would work by having the groom die in the war.

At the beginning of the novel, Christie Devon decides to leave home on her twenty-first birthday and make her own way, instead of continuing to depend upon support from her Uncle Enos and Aunt Betsey. She first tries working as a servant, then as an actress, a governess, a companion, and, finally, a seamstress. By the end of the sixth chapter, she is unemployed, except for taking in piecework in her rented room, and she is alone. Alcott wrote this section of the novel in 1861 during the first year of the war. At this point in the story, there had only been room for work in Christie's life, and Alcott's, as well.

There are two marriage proposals in this section, and Christie declines both. In regards to the first, the reader is only told about it near the beginning of the story, and the reader never actually meets Joe Butterfield, the would-be fiancé: "But when one well-to-do neighbor laid his acres at her feet, she found it impossible to accept for her life's companion a man whose soul was wrapped up in prize cattle and big turnips" (13). She is unwilling to abdicate her right to govern herself in order to procure security. Considering such a fate helps spur her desire to

explore the world beyond her small community and to resist the confines that severely limit the choices of women.

The second proposal occurs while Christie is a governess for a wealthy family, and this is a proposal that she seriously considers. Christie's good nature and friendship breathe new life into Mr. Philip Fletcher, the bored invalid who is the brother of Christie's employer, and he decides that he needs a "better-time killer than billiards, horses, or newspapers" and that the "long, listless days seemed endless without the cheerful governess to cheer him up" (64). He decides to propose despite the fact that Christie is considered to be beneath him according to class standards. Christie is expecting the proposal and has already decided to say yes. She is tired of being alone, and marriage to Philip will mean travel abroad and prosperity. However, when the moment comes, his words and his tone strike her as wrong: "The tone of unconscious condescension in it wounded the women's sensitive pride; self was too apparent [...]. This was not the lover she had dreamed of, the brave, true man who gave her all, and felt it could not half repay the treasure of her innocent, first love" (67). It is too much about him, about making him happy, her taking care of him, and him doing her a favor by overlooking her class and her past work as an actress. Christie is an independent, self-reliant woman who knows the priceless value of her heart, and though she is tempted to accept the "promotion" from governess to wife (64), she is not willing to trade her freedom for less than genuine love.

In this way the novel argues that a woman who can support herself, within the confines of the professions open to women at the time, does not have to marry. Marriage is a choice, not a necessity. This concurs with Phelps's message in *Silent Partner*. However, Alcott's heroine does eventually marry. The first six chapters of *Work* are a book left unfinished. Alcott began the novel in 1861, but she did not complete the novel until 1872. The sixth chapter concludes with

Christie alone and in poverty. She is in need of a companion; she is not happy and longs for “the sound of a loving voice; the touch of a friendly hand” (114). Alcott does not stipulate that Christie needs a husband or a man, but that she needs someone who cares.

By the time that the novel was finished and published in 1873, the war had shaken the foundations of the nation and the lives of those within, and Alcott had added twelve chapters. She was now ready to consider the plausibility of combining a woman’s work/calling with marriage. Sizer contends that “the connection between the Civil War and postwar efforts to redefine womanhood are made most explicitly ... in *Work*” (260). Although Sizer mentions Christie’s brief marriage, Sizer’s focus is on the connection between women in the novel. My focus, on the other hand, is on the decision to marry and the role of marriage in Christy’s life. Her eventual marriage does not define her. Instead, her marriage is like a sidebar to her life, and extension of her friendship with David. In the new chapters, Christie falls into despair and almost casts herself into the river before a friend intervenes and sets her on the path to fellowship. Christie finds healing in the companionship of other women and in the ministry of Mr. Powers, who brings Christian charity to all those in need. In this new life, Christie is surrounded by good friends and work that has purpose. Work, in and of itself, is not enough. In the earlier chapters, Christie had been working to support herself. Now, she has a calling to help others, and she has fellow workers in God’s cause. She has companionship and connection. A woman, as demonstrated during the war by women’s social activism, charitable efforts for the soldiers, and work as nurses can make a difference in the greater world outside of her home. Christie exemplifies this new realization. It would be a waste to confine her skills and care to one hearth.

Her life is full, but is there still room for a man, still need for a husband? Could a woman fulfill her purpose *and* marry? Christie receives two proposals in this section, as well. The first

is from Philip Fletcher, once more. But this time, he is a changed man. He is no longer ill, and his sister has passed away. His return to health has restored his looks and his vitality, and he has not forgotten Christie: “He loved her with a better love than before. His whole manner showed this; for the half-careless, half-condescending air of former times was replaced by the most courteous respect, a sincere desire to win her favor, and at times the tender sort of devotion women find so charming” (250). This time his love is genuine and coupled with respect and admiration. Christie desires to love him, too. Once again, his money is a temptation, as well. With it, she could help the needy. However, her close friend and mentor, Mrs. Wilkins, a laundress with a less than helpful husband, cautions her that friendship, money, and admiration are not enough to form a marriage upon. Nothing less than mutual love is required: “For love is love, and ef she ain’t got it, he’d better not take gratitude instid” (254). In response, Christie declines Philip’s offer once again. According to Lystra, in the nineteenth century, “Romantic love was seen—inside and outside marriage—as one of the essential ingredients of marital happiness” (225). Thus, love is a necessity for marriage. Christie cannot make herself love Philip any more than Jo could will herself to love Laurie. Love is not subject to the will. On the other hand, as demonstrated later in the novel, marriage is a head *and* heart decision.

It is in the fourth proposal that Christie finds her love match. Ironically, it a relationship based on close friendship that has blossomed into love, ironic because despite Christie’s insistence that romantic love is essential for marriage, it is friendship that draws her to the man whom she marries. The patient, dutiful David Sterling is the ordinary hero who captures Christie’s heart. He is a florist who dedicates his time to his work, caring for his aging mother, and helping those in need. At Mr. Powers’s suggestion, Christie goes to the Sterling household to be a helper for Mrs. Sterling. While there, she develops a close bond with the good-natured,

kind, but seemingly plain David Sterling, whom she comes to admire. There are jealousies and misunderstanding along the way that hinder the acknowledgment of their love. Only after David reveals his past—he has a sister who went astray and whom he harshly rejected before repenting his treatment of her, and that he has lived that repentance every day for years before finally finding and restoring his sister—does he feel free to declare his love for Christie. Overflowing with joy, Christie declares that she is “happier poking in the dirt with you [David] than I should be driving in a fine carriage” with Philip Fletcher and that she has “longed more intensely for the right to push up the curly lock that is always tumbling into [his] eyes than for Philip’s whole fortune” (271). Romantic gestures, gallantry, and wealth are outweighed by kindness, a charitable nature, and close friendship. Assured of mutual love, David proclaims that they should soon be married. David is her equal, not her superior, and they plan to work together in his greenhouse as florists, an occupation that is not strictly male or female. Such an equitable marriage relationship is made more conceivable through the war’s influence on Phelps and the readers.

However, that is in March 1861. They do not marry until November 1862. Why does it take so long? Christie moves back to the Sterling household, the home that David shares with his mother and his newly found sister, Letty. David and Christie are so happy that it seems a shame to even waste time on sleep, but they postpone marriage. The war intervenes in April 1861. David does not enlist, but each member of the household answers the call to action in one way or the other. The women “picked lint and rolled bandages,” while David arranged flowers for soldier’s graves and helped with the sanitary work (278). As David reads the war news in the evenings, “their hearts ache[d] with pity, each woman, listening to the voice that stirred her like marital music, and said within herself, ‘Sooner or later he will go, and I have no right to keep

him.’ Each tried to be ready to make her sacrifice bravely when the time came, and each prayed that it might not be required of her” (278). David broods over his desire to join the war and “do [his] share like a man” while trying to be the provider for the three women at home. The war is a call to action for each member of the household, male and female, just as it had been in reality for households across the land.

They endure the war through summer, fall, winter, and another spring. At this point, it has been over a year since David and Christie first declared their love for each other and became engaged. Alcott delays their marriage an unexplainably long time, as if neither she nor Christie could bear to limit Christie’s independence. By spring 1862, “David had begun to think that they had waited long enough, but Christie still delayed—fearing she was not worthy, and secretly afflicted by the thought of her poverty” (281). Early in the summer of 1862, David asks her again, and still she refuses, despite her love for him. This extended delay implies that marriage is not the main focus of her life. After he declares his intention to enlist in the Union Army, Christie relents. Even though she has been reluctant to marry, she has already arranged to enlist as nurse in order to be near David. In return for David agreeing to her plans to share the “hardship and danger” with him, she agrees to marry him whenever he will ask her (281). Then, despite David’s supposed anxiousness to wed, it takes three months before he asks Christie to make good on her promise. During this time, he gets his affairs in order and enlists. For the first month or two, he is at a training camp near town and can visit often. Surprisingly, he waits until the very day that his unit receives their marching orders before he asks her. He shows up at the house with a marriage license and a wedding ring and three hours leave before his company is to march off to the train station to depart for the battlefield. He says that he had meant for it to be “some bright summer day, with many friends,” and not a “dull November day” with everything

so “hurried, sorrowful, and strange” (291). That may be what he says, but both Christie and he have treated their wedding as if it is a last-minute detail to be taken care of before a long journey. Christie finally says yes, and they have an hour’s walk in the greenhouse after the wedding. Then he is off to war.

During the next two years, they meet as often as they can when either one of them can grab a furlough, but they never share a home together as husband and wife. David is mortally wounded, and Christie makes it to his bedside in time to nurse him through his last night of life on this earth. The novel does not mention it, but at some point during their meetings, they must have consummated their marriage because Christie gives birth to a daughter a few months after David’s death. There is no real development of the marriage relationship within the text. The text privileges friendship over marriage. The climatic point of the novel is David’s proclamation of his love and Christie’s acceptance. The remaining sixty-nine pages of the novel transverse the war, paying brief attention to the marriage, and culminating in the high point of Christie’s life, being “useful” (329). At age forty, almost twenty years after Christie set out to make her own way in the world, she has found happiness in her work. The novel closes with her leading a “league of sisters,” fellow women, rich and poor, white and black, young and old, united in changing lives and changing their culture (343). They help the freed people, the poor, and others from the margins of society, but their main focus is on changing the lives of women and how society views and treats women. Their desire is for women to have useful lives and to be treated with respect and equality, and they are working towards that goal. Alcott closes the text with Ruth, Christie and David’s young daughter joining hands with the band of sisters: “A hopeful omen, seeming to promise that the coming generation of women will not only receive but deserve their liberty, by learning that the greatest of God’s gifts to us is the privilege of sharing

His great work” (344). The focus of the lives of these women is doing God’s work. Sizer notes that “Alcott used the Civil War to suggest the power of women coming together and the realized potential of their great national effort” (262). The war spurs women to action for the cause of the nation and then for their fellow women. The women in David’s household come together to make bandages for the soldiers and to support “their” soldier. Then, Christie volunteers and serves as a nurse, working with other women to care for the wounded and dying. The war develops Christie’s leadership skills and her vision for the future. Christie’s marriage is a cherished memory, but it is not the fulcrum of her life.

In *Work*, the love of a man is a dear, treasured accessory but not enough to fill a life with purpose. In *Little Women*, “to be loved and chosen by a good man is the best and sweetest thing which can happen to a woman,” and love and the uniting of two lives in marriage is a taste of what heaven will be like (95, 422). When Jo and Bhaer discover that their love is reciprocated and decide to unite their lives in marriage, Alcott refers to it as the “crowning moment” of their lives (463). (In this case, it is the fulfillment of both their lives, not just the woman’s.) Christie’s crowning moment comes as she joins hands with the other women at the table in determination to work together. Alcott is taking a much more radical stance in *Work*. She has had more time to consider the lessons of the war. *Work* is written with her own views in mind, unlike *Little Women*, which was written to please the publisher and a wide audience. In *Little Women*, the war helped develop Jo’s independence and transform her into a woman determined to be an equal in her marriage, but in *Work*, the war prepares Christie for a lifetime of leadership unhampered by romantic attachment. Unlike *Little Women*, in *Work*, the love of a family is not enough to be a woman’s all and all; a woman’s main fulfillment needs to come from fulfilling her calling, her “work” in this world.

The Story of Avis: Dissipating Promises

Phelps's *The Story of Avis* (1877) offers the most complex analysis of a woman combining a career and marriage of the four novels discussed in this chapter. Unlike Perley in *Silent Partner*, Avis does marry, and unlike Jo, she does not willingly relinquish her career aspirations when she says, "I will." In addition, the marriage is not a quick side note soon ended by the sad but thematically convenient death of the husband, as in *Work*. In *Avis*, Phelps takes the reader into the arena of wedded life and the day-to-day struggles of a woman attempting to pursue a career while married. In this novel, Phelps does not ask her female protagonist to do without romance and marriage, but she clearly demonstrates the detrimental effects that marriage has on her career.

As the novel opens, the twenty-six year-old Avis has no intention of ever marrying. Her life calling is to be an artist. At age nineteen, she travels to Europe and studies art for six years, under the tutelage of master painters, pouring herself into learning and developing her skills. Recognizing her genius, the final master, at the completion of her study, says to Avis, "Mademoiselle, I will give you two years to make a reputation" (37) and sends her out into the world to paint. If this were *Silent Partner*, Avis's life would be simple. She would refuse to marry whoever might propose, and she would pursue her art. But life is not always that simple.

Marriage had meant the end of Avis's mother's career aspirations. When her mother was young, she had wanted to join the theatre, and she had been in the beginning stages of pursuing a dramatic career, when she met Hegel Dobell, Avis's father. Avis's father even admitted that her mother "unquestionably" had "genuine dramatic talent" and that "under proper conditions she might have become famous" (25). Of course, he expected her to give all of that up when she married him. When Avis asked her father if he thought her mother ever missed the theatre and

the life she had given up, her father answered, “Your mother was my wife, and my wife loved me” (25). How could she miss having a career when she had him instead?

However, her husband’s love was not enough to keep her mother from slowly withering away and dying by the time Avis was nine years old. One of Avis’s most vivid memories of her was when, as a young child, she asked her mother why she never “kept theatres” (25). It was Avis’s childlike way of asking why her mother never pursued her dreams. Her mother’s response was that “I married your papa,” and when Avis asked if she ever missed it, her mother set her down from her knee and then “impulsively recalled, snatched, kissed, and cried over with a gush of incoherent words and scalding tears. She never saw her mother cry before or after that” (24). Even as a child, Avis could feel her mother’s pain and regret, even if her father was wishfully blind to it. And Avis never forgot. There was no room in a woman’s life for a career and marriage. Avis was going to devote herself to the former.

However, Avis’s painting of Spenser’s Redcross Knight finding Una in the *Fairie Queen*, described in the first chapter of the novel, foreshadows the challenge to her intentions. In the painting, Una has stopped in mid-motion upon seeing the knight. Phelps writes, “It was impossible to look upon this woman and not say, ‘She sees the man she loves.’ Her eyes leaped to him; her lips leaned to him; her whole being gravitated to him” (9), but when an onlooker expresses surprise that Una was so “easily won,” Philip Ostrander, a handsome college instructor, speaks: “Do you not see: Every nerve and muscle is tense for flight. She will turn and run before that clumsy knight gets up to her –if she can” (9). Those are the key words: “if she can.” This is Avis’s first introduction to Ostrander, and it will be her challenge to refuse and escape his pursuit of her heart, just like Una in the painting, if she can.

Ostrander and she had first glimpsed each other in a church in Paris months before. Their eyes met for a moment across the aisle, and even though no words were exchanged, Phelps writes, “These two, man and woman grown, going out from the Madeleine that afternoon to the world’s wide ends, would have thought of one another, as we think of an unread poem, or an undiscovered country, as long as either lived” (39). There was an attraction from the start, and unfortunately for Avis’s career, they do meet again—at the poetry recital where the Una painting is revealed.

Of the four novels discussed in this chapter, *The Story of Avis* is the only one in which romantic love acts as a significant influence. Avis is the only heroine who clearly feels the tug of physical attraction and sexual tension. Physical attraction was not rare in the nineteenth century, just in these novels. The letters and diaries examined by Lystra in her study show numerous examples of letters from couples who warmly recalled nights in each other’s arms and who longingly awaited marriage when they might fully consummate their love. For example, Eliza Trescot wrote to her fiancé Eldred Simkins, “That last night, my own Eldred, was it not the happiest of our lives?... I was so happy to have your head upon my shoulder and my arm around you and to feel as if you were entirely my own” (Lystra 68). Betsey Meyers wrote to her fiancé, “I fancy in my dreams that you are by my side, and your arm around my waist and my hand in yours, and that you again lead me back to our old haunts of love and pleasure” (Lystra 60). These letters and others contained in Lystra’s study demonstrate the prevalence of romantic love and sexual attraction between nineteenth-century couples. In *The Story of Avis*, Avis’s desire for Ostrander threatens to undo her career and her future. Instead of making the heroine immune to any traces of physical desire, as she did in *Silent Partner*, Phelps pits Avis in conflict with her

own emotions, in perhaps a more realistic portrayal of what life would have been like for real women of the era who contemplated having a career.

In the story, Ostrander is all the more interested in Avis because she does not swoon after him like most other young women do. She stays away. Her self-imposed barrier is disrupted, however, when he rescues her from a strong gale that almost sweeps her into the ocean. She is out walking to the lighthouse, along the reef, when an unexpected storm arises. The pounding winds knocks her down on to the rocks, and she is in danger of being swept into the water when Ostrander, who has been watching her, hurries out to rescue her and puts his own life at risk to save her (44-45). The mixture of personal danger and gratitude forms a connection. This leads to her agreeing to paint a portrait of him for his mother.

The portrait acts as a catalyst to Ostrander and Avis falling in love, though Avis fights fiercely against any such creeping in of emotion. The painting means spending hours of time together in Avis's little garden studio. They are surrounded by flowers and the blossoming of spring. Avis has never felt so in "harmony with the infinite growing and yearning of nature," but she thinks it is just the beauty of the spring in the garden (56). Ostrander is captivated by her, studying her every move and look, thinking of how Adam wooed Eve in a garden, as well, and thinking of Avis's love as a "budding flower" (56). The painting takes weeks, but Avis is obtuse to any "budding" of emotion. One day, picking up a petal that has fallen from her hair, Ostrander dreamily says, "May is past, and June has come to us" (57). Avis is startled by the implication that there could be any progression in any "relationship" between them. Yet, silently, she feels "a sudden sick emptiness of soul, as if an artery had been opened there, which no human power could ever bind" (58). She has allowed this man to become a friend, to become part of her life. She senses her vulnerability to his charms.

June arrives fully, and the portrait is finished. She unveils the portrait, with the sinking feeling that tomorrow, she will be alone in the studio, but with no acknowledgement of any other feelings. Unable to restrain himself any longer, Ostrander tells her, “I believe you are the only woman in the world who would not understand. You do not, will not, will not. Ah, hush! For all that ails the June is, that we love each other!” (62-63). Her complexion turns the “color of white fire,” and she thrusts her hands out in front of her; “I deny it!” (64). She insists that he is gravely mistaken, that he cannot presume to know how she feels, and that his “love” is merely a “passing influence” (65). His words to her seem to be great intrusion to which she feels a “wild rebellion” (64). She is not quite for sure which thought is more disturbing—“that he loved her, or that he had told her that she loved him” (64). It is as if there is power in him even suggesting that she loves him, a power perhaps to unearth what she has hidden even from herself. Avis seeks to control her feelings, but as Rothman and Lystra have stated, romantic love was outside the realm of logic and of will, according to the nineteenth century popular belief. The Victorians viewed romantic love as “an essentially uncontrollable consequence of inexplicable forces of attraction” (Lystra 192). Avis does not want to admit to being in love, not even to herself, because love is a force to be reckoned with, and she is afraid that love could overpower her rational, well-thought out plans and priorities.

Ostrander and Avis are interrupted by her Aunt Chloe, so the full confrontation comes the next day by the sea shore. He is determined to press his suit and propose; she is equally determined to remain impervious to any emotions that could entangle her life and drain sustenance away from her art. She insists to him that she is “not a woman . . . to make any man happy” (67). She is not meant to be a wife and care for a home, but this man has “confused and agitated, nay, half blinded her,” and from him, “her nature [finds] escape or surrender equally

impossible” (69). He has rooted himself into her heart. But she cannot marry. It is not as if she has never longed for love, but her imaginary knight would be a man who could respect and honor her aspirations of becoming a great artist. She does not believe that such a man exists.

But Ostrander insists that he is such a man. He claims that if only she would agree to marry him that he would devote himself to her goals: “I should be proud to have you paint. I used to think I should be wretched with a gifted wife (all young men do); but you have taught me better. It would be the purpose [...] of my life to help you realize your dreams of success” (69). Still, Avis is not convinced. She does not believe that he could live with the reality of his eager declarations. She cannot cook, and she hates to clean, for her art has been her life. For a woman, marriage is a profession, but art is Avis’s profession. Phelps shows that Avis is not a woman suited for a traditional marriage that subjects the wife to the confines of the female sphere. But there are also the hopes that perhaps a marriage could be otherwise, that a man could support his wife in her career. Avis dreams of such a man. The years since *Silent Partner* allowed Phelps to consider the possibility that a woman might be able to combine a career and marriage. But it is an option that has not come into fruition yet.

Avis’s stalwart determination eventually breaks his will, and he turns away, offering her no hope of the friendship that she requests. He bounds away, and, exhausted from the battle, she sinks to the ground, burrowing her face in the grass and daisies. Quietly, he returns for one last question: “Tell me,--it is all you can do for me now [...] tell me if I am the man you would have, might have, and loved?” (73). Looking up from the grass, she utters, “For your soul’s sake and mine, you are the man I *will* not love” (73). But can her will control her love?

In response, Ostrander enlists in the Union Army as a surgeon. He leaves without seeing Avis again, with his only farewell being a scribbled note about the check to pay for the portrait.

It is as if there had been no personal connection between them at all. It is here that the war intervenes in Avis Dobell's life. It is the summer of 1862, and it is a summer of distraction for Avis. Ostrander is gone, but she cannot paint. She sits in front of her canvas for days without making a mark, and one night, in frustration, she burns several sketches. Previous to this, the war had been a distant hum in the background. Aunt Chloe would cut back on butter or sugar and turn the lamps down lower in order to conserve resources for the troops, but Avis had felt no real connection to any of it. However, Ostrander's enlistment brings the war to the front of her consciousness: "At the front, hale soldiers dropped from the ranks with sunstroke, and the wounded died of thirst upon the field. It was the summer of battles, --Fair Oaks, The Seven Days, Cedar Mountain, Bull Run, Harper's Ferry, Antietam" (77). Men were suffering and dying.

The war intrudes upon daily living in the novel much as it did in Phelps's own life. Many of the young men of Andover Theological Seminary, where Phelps's father was a department chair, marched out to serve the nation, and too many did not return. In her autobiographical *Chapters from a Life* (1896), Phelps writes of a time when "the professors cannot read the papers for the news they bring; but cover streaming eyes with trembling hands" (73). The women of Andover worked to do what they could for the men and boys at the front, and they grieved: "For there the women of the hill [...] pick lint and roll bandages and pack supplies for the field; and there they sacrifice and suffer like women who knew no theology at all, and since it was not theirs to offer life to the teeth of shot and shell, they 'gave their happiness instead'" (74). Women were expected to willingly encourage their male loved ones to enlist, support the troops in the field, and be willing to sacrifice those same loved ones for the cause. Phelps lost her fiancé in the war in 1862 in the Battle of Antietam (Lori Kelly 10), and she remained single for the next

twenty-six years until her marriage in 1888. The war bled into the fabric of Phelps's everyday life, much as it does in Avis's life in 1862 within the novel.

For Phelps, the war sparked her creative spirit, leading her to write a "war story," which was the "beginning of anything like genuine literature" for her (Chapters 75). Her first published novel, *The Gates Ajar* (1868), which she began during the war, was written to console the grieving women who has lost loved ones in the war.ⁱⁱ For Avis, on the other hand, the war stifles every creative impulse. In the novel, as summer moves into July and then August, the war is inescapable. The voices of the college boys singing war songs ring across the town square in the evenings; they seem to echo in her head, even when she cannot hear them, and her inspiration deserts her. Avis neglects her studio, supposedly because of the heat, and goes with her friend to the chapel where the ladies of the town gather to roll bandages and to pick lint to send to the wounded after the Second Battle of Bull Run (78). Her frustration builds, she has painted nothing all summer since the portrait, and now it is August. One night in desperation, she drinks liquor, seeking inspiration in intoxication. Finally, the songs in her head stop, and she envisions her greatest work of art, a painting of a sphinx, in which she hopes to reveal the mysteries of womanhood. But the vision is followed by a horrible waking nightmare in which she sees battle after battle with men falling, wounded to the ground, crying out in agony, and dying (83). The war will not let her escape. Men and boys are dying by the tens of thousands, and she is there in the comfort of her home. Ostrander is likely in the hell of battle somewhere, and he is there because of her. Avis was greatly troubled, as many real women were during the war, at the thought of men suffering and dying on some far away battlefield, while they, the woman, stayed at home and waited. Many historical records indicate their longing to be useful. In Avis's case, she throws herself into her art.

Upon waking the next morning, she throws herself into her new painting, hardly leaving her studio to sleep, and seeking to smother all other emotions and realities. Shortly after, when she learns that Ostrander has been severely wounded, shot in the lungs, she merely asks, without any evidence of emotion, if he will be taken to his mother's in New Hampshire (85). A couple weeks after when she hears that he has been brought to town, and is being cared for, by an eligible young woman, Barbara Allen, and her brother, Avis has nothing to say. At this point, there is some chance of his recovery, but it is not known whether he will live or die. Meanwhile, Avis's friend, Coy, has become engaged and is bubbling over with happiness (88). It is simple for Coy: She is in love, so when the young man proposes, she simply says yes. Avis looks at her with a twinge of envy and awe. For Avis, who is determined to have a career and succeed as an artist, the choices are not simple at all. She does not have room in her life for cooking, laundry, babies, and a husband who will expect care and attention. She appears to be unmoved as she hears the news of Ostrander's critical wounding. But the life-death intensity of the war is bearing down upon her heart, a heart already at battle against love.

Ostrander survives and recovers slowly throughout September, and he is determined to see Avis. Half crawling, he searches for her by the seawall, near the shore, and when she looks into his changed face, she is transformed. The summer has caught up with her. Despite her stone-like reaction to all previous news of him and his suffering, her thoughts have been of him all along: "Upon the battlefield, beneath the short, within the blazing hospital, upon the scorching journey, and at the door of death, she had followed him as one follows afar off. [...] Her mind had not been at any time laggard in its apprehension of the fact that he lay, at a stone's throw from her, grappling with life, and that another woman rendered him the tender offices of friendship and of compassion" (99). However, her imagination had not prepared her for the

haggard look upon his face and the change wrought by his nearly mortal injury. Her heart goes out to him, and her face shows it. Now, her lip trembles, and in the flood of compassion that lights her face, he gains hope that he might yet win her over, feeling that “had he come to her again in the power of his manhood, he might again have gone as he came. It was his physical ruin and helplessness, which appealed to the strength in her” (99-100). She finds his weakened state more irresistible than his once handsome face. Karen Tracey, in *Plots and Proposals* (2000), likens this to Jane’s reaction to the “chastened, wounded and blinded” Rochester in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Aura’s final acceptance of the blinded Romney in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aura Leigh* (1856) (156). Ostrander had hoped to die in battle, since he did not believe he could win Avis: “He would have died to see that lip of hers tremble so—for him. Now he saw it—and lived. He had exchanged nothing but a shot lung and a life-long feebleness—for heaven. He drew a weak step nearer to her, and held out his arms” (100). His loss of health and strength has thrown victory within his reach. The Civil War indirectly reverses Avis’s decision to not marry. Her resistance is not over, but the battle has turned decisively in Ostrander’s favor.

