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Will the Real Miss Scarlett Please Stand Up: How the Life of Mary Boykin Chesnut Can Be Considered a Model for Margaret Mitchell's Scarlett O'Hara

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WILL THE REAL MISS SCARLETT PLEASE STAND UP: HOW THE LIFE OF MARY
BOYKIN CHESNUT CAN BE CONSIDERED A MODEL FOR MARGARET MITCHELL'S
SCARLETT O'HARA

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Arts
History

by
Anna Braunscheidel
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Accepted by:
Dr. Rod Andrew, Committee Chair
Dr. Alan Grubb
Dr. Orville Vernon Burton

ABSTRACT

Scarlett O'Hara may well be one of the most well known Southern women of all time. Outside of the world of fiction, Mary Boykin Chesnut is probably the most famous woman of the Confederate era. There are striking similarities between both women, not only in terms of their experiences but also their reactions to these experiences, as well as their striking personalities. Because of these similarities, it is quite easy to draw parallels between the two women, and surprisingly, this subject, although it has been suggested, has not been explored in greater detail.

Mary DeCredico's introduction to her biography of Mary Boykin Chesnut states, "the record of her life could have served as a model for Margaret Mitchell as she created her much-loved heroine. Mary had the charm, intelligence, and independence that Scarlett exhibited again and again."¹ After e-mail correspondence with DeCredico, I found her statement to be rooted in the remarkable similarities of the women, but no other study comparing these two women exists. My research, especially concerning Margaret Mitchell, has not turned up a definitive answer as to who Mitchell based Scarlett on.

The purpose of this thesis is to test the hypothesis that Scarlett O'Hara is in fact based on Mary Boykin Chesnut. It is impossible to find a definitive answer to this question, especially considering that while she was still alive, Margaret Mitchell vehemently denied that any of her characters were based on a real person. She

¹ Mary DeCredico, *Mary Boykin Chesnut: A Confederate Woman's Life* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), vx.

describes Scarlett only as a woman who has lived through the destruction of the Southern world she knew and rose from its ashes as a new woman. After Mitchell's death, her husband John burned all her letters. Only theories exist as to who Scarlett is based on. My goal is to extrapolate the theory that Chesnut was used as a model, and give specific examples of their parallel experiences, personalities, and reactions to show that the life and actions of Mary Chesnut and Scarlett O'Hara are similar enough to conclude that it is indeed possible that Mitchell used Mary's life to create Scarlett.

Although it seems impossible to know where Scarlett came from, I argue that Mary Boykin Chesnut and Scarlett have similar experiences, reactions to those experiences, and similar personalities to warrant further study. Mary Boykin Chesnut's diaries reveal intimate details of her life, her inner thoughts, and her actions. Mitchell's Scarlett acts, thinks, and speaks in hauntingly similar ways. This thesis is a presentation of my findings as to the similarities of the two women, and how they at times conformed, and at times chafed against traditional roles of Southern females. In short, this thesis explores how Mary Boykin Chesnut was used as a model by Margaret Mitchell for Scarlett O'Hara in her novel *Gone With the Wind*.

DEDICATION

To my mother, for her constant support, advice, and for loving me unconditionally;
and to my father, for always telling me I can do anything I want to, if only I believe in
myself.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank my committee, who made this thesis possible. Dr. Rod Andrew not only helped me develop my idea for this thesis, but also spent countless hours offering suggestions for sources, editing chapters, and giving me advice on life in general. Coursework with Dr. Andrew also proved to be a vital portion of this thesis. Dr. Alan Grubb and Dr. Orville Vernon Burton also provided invaluable suggestions as to how to make this thesis better.

Many others were important in the completion of this thesis. Dr. Mary DeCredico at the US Naval Academy, Dr. Karen Cox at UNC Charlotte, and Dr. Kathleen Clark at the University of Georgia were all vital in giving me advice on books to read and other areas to explore to see if I could uncover Mitchell's model for Scarlett O'Hara.

I would also like to thank the staff at the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond, the South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina and the Charleston Historical Society, all of whom proved extremely helpful in phone conversations locating the materials I needed and providing me with access to these materials. The Kenan research center at the Atlanta History Center, and the staff at the University of Georgia library were helpful in providing me with Margaret Mitchell's letters and other writings pertaining to *Gone With the Wind* and Mitchell's life in general.

I would also like to thank fellow graduate students and *Gone With the Wind* enthusiasts, especially Mallory Neil, Madeleine Forrest, and Parissa DJangi, all of whom supported me and were always there to listen to my progress and offer suggestions, and listen to me rant about graduate student life in general.

I could not have done this without Ryan. You were always there for me, in good times and bad, telling me everything would turn out just fine, celebrating my accomplishments and wiping tears from my cheek when I felt overwhelmed. I am so blessed and lucky to be able to spend forever with you.

My parents also deserve thanks. Their financial support but also emotional support and love, even from 800 miles away, I could not have done without. My mother answered the phone and listened to me talk for hours about everything, and was essentially my copy editor for my final drafts, and my father's constant support of all my decisions made this work possible. I love you both more than words can ever say.

And finally, special thanks to Tito. I know that no matter what happens in my life, you'll always be there to greet me with a wagging tail and sloppy kisses. Thank you for being my constant companion.

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INTRODUCTION

I first picked up *Gone With the Wind* in the fall of 2008. Part of the requirement for Dr. Rosenbloom's Family in American History course at Canisius College was to read a book concerning women and families from the 18-20th century. I chose *Gone With the Wind* simply because I did not want to read *Little Women*. I knew the book was long, but my mother assured me that she could read it in a day. Although I did not finish the book in a day, further confirming my assumption that I will never be as good as my mother, I fell in love with the book the same way she had. From that point on, I was hooked. I wanted to learn more about the South, this peaceful, beautiful world that had existed at one time, and is now only a memory, "a civilization gone with the wind." The more research I did, the more I discovered that Scarlett lived in a fictional world. Grand houses, massive plantations, and extravagant barbeques were infrequently found, and certainly the biggest fallacy in Margaret Mitchell's novel was the way slaves were portrayed. More accurate was life after the war, when Scarlett and other white family members had to take up manual labor in order to put food on the table and afford the taxes on the plantation house, formerly the symbol of wealth and grandeur.

In reading Mitchell's novel, I grew to detest Scarlett. Pushy, headstrong, disrespectful, and violating all rules of a proper woman, Scarlett's words of "I'll think about that tomorrow," made me consistently more angrier. I didn't know how she could continue to act in the ways she did even though she knew what she was doing angered other Southern women. But then I realized that she was doing it because

she had to. In the New South, Scarlett had to become less womanly in order to preserve everything she held dear to her. Certainly it was improper for a pregnant woman to ride around town to inspect her lumber business, but Scarlett knew what she had to do to survive in this radically altered South. (I still fault her for not loving Rhett, however. Scarlett should have realized that Ashley was too different from her, and his weak nature would have bored Scarlett to death. Rhett Butler was right to leave Scarlett, and in my mind, he will never come back to Scarlett, no matter what sequels approved by the Mitchell estate say.)