The war is now within Avis, the struggle between her love and her consuming desire to be an artist. She refers to it as a “civil war” (106). According to Karen Tracey, “The Civil War, recast into the novel *Avis*, represents the violent male world in which Avis must be a woman and an artist, but war also operates as a doubled metaphor in her personal life, representing both the battle between Avis and Philip Ostrander and Avis’s internal conflict when struggling against her attraction to him” (153-154). In *Avis*, courtship is a “battle between the sexes; in which the heroine can either ‘defend her cause’ (and continue to be a career-oriented single woman) or ‘surrender’ (and submit herself to a risky marriage)” (154). I agree. However, the war is more

than a metaphor in this novel; it is a force outside of Avis's control and reason that breaks down the reserve around her heart and lays it open to feelings. The effects of the literal war are inescapable. Avis is painfully aware that tens upon tens of thousands of men are suffering and dying on the battlefields and in the hospitals. And the maritime music, the lists of wounded, and the need to make bandages are constant reminders of that stark reality. The brevity and unpredictability of life are made acutely clear. There may be no tomorrow for Ostrander and for many other men who have risked their all for the nation.

Both Tracey and Fetterly, who is discussed earlier in this chapter, miss the significance of the impact of the actual war on those who lived through it, including Phelps and Alcott. In *The Story of Avis*, Avis's war-inspired nightmares of men dying and sacrificing penetrate her soul and leave her raw and vulnerable to emotions. Phelps writes that Avis is "terrified by the serried advance of a mighty love upon her able and discomfited resistance" (106). Avis cannot imagine herself as any man's wife. To her marriage means giving up her life and her work; she is unwilling to do that, so she battles against the flood of emotion that threatens to overwhelm her common sense and well-thought out plans. Ostrander once again declares that he would never dream of asking her to give up her work; he only wants her love. He claims that he will fully support her in her career: "Only let us love, and live, and work together. Your genius shall be more tenderly my pride than my little talents can possibly be yours. I shall feel more care for your assured future than you ought to feel for my wrecked one" (108). Avis begs him to help her say no, to be "merciful" to both of them. She is afraid that marriage to her will make them both miserable, that despite all of his promises, he would be bothered when the "coffee" wasn't right (108). But throughout her pleading, she occasionally mutters "Oh, how pale you are" (108). His injured health, along with her growing love, which has doubtlessly been strengthened by her

months of concern over him being in battle, plead against her resolve. The war is a catalyst leading to her surrender. In *Avis*, unlike in *Silent Partner*, the heroine decides to take the risk. In *Silent Partner* the decision is not even a struggle for Perley. Stephen Garrick is the man Perley might have loved, the man she could have loved, but she does not. The war, though an influence on Phelps, is barely mentioned in *Silent Partner*. It permeates *The Story of Avis*, interrupting Avis's work, stifling her inspiration, and facilitating her acceptance of Philip's second proposal. Avis marries Philip for better or for worse.

Accordingly, Avis's personal civil war continues beyond the "I do" as she watches Philip's promises to her unravel. Ostrander provides her with a maid to help relieve her from domestic duties, but by the time the third maid has replaced the inept first and second maids, Avis is not feeling much relief. Ostrander insists that very soon they will fix up the attic as a studio for her. Despite his declarations, Avis's career is not his priority. It is merely another item on a to-do list. Meanwhile, she returns to the garden studio at her father's house when she has the time. They truthfully need more than one maid and one who is of substantial help, but they cannot afford to hire more help due to Ostrander's student loan debt that she does not recall him mentioning before they married. But at this point, six months into their marriage, she still believes that "with love as with God, all things are possible" (142). Then, there is the death of his mother. Avis travels with him to visit his mother on her deathbed. It is there that for the first time Avis realizes, though she hates to admit it, that perhaps Philip has neglected his mother. He discouraged her from attending their wedding, and he has left her alone in her little house over the years, hardly ever visiting her. Avis comes to understand that Ostrander is not a man who keeps his commitments, and he is not a man of compassion.

The months move on. Avis transfers her studio to the attic, but no great inspiration or artwork proceeds from her efforts, other than an occasional portrait to pay for household bills. There is always much to be done around the house. Unfortunately, she discovers that romantic promises made during courtship do not necessarily translate to a transformed life after marriage. Phelps writes:

Women understand—only women altogether—what a dreary will-o-the-wisp is this old, common, I had almost said commonplace experience, ‘When the fall sewing is done,’ ‘When the baby can walk,’ ‘When the house-cleaning is over,’ ‘When the company has gone,’ ‘When we have got through the whooping-cough,’ ‘When I am a little stronger,’ then I will write the poem, or learn the language, or study the great charity, or master the symphony; then I will act, dare, dream, become. Merciful is the fate that hides from any soul the prophecy of its still-born aspiration (149).

Avis finds herself falling into the patterns of domestic life shared by countless other women, and Philip cannot or does not shield her from these mundane forces that threaten to rob her of career dreams. Their son is born, and Philip’s concerns for his own teaching career grow. His career, which is his life, is his primary focus. On occasions, he tells her that she really should spend more time in the studio, and that she should spend less time on housework, and that he will do something about it, but his words are mere words, with no action to make them reality.

By the time their daughter is born three years into their marriage, her studio is neglected more than noticed, and unfortunately, she has begun to become aware of the inconstancy in her husband’s nature. Shortly after her son’s birth, she had met the woman to whom Ostrander had once been engaged during his college years, before his fancy had turned away from the girl. In

the nineteenth century, an engagement was seen as a very serious commitment that could not lightly be broken with honor. His broken engagement points to inconsistency, and his not telling Avis indicates a hurtful lack of candor. Now, Avis's father comes to tell her that Ostrander will be asked to resign from his university professorship. Ostrander is very intelligent and talented, and he has great potential as a professor, but he turns his attention to a multitude of projects and experiments, neglecting the classroom and the students who should be the main focus of all of his professional efforts. Three and a half years into their marriage, when their second child, a girl, is only a few months old, and Avis is recovering from a near fatal attack of diphtheria, she finds him flirting with another woman. She realizes that his inconstancy has crept into his feelings for his wife, at last.

The war opened the way for Avis's marriage to Phillip, but the war did nothing to transform Phillip into a new man capable of living by his word and supporting his wife in her endeavors. The war allowed Phelps to consider the possibility of a woman combining a career with marriage because it showed women as capable of engaging in a man's world of work and of stepping beyond the domestic. In *Silent Partner*, Phelps ventured forth the proposition that a woman need not marry, that she could thrive without a man. In *Avis*, she goes beyond that to consider that perhaps a woman need not give up love and a relationship for her career. But a marriage is a partnership, and Phelps questions whether a man brought up in the pre-war culture is capable of resisting those cultural influences and putting aside some of his own interests in favor of his wife's. Maybe a woman should be able to have both a career and marriage, but *Avis* shows the reader the painful reality of attempting to bring that dream into fruition.

The assurance of Philip's love for her has sustained Avis through the trials and disappointments that have followed her marriage. For years, she has comforted herself with the

fact that “he still loved her: nothing could snatch that from her,—her one sure fact, abiding calm above the gusty weather of her life. Philip loved her: let the rest go. Why should she fret?” (177). But now she is afraid that she has lost that assurance. When she accuses him of not loving her any more, he admits that his “love is not quite the same as it was” (194). She had been longing for him to prove her wrong; instead, he validates her worry. Sick at heart, she feels “as if she had plunged a knife into a dissolving ghost, and drawn it back, reeking with human blood” (194). It is a “terrible truth” that destroys any hope of maintaining any pretense of tenderness in their day-to-day lives (194). To make matters worse, Philip says that he cannot help his change in feeling, that it is part of his inconsistent nature. He acts as if it is an ailment and that she should almost pity him for having such an affliction. The loss of his love appears all the more final to Avis since in the nineteenth century love was viewed as a “mysterious agency beyond human control,” and this “made the recovery of ‘lost’ love exceedingly difficult” (Lystra 206). She has given up her freedom and her ambition and let her career wither away for this man. She has given him her soul, pouring everything into her “one great love.” And he has betrayed that love.

They both agree that he should travel abroad to Europe for his health and to give them a break from each other. After his departure, she discovers an even more terrifying loss: “With a dread that shook the roots of her belief, she perceived that her own slighted tenderness had now begun to chill. That Philip should cease to love her—this could be borne. There was a worse thing than that. All was hers while she yet loved him” (201). But she no longer loves him. Her great love, for which she has sacrificed her career, is dead. She has her two precious children but nothing else, not even hope.

A year later he returns to her, broken in spirit and suffering from consumption. In his absence, their son has died. Now, she tenderly mothers her husband, and he looks to her eagerly,

as a boy, for strength and guidance. Leaving their young daughter with relatives, they travel to Florida for the winter in an attempt to restore Philip's health. There, amongst the healing sun and lush vegetation, his love returns to her, and he timidly seeks to woo his wife a second time. Slowly he succeeds, but this time, she falls in love with the real man, not the idealized image: "It seemed to her the great triumph of her life that she could love her husband just as God made him. [...] They had saved her life of life, they had saved their wedded love: the rest could be borne" (234). Surprisingly, she considers this rekindling of love, the ability to love each other for whom they truly are, her ability to love Philip despite his weaknesses and flaws, not the painting of the sphinx or her other art work, the crowning achievement of her life.

Philip dies before spring, and Avis travels back home. She is a widow now, free to paint as much as she likes. In this respect, she is similar to Christie in *Work*. Christie's widowhood opened the way for her to fulfill her life's purpose. However, that is not the way it works for Avis. In *The Story of Avis*, marriage is more than a stepping-stone to having a daughter and getting to the serious work of life. Marriage and her husband consume Avis's life. She is empty, drained of inspiration by the time her husband dies. After she returns home, she devotes herself to painting for a year, but it is to no avail. Her art does not sell; she has lost her style. Her hands and her inspiration are no longer pliable. She will teach art, but she, now, will never be the artist that she dreamed of, the artist that she had the potential to be. Her love has taken too much out of her: "She wondered how it would have been if [...] her feeling for that one man, her husband, had not eaten into and eaten out the core of her life, left her riddled, withered thing, spent and rent, wasted by the autocracy of a love as imperious as her own nature, and as deathless as her own soul. But she would do it all over again,--all, all!" (244). She has poured all of her creativity, inspiration, and zest into loving her husband. She was only married to him for five

years, and she is only in her early thirties when the story ends, but she is convinced that her ability to create great art is gone forever.

Avis's marriage has consumed her aspirations and potential. She is no longer exceptional. It is amazing that she concludes that she would do it all over again. In this novel, however, Phelps does not ask her female characters to do without romantic love and marriage, but she clearly shows that their careers would be much better off they did. In fact, she implies that a woman may find it nearly impossible to say no to love and marriage once she is infected with the seeds of love. Ideally, a woman should be able to have both a career and marriage. Deep within her, Avis realizes "that she might have painted better pictures—not worse—for loving Philip and the children; that this was what God meant for her, for all of them, once, long ago" (244). Love should act as a catalyst for creativity and bring out the best in people, both men and women. Society has warped what was originally intended, just as this world has fallen from the perfection of Eden. An egalitarian marriage should be possible and could be possible, but a promise made in the throes of romantic love is not enough to right a wrong that has been engrained for centuries.

Lystra argues that romantic love offered the best hope for producing a companionate, equitable marriage in the nineteenth century. She contends that "romantic love was the most significant circumstance bridging the gender gap in Victorian America" (42). She believes that this passionate connection of psychological intimacy could create "a mutual identification between men and women that was so intense that lovers repeatedly claim to have incorporated a part of their own partner's inner self into their own inner life" (42). According to Lystra, this is a force that can permeate the spheres and help lovers to see the world from each other's

perspective. Phelps, on the other hand, does not place much faith in this “force” triumphing over deeply entrenched cultural expectations and boundaries for any extended period of time.

Phelps demonstrates that Avis is naïve to think that Philip and she can change the world on their own. Karen Tracey points out the reality revealed in *Avis*, that “living out a renegotiated marriage in a backwards and unsympathetic world will be difficult at best” (Tracey 151). Philip fails to keep his promises of supporting Avis’s career over his own, not only because of his weak character but also because there is no societal support for a couple who seeks to renegotiate their roles within marriage. Men are expected to focus on their own career and to provide for their families. The other professors would have considered Philip weak and unmanly if he had taken time from his work to help Avis with the housework or with childcare. He is expected to perform the role of a professor, including having dinner guests over at his house, even if it adds to Avis’s workload. Philip’s romantic love for Avis might have helped him understand Avis’s perspective, but love by itself is not enough to shield him from the pressures to conform. It takes a man of very strong character to go against the dictates of culture. Philip is not that man.

Nineteenth-century society needed to change in order to make egalitarian marriages possible and open the way for women to combine a career with marriage. Women and men needed to be transformed, but it would take time. Phelps writes that “we have been told that it takes three generations to make a gentleman: we may believe it will take as much, or more, to make a WOMAN” (246). For such a woman, there would need to be a “new” man, one who could feel deeply and be willing to abnegate some of his position and power in order to support his wife. At the end of the novel, Avis’s hope is in working to make life different for her daughter. I propose that Phelps’s hope was to inspire women to work towards such a change and to not be fooled into believing that a promise could transform the world.

Perhaps in the years between *Silent Partner* and *The Story of Avis*, Phelps had started to yearn for romantic love in her own life and wonder if there could be some way to combine a career and marriage. The novel presents a bleak picture of the prospect. However, eleven years after the publication of *Avis*, at age forty-four, Phelps decided to risk integrating career and marriage in her own life. In 1888, she married Herbert Dickinson Ward, a journalist, who was seventeen years younger than her. They were married for twenty-two years until her death. During their marriage, she continued to write and publish, but her focus turned from the more radical support of women's rights to the temperance movement, women's clothing, and anti-vivisection. Phelps integrated her career with marriage, but it affected her voice. She wrote to a friend in 1903, "the married are hampered in what they can say" (qtd. in Kessler xxi). Her career survived the experiment, unlike *Avis*'s, but many would argue that her most notable works were written before her marriage.

Conclusions

Phelps married more than twenty years after the close of the war. Alcott never ventured into marriage. They had both lived through the struggle that marriage was for their mothers. Their mothers' lives had been entrenched in the domestic despite their brilliant potential and talent. Phelps's mother managed to write and publish a few novels before her early death, but the domestic was still her primary concern. Before the war, domestic fiction writers concurred that the care of their husband, children, and home was their primary and most sacred duty. Their writing was secondary.

Alcott and Phelps, who came of age as writers during and slightly after the war, did not agree with this precept. They argued that marriage should not be a woman's whole life. Elaine Showalter concludes that several of Alcott's works focus on the "conflicts between creativity and

domesticity” (*Alternate Alcott* xxxvi). Kessler writes that “marriage for Phelps was never a proper or sufficient goal” (xxvii). Taking care of the house, caring for the children, and seeing to the needs of her husband should not be the width, breath, and height of a woman’s life. Phelps admonished George Eliot that the heroine of *Middlemarch*, Dorthea, should “never accept wifedom as a *métier*” (qtd. in Kessler xvii). Dorthea is an extremely capable, intelligent woman who gives up her own mission and calling in order to support her second husband’s calling instead of remaining a widow. However, Dorthea loves Will Ladislow, and she willingly sets her wealth aside in order to share her life with him, as his wife. It is love that undoes Avis’s career, as well. Alcott and Phelps struggled with whether or not a woman could have a fulfilling career without sacrificing love and marriage.

In *Silent Partner* and *The Story of Avis*, marriage is seen as a loss of freedom, a loss of independence, and the loss of the opportunity or ability to have a greater impact on the world. For both heroines, the way to win the battle in favor of independence and self-identity is to not begin to love. Avis fails in this area. Marriage should be equitable, but in 1877, Phelps did not see this as a reality. Several years after the publication of *Avis* and the end of the Reconstruction era, Phelps published *Dr. Zay* (1884), in which a career woman, a doctor, finally agrees to marry a man who promises an equitable marriage in full support of her career. It is implied that they are both up to the challenge. Maybe this time it will work, but Phelps does not take the reader beyond the accepted proposal.

In *Little Women* and *Work*, marriage, as it should be, is the culmination of a mature friendship between a woman and a man. It is a partnership, where the husband and wife work together. However, it is not a station that provides or allows opportunity for a woman to pursue an independent career. Alcott leaves open the possibility in *Little Women* that Jo may someday

write a good book. In *Jo's Boys* (1886), Jo is finally back to writing, but that is eighteen years after *Little Women*. The stirrings, which began during the Civil War, had had time to expand their impact both in the imaginations of authors and in society.

The Civil War had shaken women's lives. As she looked at the fields of crops cared for by soldier's wives, Mary Livermore felt that a revolution in gender roles had already begun. Anthony, Gage, and Staunton believed that the war had begun a dynamic transformation in women. Northern women writers, including Alcott and Phelps, were part of this historical awakening. The war had demonstrated that women were capable of performing men's work. Women also came to realize that the glorification of the influence and power of their domestic realm had been hollow. How could they change the world from their hearths if the men were called away to war, swept from their influence? If these women wanted to make a difference in the world, perhaps they needed a focal point beyond their own children and husbands.

The war strongly influenced both Alcott and Phelps. Alcott participated in the war by enlisting as a nurse at an Army hospital. Phelps saw many of the young men of the college town where she grew up go off to war. Her town was consumed with the war. She saw the professors grieve, and she, in turn, grieved for her own fiancé who died in battle. In addition, the war catapulted the writing careers of both women on a trajectory towards art, success, and fame.

However, the two authors treat the war differently in their writing. In the two Alcott novels, the war enables women to fulfill their potential. In *Little Women*, the war shows that the women of the family can take care of themselves, and it aids in the development of Jo's independent nature. In *Work*, the war takes Christie from knitting by the fireside and working alongside David in the greenhouse to being an effective nurse to hundreds of soldiers and preparing her to be a speaker and activist leader among women after the war. In Alcott's *Work*

and Phelps's *The Story of Avis*, the war is a factor that pushes the women to marry. In *Work*, this has positive results. As his wife, Christie is able to visit David at the front. She also conceives a daughter who is a hope for the future. In *Avis*, the war leads to her undoing. Avis finally agrees to marry Philip after his second proposal because she feels sorry for him after he is severely wounded in the war. It is also the war that impedes her creative process. War songs trouble her waking hours, and battlefield dreams trouble her sleep. In *Silent Partner*, the war is barely mentioned, but its influence is felt in Phelps's ability to create an independent heroine who does not need marriage in order to make her life whole.

In these writings, Phelps and Alcott found it difficult to imagine how a woman could successfully integrate marriage with a career. However, their serious exploration of the topic was revolutionary in itself. Most fiction before the war did not consider such a question. In the pre-war stories, women might have had to work to provide their way in the world, and perhaps in some rare story, a woman actually had a career, but most of the stories built towards marriage, specifically a marriage in which the woman would set aside any thought of a career in order to take up her domestic duties. The war paved the way for the serious consideration, both in fiction and in real life, that such a combination might somehow be possible.

Outside the realm of fiction, living out the possibilities was even more convoluted. Women struggled between hopes, aspirations, and the needs and expectations of their husbands and society. During the war, Julia Clark was in Kentucky working for the U.S. Sanitary Commission. Her husband wanted her to return home and take care of him, but she replied, "I do not think it would work to my credit or the good of the Institution to have me leave till this plan is carried thro'—" (qtd. in Lystra 146). In this case, she placed the value of her service as more important than her duty to her husband. A few years later, Clara Wheeler was teaching at the

same college as her husband, Nathaniel, and the similarities in their positions troubled him. He wrote, “You were formed for home, and to be its mistress, not to be my helper in breadwinning and my rival” (qtd. in Lystra 149). Clara’s brief “career” caused conflict in her marriage.

Dorothea Lummis was a medical student in Boston in the 1880’s. When her husband received a job offer in Ohio, she stayed in Boston to finish school. This was a bold decision, but it did not bring her happiness. As her husband and she drifted further apart, she wrote to him, “Had I known then, what it would cost us, or even that you wanted me with you, I would have given it up” (qtd. in Lystra 207). Lystra credits war with fueling the struggle over gender roles and spheres that lasted throughout the rest of the nineteenth century (141). But I go beyond that to argue that the war started the momentum towards the repositioning of marriage in a woman’s life. It was a painful, messy transition at times, especially when it crossed over the boundaries that sought to keep the woman embedded in the domestic. The war fueled the idea that marriage should not be a woman’s all and all, but applying this new realization in everyday life was a decades-long battle.

Northern women writers of the era were in the vanguard seeking to spur transformation. Marriage, for these writers, should not be the primary goal of a woman’s life, and neither should romantic love, which can lead a woman to cast aside everything for the man who captures her heart. These authors contradict a popular belief of their century when they argue against the idealization of romance. They seek to persuade women that romantic love should not be the top criteria in choosing to marry and in choosing a marriage partner. For these authors, marriage should not be a rash decision based on an effervescence of feeling. Love is an essential part, but the decision to marry should be a level-headed decision based on friendship, companionship, honesty, and compatibility, as well. Even then, the decision to marry can mean a choice between

a career and family. Marriage limits a woman's freedom to pursue her life goals and dreams. Jo Bhaer says that it is worth it. Christie does not have to decide. Her husband dies in the war, leaving her the time and freedom to pursue her calling of helping other women. For Phelps, especially, marriage is a battle, but a woman's loving, giving heart will not always obey her will and mind, even if she would be better off if it did. And there is the hope that someday a woman really will be able to enjoy a career and marriage. Marriage does not define the lives of the heroines in these works. The war contributed to this slippage, but it was just the beginning of the imaginings of the repositioning, juxtaposing, and intermingling of career and marriage for women. The battle on the fictional page and in the lives of real women had just begun.

CHAPTER THREE

SENSATIONAL BATTLEFIELD TRANSGRESSIONS AND THE RE-ENVISIONING OF “I DO”

In E.D.E.N. Southworth’s sensational novel *Fair Play*, Confederate Colonel Eastworth expects his young, Unionist fiancée, Erminie Rosenthal, to flee with him and join the secessionist cause: “I know what your professed principals [sic] are. [...] Daughter-like you take your opinions from your father and parrot-like repeat the words that he is using without attaching meaning to them. Henceforth, Erminie, you must take your opinions, not from your father but from your husband” (187). Parrot-like? Eastworth is slow to grasp that his angel has a mind of her own and that her convictions are rooted deeper than a romantic fever. In Civil War-era sensational literature, heroines do not believe in quiet acquiescence. There is a war on, and hiding behind a façade of inability is not an option. The “angels of the house”ⁱⁱⁱ have clipped their wings and have become apostles^{iv}, living examples of what women are truly capable of and willing to risk all for their belief in a cause.

During the Civil War and Reconstruction Era, Northern sensational literature consistently depicted women thrust across their domestic thresholds into the midst of conflict. According to Fahs, “Northern sensational stories embraced the transformative possibilities to be found in the disruptions of war” (255). In the South, on the other hand, cultural “constraints on gendered behavior [...] restricted the imaginations of popular writers” (Fahs 253). In Southern sensational stories, women might defend their homes or on rare occasions venture into nursing, but they are confined to their sphere. In Northern fiction, the authors explore transgressions of gender boundaries heretofore not permitted in domestic or literary novels. Heroines could not only become nurses or defend their homes, but also work as spies, dress as men, and even go into

battle. Although most of the women marry in the end, these are not the actions of a traditional domestic heroine. Many of these novels have a radical message: a woman should think for herself and place her convictions before her heart. Evans, the Southern novelist discussed earlier in this dissertation, fully supports this creed, but her heroines do not transgress beyond the feminine. Irene Huntingdon nurses the less fortunate and the wounded. She also acts as a philanthropist. Edna Earl was an author before her marriage, and Electra Gray is an artist. But Evans's heroines would never consider becoming soldiers or spies or taking on a male role. Their transgressions have limits imposed by Southern culture. The Northern writers were not so encumbered. In addition, Northern sensational literature advocates that loyalty to the nation should and must take precedence over ties of love. Evans's heroines have no such concerns. The men in her novels are all loyal Southerners. Northern sensational fiction places politics at the center of the decision to marry.

Previous chapters in this dissertation have looked at the Southern perspective, with its wishful suggestion of capable women retreating back to the domestic, and at the Northern domestic and genteel literature's focus on the feasibility of women combining a career with marriage. The novels discussed in the previous chapter on Northern fiction confined themselves to the ordinary and realistic. The heroines struggled with household duties while striving to write, or paint, or provide charitable services. This chapter examines the sensational portrayal of the rupture the war created in women's lives in regards to the decision to marry and the relationship within the marriages-to-be in E.D.E.N. Southworth's *Fair Play* (1865) as well as its sequel *How He Won Her* (1866), Metta Victoria Victor's *The Unionist's Daughter* (1864), and other fictional and nonfictional narratives, including autobiographical narratives written by female spies and soldiers. Acting upon their convictions, the women in these narratives become

defenders and protectors for themselves, the men in their lives, and their country, and when they do choose to marry, it is often to a man who is wounded or in a weakened position, and it is after they, the women, have served their nation.

Some other scholars, such as Karen Tracey in *Plots and Proposals*, Alice Fahs in *Imagined Civil War*, and Lyde Sizer in *The Political Work of American Women Writers*, view the marriage ending as a retrenchment. I do not share this view. Although most of the women marry, this seeming return to the traditional is not a retreat. These women usually end up as the more physically, and often economically, capable partner in the marriage. The men are often emasculated to a degree. They are not, at least for the near future and perhaps indefinitely, capable of being the provider and protector. These men need the help of the woman in their life. The women are viewed as respected, capable partners, not weaker vessels that need to be led. The sensational, with its high adventure and unconventional heroines, advocates for a woman's ability to perform as a man's equal in the public realm, providing a blueprint for hybridity, the blending of gender roles. These are not "yellow" stories to be discarded and disdained. They are stories of empowerment. These fictional and nonfictional narratives usurp the primacy of the decision to marry as the defining moment of these heroines' lives.

The sensational showed that women were not bound to their hearths or acceptable domestic roles. In drawing a distinction between their novels and the domestic novel genre, one publisher of sensational literature, Street and Smith, vowed to avoid "tedious narrative or weak sentimentalism" (Johannson 304). The heroines in sensational novels do not often spend time in contemplation and inner dilemma. They are women of decision and action. Sensational literature, including its chief format, the disrespected "dime novel," opened up avenues not afforded to women in domestic literature or even what was considered serious literature. In *The Imagined*

Civil War, Fahs contrasts Louisa May Alcott's wish, as expressed in her journal in April 1861, to go fight in the war and having to settle for going to care for those who could fight to the actions taken by women in sensational literature: "in the pages of sensational war literature, women acted on such longings, not only refusing to content themselves with 'working for those who can' fight but often fighting alongside men or even disguising themselves as soldiers" (231). In sensational narratives, women step beyond wishes and dreams to action, disregarding social constraints. Fahs does not acknowledge it, but Alcott demonstrated her own personal determination and bravery by enlisting as a hospital nurse in a Washington, D.C. hospital, where she risked her health and her life in order to care for the men. Eventually, she became seriously ill from typhoid fever that she contracted in the hospital and nearly died. For the rest of her life, she suffered effects from the illness and the mercury she had been given as treatment. However, Alcott, in her life and in the slightly fictionalized account of her service, *Hospital Sketches* (1863), stayed within the realm of what was permitted for women. Sensational fiction and related "factual" accounts often go beyond that realm.

Fahs notes the strong connection and similarities between sensational fiction of the era and news writing of the era. The writers of sensational literature often sought to show that their stories were based on fact, and journalists wanted to capitalize on the popular and familiar in order to win readers. Fahs points out that "even factual portrayals of female soldiers were often rooted in the breathless conventions of sensational literature" (231). The daring and the dangerous, the extreme portrayal of the evil/bad characters, the angelic qualities of the good, and the female on her own with no protectors were standard in both fact and fiction. There was a "circular dynamic," according to Fahs, in which the language and conventions of sensational fiction provided the framework for the portrayal of real events in the war, and the portrayal of

real events in this manner substantiated the validity of sensational literature (239). The authors wanted to show that sensational war literature was not a far-fetched impossibility, dreamed up in someone's imagination. On the contrary, sensational literature was often portrayed as a slightly fictionalized account based on real events, and journalists and writers conveying the real events in the same language as the fiction increased that perception. Both the sensational fiction and the sensational journalism of the era worked to show women as capable of much more daring and action than had heretofore been accepted. They also worked to create an identity for women outside of the identities of their fathers and husbands.

However, according to Fahs, the stories of women dressing as men and having to disguise themselves in order to enter into the world of men inherently imply that women cannot enter this world as themselves. These stories present, Fahs claims, "an implicit theory of female identity outside of the home as inherently theatrical; involving simulation" (240). But such transformations are not entirely theater. These women are revealing a part of themselves that had been hidden. Clothes and disguises do not change who they are and what they are capable of. The disguise merely allows them to penetrate the walls of convention and prejudice. It reveals an ingenuity that can circumvent social constructs. Both the fiction and the nonfiction attest to the truth of women's too-often-smothered potential. The authors of sensational literature and memoirs reveal this potential, while cloaking it in the aura of the almost unbelievable, and the activation of this potential reduces the essentialness of marriage in the lives of these women.

Fahs does not focus on marriage; rather, her concern is with the similarities between sensational fiction and nonfiction. She concludes that Southworth's novels *Fair Play* and *How He Won Her* demonstrate that the war affected the relationship between the nation and the individual—that the war showed that the nation could no longer protect the individual; therefore,

individuals needed to look out for themselves. My focus is on how the war affected an individual woman's decision to marry and how it affected her role within that marriage as conveyed in sensational literature. In my analysis, the sensational portrays a change in the fundamental relationship of marriage.

Southworth's *Fair Play* and *How He Won Her*: Loyalty to Nation Outranks Love

In *Fair Play* (1865) and its sequel *How He Won Her* (1866) E.D.E.N. Southworth challenges preconceived notions regarding the capabilities of women. Her four heroines are defined by their commitment to their convictions, not by their marriages. In these novels, commitment is more than mere words; it equals action. The Civil War acts as a catalyst that spurs women to reach their potential. The three main heroines marry, but only after they have proven themselves equal or dominant to their lovers, who have been weakened or made vulnerable by the war.

Fair Play begins with the four heroines graduating from school and falling in love with various men. The demure daughter of a Lutheran minister, Erminie Rosenthal, of Washington, D.C., falls deeply in love with the noble, middle-aged Colonel Eastworth. She idolizes him. The feisty Elfie Fielding, a Virginian, falls for Albert Goldsmith, the son of a wealthy plantation owner and the cousin of her friend, Alberta Goldsmith. Alberta, a wealthy Southern belle, defies her parents and escapes from a convent to marry Vittorio Corsoni, an Italian professor. On the other hand, Britomarte Conyers, a declared man-hater, wants nothing to do with marriage. She is an orphan, on her own in the world, a typical scenario for the heroine in a sensational novel, but her determined, antagonistic attitude towards men is definitely atypical. The novel opens with her declaration: "God endowed woman with individual life—with power, will, understanding, brain, heart and hands, to do his work, and if it were only in gratitude to Him, she would never

commit the moral suicide of becoming the nonentity of which man's law makes a wife" (1). She urges all women to refuse to marry until the laws of the land change to make marriage more equitable for women. However, Justin Rosenthal, Erminie's brother, enters Britomarte's life, and, very much against her will, she falls in love with him. Justin is in love with her, too, and wants to marry her, but she refuses to allow him to speak of the subject and adeptly hides her feelings from him and herself. Determined to provide for herself and to get as far away from Justin as possible, she volunteers to travel to India as a missionary. However, much to her astonishment, Justin shows up on the boat as the captain's clerk. He is not ready to give up. During the course of the journey, they, along with a maid, are shipwrecked on a desert island, and they come to depend upon one another for survival and companionship. The two would-be lovers develop a deep brotherly-sisterly bond, but Britomarte still cannot break free of her anti-marriage stance. To Britomarte, when a man says, "I love you," it means "I like the way you look, and I want to make you my slave" (*How He Won Her* 508). She squelches any outward show of sentiment, determined to hold the line against matrimony and any expression of love that could lead to it.

Up to this point, except for the shipwreck adventure, *Fair Play* almost reads like a domestic novel, but then the war intervenes. Britomarte and Justin are stranded on the deserted island during the first two years of the war, and Alberta is not discussed in this novel after she elopes with Corsoni on the eve of the war, but the other two heroines are forced to choose between their political convictions and love. For Southworth, loyalty to the nation should and must take precedence over ties of love. Conventional wisdom, as stated by Vittorio Corsoni, says that "no woman who truly loved, ever discarded her lover for a mere difference of opinion in religion or politics" (181). Colonel Eastworth is confident of this wisdom when he confesses to

Erminie that he has enlisted in the Confederate service and insists that she marry him at once and flee to the South, despite the fact that her father and she are Unionists. He tells her, "I know what your professed principals [sic] are. [...] Daughter-like you take your opinions from your father and parrot-like repeat the words that he is using without attaching meaning to them. Henceforth, Erminie, you must take your opinions, not from your father but from your husband" (187). But to his astonishment, she refuses, demonstrating a strength of character that he had no idea she possessed. Erminie's loyalty to the Union is a deeply rooted belief, not a shallow adherence to what she has been told. She will not marry a man who is betraying his country, and Eastworth is forced to flee without her. Watching him leave, she breaks down into tears (190). Her heart is breaking, but she cannot forsake her beliefs, even for him. Southworth shows that women are not willows swayed by every wind of emotion. Instead, they are capable of independent thinking and of determining and adhering to their own principals and convictions. A woman's mind is her own, and she need not and should not submit it to the man in her life, even if it costs her the relationship.

Likewise, Elfie Fielding, a Virginian but loyal to the Union, chooses her country over her lover. Assuming that Elfie shares his support for secession, Albert Goldsmith confides that he has agreed to lead a group of Confederate raiders, and that he, along with Eastworth, are part of a secret plot to attack Washington, D.C. and bring it under the Confederacy. Upon hearing this, Elfie is torn between love for a man and loyalty to her country, but she vehemently declares, "I mean to be true to my country. Next to my duty to God, I rank my duty to my country and I shall be faithful to her though my heart should break in its fidelity" (173). She loves Albert, but she cannot let that love take precedence over what she knows is right. She breaks her engagement and orders him out of the house, telling him that she will give him a couple of hours to get out of

Washington before she goes to the authorities (176). Elfie is true to her word. Southworth once again demonstrates that women are capable of making the hard choice of placing the public before the private. Elfie and Erminie's refusal to marry sets a standard for the nation, saying that the nation, the public, is more important than any individual or private concern. The men, by going off to war, as expected, place the public before the private, but Elfie and Erminie's fiancés are traitors to the nation. The women set the standard and seek to call the men back to right thinking. These women demonstrate effective leadership. Women are shown to be citizens in full standing, accountable for their actions. Why should they receive any less than the full benefits of citizenship?

Loyalty to the nation should take precedence over other allegiances. That is the standard set by Southworth and many of the other authors of sensational literature, but Alberta Goldsmith is not loyal. She is a pro-secessionist, and the beginning of *How He Won Her* explains that Alberta has converted her husband to the Confederate cause. She is not forced to choose between political allegiances and her husband, though she does care enough about the political realm to influence her husband to adopt her viewpoint. As an Italian, Corsoni was not previously heavily invested in either side, although he had made pro-Union speeches before, most likely in opposition to Alberta's father rather than in true support for the nation. Joining allegiance with his wife, he now dedicates his full support to the Confederacy.

As war envelopes the nation, none of the four heroines is content with only serving from the realm of the domestic. Their convictions spur them to action. Erminie is the least transgressive. In *How He Won Her*, she works at a military hospital as a nurse at a time when females were much discouraged from attempting the nursing profession. She is a faithful visitor and worker, bringing cheer and comfort to many wounded and dying men. Elfie, on the other

hand, is not satisfied with doing what a woman might be allowed to do. In *Fair Play*, while her father is out of town, Elfie makes a flag and has a flag pole installed in order to fly the American flag at a time when most of the other houses in her region are displaying Confederate flags. When three secessionists barge onto her land to tear it down, she shoots at them with a shotgun when they try to climb the pole. She wounds one, and he falls. The other two run away, but she fires at them until they are out of range. Later that night, a mob of secessionists attacks her house (157-159). Her father is home now, and she brings him his gun, urging him to fight. She takes one window, and he takes the other, both of them firing at the mob and being fired upon. However, her father ceases to fight when he fears that Elfie has been injured. He forces her to leave the house, which is being burnt down around them, and she becomes a refugee in Erminie's house.

In *How He Won Her*, Elfie is eager to return to the fighting. After all, she has already proven her bravery and skill against the Confederates during the flag incident. Therefore, she attempts to get herself drafted into the Union Army. Using her middle name, Sydney, she adds her name to the conscription rolls, and when her draft notice arrives, she is overjoyed. However, when she reports to the provost marshal's office dressed as a woman, they refuse to take her. She insists that a "healthy young woman is quite as well able to perform military duty as most men are, and much more able than the mere boys they are constantly mustering into the ranks" (62). But it is to no avail. Unwilling to disobey her father, she does not consider more extreme measures, such as sneaking into the military dressed as a man. Finally, she settles for letting her father pay for a substitute for her, a practice by which someone of means pays a man to take his place in the draft (67). She wants to go herself and fight for her country, but that option is refused to her by the law, the officers, and her father. Here, Southworth shows that some women

were willing and capable of fighting in the war, perhaps even better suited for the mission than some of the men who were drafted, but they were not legally allowed that option. Many of the women who wished to enlist were prevented from doing so by the law and male authority figures in their lives. Only women who were willing to transgress the law and male authority secretly could hope to participate more actively.

On the other hand, in *How He Won Her*, Alberta Goldsmith fights in the war, and she does so as a woman without any disguises. However, she does not do this through conventional means. After she convinces her husband to support the Confederacy, he becomes a guerilla leader, known as the Free Sword, and she rides at his side into battles and raids, living the life of a bushwhacker, an unconventional fighter traveling with a small band/company and not part of the official army.

However, Britomarte is the most transgressive of all. In *Fair Play*, she is brave and determined. She nurses the wounded in battle on a warship, and she dashes into the fight, using a sword to save Justin's life from a pirate. But in *How He Won Her*, the Civil War provides her with the opportunity to fully distinguish herself. Disguising herself as a man, she enlists in the Union Army and fights as a soldier and as a spy until she is captured and becomes a prisoner of war, for the duration of the war. None of these women confines herself to the domestic sphere, and three of them actively participate in the fighting. Southworth portrays women as being as capable as men in a "man's" world. They can endure the hardships and deprivations of camp life. They do not flinch from shooting the enemy when called upon to do so in battle or crisis. Even in the unfamiliar territory of war and the battlefield, they appear to be equal to any man in whatever challenge or trial erupts in their lives. The crisis of war compels them to take a stand for their

convictions and to act upon those convictions. These women are defined by their actions, not by the men they choose to marry. But they do marry.

Erminie, whose angelic qualities adhere to the pattern of extreme good and bad found in many sensational stories, is rewarded for her loyalty. After the war ends, Col. Eastworth returns to Washington. He has lost an arm and his pride. Repentant and humbled, the once lord-like suitor asks forgiveness for having raised arms against the Union. He is not the man he once was. He feels unworthy of Erminie's affection. He comes to her "pale, silent, sorrowful, mutilated," not daring to expect to hold her to the engagement made when his "wealth was great, [his] social position high, and [his] name honored" (494, 495). But despite all of the reasons he gives her for why he is not worthy of her, she declares her love for him and her intentions of keeping her previous engagement to him: "Oh, my dearest! I have but that one little phrase to answer all of your words—'I love you!' Oh, my betrothed, I love you!"(496). She is free to express her love and marry him because he has converted to her political stance. Eagerly, she forgives him and is ready to share his life and whatever hardships that might entail. After beginning their relationship as the submissive pupil of his love, Erminie is now the more capable partner physically, economically, and emotionally.

Figuratively as a political metaphor, her marriage represents the reconciliation of a wise, faithful North to an errant, repentant South. According to Nina Silber in "Intemperate Men, Spiteful Women, and Jefferson Davis," marriage became a "standard recipe of reconciliation" in "countless novels, short stories, and plays" during the Reconstruction era and continuing until the end of the century (303). Inter-sectional romance/marriage was a "powerful and compelling" image that offered hope that "what could not be accomplished through investments or through constitutional amendments might be accomplished through love" (Silber, *A Romance* 40). In

order to truly reunite the country, hearts had to be changed, and the force of love bringing two previously opposed people together in marriage symbolized the possibilities for the nation. However, the plots usually focused on a masculine North and a feminine South, with the “initially spiteful southern belle tamed and subdued by the love of a Union officer” (Silber, “Intemperate Men” 303). Southworth inverts this pattern, portraying the North as feminine, and the South as male, thus positioning the woman as the reasonable, forgiving party who chose right to begin with, and the man as the rash, overly emotional party, who is now repentant. These marriages still symbolize hope for reconciliation for the nation, but her transposition aligns the female with the position of strength and credibility.

This inverted pattern is repeated for a second heroine as well. Elfie’s loyalty is put to the test when she is kidnapped by Colonel Goldsmith and his band of raiders. He believes that once he has her in his arms her true feelings of love will surface and that she will marry him—that her love for him is stronger than her love for the Union. However, she insists that she hates him along with the Confederacy, and that she would rather see him dead than marry him. True to the sensational genre with its emphasis on action, instead of words and inner contemplation/conflict, and with its concentration on extremes, Elfie’s reaction to Albert’s disloyalty is excessive, as well as are the drastic lengths that he goes to in order to make her his wife. He forces her to marry him by threatening the minister with hanging if he does not perform the ceremony and by having Elfie’s hands tied and her mouth gagged. Albert believes that she really loves him even if she does not know it and also sees the marriage as a way to save her honor since she is a lone woman among a band of men (267-268). It is only after she has been rescued and returned to Washington and comes upon Albert in a hospital that her feelings start to change. He is badly wounded and in danger of losing his leg. Before she recognizes him, she offers him an orange,

but she snatches it away when she sees who he is. She repents only after a wounded soldier offers to give him his orange (327-328). She sobs at Goldsmith's bedside, sorry that he is wounded, but she still bemoans the fact that he took up arms against the Union. As his condition worsens, she devotes herself entirely to him and puts on the wedding ring that she had ripped from her finger after her forced wedding. By willingly placing the ring on her finger now, she is legitimizing the wedding and committing herself to the marriage, which she could legally dispute otherwise. The "loyal Union girl," whose "burning aspiration" was to see her lover "hanged for his treason" when he was strong, now declares her love for him (336). He apologizes for forcing her to marry him, and gives her the opportunity to renounce the wedding, but she commits herself to him. However, he cannot and will not apologize for aiding the Confederacy. As he nears death, she implores him to say that he is "sorry for taking up arms against [his] native land," but he cannot say what is not true. He does not believe he was wrong: "Here lying in the hospital, wounded and dying, and surrounded by the enemies of my country, and in danger of losing your love, I tell you I am not sorry for what I have done. I do not repent the course I have pursued. I know now, as I knew then, that I was and am right" (346-47). Finally, she realizes that though she "cannot convert" him, she "cannot help loving" him (347). She is not forsaking her convictions, but she is tempering her rigid adherence with mercy. Southworth likely includes this change of heart as a metaphor for her view of how Reconstruction should proceed, a more forgiving and gentle reconciliation than the one carried out by the Radical Republicans. Furthermore, it is a woman leading the way. Elfie stays at his bedside doing everything she can for him until the end. He dies in her arms. By the end of the war and novel, after a year of widowhood, she is willing to accept the attentions of an honorable Union officer. She will marry and have happiness.

Alberta marries at the beginning of the war, intertwining her allegiance to the Confederacy and her husband. Willing to brave any danger for his sake, she fights at her husband's side. They are everything to each other, placing each other before God and country, but their lives are marred by the fear and anxiety of always being on the run, not knowing when the Union might find them. Alberta cannot understand Elfie's refusal to marry Albert Goldsmith and ride with him as his wife, as she has done with her love. Alberta confides, "I have one idol, one religion, one rule of action. [...] And now I would not exchange my condition as the outlaw's wife to be the most honored lady in the land! Nor would he part with me for a kingdom! We are all in all to each other" (165). They are too much to each other, and they die together in battle from the same bullet. Through this plotting, Southworth implies that it is perilous to have no higher convictions than romantic love.

Rescued at last from the desert island, the two Union supporters, Britomarte and Justin, arrive back in the United States a day after the Gettysburg victory. After two and a half years together, it appears they will go their separate ways after a brief visit to his sister in Washington, D.C. The ending of *Fair Play* leaves the reader wondering if Justin and Britomarte will ever marry. However, in *How He Won Her*, the war breaks down all barriers between them as they get caught up in the action. When Justin enlists in the Union Army, and his unit is ready to move out, Britomarte realizes that she cannot bear being separated from him. She comes face to face with her true feelings for the first time: "Moaning and weeping in her anguish and despair, she now realized how utterly her soul had passed into the soul of her lover, so that she lived only in his life" (78). She is sorry that she refused to marry him, but she realizes that even that would not get her onto the battlefield. Only as his "brother-in-arms" (79) can she follow him into the "toils and dangers" (80). Therefore, she disguises herself as a young man and joins Justin's unit.

Britomarte next appears in the novel as an orderly named “Wing”; that fact is not announced but instead left for the reader to discern. Unfortunately, this concealment takes the reader out of Britomarte’s personal point of view. Justin (Major then Colonel Rosenthal) and Wing are shown interacting as fellow soldiers, with Wing ever ready at his side to obey, assist, and protect. Britomarte/Wing proves herself a brave, capable soldier and a leader of men, eventually being promoted to lieutenant and risking her life for the Union and for Justin many times.

Only late in the novel and war, when Justin is wounded on the battlefield and Wing comes to aid him, is Wing’s true identity openly revealed. There, with Justin, bleeding and in danger of dying, Britomarte reveals herself, and Justin admits that he has known all along. He has not said anything because he was afraid that Britomarte would disappear and not return. He has watched over her, trying to protect her as she has tried to protect him. His actions have shown that he accepts her as an equal. Now on the battlefield, she finally confesses her love for him and repents of her previous rejection of his love: “Ah! How could I have been so unwomanly, so inhuman as to repel such a heart as yours? Oh, live, Justin! Live, that I may undo the work of years, and make you happy if I can!” (438). He is overjoyed; however, he urges her to leave because she is in danger of being captured by the Rebels, but she refuses: “I am now your promised wife, and nothing on earth shall ever part me from your side unless I should be torn by violence away. If you go to Libby [prison], I go to Libby; happier if I share your fate in that foul prison and pest-house than I could be anywhere else on earth” (440). For over a year, she has been risking her life and freedom to serve with and protect Justin and the Union, but it is only now, when the possibility of him dying is vividly close, that she is willing to commit herself to being his wife. As in many of the other heroines and women discussed in this chapter, she

agrees to marry only after her lover has been weakened and is dependent upon her, even if his emasculated condition is only temporary.

They are both taken prisoner. Her sex is discovered, and she is held in a separate prison as a spy and threatened with hanging, but the sentence is not carried out due to her sex. After the war, Justin and she are reunited, and she joyfully fulfills her promise to marry him. Britomarte had hated men since childhood because her grandmother, her mother, and her sister were all used and mistreated by the men to whom they gave their hearts. However, she has come to realize over the years that Justin is an honorable man of good character who would never treat her like that. In the *Political Work of Northern Women Writers*, Sizer states that Justin is the “most enlightened male character” in any of the “wartime novels” that she has studied (220). But Southworth uses the mistreatment of the women in Brit’s family as a commentary on how much power the law gives a man over his wife’s life^v. Britomarte knows that Justin would never “abuse the power that the law gives you over the outer circumstances of your wife’s life, or that she herself gives you over the inner world of her affections” (508.) Southworth also comments through Justin that “gentle women, by too deep a submission, ruin their domestic happiness as often as the high-spirited do by their resistance. Men are not gods, dear love, and so they are very often spoiled by women” (508). Justin believes that women contribute to men becoming dictators within marriage by being too compliant. In the nineteenth century and prior, compliance was extolled as a feminine virtue. Speaking through Justin, Southworth is making a radical statement in indicating that an overabundance of this virtue can have severely negative effects. Southworth, through Justin, recommends balance and moderation.

In the closing pages of the novel, Britomarte appears to take a step back from her stance on women’s rights: “While I live, I will advocate the rights of woman—in general. But for my

individual self, the only right I plead for is woman's dearest right—to be loved to my heart's content all the days of my life!" (512). But she has found an honorable man who accepts her as an equal, and the war has given her the opportunity to prove herself so. According to Sizer, Britomarte's story is "political work" performed well in that Britomarte becomes a leader of men and brings her beau around to her point of view, in addition to advocating for women's writers in general (221). However, Sizer believes that Britomarte "has been tamed" (221). However, while she is no longer an avid man-hater, and she does agree to marry, it is as an equal to a man who has demonstrated his love and faithfulness to her for years. Her marriage is a victory, not a retreat.

Fair Play and *How He Won Her*, as popular literature of the era, were considered to be of lesser value than the literary novels and high culture literature. Sensational literature was often considered the domain of "cheap novels," and such novels were often published in pamphlet form as a series, with coarse covers "often but not always yellow," and usually sold for a nickel or dime or perhaps a little more (Fahs 226). Their "price, physical appearance, subject matter, and distribution" distinguished them and delineated them as less serious works in the eyes of the public (Fahs 226-27). However, in *Plots and Proposals*, Karen Tracey proposes that these two Southworth novels are part of the "crucial cultural work undertaken by Americans" in their struggle to "explain and control the momentous impact of the war" (132). These are not simply *yellow* novels created for the sole purposes of entertainment and financial gain. These novels explore the disruption of the war in the lives of women and how some women took up the gauntlet and pursued avenues of service and action heretofore unavailable to women. Tracey concludes that Southworth's main focus is the "impact of the Civil War on gender roles as the genteel white classes had defined them," and she believes that Southworth understood that the

“war had opened possibilities for extended women’s roles and more egalitarian marriages” (135, 139). The war acted as a catalyst providing means and opportunities for women to take on new responsibilities beyond accepted roles. Southworth sought to propagate an idea that would later be crystalized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage’s theory of transformation regarding the metamorphic effects of the war on the lives of women. In addition, Southworth carries the idea of transformation into the marriages as well. Tracey acknowledges that Southworth advocates for “marriages that are built on this broadened definition of women’s role” (146) and that Southworth was seeking to challenge those who were attempting to write and interpret women back into their places (145). However, Tracey suggests that *How He Won Her* reveals “varying degrees of retrenchment” that social historians researching the era believe occurred in the lives of real women as well (135). She argues that the marriages in *How He Won Her* indicate retreat because they appear to follow the common pattern of “women and men return[ing] with relief to household relations” at the end of the war, “reflecting conservative prewar ideologies of gender” (144-145). In addition, the change in title from *Britomarte, the Man-Hater*, in the serial publication to *Fair Play* and *How He Won Her* in the novel format signals, to Tracey, a switch in focus from women’s rights to courtship and marriage as well (145). While it is true that all of the heroines eventually marry, I do not view that as retrenchment. Rather, Southworth shows her characters entering into marriage from a position of strength.

Erminie marries as a mature woman, not as a young girl who once idolized her lover. In addition, Eastworth has lost his wealth, his prestige, and an arm. Erminie is now the most physically capable of the two, and it will be Erminie’s wealth that supports them. Elfie marries her dying lover out of mercy, making the contested “forced” marriage legitimate when she places

the wedding ring on her finger in order to secure her place by his death bed. This is an act of strength on her part, rather than a lack of commitment to her convictions, and she will enter into her second marriage as a woman defined by her wartime experiences. Britomarte enters into her marriage as a more than capable equal. She has fought at Justin's side, she has led men into battle, she has entered enemy territory as a spy, and she has risked her life numerous times for her lover and for her country. She will not be content with minding the hearth. Marrying Justin, who fully supports Britomarte's rights to equality, is a more reasonable move than prejudging every man based upon the past experiences of her family. Striving for self-actualization does not have to equate to spinsterhood, even in the late nineteenth century.

Other Transgressing Heroines: A Woman's Place Is Not in the Home

In Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's short story "Margaret Bronson" (1865), there is no hope of a marriage until Margaret's act of transgression breaks down the barriers between Robert M'Ginley and herself. She is a strong-minded and independent woman who carries pistols and who owns and manages the plantation left to her in her father's will. In the beginning of the story, Margaret appears to be indifferent to the Union soldier, Robert M'Ginley, who risks his life to come see her when his company is near her border town. They were childhood friends, but now that they are older, she addresses him as "Mr. M'Ginley," and he defers to her as "Miss Bronson." She supports the Union, despite the allegiance of her town to the Confederates, and she quietly admires M'Ginley's willingness to sacrifice home, wealth, and friends for the cause of the Union. But she responds stoically to any suggestion of further acquaintance from him. Phelps's narrative suggests that the independent woman is fighting against herself, seeking to suppress the emotions which would lead her to submit herself to a man, as after her meeting with M'Ginley she paces excitedly back and forth and clenches "her delicate hands upon her breast

with a passion that fitted the half-frightened defiance in her eye. Defiance? Of whom? Of what? Perhaps of herself?" (500).

However, later that evening when she hears of a plot to attack the Union encampment nearby, she risks her life to go warn M'Ginley and the camp. Once there she insists on fighting since it is too late for her to escape homeward. Sneaking into line, despite the sergeant's orders that she go to the rear with the women, children, and wounded, she, without the aid of disguise, fights by her friend's side. In her skirts and as a woman, she stands her ground in the ranks with the men. M'Ginley admires her courage and fighting spirit. The shared danger and sense of purpose breaks down societal barriers and the constraints of propriety between M'Ginley and Margaret. Instead of "Miss Bronson," he calls her by her first name, for the first time since childhood, and she welcomes his guidance in the battle. All of her haughtiness has dissipated, and the unreachable woman is now closer than a friend: "In that hour when she seemed to have thrown off her womanhood, he knew that she was nearer to him than ever in all of her life before" (502). And when he falls wounded, she risks her life to save him. Blocking the pathway between M'Ginley and a determined assailant, she declares, "You're not going to touch him. [...] If you come another step, and you're a dead man" (504). The rebel orders her to step aside, but when she refuses to do so, he charges ahead, brandishing his bayonet, with no intention of being stopped by a woman. She fires, and the rebel drops dead (504).

Later, Margaret fears that that her killing a man has stripped her of her femininity, and perhaps Phelps fears that her reader will reach that conclusion as well. The scene jumps to Margaret's house. M'Ginley is safe in bed, being cared for by the doctor. It is Margaret who ran to get someone to convey him off the battlefield and to her planation, and she is the one who sent someone for the doctor. He owes her his life. But she nervously washes her hands, afraid to go

into the bedroom where he is, even after the doctor informs her that he is asking to see her. She fears he will reject her and consider her as unwomanly for fighting and killing (506).

In this scene, Phelps purposefully takes Margaret away from the battlefield and establishes her in the domestic space in order to show the reader that Margaret is not an abnormality. She is a woman, but a woman can fight and/or kill in defense of her country and/or her loved ones. For the first time in the story, Margaret's femininity is emphasized. She is in a domestic space in the role of a caregiver, and she is trembling and humble. Her love makes her feel vulnerable. For the first time, her love is acknowledged openly by the author, and Margaret can no longer hide its existence.