Gone With the Wind is arguably one of the greatest novels of all time, certainly one of the best from a 20th century American writer. Margaret Mitchell, its author, had no intention of writing the book, and certainly did not want to publish her work. In fact, she only began writing the book only at the insistence of her husband, John Marsh. In 1920, Mitchell took her brother's horse, Bucephalus, for a ride, and in attempting to display her skill to her brother, she pulled the horse around into a sharp turn. The horse fell, and Mitchell's leg was crushed in the fall, requiring surgery that would leave her with a limp for the rest of her life.² When she began writing *Gone With the Wind* in 1927, she was bedridden with a sprained ankle, a chronic injury she was plagued with as a result of her accident on Bucephalus. Home alone all day, Mitchell insisted her husband bring her books from the Atlanta library, but she soon grew irritated, and it seemed there were few books Marsh brought home for her that she had not already read. Finally, in exasperation, Marsh snapped at his wife, " It looks to me, Peggy, as though you'll have to write a

² Elizabeth Hanson, *Margaret Mitchell* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 15.

book yourself if you're to have anything to read."³ Thus began the creation of arguably the greatest novel of all time, selling over one million copies in its first six months of publication, and would become the highest grossing film of all time. All because of a horse.

Margaret Mitchell was born in 1900, two generations after the Civil War ended. However, it was not until she was ten years old that she realized that the war had not ended shortly before her birth. The early years of her life were heavily influenced by the war fought decades earlier. Along with the alphabet, Mitchell was taught the names of Civil War battles, and she was sung to sleep by her mother, Maybelle, with Civil War songs.⁴ She grew up listening to stories of the war, hearing remembrances and myths, telling of the "good old days" before the war came. When Margaret was five, she went riding every day with an old Confederate veteran, and listened as he told of his experiences to Margaret and others whom he met on his ride.⁵ Therefore, the South of Mitchell's imagination was radically different from the antebellum South in reality, and her judgment was clouded as she conjured images in her head of what life was like before the war, and these distortions of reality certainly are present in her novel.

Margaret's mother taught her the importance of education, but it seems that skills in reading and writing were things with which she was naturally born. From the time she was a little girl, Margaret wrote stories, many dealing with the Civil

³ Hanson, *Margaret Mitchell*, 48.

⁴ Anne Edwards, *Road to Tara: The Life of Margaret Mitchell* (New Haven: Ticknor & Fields, 1983), 21.

⁵ Edwards, *Road to Tara*, 24.

War, and almost all of them having a heroine named Margaret. Her fantasizing about the past was a great factor in Margaret's stories. She created her own past from the tales of others and from her own imagination, and many were based on the Jonesboro and Atlanta survivors of the war.⁶

When Margaret turned fourteen, she was enrolled at Washington Seminary, an all girls' school in the Atlanta area. She was not a good student either, excelling only in English. Upon graduation, Mitchell enrolled in Smith College. Around this time she met a man named Clifford Henry, and, before he left for war, Mitchell agreed to marry him. Away at Smith, Mitchell made few friends and did poorly in her classes. It was here in late October of 1918 that Mitchell learned her fiancé was killed in battle in France. Shortly thereafter, in January of 1919, the influenza epidemic that plagued the country plagued her mother. Although her father and brother tried to keep the severity of her sickness from Margaret, it soon became apparent that Maybelle would not survive. Margaret boarded a train for Atlanta, but before she arrived, her mother had died.⁷

Mitchell completed her year of school and returned home, where she met Red Upshaw, and although she received warnings from her family and friends, married him in 1922. Their marriage lasted a meager two months. Upshaw's roommate, John Marsh, courted Margaret at the same time Upshaw did, and it was he who Margaret turned to for comfort. He convinced Margaret, who now insisted everyone call her Peggy, to take a job with the *Atlanta Journal*, where she worked for four years. Her

⁶ Edwards, *Road to Tara*, 28.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

favorite stories were about the war, and she enjoyed having people recall the old days, which she had grown to love. Peggy's relationship with John Marsh grew and in addition to his assistance in editing all her articles and stories, she began to rely heavily on him. In July of 1925 they were married. John kept pushing his new wife to write, but he was also her harshest critic. Driving around rural Atlanta after a particularly harsh remark, Peggy skidded off the road, re-injuring her ankle from previous accidents. It was at this point that John brought his wife books to read, but one day, he came home with a stack of copy paper and insisted she begin work on her own novel.⁸ The year was 1927.

Mitchell knew she wanted to write a book about the Civil War, and also knew she wanted it to be from the perspective of Southern women who had refused to accept defeat.⁹ She started at the end, writing the last chapter first. In the course of her writing, Peggy would become depressed and stop frequently for long periods of time, especially when she read other books that were grounded in meticulous facts. In 1934 Peggy was in another car accident, this time being hit by a drunk driver, and was confined to her bed for months. She was able to handwrite many more chapters, but was immobile and anxious to go to the Carnegie library and complete more research. Finally, in 1935, her book was nearing completion, but was still in a considerable state of disarray, lacking organization, transition, or explanation in many parts.

⁸ Edwards, *Road to Tara*, 131.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 135.

Here, Harold Latham entered the picture. On a mission to find potential authors, he was tipped off that Margaret Mitchell had written a novel. Latham met Peggy at a luncheon and confronted her about her book, to which she replied, "I have no novel."¹⁰ Continued prodding did not have its desired affect, and Latham prepared to leave Atlanta empty handed. On her way home from the gathering, Peggy confided in a friend that she had not given her manuscript to Latham because "it's so lousy, I'm ashamed of it." Her friend replied, "I wouldn't take you for the type who would write a successful novel."¹¹ This was the spark that was needed. Fury rose in Peggy, who was outraged with the comment. Peggy went home immediately, scouring her house for all the envelopes that contained her manuscript, and managed to present them to Latham before he left. She helped pack them in a suitcase he hastily purchased for the stacks of envelopes Peggy had brought him. Then, he left.

It seems Mitchell had a change of heart, for she wrote Latham asking for the manuscript back a few days later. Latham declined, asking for a chance to read it in its entirety first. Peggy waited, and then, on July 21, she received a telegram, declaring that Macmillan was interested in her manuscript, and received an offer for publication. Peggy accepted, but there was much more work that needed to be done. Intense pressure faced Peggy as she struggled to finish the book and change parts that Macmillan demanded needed altering. One of the most important changes

¹⁰ Edwards, *Road to Tara*, 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

included changing the main character's name from Pansy to Scarlett, from a weak, feminine character, to a strong, rogue woman.

Macmillan originally scheduled 27,500 copies for a first printing. But soon it was clear the book would be much more popular. It received glowing reviews, and was chosen by the book of the month club. When *Gone With the Wind* was finally released in May of 1936, Mitchell was in a state of shock and disbelief. Over 100,000 copies were printed in anticipation of its popularity on release date. Overnight, she had become a celebrity. Mitchell was overwhelmed with the attention she was receiving. Soon, movie rights were discussed, and *Gone With the Wind* was sold for an astonishing \$50,000, the most paid for movie rights to a book at that time.

As she and her husband began to age, Mitchell settled into the role of housewife. When John had a stroke, Peggy was by his side all day caring for him. She supported the war efforts as well, always writing to soldiers while keeping up correspondence with her friends. Hauntingly, Peggy wrote to her friend Edwin Granberry in 1945, "I'm going to die in a car crash. I feel very certain of this." In 1949 her prophecy came true. Peggy was hit by a car while walking in a movie theatre with her husband on August 11. Five days later, she succumbed to her injuries. John returned home, heartbroken, but intent on carrying out Peggy's wishes. He had a hand written list of the documents his wife wanted destroyed. All manuscripts, papers, and correspondence from *Gone With the Wind* were burned.

Gone With the Wind was without a doubt the greatest accomplishment of Mitchell's life, and Scarlett O'Hara brought her unknown fame and fortune. And

although the world may never know the secrets of the book and its creator, the fact that they are both shrouded in mystery are qualities that make the book and its characters so adored. The world will never know if Rhett Butler returns to his headstrong wife. But there are more mysteries to solve than just this one.

Mitchell's life may have been short, and she may have had only one major accomplishment, but her book changed the world of literature, and remade the South of the war years in the minds of readers everywhere. Her Scarlett is one of the most well known characters of all time, simultaneously loved and hated by millions. But the question remains: where did Margaret Mitchell get her idea for Scarlett? Was it possible she used someone as a model for Scarlett? It seems that the tight-lipped Mitchell never intended for anyone to know the truth behind Scarlett, but there exist many theories as to who Scarlett is based on.

Mary Boykin Chesnut lived a life similar to Scarlett's. She grew up in the years before the war, and her life, like Scarlett's, was completely changed after the war. There are compelling similarities between the two women that warrant a further study of their lives, patterns, reactions, and rebellions. The theory that Mitchell based Scarlett O'Hara on Mary Boykin Chesnut is relatively new and completely unexplored. Molly Haskell and Mary DeCredico both have stated this theory, but no deep study has been completed by anyone in the field of history.

This paper greatly contributes to this theory, giving specific examples of the parallels in the lives of Mary and Scarlett, as well as demonstrating their very fiery personalities and reactions to major events in their lives. Both women rebelled

against authority, refused to follow the proper rules for female actions and demeanor, and refused to remain in their proper place in Southern society. As their world was pulled from beneath their feet, Mary and Scarlett, unlike some women, adapted with relative ease to the new world where more was expected from them, and acting in masculine ways was considered more acceptable.

Chapter One describes the lives of Scarlett and Mary as well as gives a general discussion about their similarities in terms of lives, experiences, and personalities. Chapter Two delves into more detail, explaining events in their lives before the war. This includes education, courtship, marriage, child rearing, as well as the expectations for antebellum women, and how Mary and Scarlett violated many of them. Chapter Three discusses women's lives during the war, again demonstrating how Mary and Scarlett conformed to many aspects of wartime life, such as nursing, rationing, and other sacrifices, but in other ways their reactions were rebellious. Chapter Four discusses women's lives after the war and how their worlds drastically changed over the course of four years. In this last chapter, it is evident that Mary and Scarlett both fit much better into this new world than the old one, as transformation of the roles of women allowed Mary and Scarlett to be the headstrong, opinionated women they were before the war without receiving the backlash they had before the war.

Testing the theory that Mitchell used Mary as a model for Scarlett has not been explored in depth. This study is to attempt to prove that Mary is a feasible model for the life of Scarlett O'Hara. Keeping in mind that no one will ever know the

truth about Scarlett's background, this paper proposes that the theory that Mary Chesnut was the model for Scarlett is a compelling argument. This paper argues that Mary's experiences before, during, and after the war, her reactions to these experiences, her own attitudes and personality, and her own ability to adapt and survive are also themes that are evident in *Gone With the Wind*. Scarlett experienced the war, lived in a woman's world where she never fit in, and adapted in the years following the war, infiltrating the man's world, and she did so in order to survive.

CHAPTER 1

THE LIVES OF MARY BOYKIN CHESNUT AND SCARLETT O'HARA IN FACT AND FORM

At first glance, there seem to be few similarities between Mary Boykin Chesnut and Scarlett O'Hara. For one, Scarlett is not an actual person. And while this may be true, it is certain that her creator, Margaret Mitchell, based Scarlett and her experiences on actual events and encounters that Southern women experienced during the Civil War. But when the layers are peeled back, there are remarkable similarities between Scarlett and Mary, not only in terms of their experiences but their personalities as well. How these women handled the war and its aftermath and their challenging of traditional Southern womanhood reveal how truly alike they are. Their patterns of conformity as well as their reactions and rebellions mirror one another, and what they made of their experiences sets them apart from other Southern women of the time, and demonstrates how Mary's life could have been used as a model for Scarlett.

The fictional Scarlett O'Hara was born around 1849, the same year Atlanta was officially founded. She was truly a Southern belle, but certainly did not act the part. Her creator describes her as "not beautiful, but men seldom realized it when caught by her charm."¹² Part of what gave her such a fiery personality was her Irish blood, and Gerald O'Hara instilled his hot-headedness in his first daughter. Scarlett

¹² Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind* (New York: MacMillan, 1936), 25.

was fiercely jealous, and took all the steps necessary to make sure she was noticed above all other belles. But her childhood was cut short, as the first shots of the Civil War were fired and Scarlett plunged deep into a world that was not suited for someone like her who was used to a life of leisure and pampering. Forced to abide by wartime rules, Scarlett chafed at these standards, outraging all around her except Melanie, her sister-in-law by her first marriage and constant companion throughout the entire novel. She did what she wanted and acted however she wanted, displaying a blatant disregard for the rules of what a proper Southern lady should be. She emerged from the war alive, but unable to return to her former life. So, she changed herself in order to survive. Her unladylike behaviors saved her family, her home, and that red Georgia soil that was so dear to her, even if it meant she broke every rule in the book.

Scarlett refused to follow Southern ladylike behavior, and her deceitfulness and flaws are somewhat excused because of her remarkable courage and resiliency she displayed during and after the war. Deeply Southern but highly resourceful, Scarlett was a woman, but a highly masculine one, made justifiable due to the crisis of the War.¹³ There were some areas of Southern society where Scarlett fit in, but only because it pleased Scarlett and she found it enjoyable, like attendance at dances and barbeques, or if there was no way she could avoid it, like nursing. Scarlett became a different character of the war, transforming from a Southern belle to a masculinized, post-war woman, and as a businesswoman in the new South, she

¹³ Molly Haskell, *Frankly My Dear: Gone With the Wind Revisited* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), xii.

“defies decorum at every turn,” and breaks every rule in the name of survival.¹⁴ Using the war as justification for this new persona, Scarlett and other Southern women were able to shed the layers of ladylike passivity and become their own individual beings and competent agents of their lives. Scarlett especially felt no guilt in trampling male egos, and did not proceed in the traditional delicate manner in order for the confidence of the male population to be restored.¹⁵ This suited women like Scarlett, who never fit into antebellum life, and although she may not have realized it, postwar society allowed for more fluidity in the roles of women. Scarlett was able to defy the standards of a lady, without the repercussions she may have received in years past.

Scarlett simultaneously mobilized and obscured the definition of femininity. She transitioned from girlhood to womanhood under new and unique conditions, and because of the Civil War, womanhood was open to reinterpretation. Scarlett certainly did reinterpret womanhood, and her new definition of a proper lady included marriage for monetary gain, manslaughter, flagrant disregard for proper female behavior, offering herself for cash to pay the taxes on Tara, riding through town while pregnant, and flaunting her business talents, all of which violated the accepted conventions of a Southern lady. *Gone With the Wind* is a novel in which the Confederate rebellion pushes Scarlett towards masculinity and the abandonment of feminine behavior, and as other women are struggling to survive, Scarlett thrives because she embraces this new identity. Early in the novel, Scarlett’s preferences for

¹⁴ Haskell, *Frankly My Dear*, 94, 96.