Entering M'Ginley's room, she is afraid to even look him in the face, but he warmly accepts her and welcomes her (507). He has no doubt of her love or of her femininity. The woman kneeling at his bedside and the woman who stood by his side in the ranks, fighting a common enemy and stepping between him and death, are one and the same. Phelps's decision to set the ending in the domestic does not detract from the ground gained on the battlefield. She is merely reaffirming that a woman can cross outside of her sphere and still be a woman.

The couple's future marriage is implied. The shared battlefield experience has broken down the barrier between them. Before the battle afforded her the opportunity to prove herself equal to a man, Margaret was vehemently opposed to taking any action or showing any emotion that might detract from her wall of independence and funnel her into the confines of the domestic sphere. But she was more than equal. She did not fall in battle; M'Ginley did, and when he did, she stood her ground and risked her life to defend him and kill his potential killer. As in many of the other sensational narratives about the Civil War, the story concludes with the woman being the more physically capable partner. However, the battle does much more than demonstrate

Margaret's strength in a crisis. Their lives are transformed. She is the one who fought and saved M'Ginley's life. She has proven herself to him, as an equal, and taken a stand with him against her Confederate community. She is a comrade in arms, and she will become a lover. The war provided space for her transgression and opened up the possibility for an equitable marriage.

Margaret Bronson and Britomarte are not the only fictional heroines who go into battle alongside the man they love. Madeline Moore recounts her war adventures and transgressions in her fictionalized "autobiography," *The Lady Lieutenant* (1862). At the beginning of the war, Moore is eighteen, wealthy, and adventurous. Following the sensational pattern, she is an orphan; in this case, she is in the custody of her cantankerous aunt. She is in love with Frank Ashton, a poor law student. Unlike most of the other narratives' heroines, she is willing to marry him, but he is unwilling to marry her yet. He is intimidated by her wealth and feels that he must make his own fortune first or do something in order to earn her hand (14). The war provides just such an opportunity. When the war starts, he enlists right away, signing up to defend the Union even though he is from Kentucky. He believes that by defending his country, he will return with a "name so coupled with deeds of daring and renown" that he will finally be worthy of marrying Moore (15). Unable to persuade him otherwise and unwilling to part with her lover and best friend, she, in an action that would be closely mirrored by Southworth's Britomarte a few years later, decides to enlist in the Union Army as well. Secretly procuring a disguise, Moore enlists in Frank's regiment as a man. When she meets up with her lover, she introduces herself as Albert Harville, a cousin of Madeline's (19). Frank and Albert/Madeline become close friends, and he helps her get elected Second Lieutenant for the company in which he is captain. They fight side by side in Western Virginia and again at Bull Run. Moore is captured in the first battle and forced to kill her capturer with a knife in order to keep him from killing her. Frank is wounded

severely at Bull Run, and Moore devotes herself and her money to caring for him in order to save his life. Once again, the pattern of a weakened hero and a strengthened heroine repeats. As Frank nears the end of his recovery, Moore finally reveals her identity. Shocked to discover that his love has been at his side in camp and battles risking her life to be with him and then devoting herself to care for him, Frank is overcome with surprise and joy. Moore's willingness to "make any sacrifice for the being she loves" breaks down all of his objections, and they marry (40). He does not marry a delicate female but his best friend who has fought alongside of him and who has shared in the hardships and tribulations of war. The act of marrying is not a retreat on Moore's part. Moore has proven herself a capable co-protector and co-provider, as is the case in many sensational stories. Her actions have perhaps paved the way for a hybridity of gender roles within their home.

Metta Victor's novel *The Unionist's Daughter* (1862) is another popular Civil War-era sensational story that provides space for transgression and the possibility of equitable marriage. Eleanor Beaufort prioritizes her convictions over her heart. Like Erminie and Elfie, Eleanor is forced to choose between political loyalties and her love. Her love is tamed and nurtured by her convictions. At the beginning of the conflict, she is engaged to Sinclair Le Vert, the son of a local plantation owner. Secession is a divisive issue in Tennessee where they live, and even the vote over whether or not the state will secede from the Union is a matter that leads to bloodshed. Eleanor's father is an outspoken advocate for loyalty to the Union, but Le Vert's family strongly supports Southern independence. Eleanor's father incurs the wrath of his neighbors and is forced to leave town. Eleanor must choose for herself which side she will support. Thinking of her fiancé, she wonders, "Could she live without him? Could she consent ever to an alliance with his family" (20). They are a young couple in love. Le Vert's presence cheers her, even after her

father's departure, and they tease and flirt over coffee, thinking of the coming day when they will be husband and wife, paying no attention to the "little cloud no bigger than a man's hand" that had "arisen in the heaven of their future" (23).

However, they can ignore the conflict no longer once Eleanor's father is arrested and La Vert's father is one of the instigators behind the action. Monsieur La Vert insists that his son break off his engagement to Eleanor. Instead, La Vert asks her to marry him that very night so that he may take her to his home and protect her, knowing that there would be nothing his father could do if they are already wed. But she pulls herself from his arms and declares, "I should have very little self-respect or honor for my dear father if I were to go under your family roof under such circumstances. [...] As long as I have God for my friend and a pair of revolvers for my defenders I shall not quail" (37). He cannot believe that she would refuse his offer. Longing for her, he declares that he would do anything for her, and so she asks what to him seems the impossible: "Will you promise to stand true to your country—to defend my father, me and this property as far as it is in your power? Will you marry me to come here, as a Unionist [...]? If you will, I will marry you tonight" (37-38). But he does not possess her courage and conviction. He questions why he should convert to her viewpoint instead of her converting to his. But she knows his convictions are lightly held. He is unwilling to make the sacrifice of becoming an outcast and of risking his financial worth. She responds, "You refuse for social and mercenary reasons---I am willing to sacrifice all things for my country, even your love, Sinclair" (38). And so she does, breaking the engagement and asking him to leave her house and not return until he is ready to be loyal to his country. Like Southworth, Victor places her heroine in a situation where she must choose between her lover and her love for her country and father. In this test of her character, Eleanor proves willing to make great sacrifices for her beliefs. Le Vert is shown to be a man of

few convictions, choosing comfort, popularity, and the protection of his family over standing by his fiancée and his country. Ironically, it is the male who makes the more emotional decision, since popular thought of the time would expect the female to be the most influenced by emotions.

Refusing to take down the American flag that flies on their land, a heroic stand echoed in Southworth's *Fair Play* and in real life incidences, as well, Eleanor manages the plantation for months while her father is in prison, sleeping with two revolvers under her pillow in case danger arises. She has now taken on the role of provider and protector for the plantation. Once, she sees Le Vert ride by, and her old feelings of love are awakened, but her loyalty to her country is stronger than any feelings she has for him. The Confederates take her cotton and set fire to her storage building, but she refuses to hand over her slaves to the men who would whip them or worse (61). Finally, in hopes of seeing her father, she travels to Nashville, where she sneaks a gun to him when she learns that he may soon be hanged (68). In doing so, she saves his life. Victor shows her to be a woman of action who protects her father instead of relying upon him to protect her. Later, when she is accused of helping him, she bravely faces the rabble of bushwhackers at her doorstep until one of her servants rescues her from being horsewhipped (86). Victor demonstrates that her heroine is willing to risk everything for the Union, as much as any good soldier would be. Eleanor escapes, but she loses almost all of her worldly possessions, as the plantation is burned to the ground. At this point, she has given everything for the Union except her honor, her life, and her father's life.

Her father joins the Union bushwhackers, and Eleanor, who had been used to living in wealth, becomes a refugee, traveling to a rough cabin in the East Tennessee mountains, where she meets Beverly Bell, the captain of these irregular troops. For Bell, it is love at first sight. Bell

is honorable, brave, loyal to his convictions, and a leader of men. Le Vert comes up vastly short in comparison. However, still recovering from the broken engagement, Eleanor is not ready to form a new alliance. Bell takes her reserve as indication that she cannot overlook the class difference between himself and her; after all, she is from the planter class, and he is the son of a Methodist parson. But his loyalty to the Union and his strong honorable character mean more to her than he would imagine. In *Political Works of Norther Women Writers*, Sizer comments on Eleanor's "republicanism" and states that in this novel Victor works in her characterizations to "be inclusive of all the classes of Tennesseans" (95). Victor demonstrates the power of the Civil War to break through class barriers. This is also evidenced in Rebecca Harding Davis's *Waiting for the Verdict*, which will be discussed in Chapter Four of this dissertation

However, Eleanor's trials are not over. The enemy attacks while the men are on a raid, and she is taken prisoner but not before shooting one of the attackers. Eventually, she escapes with the help of her faithful servant, but she must face the loss of her father, who died while aiding Bell in an attack on the men who had kidnapped her. She is on her own, without family, a typical scenario for a sensational heroine. The Union is all she has now, and when Bell proposes, offering his love, a home, and protection, she tells him that her heart is "as cold as ice. I cannot love you or anyone well enough to marry him. I am devoted now to my country. It is all that gives me any interest in life. Oh Captain Bell, if you want to break this stupor, to thaw this ice, give me some work to do" (171). Eleanor wants to take an active, offensive role in this war. She refuses to conform to the traditional mode of domesticity. Reluctantly, Bell accepts her help. Victor moves Eleanor from defensive mode, defending her home, her servants, her family, and herself, to an offensive mode. At this point, Eleanor is done waiting for the next Confederate attack. She is ready to strike.

Bell asks her to ride sixty miles across enemy territory to deliver a secret message to a spy who is working with Bell on a plan to blow up the main railroad bridges in East Tennessee. During Eleanor's journey, she is recognized by one of the enemy soldiers. She manages to escape only through her excellent horsemanship skills and by shooting and killing a soldier who is shooting at her (180). Unlike Margaret Bronson, Eleanor does not feel guilty for taking a life, and she does not fear the loss of her femininity. She completes the mission but is recognized several days later when she runs into the same regiment on her way back to Bell. She is taken prisoner but rescued by Le Vert, who helps her sneak away secretly during the middle of the night. He claims that he still loves her, but she has no love for any enemy of her country and refuses to even shake his hand. She gives him only a brief thank you for helping her escape before she rides off, being as formal with him as she would be with a stranger (186-188).

The war goes on. Bell joins the regular Union army as a captain, and Eleanor, returning to a slightly more domestic role, travels to become a hospital nurse close to his regiment. When Bell is seriously wounded in battle, it is Eleanor who goes out onto the battlefield to search for him, and when he is brought to the hospital, she stands by the surgeon's side assisting when he amputates Bell's arm (200). She is by Bell's bedside nursing him to health and helping the other men in the ward as well. Like Southworth, Victor reels in her heroine as the novel moves towards a close, taking a step back from the dramatically transgressive.

Le Vert, as a wounded enemy soldier, is a patient in the same hospital. He once again offers to marry her, believing that it could help her to get her plantation back and to live in comfort once more (203). But Eleanor has no interest in him, despite the fact that her father is dead now. Her convictions have led her to rule him out forever as a possible husband and have opened the way for Beverly Bell despite class differences. A man's character and his degree of

loyalty to the Union are the two most significant criteria. Economic comfort and socio-economic class appear to have no bearing on Eleanor's choice of a husband.

In the final chapter of the novel, when Bell is ready to be released from the hospital, Eleanor surprises him by showing up in a beautiful, new dress and holding a bouquet of flowers, after wearing black, plain clothes often worn down from the duties of camp life or nursing for months (208). He is afraid that she has taken a wealthy admirer, someone who will raise her back to her social standing. Instead, she declares that since he has lost his arm, she has "resolved to become [his] right arm" (209). She is now willing to accept his offer of marriage that he had made many months before; or rather, she is now the one proposing. She offers to marry him that very day so that when he leaves the hospital the next day, she may go with him to care for him wherever he may go. Victor writes, "If the young man's face had not been so pale, his eyes so hollow, his form so wasted, if her eyes had not happened upon the empty sleeve of his coat, it is doubtful she would have had the courage to go on" (209). His weakness and neediness draw her to his rescue. As with Britomarte and Martha, it is after the war has given her an opportunity to prove herself and after her lover has been wounded that Eleanor feels she can submit to marriage. The step in the end towards the domestic is not a retreat. The heroine crosses the threshold in a position of power. Eleanor is the more physically and economically capable of the pair. She will be his "right arm"—his emissary in the world.

In the end, Bell and Eleanor marry and move to Ohio, where she teaches music in order to support them while they wait out the war and until they can save enough money for Bell to study law. She will have her property restored to her when Tennessee reenters the Union; meanwhile, very much in love, they struggle along financially. The war has given Bell to Eleanor, but it has also robbed him of his arm and his ability to support himself. Eleanor, despite

great loss, comes out of the war a stronger person, and even when her land is restored to her, it will be her land and money that support her husband and herself, until he is able to study towards another profession. The crucible of war has refined Eleanor, giving her a chance to develop and prove her strength of character and courage. And despite her husband's weakened physical condition, he is a person of strong character and courage, as well, willing to sacrifice everything for his convictions, a much more worthy man than the weak-willed Le Vert, who would have been her reward if she had not been willing to sacrifice for her beliefs. Victor wants her readers to know that women are capable of supporting their convictions with action beyond the domestic sphere. When Bell first meets Eleanor, he tells her, "Women have a heroism of their own. Theirs is as much in endurance as ours is in action. I think they shame us men—even girls" (103). Eleanor's heroism manifests itself in action as well as in endurance. And her marriage will be more than equitable. Eleanor will never be just Mrs. Beverly Bell.

Factual Foundations for the Fiction: Soldiers, Spies, and More

Seeking to create a sense of verisimilitude, Victor attached to her novel an "Addenda" with references to real, historical events that occurred in Tennessee during the war in order to prove that many events contained in her novel were based on fact. In one such reference, she cites a letter from a soldier in the First Tennessee Regiment (Union) that describes a young lady named Sarah Taylor, whose stepfather was a captain in the regiment (292). Sarah was skilled in using a sword and pistols and was determined to fight alongside the men. As Victor seeks to show in her "Addenda," women's courage and ability to take action were not limited to the pages of fiction. Sarah Taylor was a vivandiere, a woman who travelled with a regiment and rendered aid to the soldiers usually in the form of acting as a field nurse (Gilder). Vivandieres often wore uniforms and usually carried weapons, even though they usually did not participate in the

fighting. Some were even taken prisoner, as Taylor was in 1862. The few regiments that had a vivandiere would usually only have one, and she would be known as the “daughter of the regiment,” and often she would be a relative of one of the officers. Taylor braved the camp conditions, the battles, and eventually prison for the sake of the soldiers and her country. Loyalty to the nation and to her fellow soldiers was her priority.

Victor’s novel was also inspired by Susan Brownlow of East Tennessee. Susan was the daughter of pro-Unionist minister and newspaper publisher, Parson William Brownlow. Her father went into hiding to escape persecution for his anti-Confederate viewpoints and was eventually arrested by the Confederate authorities and later sent into exile in the North. Victor cites his writings and his speeches as evidence in her “Addenda” for her portrayal of the harsh treatment of Unionists by Confederates in her novel (220-221). While Susan’s father was away, she defended the American flag that flew on their property. She brought a shotgun out of the house and threatened to shoot the two Confederate soldiers who came to take it down. Some accounts say that the two came back with up to ninety other men, but still failed to take the flag down. Susan eventually went into exile with her father, and the two were widely popular in the North for their stance against the Confederacy, and they traveled the lecture circuit telling of their adventures. Father and daughter each had a novel written about them. Major W.D. Reynolds wrote Susan’s story with embellishments and published it under the title *Martha Brownlow*. The novel adds a romantic element by bringing in a young colonel, Lemuel Garfield, who is a co-traveler and co-escapee from the Confederates and with whom Susan and her father develop a friendship (Reynolds 27). The novel/memoir based on a real event is hardly distinguishable from the sensational fiction of the time. A Unionist female saving the American flag at gunpoint is a historical event that is replayed by Southworth, as well, in the guises of Elfie

Fielding making and saving the flag while her father is not around to assist her (*Fair Play* 157-159). It is a real life example of a woman taking a political stand and risking her life for what she believes.

Other women transgressed gender boundaries for the love of country and perhaps the love of adventure, as well. Pauline Cushman earned the rank of Brevet-Major from General Garfield for her work as a spy for the Union, and she even received commendation from President Lincoln. Her autobiographical account of her adventures, *The Romance of the Great Rebellion* (1864), and the biographical account compiled from Cushman's notes, *Life of Pauline Cushman: Celebrated Spy and Scout* (1865) by her friend, Ferdinand Sarmiento, are hardly discernable from the sensational fiction of the era. Cushman was born in Louisiana but grew up in the wilderness of Michigan, where she developed her horse riding and shooting skills. When she was of age, she ran off to New York to become an actress. In 1863, when she was working in a theatre in Louisville, Confederate officers who were waiting to be paroled asked to give a toast to Jeff Davis during her performance. She secretly went to the Union provost marshal. He suggested that she accept the dare and thereby gain the trust of the Confederate sympathizers in the area. Willing to risk everything for the Union, Cushman boldly gave the toast, "Here's to Jeff Davis and the Southern Confederacy! May the South always maintain her honor and her rights!" thus earning the friendship and admiration of the many Confederate sympathizers in the area and simultaneously losing her job at the theatre (Sarmiento 62). This paved the way for her to become part of the secret service. Thereafter, she played the role of a Confederate sympathizer in private and in public, being on alert for secrets and carrying them back to the provost marshal's men. During this time period, she assumed several disguises. On a number of occasions, she would dress as "a rough clumsy country boy, lolling" about in the saloons, within earshot of

various Louisville gentlemen hatching plots with spies, ruffians, and other questionable characters (69). In one elaborate scheme, she dressed as a young, Southern gentlemen to gain the confidence of a wealthy wife of a Confederate Congressman. The lady, Mrs. Ford, was suspected of smuggling, spying, and financially supporting the Confederacy. Cushman set a trap for the lady, and Mrs. Ford was captured and suffered seeing letters, information, and financial loan confiscated by the Union officials (83-84). Mrs. Ford was then sent South with nothing. Like Madeline and Britomarte, Cushman dressed as a man in order to open doors for her in serving her country; however, Pauline's disguises were temporary, dressing as a man for an evening of spying and then returning to female clothing in the morning. Unlike the fictional heroines, she played many parts and many faces. In addition, she never participated in the war as a soldier upon the battlefield as they did, though her spying eventually took her behind enemy lines at great risk to her life.

With the blessing of the provost marshal and in order to be of greater service to the Union, Cushman headed south to Union-controlled Nashville, maintaining her cover. Once there, Colonel Truesdail, head of the military police and scouts, asked her to cross over into Confederate territory and work as a spy. According to his plan, she would ostensibly be kicked out of Nashville and Union territory for her blatant support of the Confederacy, and once across the lines, she would travel from camp to camp looking for her brother, a colonel in the Confederate forces, and making friends with the officers as she went. Truesdail told her that the mission would "demand a quickness of intellect and a powerful constitution, a ready wit, and the courage of a soldier tried in a thousand fields; and I know not why, indeed, I have selected you in preference of everyone else, except it be that I know you to be true and to possess that unusual courage which is needed for this expedition" (112). He chose her over many trained military

men. Her response was, "I will do all that a woman should do and that a man dare do, for my country and the glorious union" (113). However, this mission was not within the parameters of what most people of the era would have considered the domain of a woman. She said what a "woman should do." Most people would have no such expectations of a woman during the era. Cushman insisted that women are capable and that they should do more than what is traditionally expected or accepted of them. The war afforded her the opportunity to transgress beyond traditional gender boundaries, with the implication that other women should follow her example. In light of her willingness to serve, Truesdail asked her to ride into enemy territory and spy on the enemy. She was to work on ascertaining the strength of the army in the various camps, the fortifications, and the number of cannons, among other tasks, and he warned her to keep no written records but to commit it to memory. It could cost her her life.

At first her mission was very successful; Cushman did an excellent job of gaining the sympathy and admiration of officers in Columbia, Tullahoma, and Shelbyville, Tennessee encampments. She gained the affection of several men and was able to accompany them on rides around the fortifications. In one incidence, she stole a map from an Army engineer, and in another a smitten quartermaster had a Confederate uniform made for her, so that she could ride with him as his aide-de-camp (154, 186). However, she did not follow the strict instructions from Truesdail to not write anything down. In addition to possessing the map, she sketched outlines of the various encampments with the fortifications shown.

These sketches proved very detrimental after Cushman was captured. When she tried to cross back into Federal-held territory, she was arrested for trying to cross without a pass (195). From there, after several gentlemanly escorts and an escape attempt, she finally ended up at the headquarters of General Bragg. Unfortunately, by that time, her possessions had been thoroughly

searched, and the sketches and the maps were discovered inside the heels of her shoes (296). No amount of flirting and pretense of innocence could erase those drawings. She was sentenced to be hung. Fortunately, she fell ill, and the illness delayed her hanging until Union troops moved into the area, and she was rescued.

Much of the autobiographical pamphlet and the biography resembles sensational fiction. However, Cushman does not marry the hero in the end. The account has no male hero. There are men who become enamored with her, there are men who are treacherous, and there are men who stand by the Union and who assist her, but it is Pauline's story. When her health recovered she traveled around the country telling her story during the remainder of the war and afterwards. After the biography angelicizes her, it also reminds the reader that any support would be appreciated in consideration for all that Cushman has done for her country (374). She did eventually marry twice after the war, once in 1872, after which she was widowed a year later, and then again in 1879. Her husband and she separated after the death of an adopted daughter. This latter marriage was actually her third. The autobiographical pamphlet and the biography neglect to mention it, but Cushman was married to a musician in 1853, and they had two children. After the war broke out, he enlisted as a musician, but he was dead from dysentery before the end of 1862 and before the beginning of Cushman's heroic adventures. She left her children with her in-laws in order to support herself by returning to acting. That is how she ended up on the stage in Louisville, which began her career as a spy.

Cushman's life had no fairy tale ending, like the fictional lives of Erminie, Elfie, and Britomarte. These characters take a stand for their convictions and are rewarded in the end with an equitable, loving marriage, as were Martha Bronson, Madeline Moore, and Eleanor Beaufort. However, like the sensational fiction, Cushman's story advocates for women to transgress the

prescribed limits of their sphere and to boldly step into the realm normally limited to men. In the conclusion of *The Life of Pauline Cushman*, Samiento writes, “She has become the apostle of womanhood in these degenerate days, when women are too much of the lady and too little of the wife and mother” (367). This radical approach suggests that women have a duty to transgress societal dictates when the dictates limit them in serving their country. In this passage, Cushman is not being redefined as masculine but as the fulfillment of womanhood. This redefinition of womanhood is a radical change from the popular nineteenth century “angel of the household” imagery that represented the paragon of womanhood. Coventry Patmore’s poem, “The Angel of the House” (1854), presented the ideal woman/wife as a pure, gentle, submissive creature devoted to her husband. In one stanza, this ideal woman appears to hover in the corners, waiting and ever-ready for a hint of whim or wish from her husband to stir her to action: “While she, too gentle even to force/ His penitence by kind replies/ Waits by, expecting his remorse/ With pardon in her pitying eyes;/ And if he once, by shame oppress'd,/ A comfortable word confers,/ She leans and weeps against his breast,/And seems to think the sin was hers” (Cantos IX, I). An angel is associated with service, tender care, and mercy. An apostle connotes boldness and an advocate with a radical message. Cushman broke from the angelic mode. She lied, flirted, accepted attention from men under false pretenses, and risked her life for her country. Her biographer argues that her patriotism and loyalty to her convictions justify all of this “unladylike” behavior and that other women fall short if they flinch from following her example. This is a more radical stance than proclaimed in any of the other works, which lift up their heroines as examples of what women can do but do not stipulate that other women have a duty to do likewise. The fiction pronounces that women should place their convictions before their emotions, but does not demand physical action of all women outside the domestic sphere.

The conclusion of *The Life of Pauline Cushman* also contains a reprint of a letter that Cushman received from a fellow woman who enlisted as a man. Nellie A.K. writes that when the war began, she “cursed the fate that made [her] a girl” and wrote that “I often laid awake all night dreaming of war and battle, until that subject became with me a regular monomania, and at last I resolved to become a soldier” (369). She determined to join her brother’s regiment. When she showed up in Washington, D.C., her brother tried to convince her to go home, but eventually, he gave up and helped her become part of the unit. She fought bravely in several battles without anyone knowing her sex, except for her brother and an old family friend who was a captain in one of the units and had helped with her enlistment. Drawn to the action, she continued to serve until it was time for her reenlistment. She reenlisted, but before she could spend her bounty money, her brother told her captain who she really was. He was shocked and amused, but her army days were over. In her letter to Cushman, she insists, “I long for my life of old adventure. If I stay here, I will die,” and she begs for Cushman to take her with her if she ever goes on another mission (370). Being confined to the domestic once more is stifling torture after the adrenaline rush of facing danger and life or death moments. But neither Cushman nor she can return after their unmasking. Nellie’s motivation was not connected to being near a lover, as Britomarte’s was, but both of them desired to serve their country and both had a strong sense of independence and adventure.

Like Nellie, and the fictional Madeline Moore and Britomarte, Sarah Emma Edmondson enlisted in the military as a male soldier. Similar to the other sensational fiction and nonfiction stories, Edmondson’s account is one of empowerment and boldness in the midst of the rift created by the war. Like Pauline Cushman and Nellie A.K., the domestic was not her domain. These women seek to redefine womanhood through their lives and their narratives. Taking some

literary license, Edmondson detailed her adventures in her best-selling memoir *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army* (1864). Her memoir contains vivid and sometimes slightly embellished accounts of her missions and service (Teorey 78). Like Pauline Cushman, she also eventually acted as a spy. Originally from Canada, Edmondson, using the alias “Frank Thompson,” enlisted as a soldier in a Michigan regiment shortly after Ft. Sumter. Officially, she served as a male battlefield nurse and regimental mail carrier, but she participated in the actual fighting as well as acting as an orderly carrying messages to officers during battle. After a close friend/(perhaps) love, Lieutenant James V., was killed in action, she determined to take a more active role in destroying the enemy: “kneeling beside the grave of him who was very dear to me I vowed to avenge the death of that Christian hero” (101). A short time later, when she heard of the death of a federal spy, she volunteered to take his place. Like Pauline Cushman, she acted as a spy, taking on several roles, except, as far as Edmondson’s superiors knew, they were sending a male into the heart of danger. Risking her life on several missions, she infiltrated the Confederate lines as a male black contraband, as an Irish peddler woman, as a black woman, as a young confederate teen looking for work, and as a Confederate teen not yet in the Army. Throughout it all, she was strongly patriotic and devoted to the Union and to her Christian faith. She felt that the Union Army was fighting on the Lord’s side. She served from May 1861 until April 1863. Suffering from malaria and in need of medical treatment, she was afraid that if she were sent to the hospital that her sex would be discovered, so she left (deserted), went north and switched into female clothing.