¹⁵ Haskell, *Frankly My Dear*, 118, 224.

male activities were made known. She liked to climb trees, and did not enjoy nightly prayers, she was never given responsibilities as a young girl.¹⁶ Thus, the “proper” feminization process never truly presented itself to Scarlett. By masculinizing Scarlett, Mitchell in effect feminizes all the male characters of the book, with the exception of Rhett Butler, and redefined the term in the wake of Scarlett. And this would not have been possible had there not been a major social upheaval to excuse much of Scarlett’s behavior. She bullies others, especially men, to get what she wants, and precisely because she is so strong, others feel protected in her presence. By providing food and shelter for her extended family and friends, Scarlett performs masculine tasks with greater competence and assurance than any man at Tara.¹⁷

What makes Scarlett such a timeless character is precisely that. She doesn’t fit in. She stands out from the norm. It draws attention to her, and it may be in a negative way, but she certainly will be remembered. Had she been innocent and morally upright, she would have been quickly forgotten. It is her sexuality, her ambitions, and her disregard for all things proper that define her very being. Although she attempts to wedge herself into certain aspects of Southern society, she clearly sticks out, and this is precisely why fellow Southern women heap scorn upon her.¹⁸ It is indeed ironic that *Gone With the Wind* is often described as being about a Southern belle. Scarlett possesses none of the quintessential belle ideals. She was

¹⁶ Catherine Clinton, ed., *Half Sisters of History: Southern Women and the American Past* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 156, 157, 164, 167; Elizabeth Young, *Disarming the Nation: Women’s Writing and the American Civil War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 237.

¹⁷ Young, *Disarming the Nation*, 237, 250, 251; Hanson, *Frankly My Dear*, 62-3.

¹⁸ Nina Silber, *Gender and Sectional Conflict* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 97.

neither pious nor gentle, and only assumed the traditional belle qualities to further her own desires. Really, the only things she enjoyed about being a Southern girl were the fancy dresses, parties, and being courted by every man in town, eligible bachelor or not.¹⁹ She may have been forced to wear homespun and raise crops after the war, but she did so grudgingly, and out of necessity. Although she grew up in the antebellum South, Scarlett O'Hara was certainly not a product of the Old South. She was her own independent woman, and did not care what others thought of her. Survival was on her mind in those frightful years after her hasty evacuation from Atlanta, and without a doubt the War shaped the life Scarlett was to live. In love, avarice, labor, in family and survival, Margaret Mitchell shared Scarlett's secrets, and in so doing, she fascinated her readers with a private world of Southern history.²⁰

What makes Scarlett believable is that she is authentic, and refuses to conform to proper female behavior. She is a real person who assumes risks, has a complex personality, and can testify to the value of hard won survival. She does possess a feminine identity, but it may not conform to the standard definition of female behavior. Scarlett claims that she would never feel like a lady again until her table was filled with food and finery. Scarlett defined femininity in terms of things, not necessarily actions, for she felt the actions she took were necessary steps in becoming a woman once more.²¹ Scarlett declares "some day, I'm going to do and

¹⁹ Giselle Roberts, *The Confederate Belle* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 1.

²⁰ Elizabeth Hanson, *Margaret Mitchell* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 100.

²¹ Hanson, *Margaret Mitchell*, xii, 14.

say everything I want to do and say, and if people don't like it I don't care." However, Scarlett does not realize that she has been doing just that all along. Expressing her feelings openly, no matter the consequences, was an important part of what made Scarlett who she was.²²

Gone With the Wind describes how one world was destroyed as a new world entered, taking the feet out from under its inhabitants. And despite this, some found the means to survive.²³ Scarlett survived because she did not conform, spoke her mind, and accepted the new world in which she lived without clinging to the assumptions of that long gone world. Most important of all, she possessed courage and the ability to shed the skin of femininity and redefined what it meant to be a woman in the post war South.

Mary Boykin Chesnut had intensely similar experiences to Scarlett. She too survived the war, and emerged from it a different woman. Even before the war, she, like Scarlett, detested standards of femininity placed upon her. Chesnut always wanted to play a more active role in society, and the Civil War gave her the opportunity to do so. Chesnut may not have spoken out the way Scarlett had, but her diary records her innermost thoughts and feelings, and reveals a masculine way of thinking similar to Scarlett's and relief in knowing that old standards she was forced to live up to had blown away in that old civilization and were to be replaced with new ones.

²² Ibid., 53.

²³ Hanson, *Margaret Mitchell*, 88.

Mary Boykin Miller was born in 1823 in South Carolina. The daughter of a statesman, Mary breathed the air of politics, and conversations she overheard taught her the importance of political issues, especially those brewing at that time.²⁴ Mary was sent to school in Charleston, where she met her future husband, James Chesnut, when she was just thirteen. While at school, Mary studied literature, music, history, singing, dancing, and French. She made many friends at school, and many of these girls remained lifelong friends to her. In 1840, Mary married James, and the couple moved in to James' parents plantation home, Mulberry. While there, Mary was confined to her bedroom, as the elder Mrs. Chesnut and her daughters took on much of the housework. Mary, like Scarlett, had little to bother herself with in these early years, and she enjoyed a leisurely life. Mary was not only not useful, but she was no longer the center of attention, a position she enjoyed for most of her life. As a result, Mary grew bored, and took up reading to fill the empty hours.²⁵

Mary's husband also became involved in politics, and Mary followed his political activities closely. Unable to have children, a fact she often bemoaned, Mary instead buried herself in the work of her husband. Much of her days were spent visiting family members and friends. In 1858, James was elected to the Senate, and he and Mary moved to Washington. Mary loved the bustle of the city and held extravagant parties for her friends, including Varina Davis, wife to the future Confederate President. When South Carolina seceded from the Union in 1860, James

²⁴ Elisabeth Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut: A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 18.

²⁵ Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 43.

immediately resigned his position. Around February of 1861, Mary began her diary, and continued to write until a few months after the surrender at Appomattox.

Hard times fell on Mary and James after the war. They had invested practically all their money in Confederate bonds, which were now worthless. In addition, James' father died shortly before the end of the war, leaving James to pay taxes on his large landholdings. Mary began to sell butter and eggs from her house to earn a small income. At one point she also attempted to publish two works of fiction, but neither came to fruition. Around 1880 she attempted to edit her diaries, but the amount of re-working they required was great. In November of 1886, Mary died, leaving her diaries in her will to good friend Isabella Martin. In 1905 the diaries were published under the title "A Diary From Dixie."

The war, for Mary, like Scarlett, meant an outlet for the frustration at being a proper Southern lady both women felt. Mary at once felt needed and committed, and the doors of escape were opened, relieving her from a world of boredom and dullness.²⁶ War, and writing in her diary, gave Mary a sense of purpose she longed for in the years before the war. Like Scarlett, who enjoyed parties with her new carpetbagger friends, Mary chirped, "I am having such a busy, happy life-so many

²⁶ Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), xxxviii. When quoting Mary Boykin Chesnut's diary, I will always use the Woodward version of 1981, as it is the most true to Mary's original words. The 1905 edition was cut to meet editors length, and the 1949 edition has various insertions by its author that were not from Mary's original diary.

friends. And my friends are so clever, so charming."²⁷ Both women managed to remain engaged in their social gatherings, one of the only aspects of femininity they actually enjoyed and conformed to. For Mary and Scarlett, the war was a blessing in disguise, and although the financial hardships were great, both women were able to express their vibrant strength and ability to thrive, as women, but as women who were more than happy to disregard the restraints placed upon them in years prior to 1861. They were able to participate in the direction of their lives more actively, and both women took on roles of men to support themselves and their families after the war.

Mary's diary reveals a great deal about her personality. The words contained in the red leather bound books reveal an eccentric lady with a caustic tongue, and her words were arrogant and ambitious, yet she always had the ability to charm every man she came across.²⁸ She had a frankness about matters that few other women possessed, and she was a woman of strong opinions, strong loves and hates, and after a lifetime of considering herself useless, keeping a diary during what Mary rightly felt to be one of the most important events in history challenged her and gave her life added meaning. Mary was capable of being subjective at one moment, but objective the next. She was arrogant and ambitious, quick to judge, but perfectly willing to change her mind. Like Scarlett, Mary exposed in her diary the parody and hypocrisy of the Old South's class system through her own obvious vanity.²⁹ Like Scarlett, she was quick to mention the flaws she found in Southern society, but

²⁷ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 597.