Initially, she hoped to return to her unit, but when Frank/Sarah was listed as a deserter, she knew it was impossible. After her recovery, she joined the Christian Commission and continued to serve her country and the men in that capacity as a female nurse from June 1863

until the end of the war. In 1864 she published her story, but not her assumed name, and donated almost all of the profits to a soldiers' relief fund. According to multiple historical sources, she married in 1867 and eventually had three children, along with two adopted children. In 1876, she attended a reunion of her regiment, and she decided to seek a pension and gathered testimony from the men she had served with in the Army in order to prove that Frank Thompson and Sarah Emma Edwards were one and the same. She eventually received the pension and had the desertion mark removed from Frank Thompson's name, receiving an honorable discharge instead. Later, she was accepted into the Grand Army of the Republic, a fraternal association for Americans who served in the Union Army during the war. She was the only female member. According to scholar Matthew Teorey in "Unmasking the Gentleman Soldier in the Memoirs of Two Cross-Dressing Female US Civil War Soldiers," some strong, independent women, like Sarah Emma Edmondson, took the prohibited step of "unsexing" themselves to gain access to male space and authority (74). They sought to serve and to receive the respect and equality they deserved, respect and equality not accessible in skirts. In Edmondson's case, she sought to retain the respect and equality years later when she, as a woman, revealed herself to the men with whom she had served. She expected the friendships and admiration forged on the battlefield and in camp to penetrate any prejudices aroused by her attire. She wanted credit and acknowledgement of her service, and she received it.

While it is true that Edmondson fought for her country, in some ways, she also fought for a man whom she deeply cared about. Whether or not she loved him and enlisted to be near him, as the fictional Britomarte Conyers and Alberta Goldsmith did to be near the men they loved, is not known. In her memoir, she states that she had known Lieutenant James V. (Vesey) since childhood, and that he had always been a "faithful friend" (99). It makes the reader wonder if it

is more than mere coincidence that she ended up in the same regiment as her childhood friend, especially since the regiment was a Michigan unit, and she and James had grown up in New Brunswick, Canada. She states that he did not recognize her due to her change in name and appearance and the passage of five years since they had last seen each other (99). It was his death that led her to seek revenge against the enemy and to volunteer as a spy. In her grieving, she states, "I was left alone with a deeper sorrow in my heart than I had ever known before" (99). Whether her love for him was rooted in romance or deep friendship and whether or not she was partly motivated by the desire to be near him when she enlisted are not revealed, but she fought for him all the same.

Edmondson loved a man, but her love was not her life's purpose. None of the women examined in these historical accounts sought refuge in the realm of domesticity. In their minds, a woman's duty and a woman's abilities called for more. These women did not wait for their loved ones to return from war, and they did not satisfy their need to be useful by serving through traditional means of sewing, making bandages, preparing food, and other such tasks. Instead, they engaged in the male world of soldiering and spying. Through the opportunities created by the war, they saw to redefine the acceptable limits of womanhood.

Edmonson's experiences and accomplishments demonstrate that the sensational plots and characters discussed in this chapter are not far-fetched imaginings. Her story, though embellished at times, places the fictional stories of Martha Bronson, Britomarte, Alberta Goldsmith and others within the realm of the possible. The fiction could simply be a mimesis of the actions of real women. Edmonson passed for a male field nurse and soldier for over two years without being discovered. She treated patients in battlefield hospitals, rode on dangerous missions carrying orders during battles, fought in battles, and risked her life as a spy behind enemy lines.

Eventually, even the U.S. Congress recognized her service, giving her a pension and an honorable discharge. Nellie A.K. participated and fought as a soldier until her enlistment was up and her brother revealed her identity. Pauline Cushman acted as a spy, donning various disguises while seeking to uncloak Confederate sympathizers within Union conquered areas and travelling into Confederate territory attempting to discover battle plans, fortifications, and army strength, eventually being sentenced to be hung as a spy.

This chapter has treated examples of Civil War narratives written by women that feature a strong female protagonist. From the same era, there are a number of narratives, fictional and factual, written by men that also include a strong female protagonist, most often in disguise as men, acting as soldiers and spies, and performing other transgressions. Altogether, it is believed that over 400 women served in the military during the Civil War. “Women who Fought: Daughters of America who Followed...,” published in the *United States: A Quarterly Review of Military and Naval Affairs* (1892), named a few more of them as evidence, stating that since women have fought for this country, they deserve the right to vote. One of the examples included Mrs. Kady Bromwell, who, in order to be near her husband, actually enlisted in a Rhode Island regiment as a woman. She bravely served as a color-bearer, in the midst of the several battles. In another case, Miss Francis Hooks, similar to Sarah Edmonds, enlisted, disguised as a man, in order to be near a man she loved; in her case, it was her brother. She had neither parents nor other family. After her brother was killed, she enlisted in another regiment. Over the course of the war, she served under a few different aliases and with several regiments. Her sex was discovered twice during her service. Once was in Missouri when she was wounded, and she was sent home, only to re-enlist, and the second time was later in the Battle of Chattanooga, after she

was taken prisoner by the Confederates and was shot in the leg while trying to escape. It is believed that she re-enlisted again and perhaps served for the duration of the war (“Service”).

The memoirs and autobiographies detailing the lives of some of these women sound almost fantastical, especially to the nineteenth-century reader, and perhaps they gained readership by utilizing some of the tropes of sensational fiction. But they attest to a truth: that some women ventured a world away from their sphere and proved themselves equal to the task in the man’s field of war. Sizer saw political meanings in the fiction of Northern women writers, but the real women discussed in this section are committing a political act, as well, by sharing the nonfiction stories of their lives.

Conclusions

Except for the heightened emotions, the melodrama and the almost flawless heroes and heroines, many of the sensational war fiction stories sound as if they could have been taken from the pages of an autobiographical narrative. These true narratives and fictional stories worked together to carry a cultural/political message: that women are capable, that they proved themselves during the war, and that marriage and/or the end of the war should not signal a return to their previously limited sphere. In each of these works, the war disrupts their world. It will not be the same as it was before the war. By the conclusion of many of the fictional plots and some of the nonfiction narratives, the roles of the hero and heroines have been inverted. In these cases, the women now possess superior strength and economic standing and have proven themselves as good leaders either on the battlefield or in their personal lives, and the men have been physically, and often economically, wounded or disabled. Often, they have been rescued by the women in their lives. This reversal in standing will carry over into their marriages as well. The strong-willed Martha Bronson will not be one to demurely follow her husband. Britomarte will be an

equal with her husband, and Elfie and Erminie will have strong positions in their marriages, and so will Eleanor Beaumont. Elfie and Eleanor risk their lives for the Cause, and Martha, Madeline, and Britomarte fight alongside their husbands to-be as fellow soldiers.

In addition, the aftermath of war transgressions resonated in the lives of real women, as well. Pauline Cushman, Nellie A.K., Sarah Edmondson and others risked their lives for what they believed, and sometimes, like their fictional counterparts, they also risked their lives for the men they loved. They were all capable women who showed that they could handle themselves in a man's world. And that knowledge, capability, and confidence would have affected their future relationships and marriages. Cushman, though she married twice after the war, was someone who would define herself and stand apart from any man. Nellie A.K.'s life after the war is unknown, but she was already dissatisfied with trying to fit back in at home, and Edmondson was the wife taking her husband to *her* war reunion and helping to support her household with her war pension. Their war experiences will impact the rest of their lives and help shape their marriages.

The fictional stories also seek to politicize the decision to marry. In them, women are called upon to place public allegiances such as loyalty and duty before private connections. While this also may be true in the lives of the women in the autobiographical accounts in that they often leave home, family, and friends, and risk their lives for the nation, the fiction often focuses the spotlight on the decision to marry. Martha and Britomarte do not accept their lovers and marry until after they have proven themselves. Eleanor rejects her first lover and does not agree to marry her second beau until she has proven herself, as well. In all three cases, these women do not make the final decision until after their lovers have been wounded. Love, by itself, is not enough for these women. They desire equitable relationships in which they do not lose

their personhood. However, the most pivotal cases are the incidences where the women are called upon to choose between their loyalty to the nation and love for their fiancés. Elfie, Eleanor, and Erminie each ends an engagement with a man they love because of a conflict in political beliefs. It is a sacrifice that breaks each of their hearts, especially in the case of Elfie and Erminie; however, the nation must come first. This further propounds the idea that there are higher, more public considerations that should at certain times outweigh private considerations like love and security. According to these female authors, a woman should not be a chameleon who adopts the ideas and principles of whichever household she resides in or whatever man she is most closely connected with. Rather, a woman should determine her own convictions and values and stand by what she believes is right regardless of what her lover or husband-to-be might think. The cost of some of those convictions might be extremely high. But in the process of loving and marrying, she should not compromise who she is, which is what these novels tell their readers. In *Searching the Heart*, Lystra writes that by the mid-nineteenth century love ruled as supreme and “romantic love was seen—inside and outside marriage—as one of the essential ingredients of marital happiness” (225). Civil War-era sensational literature would add that while love is essential to marriage, there are higher considerations to be taken into account that may/should overrule the desire to say “I do.”

None of these women could or should fit neatly back into the confines the domestic shell imposed upon them by conventional society. The crisis of war activated latent potential within women. In *The Political Work of American Women Writers*, Sizer suggests that Phelps’s Martha Bronson is a “woman who can be all that a man can be and still retain the virtues of womanhood” (180). This could apply to several of the other characters and women studied in this chapter as well. They could face the enemy on the battlefield or outwit the foe in the

shadowy world of espionage, but they could also be caring and feminine. Martha tended to her lover's wounds and got him back to her house to be cared for, and she feared his possible rejection of her for being "too manly" more than she had feared the bullets on the battlefield. Britomarte also tended to Justin's wounds, and Erminie and Elfie worked in the hospital caring for the wounded. In Edmondson's narrative, there are several instances of her aiding the wounded, including a memorable scene of her caring for a wounded enemy soldier and comforting him as he lies dying. These women do not lose their femininity. They retain it while taking on the courage, calmness, and logic often associated with men. Sizer writes that "these writers did not suggest equality with men but a certain kind of transcendence: women could be gentle, compassionate, competent, and *soldiers*, if need be. These authors both gave power to their characters' assumed natural attributes as women and suggested that these very attributes should cause that sphere to be extended into public life" (Sizer 181). They suggest hybridity. These women could encapsulate, when needed, the best qualities of both spheres. These writers make the case that women should not be ostracized from the public sphere. They should not step back into the shadows due to their gender.

These yellow-covered dime novels and sensational narratives create an impact that goes beyond financial gain and entertainment value. These are stories of strong women and wounded men. These narratives and stories work at prying open space—space for women beyond the traditional domestic sphere, beyond liminality—space in which to utilize their potential. The authors strive to raise readers' awareness of the possibilities and encapsulate the wider vision of a woman's role into permanency. This expansion of a woman's role/place lessens the dominance of marriage in the lives of the sensational characters and the living women who have brought the sensational into reality. This is not to say that these women do not or will not marry, but when

they do, the decision of whom to marry will be based on their head and heart, and their marriages will not be all that they are. They will not be defined by their marriages or their husbands. They will be more than their “I do.” Furthermore, if these characters, who are only a few shades of melodrama away from the living breathing women portrayed in the news and memoirs of the day, can activate their potential, then it is possible for ordinary female readers to do so as well.

CHAPTER FOUR
INTEGRATED POSSIBILITIES: INTERRACIAL ATTRACTION AND
HUMANIZING THE OTHER

Civil War and Reconstruction-era stories about interracial relationships are loaded with subterfuge. Often the mixed race characters are masked in whiteness until the empathy of the co-protagonist and the readers are gained. Louisa May Alcott's "M.L." provides an excellent example of this. The heroine, Claudia, and readers are unaware of the hero's racial identity until later in the story:

Claudia saw a face that satisfied her eye as the voice had her ear, and yet its comeliness was not its charm. Black locks streaked an ample forehead, black brows arched finely over southern eyes as full of softness as fire. No color marred the pale bronze of the cheek, no beard hid the firm contour of the lips, no unmeaning smile destroyed the dignity of a thoughtful countenance, on which nature's hand had set the seal wherewith she stamps the manhood that no art can counterfeit (Alcott, "M.L." 5).

Thus began the romance with the attractive "foreigner," a man with a dark secret that could ruin her life.

The Civil War opened up possibilities previously considered unthinkable. This chapter takes a look at the potential for interracial relationships between African-Americans and whites as portrayed in the daring works of three white Northern women: Louisa May Alcott, Lydia Maria Child, and Rebecca Harding Davis. These radical authors contended that interracial attraction and love were legitimate feelings that should not be scorned. Their narratives struggle with the question of whether attraction and love can overcome the racial barriers sufficiently in

order to forge an enduring relationship. This chapter will explore interracial attraction and love in three of Alcott's Civil War era short stories, in Child's *Romance of the Republic* (1867), and in Davis's *Waiting for the Verdict* (1868). It will examine their treatment of the relationships portrayed and the conclusions reached in each work, which range from marriage, to a moving away from the possibilities of developing a relationship, to a deliberate decision to forgo the relationship due to societal concerns. The works will also be examined in light of the political view of Alcott's work that Hsu, in *Manifest Domesticity in Times of Love and War* (2008), characterized as the white middle-class woman domesticizing the exotic, and other critical and historical examinations of interracial attraction in literature of the era. Finally, the chapter will consider to what extent the Civil War opened or left closed these possibilities in real life during the era.

There were very few published fiction works by African American women by the 1860's and mid 1870's. (*Our Nig* (1859) by Harriet Wilson is one exception^{vi}.) So this chapter examines interracial attraction from the point of view of white female authors and focuses on white society's fear and prejudice regarding the mixing of white and black blood. On the other hand, I do include Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in the non-fiction historical section of this chapter as a slave's testimony against the illegitimate interracial sexual attraction that was all too prevalent.

The Civil War ripped through the social, economic, and ideological foundations of the South, especially in regards to the system of slavery, leaving even Northerners to question what would become of the newly freed slaves. Even before the Emancipation Proclamation, Americans began to consider how freedmen and women would be acclimated into white society. White Americans wondered and sometimes feared how the two races would intermix. The term

“miscegenation,” which refers to the interbreeding of people of different races, and which came to be seen as a criminal offense, was not coined until 1864. During the 1864 presidential election, Democrats circulated a satirical pamphlet called “Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the White Man and Negro,” making it appear as if Republicans and abolitionists supported interracial marriage (Pascoe 28; Hodes 230). Most Republicans and many abolitionists either ignored the accusation or rushed to deny any association with the pamphlet or support for interracial marriage (Hodes 231). The pamphlet and the term fed into the uncertainty and fears of how the freeing of slaves would change the interactions between white and black and lead to a proliferation of interracial attraction and relationships. But in the midst of the turmoil and upheaval created by the war, some saw hope and possibilities for real change.

Alcott, Child, and Davis pondered in their fiction the almost unmentionable in real life. Two of the narratives, Alcott’s “M.L. (1863) and Child’s *Romance of the Republic* (1867), dared venture beyond posing the possibility and allowed the characters to fulfill their desires in marriage. Alcott actually wrote “M.L.,” which is loosely based on reality, in 1860, before the war, but she could not find a publisher at that time. In her “My Contraband” (1863) and “An Hour” (1864), there is interracial attraction and/or love, but the feelings are not allowed full expression. In Davis’s *Waiting for the Verdict* (1868), a young white woman falls in love with the eccentric but renowned Dr. Broderip before she discovers that he is a mulatto passing as white. Miss Margaret Conrad’s love for her fiancé cannot overcome the racial barrier. She disconnects herself from him, refusing to see him before he goes off to war, but her heart is his forever. He perishes in the war, but she becomes a teacher for the children of ex-slaves. Margaret and Broderip’s reunion in heaven, where color does not matter, is the future painted in the novel.

These authors allow the white heroine or hero the possibility of marrying someone outside of their race, to step beyond the conventions of society. This is a startling choice not offered previously in standard American fiction before the war. Lydia Marie Child, James Fenimore Cooper, Elizabeth Oakes Smith, and Catherine Anne Sedgwick had considered it in relation to Native Americans in their fiction written decades earlier, but the mixture of black and white was considered to be an ugly, (not-so-secret) secret of plantation masters forcing themselves upon their female slaves and the rumor of slave mistresses interacting sexually with male slaves. The thought of mutual and willing attraction was heretofore greatly feared, so it was served to the readership in a romanticized fashion, often idealizing mixed-race characters as exceptionally talented, intelligent, and/or attractive.

In the Civil War-era interracial attraction stories, the racialized hero/heroine is Spanishized (Hsu 63). Instead of portraying the heroine/hero as having strong African-American features, the authors color them “yellow” or olive and give them dark eyes and smooth, dark hair, as if they are of Spanish or Portuguese descent. They are part white, being either mulattos or quadroons. Some of them even pass for white until their ancestry becomes known. The authors believed that this would be more palatable for their audiences, which would be more likely to identify with the characters and to understand the attraction.

In this way, all three authors seek to expose the readers to the humanity of the racialized Other. In the three stories that involve the serious possibility of marriage, the authors do not reveal the race of the hero/heroine until their white lover and the reader have already learned to care about them as a fellow human being. These stories privilege love and hold it in higher esteem than much of the other fiction of the era. The more audacious of these stories suggest that love should be allowed to draw hearts and lives together regardless of social dictates, monetary

considerations, and political agendas. Marriage in this fiction acts doubly as the ideal culmination of love, when it is not hindered by prejudice, and as a political metaphor representing the integration of the races, suggesting more than coexistence and tolerance.

“An Hour”: Love Out of Reach

In Alcott’s “An Hour” (1864), interracial love is instrumental in saving lives, but it does not overcome racial constraints to the point of leading to marriage. In this story, which is set during the war in South Carolina, the hero, Gabriel, is white, and the heroine, Milly, is of African descent but more white than black in appearance. In the beginning, she is his father’s slave. She was bought as a gift for Gabriel in order to teach him the “pleasures” of slave ownership (54). Love is not a necessary component of a relationship in such cases, and white society would look the other way in the patriarchal South, as long as the relationship was kept behind closed doors and the female slave was not treated as an equal.

But Gabriel, who was schooled in the North according to the wishes of his now deceased mother, has not exercised his rights of ownership: “Gabriel, in his brief visits, soon convinced his father that no temptation could undermine his sturdy Northern sense of right and justice, and though he might easily learn to love the beautiful woman, he could not learn to oppress the slave whose utter helplessness appealed to all that was manliest in him” (54). Gabriel is very much attracted to this “brilliant flower of the tropics” (48), but he has chosen, due to his sense of honor, not to engage in a sexual relationship with a woman over whom he has complete authority. He has feelings for Milly, but she is off limits.

Milly, for her part, is in love with Gabriel, and her love plays a crucial part in the events of “An Hour.” The story opens with a deathbed scene. Gabriel’s father is dying, and his stepmother and stepsisters are gathered around the bed. Upon his father’s death, Gabriel will

inherit the plantation, and for several days, he has been struggling with the dilemma of whether to free the slaves, as he would like, or to keep the plantation intact, so that his stepmother and stepsisters will not be penniless. At the beginning of the “hour,” Gabriel becomes aware that Milly and the other slaves are behaving strangely. He persuades Milly to confess, and from her, he learns that the slaves, whom his father has abused and badly mistreated, have organized an uprising. They have already seized the overseer and are torturing him, as they have been tortured, and within an hour, they will be headed for the plantation house. Milly begs Gabriel to leave, saying that she will secure his freedom but no one else’s. He refuses, insisting that he cannot leave while his stepmother and sisters are in danger (56).

Gabriel promises to free all of the slaves in the morning if Milly will only help him keep his family safe, but she is uncertain of whether to believe him, and she is torn between her love for him and her loyalty to slaves, whose degradations she has witnessed and felt. Aware of her feelings, Gabriel appeals to her love for him through “the magic of a power which the young man had never used till now, though conscious of possessing it,—for Milly’s tell-tale countenance had betrayed her secret long ago” (57). And he succeeds by treating her as an equal and appealing to her mercy: “No man had ever looked into her face before with eyes in which admiration for her beauty was mingled with pity for her helpless womanhood; and, better than all, no man, old or young, had ever until now recognized in her a fellow-creature, born to the same rights, gifted with the same powers, and capable of the same sufferings and sacrifices as himself. That touched and won her” (56-57). His approval and respect mean everything to her. She agrees to go to the mainland for help. It is she who will save *him*, and Gabriel holds “out his hand, as if pledging his word to obey and trust” her (58).

In the end, Gabriel proves his courage and honor. While Milly is risking her life for him, he goes down to the slave quarters and places himself at the mercy of fifty angry men. In the tense meeting that follows, he asks for their forgiveness and declares all of them free. The Lord has answered their prayers, and as their rage dissipates, tramping can be heard in the distance. It is inferred that it is help brought by Milly, men ready to put down a slave uprising. This would seem to indicate the potential for danger and violence to the slaves gathered around Gabriel, but Alcott writes that “none trembled and none fled; for a mightier power than either force or fear had conquered, and the victory was already won” (68). The story ends. Gabriel and his stepfamily are saved. Gabriel is a man of his word, and the slaves will be free, but will the men who have been summoned drop their weapons so easily? That question is left unanswered.

And finally, what becomes of Milly’s relationship with Gabriel? She loves him, and he knows it. She is more of a lady than his two white stepsisters could ever be, and she has risked her life for him. He finds her attractive and could easily fall in love with her. He respects her and acknowledges her as a woman of strong character, capable of mercy, grace, and courage. In addition, he has just defied Southern conventions by freeing all two hundred slaves on his newly inherited plantation. But is he ready to violate the taboos against interracial relationships outside of the master-slave hierarchy? Earlier in the story, Alcott refers to Milly’s feelings for Gabriel as a “hapless human love” and states that “Milly felt this deeply, and knew that the few black drops in her veins parted herself and Gabriel more hopelessly than the wildest seas that ever rolled between two lovers” (54). Milly is almost “white,” but any trace of blackness creates a seemingly un-crossable social chasm. Gabriel trusts her with his life, and his feelings for her very likely go beyond attraction and respect to love, but the ending of the story gives no indication that he will pursue courtship and marriage with her, and he is too honorable to engage

in a romantic relationship with her under any other terms. The story's ending does not mention Milly at all. As "An Hour" concludes, the fifty perpetrators kneel on bended knees praising the Lord for the freedom that Gabriel has granted. The footsteps and voices of the "rescuers" that Milly has summoned can be heard in the distance, and Milly is likely with them, but the focus is on the newfound communion between Gabriel and the slaves he has freed. Barriers have been broken, but those are barriers between master and slave, not between Gabriel and Milly, as man and woman. The angel-like Gabriel has become a benefactor, willing to risk financial ruin, but crossing the racial marriage boundary seems a step beyond his willingness to transgress.

Alcott allows the reader to sense the loss of the potential relationship due to racial boundaries. There are all the factors for romance, courtship, and marriage. But societal prejudice bars the way for Gabriel, and the awareness of her readers' and American society's prejudices mutes Alcott's conclusion. These potential lovers are in South Carolina, not on foreign soil, as in "M.L." The irony is that some level of racial attraction led to Milly being of mixed race herself, but, of course, that was under the master-slave relationship. A respectable, equitable relationship entered into voluntarily was what was forbidden.

In *Public Vows*, Nancy Cott relates an incident from the diary of Ella Clanton Thomas, a plantation mistress from Georgia, regarding an interracial marriage. The account tells of a southern man who had lived with a mulatto slave for years. The community ignored the situation until he took the woman north and officially married her. At that point, "public opinion was outraged" and "his father was terribly mortified and has since attempted to prove that he is a lunatic" (42). Illicit sex was tolerated; marriage of a white to someone with any trace of African blood was not. In her novel, Alcott foregrounds the issue of interracial attraction, helping the reader to question why a few drops of blood should not be allowed to create such a barrier.

“My Contraband”: Conflicting Identities

In Alcott’s “My Contraband” (1863), there is interracial attraction, but the heroine’s awareness of the hero’s blackness eradicates any possibility of a romantic/love relationship between the two. Unlike the stories where the racial identity of the Other is kept secret at first, Faith is informed that Robert is a mulatto before she even sees him. She is a nurse in a Union hospital, and she is tasked with caring for a Confederate soldier who has typhoid fever. The doctor assigns Robert to be her assistant, describing him as “not much darker than myself [the doctor] (70). When Faith first sees Robert, she is struck by his handsome, manly appearance: “I had seen many contrabands, but never one so attractive as this. [...] this boy was five-and-twenty at least, strong-willed, strong-limbed and manly, and had the look of one who never had been cowed by abuse or worn with oppressive labor” (70). She does not view him as a slave, but as a man, and she is seeing him with the eyes of a woman, not a mother. Her description goes on:

The profile which I saw possessed all the attributes of comeliness belonging to his mixed race. He was more quadroon than mulatto, with Saxon feature, Spanish complexion darkened by exposure, color in lips and cheek, weaving hair, and an eye full of the passionate melancholy which in such men always seems to utter a mute protest against the broken law that doomed them at their birth (71).

This description of Robert epitomizes the “Spanishization” technique described by Hsu. At this point, the reader is wondering about the potential for romance here, despite the racial difference. Alcott desires for the reader to feel the attractiveness, as well. She wants the reader to view Robert as a man, a potential suitor, instead of as a lesser being.

However, it is only for a moment. The fear of miscegenation was too dominant in Civil War America (Hsu 64). Alcott disrupts the attraction by having the man turn to face Faith: “In an

instant the man vanished and the slave appeared. [...] as he started up, with his hand at his temple, and an obsequious ‘Yes, Missis,’ any romance that had gathered round him fled away, leaving the saddest of all sad facts in living guise before me. Not only did the manhood seem to die out of him, but the comeliness that first attracted me; for, as he turned, I saw the ghastly wound that had laid open cheek and forehead” (71). This gothic disruption of the wound and blackness shocks the reader as well as Faith. His servile attitude returns Faith to the proper place of “Missis,” and she gives him an order.

Moments later, when he has his “handsome profile” turned towards her again, she thanks him for his help (Alcott 72). As a slave, he is so unaccustomed to being treated civilly that he feels the need to remind her that he is not a white man. Robert exudes a conflicting duality. He is almost white, but not white. He is black, but not really black. There is no secure place for him in American society. This is represented by the fact that he does not fit in with any of the regular hospital wards (Alcott 72). The wounded, white soldiers will not allow a black man to stay on their floors, and Robert, feeling superior, does not want anything to do with the floors for blacks. Faith’s feelings towards him also suffer from this duality. She, on the one hand, is attracted to him and respects him, yet, moments later, is either repulsed by his blackness or pitying him for the mistreatment he has endured. It troubles Faith that, in comparison to the foulmouthed Rebel captain whom she is treating and whom society would view as a gentleman, Robert is the true gentleman of the two (Alcott 73). She attributes her unconventional viewpoint to the fact that she is a “fanatic” and states that this “accounts for such [her] depravity of taste” (Alcott 73). Her attraction, her admiration towards a black man is abnormal, by her own admission. She finds her reaction to Robert to be uncanny. The unadulterated reaction free from the blinders of prejudice

is considered unnatural. This could also symbolize the conflicted attitude that the North in general had towards blacks. Hsu concludes:

My contention is that because Robert is a “U.S.” ex-slave, the storyline of “My Contraband” may seem too sensitively close to the dilemmas that the nation encountered around the Civil War period; accordingly, Robert not only cannot serve as a lover/husband to the white woman or a father to the future nationals, but he also has to die in order to avoid further complications. He must first be infantilized (in order to be a son, not a husband, to the white woman), and then be killed—all in the name of the Father. (60-61)

It is true that Faith becomes a mother figure to Robert instead of a possible love-interest or friend, but I do not agree with Hsu’s implications. The rupture is not neatly contained. I argue that the evolution of the relationship to mother-son does not completely mute the transgression. Yes, Faith helps redeem Robert. She saves him from murdering her patient, the sick Confederate captain who turns out to be Robert’s previous master, who raped Robert’s wife and took her from him. In addition, she finds him a way north to Massachusetts to start a new life. Once there, he enlists in the first official regiment of Black troops and returns to the South to fight, being mortally wounded at the battle of Fort Wagner (83-84). Seeing him on his deathbed, Faith learns that he had taken her last name, “Dane,” as his. He proves his manhood, but the threat of miscegenation has been removed. Faith has become a mother figure, “disciplining” the mixed-raced character through love and shaping him into an “assimilable national member” (Hsu 38). She helps him find his place in the nation. He has become a “son,” not a lover. I agree with Hsu’s contention that the sexual attraction has been safely defused. However, this does not erase

the fact that the spark existed. Alcott allowed the attraction, even if it was only momentary, and that is the radical element of this story.