²⁸ Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, xi, 5.

²⁹ Haskell, *Frankly, My Dear*, 99.

reluctant to relinquish former privileges she and other women of her class enjoyed. Neither agreed with the trade off that if she acted like a proper woman, she would be afforded the benefits of being treated as such. Mary and Scarlett wanted to be treated like ladies, but did not want to act like them.

Mary was an astute observer, and much of her diary, although she claims it to be objective, discusses many aspects of South Carolina life in an subjective and opinionated way. In the beginning of her diary, she insists her account of the war would be unbiased and without opinion, but it is evident that Mary was unable to remain impartial. While keeping her diary, she was simultaneously a novelist, journalist, social satirist, autobiographer, and memorialist. Her intelligence and wit won her many admirers, and she discussed many of these admirers in her diary. Her diary is not so much a record of events but an opportunity to offer up her opinions about practically every aspect of life. She recorded political and military developments, but also gave an important civilian perspective of the war, and the perspective of a woman no less, just as Scarlett served to reveal the war from a strong woman's point of view.³⁰ Mary's perceptiveness, astuteness, and attention to detail, coupled with the fact that she was able to observe many important events of the war at close range are what makes her diary so valuable. She was also a brilliant conversationalist, which is evident in her diaries. Like Scarlett, she enjoyed playing the belle, but did not want to be held to the standards that circumscribed proper

³⁰ Marjorie Julian Spruill, Valinda W. Littlefield, and Joan Marie Johnson, ed., *South Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, vol.1 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 8, 203, 233.

Southern ladies.³¹ Her patterns of life conform to the belle ideal but it is the reactions--to proper behavior, to dealing with the loss of slave labor, to doing manual labor--that differed from those of most other women of the South.

Mary's diary reflects the spirit with which Southerners bore their trials, and it gives an uninterrupted account of the entire war. Her writing exposed the limits placed upon her gender, and Mary frequently referenced the fact that these limits prevented women from achieving greatness. Mary had firm opinions, and was severely critical of men, and often overly criticized men in positions of power during the war. Mary was also skeptical of the society in which she lived. She made fun of Southern rituals, such as courtship, insulted the standards of beauty, and laughed at the standards of Southern integrity. For Mary, the world in which she lived did not make sense. Writing was for her a way to break out of the confined space she to which she was relegated. She questioned old certainties, disputed tradition, and spoke in a startlingly modern way. She, like Scarlett, was certainly one of the first truly modern Southern women, taking control of her life and not sitting back to wait for a return of the days of old, especially since she felt particularly out of place in that old World.³²

³¹Bell Irvin Wiley, *Confederate Women* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975), 20; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 276.

³² Sarah E. Gardner, *Blood and Irony: Southern White Women's Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 172-3; Anne Goodwyn Jones and Susan V. Donaldson, *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 9, 10, 109, 115.

When looking at the normal course of their lives, one can see Mary and Scarlett both have similar experiences and reactions. Scarlett and Mary were both born into wealth and were raised with the best of everything. Mary's father died when she was young, however, leaving a doting father out of the picture for her. Their similarities separate in the next years of their lives. Scarlett gets married before the war and has one child, and proceeds to marry again once her husband dies, a casualty of illness in the Civil War. Mary also chose a husband, but his high political clout earned him a seat in the political realm and away from battle, at least in the first years of the war. Both women enjoyed courtship, and when they were married, some of that fun and free spiritedness left their lives. They both had a flair for the dramatic, and enjoyed collecting men just to prove their desirability to others. Neither woman was subjected to running a plantation until after the Civil War, a task for which they were both poorly prepared; Mary because she was never given a chance due to living with her mother-in-law, and Scarlett because the war interfered with plantation life just as she was reaching the age of maturity. The coming of the war shocked both women as well, dually predicting that it would be a short battle in which the South would quickly and easily triumph over its Northern aggressors.

During the war, both Mary and Scarlett moved around a great deal. Scarlett split her time between Atlanta and her Jonesboro, Georgia plantation home of Tara, but had a true love of cities, especially Atlanta. Mary moved with her husband and President Davis mostly between Columbia, South Carolina and the capital at Richmond, but Mary sometimes returned to Mulberry, her husband's family's

plantation home in Camden. Mary as well loved cities and was bored living away from the bustling cities of Columbia and Charleston. This travel allowed both women to see the war firsthand. Both served as nurses to wounded soldiers, and Mary commented in her diary about the horrors of war she witnessed, until she eventually quit, while Scarlett also ran from her duties as nurse to the bloody, dying soldiers.

Mary and Scarlett both loved to portray the proper lady, but were in fact bored with the tiresome role of Southern belles before the outbreak of the war. Mary spent her afternoons living with her in-laws at Mulberry plantation where she made “clothes for the slave children and engag[ed] in desultory and boring small talk. Even gossip was tame, for her mother-in-law refused to hear ill of anyone—a trait Mary found infuriating.”³³ When Mary was free of the social constraints of Southern society, she enjoyed playing guitar and teaching slave children to read, which at the time was against the law in South Carolina. In the same way, Scarlett challenged the traditional authority that was laid down for her to follow. She initially refused to eat before the barbeque at Twelve Oaks and frequently complained about the cumbersome dresses women such as herself were forced to wear, even though she loved fashion. The rebelliousness of both women and challenging of traditional gender roles show how both women were anxious to change the New South themselves, that they felt they were best suited for this job, in order to retake their position as proper Southern women and be treated as such.

³³ Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 50.

Neither woman fits into a proper place, and they occupy zones that are outside the considered standards for women of their day.

The hardships both women faced after the war is the point at which both women can be seen to be most similar. Mary and Scarlett were both left practically penniless by the end of the war, and were forced to take on jobs that were generally seen as unusual or inappropriate for antebellum ladies. Scarlett ran a lumber mill, while Mary sold butter, eggs, and other goods out of her damaged but still standing plantation house. Many women had worked before the war, but for a lady of such standing as Mary and Scarlett, this was a new and different world they were entering. The Chesnut family was forced to sell off almost all their land in order to try to salvage what remained of their lives. Tragedy also hit hard after the war for both women. Mary's father-in-law, mother, favorite sister, and husband all died within 20 years of the war end, leaving her to care for the plantation almost singlehandedly. With the death of Scarlett's mother and father, she was left to care for Tara, her sisters, the remaining slaves, and children. Scarlett vocalized her dislike for these tasks that were once considered menial, and Mary as well reflected on the pathetic situation she was facing in her diary in post war entries. Once the host of grand dinners and balls, Mary Chesnut owned only a few dresses and barely had enough food to feed her and husband, and Scarlett was forced to make a dress from curtains.

What is most similar about these women however, cannot be explained in events. Both were educated, headstrong women who were not afraid to voice their

opinions. They were not afraid to occupy zones that were considered for males only. They both were incredibly affected by the war, but did their best to gather up what remained of their lives and attempted to move forward. Elite white women such as Mary and Scarlett both played a part in the Confederate war effort. Despite their parts being small in the larger perspective, their service as nurses, managing plantations and slaves in the absence of men, and being the strong face of the home front served a great purpose in the Confederate cause. Clearly, the war disrupted the traditional gender notions of Southern women, and after the war, both Scarlett and Mary were unable to relinquish these newly found, unconventional roles. It was important that they worked to continue to support their families in the wake of the devastation in the South. Mary sold food out of her home, and Scarlett worked in the fields growing and harvesting cotton in attempts to salvage what remained of the old South, while simultaneously changing the South forever by putting themselves in this position. Mary's husband returned to his law practice, but her ever-present fear of his being tried for war crimes, coupled with his lack of inheritance or penchant for hard work, left few other options for Mary, who was especially unaccustomed to such a simple lifestyle.

Both Scarlett and Mary were women who lived "through the collapse of one civilization and the birth of another," and in this respect, they both represented the "new woman" that emerged from the South.³⁴ Both women did not immediately enjoy the increased responsibilities they took on. Scarlett continually uttered that

³⁴ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Scarlett O'Hara: The Southern Lady as New Woman." *American Quarterly* 33, no.4 (1981): 392.

she would think about it tomorrow, and Mary as well stated “No-No-I will not stop and think.”³⁵The social upheaval that both women lived through and participated in makes them similar to one another, yet also representative of all women of the post-Civil War South. How they handled this change was what made them different. They accepted new roles at a time when others were pining for the days of old. They were the figureheads to which all other women could look. The conflicts which Mary and Scarlett encountered were not unique to them, but the ways in which they dealt with the blows that the breakdown of the Confederacy laid upon them is significant. Their strength would be a model for all other women. The collapse of the old South represented both women’s end of childhood, and the New South represented their journey to womanhood, and growing into adults, an event that was practically forced upon both women. Mary and Scarlett both experienced the same events other women of their time dealt with. How they reacted and handled these events is what sets them apart, and the fact that their reactions were so alike one another testifies to the theory that Mary Boykin Chesnut’s life was a model on which Scarlett O’Hara’s life was based.

Thus, reconstruction forced women to confront how to remain a lady under these new and radically changed historical conditions. Many women were left without a husband or any man in general to rely upon for financial support. Especially in the case of Scarlett, the challenging of gender roles was something she had to do in order to save Tara, the only thing that mattered to her. Both Scarlett and Mary however, did not start off as necessarily proper Southern women. Their

³⁵ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 528

outspokenness and opinionated beliefs made them more likely to be able to conform, however unwillingly, to this new role. Mary was not a beautiful woman, but charmed other men with her eloquence and speech, and enjoyed the company of other men to share in an intellectual conversation, much to the dismay of her husband. Women like Melanie Wilkes had no chance to fit in to this New South which Mary and Scarlett seemed able, if not willing, to confront, and it seems quite fitting that Mitchell chose to kill her off. It seems as though their lives before the Civil War made them more readily able to cope with the new World which was thrust upon them.

The next chapters demonstrate the experiences of Southern women before, during, and after the war. In some ways, Mary and Scarlett are typical Southern women, but in other ways, they differ greatly. Specific experiences and examples will serve to further demonstrate how Mary's life could be a model for Scarlett. Their courage, headstrong personalities, and will to survive made them different from the rest, and although different may not have always meant better, the fact that these may be the two most recognized women from the Civil War era speaks volumes to their importance.

CHAPTER 2

“THERE WAS A LAND OF CAVALIERS AND COTTON FIELDS CALLED THE OLD SOUTH...”

Antebellum Southern society set the bar high for elite white women such as Mary Boykin Chesnut and Scarlett O'Hara. They were forced to conform to standards they did not always like, think things they did not believe, and act in ways they often found repressive. Both women were examples of this conformity and of their rebellion against it, and their rebellion serves to demonstrate just how limiting these expectations were. They both illustrate what was expected and also what was considered rebellious. In some ways, they conformed, and in other ways, they rebelled. Their lives reflect the proper patterns of conformity, but their reactions are what is rebellious. And their rebelling shows how limiting expectations were for women. Before the outbreak of the Civil War, Southern women were penned in to a corner of society where were forced to obey the commands of their fathers and husbands. This patriarchal authority ruled over women's mind, body, and spirit with an iron fist. This position offered women extreme protection and guaranteed their lives would be safe and secure, albeit without much excitement.

The image of the plantation mistress has even been described as “a carefully cultivated distortion of reality meant to embody the grace and ease to which white women aspired.” Therefore, when news of Fort Sumter reached the ears of these women, they “believed that not only was their way of life at stake but so was their

ability to live up to the ideals of Southern slaveholding women set before them.”³⁶ Antebellum families such as Mary and Scarlett’s, who owned slaves, exerted the greatest influence over the culture of the time and shaped the society in which every Southerner lived. It was they who set the standards for gentility and honor, and thus Southern women were held to this standard not only because it defined a proper woman but because it defined the society in which they resided.³⁷ Whether or not Southern daughters lived up to these standards is another matter entirely. Both women went through the motions to meet these standards, but their reactions indicate their dissatisfaction in many areas in Southern women’s lives. Despite the restraints placed on the lives of women, Southern belles enjoyed their un-taxing and leisurely lives and liked being taken care of and having as many worldly possessions as they wanted at their fingertips. And even as some women encouraged the coming of war, many did not think it possible that the South would lose and their lives would be changed forever.

The first thing an antebellum Southern belle had to attain was a proper education. This was expected for elite whites and was a standard both Mary and Scarlett met with little resistance. Some young girls were educated at home, but others, like Mary and Scarlett, were sent away to boarding schools in larger cities. These schools were founded to provide suitable facilities away from the plantation as well as a sophisticated course of instruction that was not necessarily available

³⁶ Catherine Clinton, *Tara Revisited: Women, War, and the Plantation Legend* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1995), 41; Victoria E. Ott, *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age during the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 2.

³⁷ Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 3-4.

back on the plantation. Margaret Mitchell alludes to the fact that Scarlett was educated in the early chapters of *Gone With the Wind*. She was educated at the Fayetteville Female Academy, and prior to that had a governess for two years, and had completed her schooling by the time she was fifteen. Likewise, Mary Chesnut was educated, she at Madame Talvande's school in Charleston. Madame Talvande herself was a native of Santo Domingo, and hers was one of the first successful female academies in the South.³⁸

Female academies were held largely responsible by the parents of their charges to refine young ladies' temperaments, manners, fashion sense, and social graces. These schools were in reality extensions of the home. Most female academies taught classical literature, Greek, Latin, history, and above all, French. One grandfather wrote his granddaughter about the language, "No lady is considered well bred who cannot converse and correspond in it."³⁹ The curriculum was broad for Mary, but she was educated as a proper young Southern woman normally was. In addition to literature, Latin, history, and Greek, Mary was also educated in the natural sciences. Above all, Mary learned French, and was actually so well versed she was often mistaken for a native French speaker in later years.⁴⁰ Scarlett's curriculum was never discussed, but one can gather that she too was educated in

³⁸ Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 127; Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind* (New York: MacMillan, 1936), 26, 75.

³⁹ Giselle Roberts, *The Confederate Belle* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 19; Marli Frances Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-1880* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 99; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 132.

⁴⁰ Elisabeth Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut: A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 27.

the classics, as was common in all female academies. Both girls took to education as a proper young woman should, and enjoyed school thoroughly, conforming to the standards of society.