“M.L.”: Love Overcomes All

In “M.L.” (1862), Louisa May Alcott dares what many authors do not. She allows her two main characters, an interracial couple, to marry. Like Margaret Conrad in *Waiting for the Verdict*, Claudia does not realize that the man with whom she is falling in love is of African descent. Before Claudia ever meets Paul Frere, she hears his voice and is mesmerized by his singing, for “it had soothed the secret pain of a proud spirit, it had stirred the waters of a lonely heart, and from their depths a new born patience rose with healing” (4). It is rumored that he is Spanish and of noble birth, but he silent regarding his past, referring to himself simply as “plain Paul Frere, trying honestly to earn his bread” (40). All of this Claudia hears before she even meets him. As she studies him, she is reminded of a painting of a storm-thrashed island paradise awakening at dawn. In Paul, she

[s]aw a face that satisfied her eye as the voice had one her ear, and yet its comeliness was not its charm. Black locks streaked an ample forehead, black brows arched finely over southern eyes as full of softness as fire. No color marred the pale bronze of the cheek, no beard hid the firm contour of the lips, no unmeaning smile destroyed the dignity of a thoughtful countenance, on which nature’s hand had set the seal wherewith she stamps the manhood that no art can counterfeit. [...] But on the forehead lines that seldom come to men of thirty, in the eye the shadow of some past despair, and about the closely folded lips traces of an impetuous nature tamed by suffering and taught by time. (Alcott “M.L.” 5)

Thus, Claudia and the reader are intrigued by this tanned, handsome man of mystery, and by the time Claudia has spent a few minutes conversing with him, observing his respectful, gentlemanly manner and feeling the effects of his frank disposition, she is starting to fall in love.

There are no apparent barriers to the romance. Claudia is an independent woman of means with no close family. She makes her own decisions, and she has put off marriage, believing it better to delay wedlock or even remain single rather than marry without love. And now love has come at last. As the weeks pass, she sees in Paul “the friend she had desired, for her she found a character built up by suffering and time, an eager intellect aspiring for the true, and valiant spirit looking straight and strong into the world” and to her “the music of his life became more beautiful than any song he sang” (8-9). Beneath the May moon, they decide to marry. And why not? She is in love with him, he is the man of her dreams, and he is in love with her. And even the nineteenth-century reader is likely ready to say “why not?” and cheer her on. But then, a few days before the wedding, Claudia’s gossipy “friend,” Jessie Snowden, stumbles on a revelation. Paul is an ex-slave.

If Claudia had known this when she first met Paul, there would have been no romance. If the nineteenth-century reader had known it, there very likely would have been far less empathy and connection. Alcott “Spanishized” her mixed race hero to make him more palatable for her reader (Hsu 61). In fact, the mixed race heroes and heroines in Alcott’s Civil War-era abolitionist stories are all presented as a “romanticized Spaniard type, the exotic, attractive, racially ambiguous other, who has a dark look but is generally assumed to be white” (Hsu 62). In the story Paul’s mother was a quadroon, meaning that she was only one-fourth African-American, and his father was his white master. But these few drops of “black” blood are enough to taint him in the eyes of white society and render him unacceptable. Jessie Snowden is fully aware of this

when she confronts Paul and Claudia with her newly discovered information, and they know that soon all of their friends will hear the news from Jessie as well. Paul has struggled to tell Claudia the truth about his past with the hope that she would be willing to overlook it, and it would have been a secret between them that no one else needed to know, but now, it will be broadcast, ensuring that Claudia will become a social outcast if she does not break off her engagement with Paul.

Unlike Margaret in *Waiting for the Verdict*, in which the heroine is greatly disturbed when she learns that the hero is not pure Caucasian, Claudia is not repulsed by Paul's connection to Blackness. Alcott writes, "Pride, and fear, and shame had dropped away, leaving the purer passion free; now justice and mercy took love by the hand and led it home" (21). Declaring her continued love, she takes him into her arms. She commits to marrying him regardless of the social costs. Romantic love is privileged here above other concerns and priorities. This is a radical shift from the priorities advocated in the fiction discussed thus far in this dissertation which privilege logic, duty, and politics over love.

On the other hand, other fiction written by women of the era insists that the heart should not rule. Rather, the head should lead the heart and not vice versa in matters of marriage. In the Northern literature written by women of the era, marriage and romantic love were not the sole focus of a woman's life. The importance of meaningful work and the possibilities of a woman having a career are explored; Alcott's *Work* is a prime example of this. The one character in the stories examined who yields to love for a man above all else, Avis, in *The Story of Avis*, suffers greatly for her choice. Her artistic hopes and abilities wither away as she is lost in subjugating her interests to those of her husband and eventually in mothering and nursing him until the artist in her is dead. There is a high price to be paid for being ruled by emotion. Furthermore, in

sensational literature, the authors argue that loyalty to one's country should overrule romantic feelings. Marriage is not the priority. There is work to be done and a nation to be saved. The female characters decline marriage until they have proven themselves a man's equal. In the Southern literature, there is the call to place duty before romantic love in *Macaria*, and in *St. Elmo*, Edna pursues her career to the edge of death before she gives into love.

But Civil War era literature that highlights interracial attraction does not agree with the marginalization of romance and love. In several interracial stories, including "The Hour," *Waiting for the Verdict*, and others, characters suffer a loss when they allow societal concerns to overrule romantic love. Romantic love is the force that has the power to penetrate through the layers of prejudice. In *Searching the Heart*, Karen Lystra argues in support of the power of romantic love. However, her focus is on its power to overcome the societal barriers between men and women: "Romantic love was the most significant circumstance bridging the gender gap in Victorian America" (Lystra 42). I agree with her, but I see broader applications beyond its ability to pierce the male and female spheres and form genuine connections. I argue that Civil War-era interracial literature demonstrates that romantic love is the force with the most potential to bridge the racial gap as well.

Lystra holds that love could enable a couple to see the world from each other's perspective, that it would help the two lovers identify with each other as no other force could: "For the experience of love created a mutual identification between women and men that was so intense that lovers repeatedly claim to have incorporated a part of their own partner's inner self into their own inner life" (42). This immersion into another's self stands the best chance of being able to penetrate the blindness created by deep-seated personal and societal prejudices. This

holds true for characters and for readers, in addition to couples. Romantic love diminishes the distinction of the Other.

Hsu argues that the relationships between Claudia and Paul in “M.L.” and Faith and Robert in “My Contraband” are more maternal than romantic. She contends that these stories show the Northern white woman bringing the racialized other into the national family through domestication and maternal love (22, 27). This holds true for “My Contraband.” Faith never has a chance to become romantically attached to Robert. She knows before she sees him that he is a mulatto. This knowledge does not prevent her initial physical attraction to him, but then he turns, and she sees his whole face, revealing the gash, which almost seems to darken his whole complexion in her eyes. Then, he speaks, and it is the tone and dialect of a slave that she hears. The blackness is complete, and her acceptance/attraction recoils, but in order to keep this potential deviance/attraction in place, she mothers him. Additionally, I concede that there are brief maternal elements in “M.L.,” such as when Paul confesses his past and Claudia takes him in to her arms, declaring that she loves him still. Alcott writes, “Paul was the weaker now, and Claudia learned of the greatness of past fear by the vehemence of present joy” (22). However, it was romantic love, not maternal, that emboldened Claudia and spurred her to cross into the forbidden zone of interracial marriage.

Claudia connects deeply with Paul, and he transforms her life. Though she has wealth and many friends, she had been lonely with no true, close friend in her life, no one to love her or for her to love. His music touches her soul, his physical appearance attracts her, and his heart and character win her. Alcott writes of Claudia that “she was blessed with a romance that taught her wiser lessons than reality had ever done” (12). On the night of her birthday, while “the

moonbeams danced like elves upon the keys,” Paul proposes, not with words, so much, as with his eyes:

Paul bent on the woman whom he loved a look tenderer than the most impassioned prayer, more potent than the subtlest appeal, more eloquent than the most fervent vow. He saw the maiden color flush and fade, saw the breath quicken and the lips grow tremulous, but the steadfast eyes never wavered, never fell, and through those windows of the soul, her woman’s heart looked out and answered him (10).

The moment and their hearts are full of romantic love, and it is this love that later, despite the disapproval of everyone else she knows, propels Claudia to fulfill her decision to marry him, even after she learns of his background.

The power of love to embolden its participants to defy societal barriers against interracial relationships is evidenced in reality as well as fiction. According to Susan Elbert in “An Interracial Love Story Fact and Fiction: William and Mary King Allen,” Alcott based “M.L.” on a real couple: William G. Allen, a quadroon professor, and Mary King, the daughter of an abolitionist minister and a student at the coed, mixed-race college where Allen taught. According to Elbert’s research, Allen, in addition to being a professor of Greek and German Languages and Rhetoric at McGrawville College in New York, was also a lecturer, a lawyer, and a writer who was well respected in abolitionist circles (29). He first met Mary King when he was a guest at her father’s house in the spring of 1851, and she was preparing to become a student at McGrawville. She was a student at the college for the next one and a half years, and it was during this time, with her living quarters only across the street from where Allen resided, that the two became close friends (30). In Allen’s words, they “freely conversed” (Allen 42). They saw

each other as fellow human beings and as equals. By December 1852, they were considering marriage (Elbert 31). But unlike Claudia, who was unaware of the race of her lover and fiancé until a couple weeks before their wedding, Mary was painfully aware of the societal condemnation that a marital alliance with Allen would bring upon her. Even friendship with such a man was enough to draw the ire and disapproval of anyone outside of abolitionist circles. Interracial marriage was an abomination to most people in the US. It was for this reason that Allen insisted that they part temporarily in order to give Mary time to fully contemplate her decision. In “M.L.” Paul had a similar reaction once Claudia became aware of his full identity, and he realized that Jessie Snow would not keep his race a secret from the community. Like Claudia, Mary King’s final answer was a resounding “yes.” Her fiancé, William, fervently admired her for her courage:

I will not speak of myself, but on the part of Miss King, this was certainly a bold step. It displayed a moral heroism which no one can comprehend who has not been in America, and who does not understand the diabolical workings of prejudice against color. Whatever a man may be in his own person, – though he should have the eloquence, talents, and character of Paul and Apollo, and the Angel Gabriel combined, – and though he should be as wealthy as Croesus, – and though, in personal appearance, he should be as fair as the fairest Anglo-Saxon, yet, if he have but one drop of the blood of the African flowing in his veins, no white lady can ally herself to him in matrimony, without bringing upon her the anathema of the community, with scarcely an exception, and rendering herself an almost total outcast, not only from the society in which she formerly moved, but from society in general. (Allen 43-44)

Mary's love for William was stronger than her fear of what such a decision would bring. Elbert does not refer to their relationship as romantic and said that Allen avoided the word "love" in discussing Mary (31). However, I contend that their actions demonstrated their feelings. Love between a black person and a white person was almost unspeakable. But they were in love, and Mary's love for him emboldened her to risk everything. Mary writes, "Friends may forsake me, and the world prove false, but the sweet assurance that I have your most devoted love, and that that love will strengthen and increase in proportion as the regard of others may diminish, is the only return I ask" (Allen 38). Romantic love motivated Mary and William to risk all.

However, Mary lost more than she even anticipated. According to Elbert, Mary's father, who was an abolitionist minister and who had welcomed Allen in to his home, supported Mary at first, and so did her sister. But her brothers, one of them a Reform minister, were strongly opposed, and so was her stepmother. Their avid disapproval combined with stringent pressure from the community led her father to reconsider, and he removed his blessing, even going so far as to ban Allen from the house (Elbert 33). All of their friends fell away amongst the sea of disapproval and anger, except for one couple. It was at this couple's house in a nearby town that William and Mary arranged to meet in order to make plans. However, the town found out, and an angry mob, consisting of four to five hundred people, came to the house. A man, arriving just ahead of the mob, warned them that "All Fulton had been up in arms since the previous night, crowds gathering in the streets, while 'Tar, feathers, poles, and an empty barrel spiked with shingle nails had been prepared' for William G. Allen" (Elbert 33). A few men, in order to spare the couple giving William and Mary refuge, managed to help Allen escape. Their engagement almost cost William his life and left Mary feeling terrorized (Elbert 33). Their intended marriage had aroused the hatred of a Northern town, and this was not an anomaly. They had to wonder if

they would be welcome anywhere in the US. Eventually, with the help of secret friends along the way, they were able to reunite and marry in New York City, spending a few days in Boston, before they sailed across the ocean to make their home in England (Elbert 38). As this anecdote demonstrates, interracial marriage seems to have been considered the epitome of depravity by the vast majority of Americans in the mid-nineteenth century. Having any link to black ancestry marginalized a person as Other and a contaminate that could not be allowed to intermingle with whites, especially sexually with white women.

Alcott wrote “M.L.,” the fictionalized version of the Allen’s romance and marriage in 1860, but she could not find anyone willing to publish it. It was only after the country was in the midst of Civil War that she found a publisher with enough audacity to run the story. An anti-slavery newspaper, *Commonwealth*, serialized it in early 1863. And given the adamant opposition, in the US, to miscegenation, Alcott set her story in Cuba, outside of the U.S., hoping to de-escalate the “threat” by keeping it at a distance. In addition, as mentioned previously, she does not reveal Paul’s “negro” heritage to the reader or to Claudia until both have had a chance to view Paul as a man and to feel the attraction. Mary King was under no delusion when she accepted the friendship and then the attentions of William Allen. She knew his heritage, and saw him as a fellow, equal human being in spite of that, and fell in love. Unfortunately, her family, friends, community, and beyond could not leap beyond their prejudice. Claudia, once she did discover the truth, was aided by the fact that she was an orphan with no family and with enough money to be comfortably independent. Paul and Claudia flourished in their married life. Married reality for William and Mary King likely included plenty of love and affection, as evidenced by his writings and the growth of their family, but they struggled financially for the next twenty-five

years in England and Ireland, with William never finding a secure, long-term position (Elbert 40).

Historical Context: The Reality that Could Not Always Be Hushed

The rabid animosity in American society against any who dared cross the color line in regards to romantic and/or sexual relationships did not deter all attraction. The scathing disapproval merely drove it further into the shadows. Interracial attraction was not a fiction dreamt up by Alcott, Davis, and others. It is just that very few dared to seek to enter into an honorable, respectable relationship as William Allen and Mary King.

The rape, assault, and coercion of female slaves by their owners is well known. Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* provides evidence. Jacobs' owner, Dr. Flint, pursued her for years, devising several schemes, such as ordering her to sleep in his room as servant to his daughter, making plans to take Jacobs to Louisiana with him on a trip, and building her a little cabin off in the woods away from everyone else in order to avoid his wife's scrutiny. Thankfully, in Jacobs' case, she was able to evade his grasp. Other women on Dr. Flint's plantation were not so lucky. He was the "father of eleven slaves" (32). Such behavior as his was all too common amongst slave owners.

A much more rarely discussed reality was the attraction between white women and their male slaves. In 1863 the American Freedman's Inquiry Commission held hearings in order to plan how to best integrate freed slaves into society. According to historian Martha Hodes's "War Dialogues on Illicit Sex: White Women and Black Men," the commission heard a substantial amount of testimony and evidence corroborating the existence of sexual interaction between white Southern women, especially in regards to plantation mistresses and daughters and male slaves. This testimony had such potential to be lethal to any plans for integration that the

commission suppressed this section of their findings (232). Much of the testimony came from white, male abolitionists who had developed strong ties with blacks. Captain Richard Hinton, a commander of black troops during the war, testified that “I have never yet found a bright looking colored man, whose confidence I have won, who has not told me of instances where he has been compelled, either by his mistress, or by white women of the same class, to have connection with them” (qtd. in Hodes 235). He also recalled a conversation with a doctor who had practiced in Missouri and Virginia who had had quite a number of white female patients, who had “compelled some one of the [black] men to have something to do with them” (235). In addition, he described specific witnesses, such as a black steamboat steward, Patrick Miller, who told of the numerous plantation class women who sought to sleep with the black stewards on the steamboat (233-34).

James Redpath, a white abolitionist who had conducted research in the South during the 1850's, also testified of conversations he had with black men regarding relations between white women and black men. One interviewee told him that “it was just as common for colored men to have connection with white women, as for white men to have to do with colored women” (qtd. in Hades 233). Redpath also spoke of hearing black men joke about the number of white women who end up having black babies (233). The report contains testimony from Major George Stearnes and others that corroborates Hinton and Redpath's revelations. Sexual attraction definitely crossed racial boundaries, but it was more likely to be acted upon when the enamored party was in a position of power over the other.

The close contact of slaves working in and around the house created an atmosphere where romantic and sexual attraction were distinct possibilities. In Alcott's “An Hour,” Gabriel resists the temptation, but too many plantation owners and their relatives did not. However, the

honor and purity of the upper class Southern women were considered to be safeguards against such desire on their part. White women of the lower classes who had interactions with black men were considered to be “depraved” and not as virtuous as planter-class women (Hodes 235). The commission’s suppressed report says otherwise. Redpath and Hinton both testified that in addition to mimicking the examples of their male relatives in giving into their passions, white women also saw sexual relations with blacks as “safe.” One of their informants stated, “If I have connections with a white girl she knows that if she takes precautions she is safe, for if I should tell I should be murdered by her father, her brother, or herself” (qtd. in Hodes). The slave was not truly safe regardless of his response to such advances. If he has relations with the woman, he can tell no one, and if he is caught, his life could be in danger even if he had been coerced, and if he refused, the woman might be insulted and accuse him of attacking her.

In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Jacobs also exposes the sexual desire expressed by the daughters of slave owners for some of the male slaves. Jacobs argues that the daughters were “contaminated” by hearing/seeing their father’s and brothers’ exploits with the female slaves (46). Slavery was a “blight” on the “souls” of the slave owner’s children (46). In the midst of such a corrupt system, purity and honor amongst upper class women and men were not easily maintained.

Hodes and the commission’s report both speak in terms of sexual connections, coercion, and promiscuous white women. Love does not enter into the discussion. It is likely that there were some cases of mutual affection, although any emotional attachment on the part of the slave would be complicated by his lack of agency. In her memoir, Jacobs tells of her white lover, Mr. Sands, an unmarried gentleman who took an interest in her. He expressed sympathy and concern and even wrote her letters and notes, quietly courting her much as he would a white girl, but

without parental involvement or public knowledge. But the relationship did not and could not end in marriage. However, feeling that it was “less degrading to give one’s self, than to submit to compulsion,” and believing that taking a lover and bearing another man’s child would protect her from being raped by her master, she accepted the man’s advances (48). At this point, she had affection for him, and he appeared to have affection for her. He was kind, and he eventually succeeded in purchasing their children and her brother from her master. But this relationship left her feeling used. And in the end, despite many promises, he did not give her children their freedom willingly (118, 137). He eventually ran for Congress and married a white woman. A Southern gentleman could not legally marry his black mistress even if he was willing to suffer the social ostracism that would accompany such an act. The affection that Mr. Sands had for Jacobs did not survive the years and the social and legal barriers regarding interracial relationships.

But if love did exist in an interracial relationship, it could not be voiced openly beyond the couple or acknowledged. Love would speak of the possibility of equality, unlike pure physical attraction, and such a possibility would be anathema to Southern ideology and even more than most Northerners could tolerate, as evidenced by the community’s harsh treatment of William Allen and Mary King. Mere sexual attraction was scandalous enough. Hodes points out that Redpath withheld such information in the published results of his study in the late 1850’s. It was not until his testimony before the commission in 1863 that he dared give voice to the witnesses who had spoken of the taboo subject (Hodes 232). The war opened up the possibility of change, a change feared so much that the findings, though voiced to the commission, were still kept hidden.

Joann Cashin's "'Since the War Broke Out': The Marriage of Kate and William McClure" exposes an unusually equitable relationship between Kate McLure, a plantation mistress, and one of the plantation's slaves while William was away at war. As discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation, the war altered the roles and power structure within the McClure's marriage. Kate slowly began to assume more and more of the responsibilities for running the family's plantation despite her husband's determination to leave the management to inept male relatives and overseers; as Cashin states, "Any white man would do, it seems" as far as William was concerned (210). The one man who did appear to be competent, in Kate's judgment, and whom Kate trusted, was a slave named Jeff (Cashin 205). As the war wore on, and feeding and clothing her family and their slaves became a struggle, she wrestled control from one incompetent overseer after another and ignored the advice and orders from male relatives called in by her husband. Instead, under her management, she placed Jeff "entirely in charge of food crops and the livestock" and "set him out alone on errands across the countryside" (207). At one point in her letters to her husband in a discussion of how the overseer Mabery was a "low" and "profligate" man, she stated that Jeff "gave her accurate information about the health of the other slaves" (209). Her respect for this slave was evident. Cashin argues that "evidence of this kind of relationship between mistress and slave is rare" (209). She worked with him as a partner in many aspects and relied upon his judgment. In early 1864, she "deputized him to help her run the plantation" (Cashin 209) and stated, "I am quite independent of Mabery, if I can help Jeff when I want him" (qtd. in Cashin 209). Cashin does not address the possibility of attraction or romantic feelings between Kate and Jeff, and Kate's letters to her husband do not, of course, reveal any such feelings. However, even the mere suggestion of anything of the sort by Kate would have jeopardized Jeff's life. But she respected and relied

upon this slave, treating him as a trusted partner as the war dragged on. They appear to have had a matrimonial-style partnership, working together to care for their home, the plantation, and all who depended upon them. In the silence, there is the possibility that attraction, a relationship, or even love could have existed between them, but the letters are silent on such matters.

A more openly discussed topic was Kate's reaction to William's hiring a freedwoman as his cook and laundress while he was in the Army. Cashin argues that Kate must have believed that Williams was having an affair with the woman. In her letters, Kate's tone was "angry" as she insisted that William's actions would jeopardize "his reputation as a 'Christian' and a 'Gentleman'" (Cashin 206). But he responded that "he could commit 'even more questionable acts' before his reputation would be damaged" (Cashin 206). Even though it is never stated outright, it is obvious that Kate believed that William was attracted to his servant and that it was likely that he would act upon that attraction. And as a white patriarch, he did not seem concerned that others would suspect him of such behavior. However, if Kate had revealed any trace of attraction or romantic feelings for Jim, it would have almost been considered blasphemy.

Since the 1660's, there had been numerous colonial and state laws that sought to define interracial marriage as illicit sex. However, the Civil War and Emancipation stirred the possibility of change, and many feared that change. According to Peggy Pascoe in *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, interracial marriage became a "hotly contested issue during the Civil War and Reconstruction" (3). Eventually the fear of the mixing of the races and the loss of white privilege led to an expansion and solidifying of the laws and an increase in the severity of the penalties. According to Pascoe, "From the 1860s through the 1960s, the American legal system elevated the notion that interracial marriage was

unnatural to commonsense status and made it the law of the land” (3). For example, the 1870 Indiana law called for a punishment of at least a year in prison, not to exceed ten, and a fine of at least \$1,000 (Pascoe 47). An 1865 Mississippi law made interracial marriage a “felony and declared that violators would be subject to life in prison” (30). Someone could potentially receive a life prison sentence for the “crime” of marrying someone of a different race, especially if one of the spouses was white. The rush to legislate swept both the North and the South.

It should be noted, however, that the fear and race to legislate concentrated on maintaining the purity of the white race. Someone of African American descent would be free to marry a mulatto, quadroon or an octoroon, and most likely, the community would not bother to object to a Black marrying someone of Chinese or Native American descent either. This was a newborn freedom for those blacks living in the South or who had been slaves. Prior to the Civil War and Emancipation, slave marriages were not legally binding or respected. Slaves were at the mercy of their masters, who could order them to “take up with” or separate from whomever they saw fit. The Civil War brought about freed people’s right to marry, as long as the relationship did not involve someone who was “white.”

However, the war and emancipation paved the way for resistance as well. While the law was still in flux, some daring couples married, and others who already considered themselves to have been married fought for their rights in the court system. Pascoe discusses a Texas couple, Alfred and Leah Foster. Alfred was a plantation owner, and Leah was a slave whom he purchased. However, he soon came to treat her as his wife. Between 1837 and the 1850’s, the couple had five children, and although she and the children had a separate residence, she usually slept with him in his bed, and he claimed the children as his own, giving them his name. In 1847, Alfred gave Leah and her children their official freedom, though she still continued to live

with him as a “wife.” At the time of his death in 1867, after the war, he left a will leaving all of his land and possessions to her and her children, providing that she did not marry. However, two white men in the community sought to take the land from her on the basis that she was not and could not be Alfred’s wife due to her race (17-18). They tried to paint the relationship as one of illicit sex between a master and his freed slave. In 1871, the judge, using Alfred’s right as a white man to dispose of his property as he saw fit, and his right to marry whom he desired as justification, ruled in favor of Leah. The opponents, with the support of the white community, appealed the decision to the Texas Supreme Court, and surprisingly, the court also ruled in Leah’s favor. Pascoe argues that it was the Civil War’s demolition of slave law that enabled the judge, Livingston Lindsay, and later the Texas Supreme Court justices to consider the possibility of the legitimacy of a marriage between a white man and a black woman (36, 39). However, she notes that in the disarray which pervaded their conquered society in the first few years after the war, the judges’ desire to reestablish the white male rights which the war had called into question was the strongest motivating factor in this case and others (40).

Based upon this ruling and others, a few couples took advantage of the conflicting opinions and loopholes and married (48-49). This does not mean that they were accepted by their neighbors and families or that they did not face threats of court cases, fines, and imprisonment. They faced fierce opposition in many cases, but they determined to pursue their love despite the opposition. The battle continued during the Reconstruction years, and several states had their miscegenation laws declared invalid or unconstitutional before the laws were later solidified (43). The Civil War opened up this possibility, disrupting the status quo and providing the potential for change. But for couples who considered going against societal dictates, having their personal lives examined in public before a judge and risking fines and imprisonment were not

their greatest concern. According to French researcher Augusta Carlier in *Marriage in the United States*, “the force of prejudice” against interracial marriage was such that “no one would dare to brace it. It is not the legal penalty which is feared, but a condemnation a thousand times more terrible” (Carlier 88). Carlier conducted his research, before the Civil War, in the 1850’s. In the years following the war, some daring couples emboldened by Emancipation and its aftershocks dared brave the thunder of condemnation.

Romance of the Republic: Simply Love

An ardent reformer since her youth, Lydia Maria Child dared to include three interracial marriages in her *Romance of the Republic* (1867). However, the couples did not have to deal with onslaught of volatile public opinion because no one but their closest protectors had any clue to their racial identity in two of the marriages, and in the third, no one was aware of the crossing of forbidden racial boundaries at the time of the wedding. Thus, the couples were saved from savage ostracization. The two main relationships on which the novel focused also took the safer route of having the two heroines be of mixed race instead of the two heroes. As mentioned earlier, the thought of white men being attracted to black women and entering into sexual relations with them was more palatable to the nineteenth century public than the idea of the “pure” white woman being attracted to a black male and engaging in intimate relations with such a man (Hodes 235). Still, Child crossed a forbidden line in promoting interracial marriage in which one of the parties in each couple was part Black. Previously, she had crossed the interracial divide in *Hobomok* (1823), but that involved a Native American, not someone of African descent, and the novel concluded with the Native American leaving so that his white wife might be free to marry her white lover who had returned from being lost at sea. Violating the code in *Romance of the Republic* led to disappointment for Child and poor book sales. She

had enthusiastic hopes for the novel, hoping for it to be another *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in its range of influence: "In these days of novel-reading, I thought a Romance would take more hold of the public mind than the most elaborate arguments; and having fought against Slavery, till the monster is legally dead, I was desirous to do what I could to undermine Prejudice" (Child, *Selected Letters* 482-83). But condoning or promoting interracial marriage was a step too far even for most abolitionists, and Child felt the rejection. In a letter to Louisa Loring, Child wrote, "The apathy of friends [in regards to her novel] took all the life out of me, and has made me feel as if I never wanted to put pen to paper again" (qtd. in Clifford 281). The spurning of her work, even in abolitionist circles, silenced Child's voice on the topic.

Romance of the Republic is similar to Alcott's and Davis's works in that the characters are "spanishized." The two characters, Rosabella and Flora (cited as) Royal, are octoroons (1/8 black), and they are not even aware of their racial background at the beginning of the story. Their father is a wealthy, white merchant in New Orleans, and as far as they know their mother was French and Spanish (22). They live protected lives, out of public view, and they have both reached the pinnacle of accomplishments in regards to young, Southern ladies of the era. They are fluent in several languages, including Italian, French, Spanish, and English; they sing, play the piano, and dance like angels; and they are lovely, refined, and honorable. It is not until their father's untimely death that the two girls learn the horrible truth: their mother was a quadroon and a slave, their father never officially set her free, and they are in danger of being sold (43). At this point, the plot falls within the confines of the standard nineteenth-century tragic mulatta trope. In this trope, a girl, who appears to be white and who believes that she is, discovers that she is not, and tragedy ensues. The discovery often comes after she becomes engaged and/or after the death of her father, and she loses everything. After their father's death, Rosabella and

Flora appear to be fulfilling this pattern. They look Spanish or Italian. No one would guess that they have any trace of African ancestry, and even though they are the epitome of Southern womanhood in all other ways, having a black grandmother strips them of all of their rights and their humanity in the eyes of most Southerners and too many Northerners.

However, there are a few exceptions in the novel, and one of these is Alfred Royal King, a Northerner and the son of a close friend of Rosa and Flora's father. King learns of the girls' heritage shortly after his first introduction and visit with them, but his heart is already engaged. Their beauty, graciousness, and musical talent enchant him that very first evening, and he is especially susceptible to the innocent charms of Rosa (3-11). Several years later, when he encounters Rosa again, he recalls that evening and confesses, "How could I forget it, when my heart there [referring to their first meeting] received its first and only deep impression. I have loved you from the first evening I saw you (250). The novel breaks from the "tragic" trope. Knowledge of her racial identity does not alter his first impression and his love. His emotions were already engaged, and he still sees her as the woman of his dreams. The words "quadroon" and "octoroon" do not change this: "Octoroons. He repeated the word to himself, but it did not disenchant him. It was merely something foreign and new to his experience like Spanish or Italian beauty" (14). Child's Alfred King is a rarity in his open-mindedness and lack of prejudice.

After his first brief acquaintance with Rosa and Flora during his initial visit to New Orleans in the beginning of the novel, King goes abroad with his ailing mother for several years, and, believing that Rosa's affections are attuned to someone else, he does not seek to correspond with the family. He is, therefore, unaware of the death of their father, the selling of the estate to settle with the creditors, and the selling of the girls. Rosa and Flora are tricked into trusting

Rosa's beau, Mr. Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald helps the girls escape the creditors, and supposedly "marries" Rosa, but the ceremony is a fake, and Fitzgerald is fully aware, even though Rosa is not, that interracial marriages are void in New Orleans and elsewhere in the South. The girls are also unaware that he officially owns them.

Before a year has expired, Fitzgerald's thoughts and hands are roaming, and his attention drifts towards Flora, Rosa's younger sister. Flora is befriended by a wealthy, white female benefactor, who aids her in running away and takes her in as a daughter (106). Then, Fitzgerald officially marries a "white" wife. Angry and hurt, Rosa learns that her marriage was a sham and that she is a slave (140-141). She finally realizes Fitzgerald's true character, but she is also already pregnant with his child. Shortly after the child is born, she learns that Fitzgerald has agreed to sell her in order to pay his debts. With the assistance of old family friends and funds anonymously left for her use by King, she runs away and ends up in Europe. There, as she is embarking on a career as an opera singer, King recognizes her, and renews their acquaintance. It is there in Italy that he tells her of his long-standing love for her and proposes to marry her (250). Child safely locates the marriage in Europe, where interracial marriage is more accepted, and no one except for King and Rosa's two close friends even knows that she has a few drops of Black blood. Therefore, there are no legal hurdles and no worries of activating the harsh whip of public opinion. Most importantly, Alfred is not deterred in the least. His heart has been hers since the first evening, and the color of her grandmother's skin can do nothing to change that fact.

Flora also finds a man who is not troubled by her racial link. His name is Florimond Blumenthal. Blumenthal has known the girls since they were children, and he was a young German boy starting out in the world of work in New Orleans (58). Their father hired him to do

errands and acted as a benevolent benefactor to him, assisting him in his rise from errand boy to a clerk and beyond. When their father dies, Blumenthal brings the girls a gift of two lovely baskets and secretly gives the lady looking after them fifty dollars to help them out. He also pledges to send half of his salary each month in order to help provide for them (48). He says that this is because of the debt of gratitude that he owes to their father, but his feelings for Flora become more obvious when he returns a few days later and blushe[s] like a girl as he offer[s] two bouquets to [her]" (57). His feelings are engaged. He views Flora as a very attractive young woman and a talented singer and dancer. She has captured his heart, but at this point, he is unaware of her heritage. Child provides the opportunity for him to connect to her humanity first before prejudice can enter in. The truth is rudely revealed to him a couple days later when he attends a creditors' meeting, hoping to secure what he can of the girl's father's property for them. He is about to leave the meeting when the head creditor announces, "We have not yet mentioned the most valuable property that Mr. Royal left. I allude to his daughters" (68). Blumenthal is shocked. He had no idea that the girls or their mother were part African American and no idea that all three of the women were legally considered to be slaves.

But, like King, Blumenthal has already seen the heart of his beloved without the disruption of race. His feelings, his connection to them, especially Flora, are unmovable. He endures the disdain and ridicule from the other creditors in order to try to save the two sisters from the auction block. He pleads, "Their father was my benefactor when I was a poor destitute orphan, and I would sacrifice my life to save his orphans from such a dreadful calamity" (69). He even offers to work as an indentured servant for years in order to obtain their freedom, but it is to no avail. The top creditors want their money now. There is nothing that he can do. In addition, when it is learned that the girls have escaped, the creditors believe that Blumenthal

must have assisted them, and his life is threatened (72). He leaves New Orleans, unaware that it is Fitzgerald who helped the girls escape, with less than noble motives.

A few years later Flora and he meet again. He has traveled north looking for the two sisters, and she is living in Boston with her adoptive mother, who helped her run away from Fitzgerald. Blumenthal is only a clerk, and she the daughter of a wealthy lady, but their love blossoms, and they eventually marry (147, 282). There is no outcry of public opinion because no one but Flora's adopted mother and her abolitionist friend knows that Flora is not completely white. That is, except for Blumenthal, and it makes no difference to him. Once again, Child has saved her interracial couple from legal and social calamity.

Child creates two uncomplicated heroes who are not burdened with the prejudice of their era. The men boldly dare to do what many ardent abolitionists would not. They knowingly marry spouses who have the "taint" of Black blood. Of course, these two young men fall in love with their perspective brides before they learn of the potential barrier. They are already connected with the soul of their love before the realization of racial difference. This is true for Claudia in "M.L." and Margaret in *Waiting for the Verdict*, but Child's white protagonists do not struggle with the decision to unite themselves for life with a member of another race. There seems to be little question or little doubt in the minds of King and Blumenthal. This is romantic and inspiring, but, based on the real-life accounts examined above, not completely realistic.

The third interracial marriage in *Romance of the Rebellion* contains even less questioning: no one was aware at the time of the wedding that there was any racial difference. Late in the novel, the reader learns that shortly after the birth of Rosa and Fitzgerald's baby, Rosa had switched her baby with his legal "white" wife's baby. Through a series of plot twists, it is discovered that the son of Fitzgerald and Lily Bell (his white wife) was sold into slavery as

a child since everyone believed he was of African heritage, and that as a young man he married a mulatto. Later, after he has fought in the Civil War and is on his way to Europe to be trained as a businessman under the guardianship of Alfred King, he learns that he is white, but that does not change his love for his wife. And he is not made aware that his white mother does not wish to claim him because he is married to a black woman (437). Lily Bell Fitzgerald sacrifices the opportunity to meet her son and the possibility of establishing a relationship with him because of prejudice against interracial marriage (420). Lily's aversion and loss are a foil to the enlightened and rewarded responses of King, Blumenthal, and other abolitionist characters.

Love makes all the difference in *Romance of the Republic*. King and Blumenthal risk public censure and ostracism, a punishment considered worse than jail by many of this era, in order to marry the women that they love. They use secrecy as a weapon to protect their brides and themselves, but there is always a risk of secrets becoming known. Love provides them with the courage to dare and with the vision to see beyond the cloak of prejudice. This preeminence of romantic love is a rarity in fiction written by women in the Civil War and Reconstruction Era. In most of the fiction discussed in this dissertation, letting one's decisions be ruled by romantic love is viewed as a mistake. Many of the authors privilege loyalty to the nation, self-actualization, career development, and/or duty over emotional concerns. They do not advocate sacrificing family, community, and future for a marriage partner. Interracial fiction is the exception. In these stories, love is the force that has the power to prevail. In *Romance of the Republic*, the heroes follow their hearts and find happiness. In "The Hour" and "My Contraband," the characters lose the possibility of a relationship that might have been the treasure of their lives because they smother the possibility of love or attraction beneath the racial barrier.

But the novel's message concerns more than an individual's loss. It is a "romance of the republic." It has national implications for the nation torn apart by war. In "Writing Reconstruction: Racial Fluidity and National Reunion in *A Romance of the Republic*," Lori Robinson observes that Childs conflates "domestic union with national (re)union" and holds the family up as a model for reconstruction and reunion for the nation (632). In other words, the act of marriage has political implications in the novel. Robinson points out that the novel is progressive and radical in its contention that racial identity is fluid and an "arbitrary marker" (636, 638). In *Romance of the Republic*, race is as inconsequential as Rosa's "grandmother having a darker complexion" (Childs 363). That is a shocking position. People had been enslaved, beaten, sold, cut off from education, and treated as non-persons, among other injustices, because of the perceived racial divide that rendered blacks as sub-humans in the eyes of too many whites, and Child claims that there is no basis for this, that there is no core difference, that race is no more than hair color and skin tone. However, Robinson claims that the novel's genre, sentimental romance, undermines its message (634). According to Robinson, framing the solution to reunion in terms of family and sentimentality contradicts the supposition that race is arbitrary and instead assists in solidifying racial classifications (634). She states that "it is the romance's insistence on stability, on domestic borders (like the parlor), and on the social cohesion produced through family that cannot help but fix racial and national identities" (652). In addition to the fixed hierarchy within the traditional family of the era, Robinson points out the closing scene of the novel where Rosa and Flora's families are gathered together. There are the two white patriarchs (the two husbands), the two mixed race sisters, and the children, also framed by the blacker servants. There is a sense that everyone has their place within family and within the nation, and those who do not fit within the borders are the Other, leaving little

room for fluidity. Robinson contends that this novel participated and perhaps helped partially lay the literary groundwork for formalizing deeper race divisions in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. I disagree. Child's radical message that people are not defined by race and that race is no deeper than skin color and hair texture far outweighs the confining forces of domesticity and national identity portrayed in the novel. The couples in the novel marry out of love with no regard for ancestry/race. The novel takes a stand for interracial marriage, an idea considered to be an abominable apostasy, even in many abolitionist circles. That is the message that resounded and shocked the public, even if it was not welcomed.

The Civil War inspired Child to believe that now might be the time to risk publishing such a story that she waited until 1867 to write. Emancipation was now a reality. But what next? What role would black people play in American society? How would the two races interact? Child hoped to inspire readers with mixed race characters who epitomized true womanhood, even if they were naïve, and with white heroes free of prejudice. The perfection in the mixed race characters is similar to that found in Alcott's "M.L.", as is the privileging of the power of love. However, in *Waiting for the Verdict*, Davis provides the most thorough and realistic examination of the struggle over the decision to marry in regards to interracial love. In *Political Works of Northern Women Writers*, Sizer writes that *Romance of the Republic* was "the most conservative" of the interracial fiction written during these early postwar years, including Davis's novel (234). Sizer says this in part due the sense of New England superiority that comes across in the novel, including the implications that "they," blacks, need to be educated and trained in order to be brought up the level of "whites and light-skinned blacks" (235-236). I agree that this hierarchy is problematic, but I do not view the Child's novel as conservative. Davis's novel was more realistic, but she does not allow her interracial couple to marry. Child,

on the other hand, included three interracial marriages in *Romance of the Republic*, which was more daring than any other writer of the time. In addition, she suffered ostracism and rejection from the public and from her abolitionist friends over her support for interracial union in this novel. *Romance* may have been overly optimistic and short on inner conflict, but it was a bold work of literature.

Waiting for the Verdict: No Union this Side of Heaven

In *Waiting for the Verdict*, Rebecca Harding Davis considers whether or not love can triumph over the barriers of class and race and whether the Civil War has truly made interracial marriage a possibility. Rosslyn Burley, an illegitimate, market girl, and Garrick Randolph, the aristocratic son of a plantation owner, struggle with the first question. But I will focus on the second question and the second couple, Margaret Conrad and Dr. John Broderip. Like Alcott in “M.L.,” Davis initially keeps the mixed race identity of her main character hidden from the other characters and the reader until the reader is immersed deep in the midst of the drama and the heroine has already lost herself in love with her “foreign”-looking hero. Similar to Alcott’s work, it is the hero who has Black blood instead of the safer choice of having the heroine be of mixed race, as in Child’s novel. Thus, Margaret Conrad and the nineteenth-century reader can open themselves up to the humanity of Dr. John Broderip and see him as a man before their prejudices are awakened by knowledge of a “few drops of negro blood.”

However, unlike Paul Frere in “M.L.,” Dr. Broderip is not a man whom most women would notice. He is neither charming nor handsome. Davis first describes him as a “small insignificant figure ... in gray” (67). He would hardly be noticed at all if it were not for his skill: He is also a brilliant, much-sought-after surgeon who overcharges his wealthy clients but donates his services to the poor. Margaret Conrad is puzzled by him: “It was an insignificant,

slight-featured face. ‘Cruel and hard?’ She could hardly call it that and yet--” (69). Margaret and he first meet when she brings her father to him for Broderip professional opinion regarding her father’s failing sight. There is no hope of her father seeing again, but the quirky, aloof Broderip quickly becomes a close family friend. He is attracted to Margaret from the beginning and treasures a bracelet that Margaret drops during her first visit to his office. He asks permission to keep it as his only fee for his professional services to her father, and occasionally, he takes it out of its hiding place to dream: “It might have been a charm, by the curious change which it worked on his pale, insignificant face. It grew, slowly, fine-nerved and wistful as a woman’s, the protruding forehead lowered, a rare, subtle intellect looked out of the hazel eyes, which were usually but a shining, confusing mask” (74). The dream of this lonely, eccentric, sometimes peevish surgeon, who shuts off his inner self from the world, is to marry Margaret.

But does he have the right to ask her to marry him? Davis reveals this struggle to the reader part way through the novel. She includes a scene of Broderip visiting with his “mother” in the upper room of his house where she lives as an invalid. Her great love and concern for him are shown, in addition to her reluctance to physically touch him (117). It is during this conversation that the reader becomes aware that a troubling secret from his past haunts John Broderip. In response to his mother’s concern, he states, “No matter what work or study I begin, the remembrance comes that there is something here’ (drawing one finger across his forehead), ‘which must one day come to light. Let me make my life what I will, it is a thing which the vilest ruffian in Moyamensing prison would not exchange for his own” (116). Neither the mother or son openly discuss what the secret is that lies within him, but it is dark enough to cause Broderip to doubt whether he has “a right to be loved, to have a home, and wife, and children of his own” (118).

To his delight, his mother, whom he reveres, nervously tells him the conclusion that she has reached in regards to this dilemma: “If a woman puts her hand in yours and says that she loves, I would say that He (God) meant you for each other” (119). He is astounded at these words. From the conversation, the reader can garner that Broderip’s sense of unworthiness and hesitation do not arise out of any wrong he himself has committed, but rather the impediment has been passed down to him from his grandfather and beyond. And despite his mother’s encouragement, he still struggles with the moral question of whether or not he would have a duty to tell his potential bride his secret (117). The question of whether or not someone of mixed race has a duty to reveal their racial background, especially to a potential marriage partner, reverberates throughout the novel. Davis raises the question of whether passing for white indicates a lack of moral integrity. This is a nonquestion in Child’s novel. In *Romance...*, Rosa and Flora do not feel a duty to be “black.” Black or white does not define who they are. In Davis’s novel, passing is a moral dilemma. Broderip is willing to open himself up and confess all of the defects in his temperament and character, but he agonizes over the question of whether he has a duty confess the secret of his ancestors: “But if she loves me, in spite of all, will there be more to tell? May she come to me, seeing only that part of me in my soul or brain for which I am responsible, or must I go back and show her the hand injustice dealt me before I was born?” (119). His mother leaves that decision to him, but she fears the hope that she has kindled in him and inwardly questions whether her love for her son has clouded her wisdom. After he leaves the room, she worries to herself: “Love and marriage are not for him. He should submit to God’s will,” but then she ponders, “Was it God’s Will? Was it?” Davis intends for the reader to question this as well. Was it God’s will that a man be denied the opportunity of marrying and having children because of his ancestry? Was it God’s will that a man’s work, talent, good

deeds and more count for naught because of a trait passed down through his blood? The apparent injustice of it is blatant to the reader. Yet the reader is left to ponder what the trait could be.

In the opening chapter of a novel, the reader is introduced to a young mulatto boy who kills his own dog rather than see the animal given away by his master to a young girl on a ferryboat. A friend of his master's, a middle-aged Quakeress, takes pity upon the boy. It is hinted that perhaps the boy stays in the North with her. Then, the story line is dropped, as the novel switches to its focus to Rosslyn Burley, the young, raggedy girl on the ferry who is the illegitimate daughter of the mulatto's master. Some readers might have questioned if John Broderip's mother could be the Quakeress years later. But Margaret Conrad has no such insight. She is a strong woman and blunt, possessing a beauty that is not obvious to the casual onlooker but one that grows the more one gets to know her. Early in the novel, Broderip characterizes her by comparing her to his favorite racehorse, whom he treasures: "She might be vicious in temper, but she was as sensitive, as honest, and as game; as loyal, too. If that woman once cared for a man she would run her race, without wincing, to serve his interest or pride, until she fell dead under the spur, as a thoroughbred will do" (71). She is not a woman given to emotion, and she is not easily swayed. He believes she would take on the world to stand up for her man. However, he agonizes over whether it is fair to ask her to marry him, especially without revealing his secret, and place her in jeopardy of being rejected and shamed by the world, if his secret ever became public knowledge.

His friendship with Margaret and her father deepens, and his visits to their home in the country become the delight of his life. Their home is the only true home he has ever known. It is the summer of Broderip's life: "such as had never dawned in his life before" (194). But in the

height of his joy, he suddenly learns that the Conrads are going to have to move, that her father has lost his money in an investment and that they will have to return to their previous home in the West. He had hesitated to propose previously, feeling it the more honorable pursuit than perhaps marrying her under false circumstances, but now he realizes that he could lose her forever if he does not speak and that now she needs him: "She was poor now; miserably poor, it might be;...he could save her from this" (199). The world would be glorious with her at his side, and he senses her love. She is ready to say "yes."

But then an apparently minor incident occurs that changes the course of their lives forever. He comes to her to propose, and she was ready and willing to yield her heart and life to him. They could have been married without her knowing and maybe never learning of his ancestry, but at that moment a black servant came to deliver a note to Margaret, and her revulsion at the possibility that her fingers might brush against black skin was apparent. Margaret "unconsciously drew back from the woman before she took it, and when she was gone, shook the note in the fresh air as if it was tainted, before she thrust it in her pocket. Looking up, she saw Doctor Broderip looking at her with eyes that seemed blind, his face quiet and cold" (199). He does not propose. Instead he tells her, "I have had a miserable secret, and there might come a time a day when you would know it. I have seen the very look which you would turn on me when you heard the truth" (200). She suspects that he has perhaps committed some crime in the past or some other grave sin, but the thought of race does not enter her mind. Confident of her love for him, she bids him to trust her: "You do not know me. I am no schoolgirl with shallow fancies. I do not veer with every wind that blows" (200). But he could not bear her repulsion to the black blood within him if she were to ever find out, and he cannot fathom bringing shame to her if his lineage was ever to become public knowledge.

Davis portrays Margaret as a woman unaffected by the opinions of others. She is determined and grounded. If this woman could bring herself to overlook race, to overlook the common prejudice against Blacks, then it would not matter to her what the rest of the world thought. The question left for the reader to ponder as the novel reaches its climax is whether or not Margaret's love for Broderip will be stronger than her aversion to blacks. After several months of separation, Broderip finds a way to clandestinely assist the Conrads with their finances, and they are able to return to Philadelphia. He then renews his friendship with them and his courtship with Margaret. The time is ripe for his third attempt at proposing, and Margaret is his for the asking: "She had been inscrutable to him hitherto, but he knew now that the key was in the lock, and his hand upon the key" (307). Her heart is his, and she is ready and willing to marry him. All he has to do is ask.

However, on the eve of his intended proposal, his brother, Nathan, a slave, whom he has not seen since childhood, shows up at Broderip's house. Broderip is torn between acknowledging him as his brother, letting him die on the operating table, or treating him and sending him away as if he does not know who he is. Broderip makes the life-altering decision to acknowledge Nathan as his brother. He knows that this confession will most likely destroy his relationship with Margaret, but for the first time in his life, he is willing to risk everything for the sake of the truth: "Tonight, the night when he meant to woo from the secret depths of her soul the evidence of her love for him, when he meant to touch her lips at last to his to feel her heart beating against his own, weak and famished, which had never known the love of a woman, the desire to be true to her, to strike down the damnable lie in which he moved, became maddening" (304-305). He could not bear to hide the truth from her any longer. He had to know

if she could still love him after learning his true identity, and he was willing to gamble everything on that long shot in order to face “God, at last, an honest man” (304).

Aware that there is some dark secret from Broderip’s past that has kept him from previously declaring his love for her, Margaret attempts to reassure him that it will make no difference: “No action or word of yours, no fact of your past life can change my feeling toward you” (308). She is willing to forgive him for whatever he may have done in the past. Nothing can alter her unspoken love for him, or so she believes.

But then he takes her to see his brother, who is sleeping, recovering from the operation. He pauses at the entrance to the room, and tells her, “I have committed no crime, Miss Conrad. My fault lies in that I was born below the level of humanity” (309). She reassures him, “There is no poverty of birth, nor hereditary vice which could warrant such words” (309). None of it makes any difference to her: she loves him. But then he says, “It was a poor birth, yes. But there was no hereditary vice. My parents were clean, honest, pious Methodists. But they were black. The man lying yonder is my brother” (309). But Blackness is not something that can be forgiven. It is a barrier that cannot be removed, not in the eyes of white society, North or South, and not in the eyes of Margaret Conrad.

She stands silent. When he touches her hand, it is cold, and “a shiver [creeps] over her powerful frame” (309). The warmth is gone: “her face [is] stony” and her “eyes dull” (309). That one word, “black,” lays desolation to all of his dreams and hopes. In agony, he declares, “I would have married you if you had been a fiend from hell!” (310). She does not share his conviction. Unfortunately for Broderip, being “black” in the nineteenth-century US renders one untouchable. Margaret would have more readily married him if he had declared himself a murderer. Black blood is “abhorrent” to her (313). She believes that “gulf” between races is one

that “God never intended to be crossed” (310). (This is ironic considering that Broderip’s birth as a mulatto is the result of a mixing of white and black blood.) And Broderip can already detect a change in Margaret’s voice, a shift in her tone to a “gentle quality” that one would use in making an explanation to an “inferior” (310). That one little word awoke a prejudice deeper than her love. She says that they should not meet again, and she leaves without even offering her hand. Her prejudice ends their relationship.

Many of Davis’s nineteenth-century readers would likely have shared Margaret’s sentiments if they had been made aware of Broderip’s race early in the novel. However, Davis awakens them to Broderip’s humanity before they can discern his ancestry. They empathize with Broderip. They live through his loneliness, his desire for a home, his love for Margaret, his driving hunger to be loved and accepted, and to have a life as other men. He is not an attractive or particularly appealing man. He even appears to be a weak man at times, in areas outside of his profession, struggling to claim his manhood. But his skill as a surgeon is renowned, as well as his desire to help the poor. He is a cultured and educated man of refined tastes. Davis provides the reader with the opportunity to see Broderip as a man, a fellow human being, before becoming aware of his racial status. The reader can feel what the loss of Margaret means to him, and the loss of his dreams, his medical practice, his place in society, and the respect and honor of the community. He loses it all once his race becomes common knowledge.

Why should someone with the skill to become a brilliant surgeon and save many lives be regulated to the role of a servant because of his ancestry? This is the question that Davis forces her readers to ask. The day after his unveiling, Broderip bemoans the injustice: “He looked at the yellow skin of his wrist with a fierce loathing. It was an iron mask that shut him in from all the hopes, the ambitions, the enjoyments of other men” (313). Why should the color of his skin,

so light that he had been able to pass for white since his childhood, be such an unsurmountable barrier? Davis causes her readers to question the societal dictates that enforce these divisions. The title of the novel captures the crux of this conflict: *Waiting for the Verdict*. By the end of the novel, the slaves have been freed, but there is great uncertainty as to what that freedom will mean. Will the nation welcome them, offering them work, education, opportunity, or will white society continue to treat the freedmen and women as less than human? A slave mother, Annie, Nathan's wife, worries for her son: "Dar's power in Tom's head, Missus, and dar's bad passions in his blood, and ef dar's no work given to de one, de oder has its work ready. He must be a man or a beast, an' dat soon. [...] Dar's four millions of his people like him; waitin' for de whites to say which dey shall be—men or beasts. Waiting' for the verdict, madam" (354). The Civil War had ended slavery, but now the people of the North need to decide how they will treat the freed black people and what place they will make for them in society. Will they make room for them in the factories? In the schools? In their neighborhoods? But even Annie dares not suggest that they make room for them at the altar beside a white person (355).

Broderip receives Margaret's verdict, but not all of the characters agree with her. Her father, Hugh Conrad, is disappointed with his daughter's rejection of Broderip. Conrad says, "Now's the time to stand by him. I reckon you have not forgotten what we owe to him" (312). Pale and sick at heart, but still unmoving, Margaret reminds him of the reality of Broderip's ostracism: "There is not one of his hospitals or patients today would open their doors to him, if he assumed his old place; there is no a club, church, theatre or restaurant from which he would not be ejected like a felon; the academies of science or art, where he was a director, would admit him only if he came as the servant of a white child..." (312). Margaret is a participant in that rejection. Conrad is not. Conrad and his friend Ottley go to reaffirm their friendship with

Broderip and offer him advice and support. Ottley shakes Broderip's hand in greeting, breaking the touch barrier, and in the congenial visit between the three, Davis writes that the "gulf between white man and the black was bridged over" (316). For them, race is not an insurmountable barrier. Conrad encourages Broderip in his plans to serve his people by fighting to win their freedom, and Broderip determines to use his resources to form a regiment of black soldiers that he will lead as its colonel. One of his surgical assistants, George Farr, disregards the race barrier and aligns himself with Broderip, as well, and eventually joins him as the surgeon for his regiment.