Some schools also incorporated religious instruction as well. A few, like Madame Talvande's, taught courses in mathematics, such as calculus, and sciences, but most felt young women would never need to learn such skills, and instead taught classes in manners, dancing, sewing, and femininity-all skills young girls cultivated at home with the help of their mothers. Such topics were intended to serve no practical purpose and were only specialty skills. Never was a young elite girl like Mary or Scarlett taught to quilt or sew clothes but instead learned embroidery and needlepoint. However, most young girls never intended to put any of these skills to use beyond the traditional roles of Southern belles in society, but instead used them to impress young suitors. Education coupled with the words of their mothers so that these young girls would someday become proper Southern women who embodied moral fortitude, maternal values, and domesticity.⁴¹

There was only one region for this education to take place though. It was acceptable for fathers to send their daughters away to school, as long as the schools were in the South. Sending daughters to the North to be educated was considered an insult to the society in which they lived.⁴² Tidewater area schools in Fayetteville and Charleston were popular education destinations for Southern girls. Northern

⁴¹Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 17, 166.

⁴²Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 63.

educations threatened the stability of Southern society, and a girl educated in the North could come back to the South and threaten to undermine what their entire society stood for.

Mary and Scarlett were sent to school instead of staying at home for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, girls were educated as part of their quest to find a suitable husband. The female academy was “designed to instill domestic virtue and reinforce women’s roles as nurturer and wife,” and therefore enhance girls’ chances in the marriage market.⁴³ One of the advantages of education at a female academy was that it created young women who were better suited for motherhood and would be better able to raise virtuous and responsible children. Southern society motivated the education of Mary and Scarlett so they would be furnished with the appropriate skills that would allow them to “fulfill their moral obligation to the household.” Education, they felt, would produce an accomplished young lady, who would soon grow into an accomplished wife and mother. Parents also sent their daughters away to school because they believed higher education not only inculcated notions of female duty but also developed their intellectual abilities. They expected that they would be taught intellectual, musical, and artistic skills that would enhance their gentility and give them a sense of self-fulfillment.⁴⁴ It can certainly be assumed that Mary learned the proper methods of becoming a young woman. The feminine community of which she was a part frequently participated in

⁴³ Jean E. Freidman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 100.

⁴⁴ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 62; Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 23; Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 16; Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 22-23.

social gatherings, which would have required that Mary have proper training. Likewise, Scarlett was also properly trained on how to act like a proper woman. At the Fayetteville academy, she was taught how to act a lady, even if she wasn't truly one. Mitchell writes,

She knew how to smile so that her dimples danced more gracefully than she. She knew how to walk pigeon-toed so that her wide hoop skirts swayed entrancingly, how to look up into a man's face and then drop her eyes and bat the lids rapidly so that she seemed a-tremble with gentle emotion. Most of all she learned how to conceal from men a sharp intelligence beneath a face as sweet and bland as a baby's.⁴⁵

Both women were educated as a proper young lady should have been, and they both enjoyed conforming to these particular rules because of the social acknowledgement it brought.

It was important, though, that young women were not overly educated. Politics in particular was one arena from which women were strictly prohibited in antebellum Southern society. The nature of the education young girls received meant that they possessed little of the political knowledge of the time. Politics was no place for a proper woman, and many men felt it was best if women were kept in the dark about any political issues of the time. Elite Southerners regarded politics as a "public, masculine pursuit," and women would be better off studying topics "more important to them and to their happiness."⁴⁶ Furthermore, some Southern men feared that over-educating a woman could potentially alter the lives of all Southerners. In order for slavery to persist as the backbone of Southern society, the

⁴⁵ Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 75.

⁴⁶ Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 38.

position of women had to remain exactly as it was, without an inch of room for change. Education was meant for them to remain in this fixed position, serving the limited purpose of impressing a husband. Challenging or changing this position and purpose could have undesired results. Therefore, an important part of the curriculum was keeping politics out of the minds of young women. The academy was “an end unto itself rather than a means to pursue further goals.”⁴⁷ Both Scarlett and Mary violated this last rule of education. Mary was intensely interested in politics, and her interest grew after her marriage to a statesman. Although Scarlett never directly voices her interest, it is clear that she understands a great deal about political life around her. Both women lived at a time when avoiding politics was practically impossible. Mary and Scarlett had opinions, and unlike other women who repressed the urge to voice these opinions, Mary and Scarlett had no qualms about saying anything they wanted, especially about politics, even though it was not yet considered acceptable for a woman to think in such ways, much less voice these thoughts. Here again, the two break from tradition, and although they attend school, they both go out of their way to become educated in ways that were inappropriate for women. For strong willed women like Mary and Scarlett, there was no stopping the extent of how they would push the envelope in Southern society.

Southern parents, especially mothers who had been in the same position as their daughters, understood that young girls' education was their chance to leave the plantation and enjoy a period of freedom before they were forced into wifely duties of the plantation. Most Southern fathers sent their daughters to school

⁴⁷ Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 136-137, 138.

because they hoped the training provided would prepare them for their place on pedestals. Education never was meant to suggest expansion of the woman's sphere. The whole point of her education was so that she could inhabit the sphere more gracefully and conduct her responsibilities more effectively. Most men still felt that even women who were educated at these academies still had a lower intellectual capacity than the opposite sex. But there were some women like Mary and Scarlett who chose to challenge accepted hierarchies of gender, class, and race with the educations they received away from home. Indeed, Scarlett, who probably was educated in mathematics at school as well, would later use her addition and multiplication skills to her advantage in her business. Her husband was upset by this, and Frank Kennedy felt there "was something unbecoming about a woman understanding fractions and business matters and he believed that, should a woman be so unfortunate as to have such unladylike comprehension, she should pretend not to."⁴⁸ Frank Kennedy supports the traditional education boundaries for women, but Scarlett disregards them completely, seeing nothing wrong with displaying her sharp mind. Most schools tried to counteract this, though, as the parents who footed the bill for their daughters' educations wanted an education that did not produce a dissenting daughter. Gerald O'Hara and Steven Miller were sorely disappointed in the daughters that graduated from the female academies. Both were headstrong young women who used their education for their own benefit later in life. Most schools had strict codes of discipline set forth by the board of trustees of the

⁴⁸ Anya Jabour, "'College Girls;' The Female Academy and Female Identity in the Old South," in *Lives Full of Struggle and Triumph: Southern Women, Their Institutions, and Their Communities*, ed. Bruce L. Clayton and John A. Salmond (Gainesville: The University of Florida Press, 2003), 75; Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 577.

school.⁴⁹ Their reaction to education here is rebellious. Proper women were to conceal their knowledge of these subjects. Mary and Scarlett voiced them adamantly.

Still, girls like Mary and Scarlett cloaked their uniquely different thoughts with the bonds of friendship made in the boarding schools. Their desire to participate in the social life of schools led them to defy the school rules and by extension their parents, and in turn challenged proper positions of women in Southern society.⁵⁰ It is clear that Mary and Scarlett were both intelligent women who were educated both by books and by the rules for women in society. Mary's diary reflects the fact that she always knew how to act the proper woman, so she, like Scarlett, learned to follow these rules in order to become a desirable female. However, they only followed the rules they wanted to. Unable to keep opinions to themselves, their words spewed from their mouths in ways that were improper for women, simultaneously doing what was expected by attending school, yet rebelling in reaction to the specific teachings they did not agree with. They only followed the rules that satisfied them. Both enjoyed dancing and learning to charm men, so they followed the rules there. But keeping silent on political matters and pretending to not know things they were taught did not sit well with them, so they conversed openly about it.

Second, young women were able to forge friendships and kinship networks while away at school that would have been unattainable at the rural and distant

⁴⁹ Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 133.