In addition, there are two other characters who continue to view Broderip as an equal despite his race. Lieutenant George Markle, another contender for Margaret's affections, figures out Broderip's racial identity before anyone else, but he determines that he will not use race as a tool to win Margaret. When Broderip's ethnicity becomes common knowledge, Markle goes to meet him as a man, holds out his hand to him, demonstrating a willingness violate the taboo against touching Black skin, and declares his admiration of him and his desire to transfer into his regiment and serve under him (323). In addition, Ross Burley, the heroine of the novel's second plot line—which focuses on the romance between a poor, illegitimate, but virtuous young woman and a wealthy, Southern gentleman who learns how little honor his family and he have—condemns Margaret's response. Ross is with Ottley and Conrad as they say farewell to Broderip and his troops embarking for the battlefield. Margaret is there, as well, and Ross is disgusted with the emotionless, unmovable Margaret, who makes no gesture of goodbye or regret other than to raise her eyes to look at Broderip as he leans against the ship's railing extending his hand in farewell to her. Ross declares, "If I were a man, I would ask no better fate than to fight as his side" (326). Margaret's stalwart reply is that Broderip "is a negro. Nothing

can make him as other men” (326). Davis uses Markle, Ross, Ottley, Conrad and Farr as foils to Margaret, condemning Margaret’s rejection of Broderip through their examples of acceptance. Davis does not state that Margaret is wrong; she lets the readers draw their own conclusions, as they see the other characters stand by Broderip. Davis demonstrates that there is another choice other than the standard Northern, white response to black people. These foils cross the color barrier in treating Broderip as an equal.

Of course, as Margaret points out to her father, Broderip is not asking her for gratitude or friendship (312). The other characters offer friendship and acceptance to Broderip, but Margaret knows that Broderip is asking her for more than that: he wants to marry her. The novel questions whether the marriage threshold is one that can be crossed across race lines. Sizer, in *Political Works of Northern Women Writers*, states that Davis’s novel shows that interracial relationships fail due to “deeply embedded, and lasting, racial prejudice” (232). I agree that this is the reason that Margaret does not marry Broderip. However, Davis’s message goes beyond that to show that this is not how things should be. Davis is writing against the prevailing culture of her day. The secondary characters continue to stand in contrast and voice a more radical viewpoint. Conrad and Markle view interracial marriage as a legitimate option, not a moral violation. Markle considers Broderip to be a fellow contender for Margaret’s affection and as a better man than himself. He meets with Broderip in order to ascertain if Broderip has a prior claim to Margaret’s heart that would preclude Markle’s attempts to court her. As much as Markle wants Margaret for himself, he does not see marriage between Broderip and Margaret as an impossibility or as an act against God’s laws. However, he comes to realize that race is an insurmountable barrier in Margaret’s opinion. Conrad wonders, quietly hoping, that maybe someday his daughter will reconsider. He says that “time will tell” whether or not Margaret will

have a change of heart (313). At the end of the novel, as they are waiting to learn if Broderip survived the war, Conrad and Ottley look at Margaret sitting by herself by a stream. Conrad is certain that Broderip will return. And Ottley wonders, “If Broderip came to her now? After all that he has done [raising a regiment, leading them bravely into battle, and being captured and taken as a prisoner of war]?” (355). Conrad replies, “It would avail nothing. The Negro blood is between them. And yet—“ (355). And yet... he wonders if maybe there is some chance that love could overcome her objections. He does not share her concern that the mixing of races is abhorrent to God, but he knows the stubbornness of her heart.

Davis does not take the radical step of allowing her characters commit to an interracial marriage, as Alcott does in “M.L.” and Child does in *Romance of the Rebellion*. The Civil War freed black people in America from slavery, opening up more new possibilities, but many white people feared these new possibilities. The fear of miscegenation was a greater concern in 1868 than it had been in 1863. The abolishment of slavery had thrown the relationships and divisions between white and black into uncertainty (Pascoe 28-30). Davis risked alienating readers if she went too far in overtly advocating interracial marriage, as Child may have. Davis’s approach is more subtle. As mentioned previously, several of Davis’s characters voice opposition to Margaret’s rejection of Broderip, and Markle and Conrad view interracial marriage as a realistic option for Margaret and Broderip, but Margaret refuses to consider it. However, Davis postpones the possibility of such a union until heaven. When Markle persists in his quest of finding out if Broderip still has any hope of marrying Margaret, Broderip replies, “I may never see Margaret Conrad’s face again. But she will never marry you—she will never marry another man. I think there is somewhere a world where my color will not keep me from her” (324). It would be a world where things are as they should be. Markle determines to not let the thought of

a union in the hereafter stop him from pursuing the woman of his dreams, but Broderip believes that Margaret will be his, if not in this world, then in the one to come.

The end of the novel alludes to this same possibility. Markle returns after the war has ended to tell Margaret that Broderip died at the end of the war. A man of integrity, Markle relates the story of Broderip's bravery in battle, his capture and imprisonment at Andersonville, and his eventual release and victory ride into Richmond, where he was fatally wounded. Even though he fears reawakening Margaret's love for Broderip, he does not flinch from accurately describing Broderip's action in admirable detail. His opponent for Margaret's affections is now dead, but he senses that he has still lost her. As Markle finishes his story, he feels "a dull uncertainty, an ache at his heart, new to it" (360). Previously in the novel, he had been confident that he would eventually win Margaret, but now he is uncertain. There appears to be a spiritual, emotional connection between Broderip and her that is not confined to distance or mortality. When he tells Margaret of Broderip's death, she tells him, "I know the hour—I knew it when it came" (359). And when Markle refers to Broderip's qualities, he uses, the past tense "were," but Margaret changes it to present tense "as they are," and adds "someday my friend will come to me; and with all his whims, with all his moods, as he left me. There is no such word as dead, to me" (359). As far as she is concerned, her relationship is not over. Their connection, their love, is beyond race, flesh, and blood. However, if she married him on this earth, they would have been engaged in a life-long battle against fervent societal forces but, more importantly, against her own deeply embedded prejudices. Their reunion is only a viable option beyond the physical realm.

Margaret exhibits an air of confidence and a sense of fulfillment that were not there before (361). After Broderip left for the battlefield, she decided to dedicate her life on earth to

helping Blacks, whom she had previously disdained, spending her days in a little run-down school in a rougher section of Philadelphia teaching black children (355). Is this as penance for her rejection of Broderip, or perhaps her way of connecting to the man whom she could not marry, at least not on this earth? As Markle leaves her in the dark by the stream with her gaze focused south, he looks back at her and wonders, “Is it that the dead speaks to her, and that she makes an answer as she will never do to [my] living love?” (361). He sadly resolves that if nothing else he can join her, working by her side, in her “despised work” of helping Blacks (361).

In “Miscegenated Whiteness: Rebecca Harding Davis, the ‘Civil-izing’ War, and Female Racism,” Stephen Knadler offers his theory on Davis’s interpretation of race and her decision not to end her novel with an interracial marriage. According to Knadler, Broderip is not the only “mullato” at the center of *Waiting for the Verdict*. Knadler contends that Rosslyn Burley’s “racial identity [is] ambiguous and fluctuating” (86), and he refers to the “mulatto-ization” of “Rosslyn (87). As evidence, he references Rosslyn’s confession to Garrick Randolph, her upper-class, Southern suitor: “I not only belonged by birth to the class which you place on par with your slaves, but I worked with them. I was one of them. I believe in my soul I am one of them now” (Davis 230) and builds from there (Knadler 64). According to Knadler, Rosslyn, whose father was a Southern aristocrat who never married her Northern working class mother, is caught at the intersections of North and South, working class and aristocrat, and black and white (73). He argues that Davis offers this amalgamated whiteness as a solution for reunion and Reconstruction (89). For him, in *Waiting for the Verdict*, race is not a physical attribute but a spiritual matter or “ideology” (89). This provides the opportunity for the Other to integrate into whiteness. Knadler uses the examples of Rosslyn and a slave named Annie. I concur with

Knadler regarding the “mulatto-ization” of Rosslyn; however, race in *Waiting for the Verdict* is too much of a blood-borne fixed attribute that cannot be cultured away. I argue instead that Davis does not grant Broderip the leniency and flexibility allowed Rosslyn. He is not allowed to meld into whiteness, though he is educated, cultured, and domesticated. It is not until he stops passing and claims his blackness and his people that he is considered to have reached full manhood at last. Conrad tells Margaret, “I think this sacrifice for his people’ll bring out the man in him more’n any selfish love for a wife or home would have done. [...] He was half beast before, in his own notion; but, curiously enough, it’s through his Negro blood that humanity’s got hold of him” (Davis 327). Race seems to be a physical element in his being from which Broderip cannot and should not escape, and trying to hide this core part of his being is detrimental to his manhood. It is only in acknowledging this element of himself that he gains freedom and respect. He cannot adopt whiteness. Knadler does not address this point in his argument that the novel supports amalgamation into whiteness and his contention that race is an abstract concept in the novel.

And for all of Davis’s open-minded views on race and the hybridity of Rosslyn, Davis does not cross the threshold of allowing Margaret to marry Broderip. Knadler contends that Davis’s theory of miscegenated whiteness is threatened by the possibility of an “actual [interracial] sexual union” or marriage (95). He argues that Davis is afraid that a physical interracial union would destroy the purity of her white heroines (96) and that would destroy their ability to lead the way as republican mothers. This hard racial line is a contradiction to the flexibility of race that pervades other areas of the novel.

I agree that there are multiple contradictions in the novel; however, I disagree with Knadler’s statement that Davis retreats. Rather, I contend that Davis shows her disapproval of

Margaret's refusal to marry Broderip through the voices of the other characters, such as Conrad, Otterly, and Rosslyn. The negative ending is more powerful than if Margaret had relented and given into her love and married Broderip. That would have been romance not realism. Davis is offering a scathing critique of the prevailing culture. Margaret suffers for allowing prejudice to overrule her love. The loss haunts the reader. Margaret was more than ready to marry Broderip before she learned of his heritage, and society was more than willing to accept them as a couple before his true identity became known. Margaret's love does not end after the announcement, despite her hardened rejection of all contact from him. She seeks absolution through her service as a teacher to poor black children, *his* people, but her focus is on the world beyond where she hopes to one day be reunited with Broderip. Davis does not allow an interracial marriage to transpire in the pages of her fiction, an action which could have alienated many readers; but, in my reading, she uses Margaret as a negative example of the loss and waste that comes from being ruled by prejudice. Davis leaves it to her readers to judge whether such unions should have to wait until the next world. However, she shows that there is no logical reason outside of societal constraints that would prevent such unions. Interracial love and attraction are not unnatural. Prejudice is the unnatural apparition.

Conclusions

The volatile disruption created by the Civil War provided Alcott, Davis, and Child the opportunity to explore the possibility of interracial marriage. They dared write approvingly about what had been disdained and hardly been murmured before. They had the audacity to suggest that black bodies (or at least barely black bodies) could be attractive to whites and that attraction between black and white people could rise above lust to become love. These writers argue that there can be heartfelt connection that transcends race and that this love is worthy of

marriage. They risked public censure and disdain. Even Child's abolitionist friends failed to support this radical venture. But these writers sought to change minds and forge a welcomed place for black people in white, especially Northern, society.

The characters in this fiction struggle with the hushed reality that attraction and love are not limited by skin color. In real life, couples who dared cross the race barrier in marriage suffered the consequences, such as William and Mary King Allen, who lost all familial and community relationships, risked being tarred and feathered, and were forced to live the rest of their lives overseas. After the war, there were a number of couples who risked everything to marry their love. Many of them were taken to court where some prevailed in the radical years following the war, but many did not.

The three authors examined above strove to show their readers the humanity and potential of the Other. Paul Frere was a gentleman and accomplished singer. Rosa and Flora were accomplished and talented young women. Broderip, though a more realistically developed character with weaknesses and strengths, was a renowned surgeon. All of the characters, including Milly and Robert, were "Spanishized" in order to make their appearance more palatable to the nineteenth century reader; and in all of the cases that led to the serious consideration of marriage, the white protagonist is unaware of the Other's race until after they have connected emotionally. The authors wanted the white protagonist and the reader to view the mixed race character(s) as a person before their vision could be clouded by prejudice.

These stories emphasize love and the significance of love to courtship and marriage more than other fiction of their era. Love is seen as the only force that can triumph over the prejudices and societal pressures. Those characters who follow the dictates of love, such as Claudia and Paul Frere in "M.L.," and Rosa and Alfred King, and Flora and Florimond

Blumenthal, live lives rich in happiness and family. Margaret Conrad, who follows the dictates of her prejudice instead of her love, lives a life of regret and dedicates herself to making amends, while waiting the hope of a heavenly reunion. In “An Hour,” Milly and Gabriel will live with the loss of not marrying the one that they love, and in “My Contraband,” Faith will continue as a spinster. There is a great personal cost in allowing prejudice and societal dictates to rule. These stories privilege love, and that distinguishes them from the other fictional works discussed in this dissertation. The Southern fiction with its emphasis on duty, and the Northern fiction with its exploration of career and self-fulfillment possibilities, and the sensational stories with their prioritizing of nation and being true to one’s convictions seem to mistrust love and view it as an emotion with the power to misguide. Interracial stories, on the other hand, respect love as the one force with the potential power to pierce through societal barriers and cast prejudices aside.

CONCLUSION

In April 1862, Lucy Buck of Virginia wrote, “We shall never any of us be the same as we have been” (50). She wrote the passage out of grief and a deep sense of loss of all that the war had taken so far. However, women fiction writers of the era glimpsed this truth from a different perspective and welcomed the dismantling of what had been. Women’s lives would not be the same after the war. Not if they could help it.

This dissertation has investigated the monumental effects that the American Civil War had on the decision to marry—including whether or not to marry, whom to marry, and when, and the role and relationship expectations after vows were said—as reflected or imagined in American fiction from the 1860’s and 1870’s. Through their Civil War-related fiction, Rebecca Harding Davis, Louisa May Alcott, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Augusta Jane Evans, E.D.E.N. Southworth, Lydia Child, and other women authors seized upon the opportunities created by the war to seek to instigate lasting changes in the lives of women. They discerned that any lasting transformation must begin with the defining moment of a woman’s life—her decision to marry—the decision that shapes and limits her pathway and identity for the rest of her life. These authors focused their pens on this pivotal moment, enduing it with tremendous political resonance and embedding within it their hopes for reform. The Civil War diffused the hard lines between the imposed dichotomies of male sphere/female sphere, white/black, and others and started in motion events, forces, and thoughts that could lead to lasting transformation in the lives of women, and these authors sought to encapsulate the temporary disruption into a permanent permeability. These new possibilities were reflected in the fiction in the decision to marry

Marriage was the nexus of a woman’s life. One of the most significant transformations instigated by the war and its aftermath was the beginning of the transition towards lessening the

magnitude of marriage in the lives of women. After the war, a woman had more freedom to not marry. The possibilities and opportunities for her working outside of the home were more prevalent. The choices of work/careers were also wider. In general, she was prepared to have more input on the farm/plantation, and she had more opportunities to meet in associations and organizations. There was more leeway in the degree of her submission/non-submission and dependence/independence. Marriage began to no longer be, to the degree that it had been, the overwhelming determiner of her entire adult life. Postwar women's fiction was the catalyst for expanding and solidifying the changes ignited by the war.

From this point, there is room for other scholars to continue this study and further confirm and analyze the changes in marriage spurred by the war by studying additional diaries, letters, and other primary sources from the era. Examining additional primary sources written by women of the era would be an excellent way to further discover to what extent the rhetoric was lived out in individual decisions and actions. In addition, fiction from the latter decades of the nineteenth century could be included in order to gauge the expansion or narrowing of the trajectories of proposed transgression as the years went on. I would be interested in analyzing such works as Edith Wharton's *House of Mirth*, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Willa Cather's *O Pioneers*, Mary Austen's *A Woman of Genius*, and other late nineteenth century and early twentieth century works written by women in regards to the decision to marry and the effects of marriage or the lack thereof on the lives of their female characters. Other voices, more diverse, could be brought in, as well.

For example, this dissertation does not examine the topic from the male point of view. How was marriage viewed and treated in fiction written by male authors during the 1860's and 70's? How were women treated in this fiction? In my research beyond this dissertation, I plan to

examine the male response as illustrated in De Forest's *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* (1867) and in his *The Bloody Chasm* (1881) and also Henry James's Civil War era short stories: "A Most Extraordinary Case" (1868), "Poor Richard" (1867), and "A Day of Days" (1866). My consideration of the De Forest novels will be informed by Todd Thompson's "Reconstructive Realism: Satire in *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty*," Gregory S. Jackson's "A Dowry of Suffering: Consent, Contract and Political Coverture in John W. De Forest's Reconstruction Romance," Nina Silber's *Romance of Reunion* (1993), and John Casey Jr.'s *New Men: Reconstructing the Image of the Veteran in Late Nineteenth Century American Literature and Culture* (2015). My investigation of James's stories will be enlightened by David Matthew Southward's "*What Is between Us?*" *Henry James and the Rhetoric of Intimacy* and other critical sources.

De Forest, like the women authors of the era, used the decision to marry as a metaphor for his political agenda. Utilizing a blend of romance and realism, De Forest seeks to teach the reader a lesson in reunion. In *Miss Ravenel's Conversion*, it is only through the northern Captain Colbourne's and the southern Miss Lily Ravenel's leaving their own regions and experiencing views outside of their limited home environment that they are able to overcome regional prejudices and forge a viable relationship (Thompson 430). In *The Bloody Chasm*, the honorable, level-headed, ex-Union officer Underhill must persuade the quick-tempered and understandably bitter Southern belle, Virginia Beaufort, to fully accept him as her husband in more than name only, just as the South must accept the North as a life-long partner. These inter-regional couples demonstrate De Forest's plan for effective Reconstruction. Opposed to the strong-armed, forced-consent approach of the federal government, De Forest believes that the North must win the heart of the South, that healing requires emotional ties, consent and commitment. Gregory S. Jackson

explains in “Dowry of Suffering” that De Forest seeks to transform the hero and heroine, representing the two opposing sides, from “victor and vanquished to that of sentimental companions jointly struggling to meet their greater obligations” (284). While I agree with Thompson’s and Jackson’s assessment of the political implications of these two reunion romances, I plan to investigate De Forest’s characterization of the two heroines as being less than equal to the intellectual and emotional maturity of the heroes, an area not covered by these critics.

James’s Civil War-era stories, on the other hand, lack a political focus in regards to courtship and marriage. Instead, they concentrate on the nuances of interaction between the two genders. They are courtship stories. Intimacy, or rather the lack thereof, is an overriding theme within their pages (Southward 18). The male and female characters struggle to know each other and usually fail. The war is an intruding force that further estranges the two genders from each other. In James, the Civil War precipitated a deepening disconnect between the two sexes (Southward 18). The nation is distant in these stories, and the men who have served the Union may gain attention and respect, but their military service and sacrifice does not usually serve them well in the attempt to gain the hand of the woman they wish to marry. In contrast to De Forest’s novels, where the couples overcome their differences and form an agreeable marriage, the featured couples in James’s works never make it to the altar.

Altar or no altar, the portrayal of the female characters in the “male” fiction varies significantly from the heroines of the women’s fiction. In contrast to the female authors, De Forest does not envision new possibilities for women outside of their spheres beyond the war, other than their maturing from their experiences. Miss Ravenel is portrayed as a rather “silly” but virtuous young woman whose political opinions are too heavily determined by the men in her

life. In the first part of the novel, she shows little discernment and is easily enchanted and deceived by the drinking, womanizing Colonel Carter. At this point, she is not the woman of courage and conviction that is exemplified in the novels written by women. The women authors of the era would likely have disdained De Forest's heroine. However, Lilly eventually matures. It takes hardship, work, and eye-opening experiences in New Orleans and the battles over the Louisiana backcountry to spark the development of courage and wisdom within her. The death of her less than spotless husband is the final impetus that nudges her towards full maturity and opens the way for her union with the brave, honorable, and dependable Colbourne.

In *The Bloody Chasm*, Virginia Beaufort is in need of wisdom and maturity as well. The war has left her destitute, bitter, and angry, as it has most of the South. Willful and emotional, she is at first willing to allow her "dependents" and herself to go hungry rather than accept any assistance from her Yankee uncle. Eventually, she reluctantly consents to her uncle's will, which dictates that she must marry his nephew, Underhill, in order to receive a portion of this wealth. This she does, upon the preposterous condition that she never has to see her husband's face or live with him. Underhill spends the rest of the novel seeking to trick his wife into falling in love with him, assured that distance from the South and luxury will soothe her pain and bitterness.

Neither of De Forest's heroines mirror the women portrayed in the works of the female authors of the time. They both act foolishly or silly in the beginning, allowing themselves to be ruled by emotion rather than logic. In addition, they are not concerned with expanding the parameter of their influence beyond their own spheres. Furthermore, in *The Bloody Chasm*, De Forest indicates opposition to transgressing class divisions when it comes to choosing a marriage partner. This boundary is not recognized by the majority of the women authors. Overall, De Forest advocates companionate marriage within one's class and provides for his heroines to

mature into reasonable, well-guided women by the end of the novels, but he does not empower them.

James's women are also dissimilar from the heroines in the fiction written by women of the era. The women in his stories have control of their emotions and their lives, perhaps too much control. They have position and power, within their circles, that evades the heroes of the stories. Yet for all of their logic, they struggle to know themselves, and their greatest fear seems to be that they will go beyond the dictates of cool civility and risk showing their feelings. The women are often unfathomable to the heroes, themselves, and the reader. His heroines lack the spirit and full-bodied emotional range of the heroines portrayed in women's fiction. And despite the fact that he allows them self-determination and rule, they do not find happiness or contentment. They lack the sense of purpose and meaningfulness in their lives that the female authors often grant their heroines.

Overall, the male authors, in this sampling, are not advocating transgression and transformation in regards to women's gender roles. De Forest's fiction keeps the women within their sphere and within their class, except for temporary fluctuations due to the circumstances of war. James may allow his women a level of independence made possible by their wealth/class, but their lives lack purpose. The fiction from the male perspective tends to be more conservative than the female fiction of the era in regards to women transgressing traditional boundaries in the realm of courtship and marriage.

Finally, I would consider studying how men of the era dealt with the decision to marry and to whom. I would review diaries and letters of the time period, including Samuel Cormany's diary, the Barton brothers' letters and journals recorded in Margareta Barton Colt's *Defend the Valley*, Robert Carter's *Four Brothers in Blue*, De Forest's *A Union Officer*, Lystra's *Searching*

the Heart, Rothman's *Heart and Hands*, and other primary sources. I would compare their attitudes towards matrimony and the role of their (potential) wives to the expectations and decisions expressed by women in their personal writing. I would also consider investigating the extent to which De Forest's portrayal of emotional intimacy, which Victorian couples considered so essential in courtship and romantic love, is confirmed in the lives of real men and women, and the extent to which real couples floundered in the milieu presented in James's work.

On the other hand, in addition to the male voices, there are other female voices that could be explored, as well. This dissertation has looked at how the Civil War affected the decision to marry as portrayed in literature written during the Civil War and Reconstruction Era by middle class and upper class white women. In the historical context sections, I have in a few instances included letters, diary entries, or narratives from lower class white women and from women who are of mixed, and/or African American slaves. In addition, I examined literature that addresses intermarriage between whites and a spouse of mixed African and Caucasian ancestry. Yet the fiction writers who have spoken in the pages have been middle and upper class white women.

There is room to explore this topic from the points of view of other voices and lived experiences. In the future, I would like to explore the effects that the Civil War had on marriage as expressed in the fiction written by Black women. The scarcity of published works by Black women before the end of the Reconstruction era would necessitate expanding the boundaries of the date range. I would begin with Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859) and expand range towards the end of the nineteenth century to include Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy* (1892), Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces* (1900), and other works. Further research would be required to uncover primary sources, such as diaries and letters written by black women of the era. Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, a source that I examine briefly in Chapter Four of

this dissertation, would be a good source to critique more in depth.

I would also take a closer look at the war's dramatic effect in the South in regards to former slaves. Prior to the war, slaves could not legally marry. Even free blacks could not legally marry a white in the South, or even in some Northern or western states. The Civil War brought legitimacy to marriages between Blacks in the South. The federal government became heavily involved through the contraband camps, during the war, and the Freedman's Bureau after the war in encouraging "formal, legal marriage" amongst the former slaves and in "enforcing the laws of marriage" (Cott, *Public Vows* 83). The government and reformers saw marriage as a civilizing factor and sought to abolish the practice of enslaved people just "taking up with each other" when legal marriage had been denied them. Freedman's Bureau representatives admonished their charges that "regular lawful marriage is a most important thing. No people can ever be good and great, nor even respectable, if the men and women 'take up together' without being married" (Cott, *Public Vows* 87). Once again, marriage was seen as a political act. The Freedman's Bureau, on behalf of the U.S. government, portrayed marriage as a civilizing, humanizing rite that prepared former slaves to be participating citizens. Blacks had varied reactions towards this push towards marriage. One black speaker, on the anniversary of the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery, declared that it was a "day of gratitude for the freedom of matrimony. [...] Now we can marry and raise our children and teach them to fear God, O! black age of dissipation, they days are nearly numbered" (qtd. in Clinton, "Reconstructing Freedwomen" 306). On the other hand, many Blacks, after seeing the hypocrisy in the marriages of too many slave masters, were not quick to comply with white laws regarding marriage (Clinton, "Reconstructing Freedwomen" 306). Chapter Four of this dissertation briefly looks at historical incidences of interracial marriage after the war, but the effects of the war on marriage between

black people are not addressed. This would be another area that could be explored more extensively.

The Civil War was a catastrophic event that forever transformed the lives of those who survived its wrath. It did not alter the lives of women as dramatically as it did the lives of the newly freed slaves, but it kindled the spark of resistance and transgression for white women. As this dissertation has shown, this transformation was not a myth. Household after household never quite returned to its prewar mold, and decisions both minor and major, both daily and long term made within households etched away at the past and began the alternation of women's lives. Women fiction writers of the era led the vanguard in questioning accepted truths about marriage. However, the vanguard did not stand alone. In the future, I hope to enrich my study by bringing in a diverse spectrum of voices in order to explore this topic to its fullest.

ⁱ In 1855, Hawthorne wrote his publisher: “America is wholly given over to a d---- mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash” (qtd. in Showalter, “Introduction” xxxv).

ⁱⁱ This novel is not examined in this dissertation due to the fact that this novel focuses on the heroine’s love for her brother.

ⁱⁱⁱ This phrase references the popular nineteenth century poem by Coventry Patmore.

^{iv} References a quote from Ferdinand Samiento’s biography of Pauline Cushman: “She has become the apostle of womanhood in these degenerate days, when women are too much of the lady and too little of the wife and mother” (367).

^v In her own life Southworth had personally suffered from mistreatment by men. Her stepfather refused to offer her family refuge and support when her husband showed a lack of interest or inability in obtaining employment. In addition, her husband abandoned Southworth after four years of marriage when she was pregnant with their second child. She was forced to struggle to support herself, their young son, and the new baby while her husband ran off to Brazil to never return (Kelley 159).

^{vi} There is debate amongst scholars as to whether this work is fiction or autobiography. Research conducted by Barbara A. White and presented in “Afterword” as part of the 2002 edition of *Our Nig* shows that many of the plot elements and characters were autobiographical. Wilson dared what white writers had not up to this point: she included an interracial marriage between a black man, Jim, and a white woman, Mag. The man loved the woman, who was an outcast from white society for having born a child out of wedlock, and although she did not love him, marrying him was a preferable choice to hunger, want, and cold. However, the marriage is treated as one of the more positive elements in Mag’s life, despite her further decline in the eyes of white society. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and others speculate on the negative effects that appearing to condone interracial marriage had on the lack of recognition and circulation of the novel (“Introduction” *Our Nig* xxix).

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