⁵⁰ Jabour, "College Girls," 85.

plantation homes. These young girls, whose parents were wealthy enough to send them to schools, were able to participate in the “social networks that bound the members of that political class together.”⁵¹ In other words, girls forging bonds with one another promulgated the ideal antebellum society. However, some young women who attended schools also found in their education a way to resist their assigned roles in society. These same female networks also developed what some scholars have called a female “culture of resistance” for other young girls who were unhappy with how their lives would be decided for them and the dreary monotony in which they would soon be forced to live out the rest of their days.⁵² Interestingly enough, neither Scarlett nor Mary retained many of their friendships. Mary had only two girls with whom she stayed in contact with after school, Sue Petigru and Mary Serena Chesnut Williams, but she lost touch with them after the beginning of the war. Scarlett rarely mentions friends, (with the exception of Cathleen Calvert), and it is clear from the reaction of girls in town that other girls do not take to Scarlett and her fiery personality.⁵³ The Tarelton, Calvert, and Wilkes girls smile and wave to her in person, but gossip behind her back, and when Scarlett overhears, she is infuriated, but refuses to change in order to win their acceptance. Mary too seemed to be out of touch with other women, and refused to conform to the person they wanted her to be just so they would accept her. Both women were too ahead of their

⁵¹ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 69.

⁵² Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 51.

⁵³ Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 27-8.

time, too different from potential friends, to form kinship networks with other women, and were infiltrating the world of men in order to satisfy their ambitions. They both reacted with ambivalence when it was brought to their attention their non-existent number of female friends. They didn't need these simpering, fake women, and in fact, wanted nothing to do with them.

Most girls graduated from the female academy at age sixteen. Between their years of schooling and marriage, most had little to no responsibilities. These girls savored this time between childhood and marriage as "a time of freedom, unburdened by the familial responsibilities that lay ahead after marriage."⁵⁴ Many chose to fill this gift of time with reading. Especially for young girls who had graduated from female academies who had been taught to make good use of time and felt idleness was hopelessly dull, like Mary and Scarlett, doing little or nothing weighed on their consciences.⁵⁵ For these young women, reading stimulated self-examination and discovery of who they really were and helped them develop their character in their own way.

What Mitchell writes of Scarlett's life as a belle does not specify whether or not she enjoyed reading. But, since she was educated, it is most likely that she was introduced to reading for leisure. It is known that she read novels, like most other women. Rhett makes a sarcastic remark to her, asking if she had ever come across the situation of the disinterested wife falling in love with her own husband in her

⁵⁴ Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 30.

⁵⁵ Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 106.

novel reading.⁵⁶ Since Mitchell did copious amounts of research on Southern women before she published her book, she probably did intend for Scarlett to read, but never mentioned so in her book because it was not crucial to the story line. It is certain that Mary loved to read, however. Even after she was married, Mary was afforded the leisure time to read. She was very jealous of the library of her mother-in-law, and always ascribed to have a grand collection someday. Mary's favorite books to read were novels, and she perceived them to be the most interesting works of literature.⁵⁷ Here we see both women conforming to the typical model of a Southern woman. And they didn't deviate from this because they both enjoyed reading, and were too self-centered to give up anything from which they got enjoyment.

Mary and Scarlett, like most girls, chose to read novels about young women like themselves. For young women, novels were the most attractive form of writing, and they seemed to read with their emotions as much as their eyes. Novel reading was a way for women to live out their private fantasies without disturbing the social structure of the antebellum South. As young girls closed their bedroom doors and picked up their books, they shut out the world around them and let their imaginations "play with the forbidden delights of romance and adventure."⁵⁸ This was especially true of Mary, who spent most of her days feeling useless, even as a wife. She and Scarlett yearned to live as freely as the women of their books did, and

⁵⁶ Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 778.

⁵⁷ Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 53.

⁵⁸ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 158; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 261.

they probably fashioned themselves after some of the characters they came across. For these girls, reading was a refuge, and the book was not merely an object but a place where they went to escape their everyday lives and vicariously experience the life of another girl. Narratives of female trials and triumphs allowed Mary and Scarlett to “imagine challenges beyond their own, customarily limited experience. “ Fictional characters jumped off the pages and became real people for these girls, and were often just as influential as actual friends and relatives who existed in the lives of these young women. The female writers intrigued women especially, for no one knew the plight of women better than a woman. The success of female writers turned them into heroines of their reading public, and many women both admired and envied the woman writer.⁵⁹ The classic and contemporary books that Mary and Scarlett read allowed them to use their intelligence to evaluate the culture around them, and they found the society in which they lived lacking. They wanted more from life, and pushed the envelope constantly, trying to create and enter a fictional world that leapt from the pages of their books.

Many young girls continued to read into womanhood, although their time was greatly limited and they were not afforded the luxury of reading all day. This continuation of reading persisted because it was one of the few ways in which women could express their intellectual abilities. Not being permitted to use their minds or education once married, women read constantly, if only for escape from the world to which they were bound, and for their own amusement. The reading of fiction, for most women, helped them to live out their anxieties about the rest of

⁵⁹ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 155, 154, 165.

their lives, but it also helped to quiet anxieties as well.⁶⁰ Since Mary and Scarlett had relatively little house work to do, Mary because she moved into a house already run by her mother in law, and Scarlett because she moved in with Aunt Pittypat, they were both able to continue reading after they were married. Scarlett faced other challenges that prevented her from extended periods of leisure time, but Mary, even as an old woman, formed reading circles and organized book exchanges.

Novel reading allowed Mary and Scarlett to live out fantasies through fiction. It was only after this leisure time was taken from them that the need for excitement had to be satisfied, and Mary and Scarlett began to act in the ways of the heroines on the printed page. Novel reading, although considered quite inappropriate for young women due to its adult themes of love, adultery, and sometimes murder, was another area in which Mary and Scarlett were a part of the mainstream simply because of how many young women did read novels.

Women as well as young girls prided themselves on their dress and appearance. During their years of school, parents and educators both encouraged plain dress, but to no avail. Girls looked forward to the day when they could lower their hemlines and pull back their hair, signifying their transformation from a girl to a young lady. This new form of dress was also a sign of gentility for women. An essential part of the wardrobe of antebellum women was the corset, and “lacing.” This act of pulling the corset tighter to make a woman’s waist smaller was an indispensable part of the ideal figure of a Southern woman. Corsets also emphasized

⁶⁰ Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 75; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 160.

women's breasts, and in conjunction with hoopskirts made of metal and surrounded by yards of tulle, effectively shrunk the waists of women and allowed them to achieve the perfect hourglass shape that was so desirable for antebellum women.⁶¹ Mary was surely laced up in a corset by one of her servants, and no one can forget the scene in *Gone With the Wind* when Mammy laces Scarlett before the barbeque at Twelve Oaks. She prided herself on her nineteen-inch waist, the smallest in three counties.

It was important that women did not alter their appearance too much however. It was fine to shrink their waists, but chemical alterations, such as the dying of hair and use of rouge, were reserved only for prostitutes, and therefore decent women were strictly forbidden from using such beauty tools. Scarlett certainly violated these roles, choosing to wear rouge in postwar Atlanta, creating gossip all over town. Mary was more refined, but she too would have liked to alter her appearance should the chance present itself. Neither Mary nor Scarlett was beautiful. In fact, Mitchell opens her book with the line, "Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful," but continues on to say, "but men seldom realized it when caught by her charm."⁶² Mary, too, was never considered a beauty. She was short, and had very plain features with a wide forehead and nose.⁶³ But she also was able to charm men in ways other women could not. She had a delightful sense of humor and an outgoing personality. Her conversation skills were second to none, probably as a

⁶¹ Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 31; Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 30; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 99; Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 34.

⁶² Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 25.

⁶³ Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 53.

result of her education in history and literature. And she dressed in ways that always emphasized her best features, just as Scarlett loved to wear green to emphasize her sparkling eyes.⁶⁴

Both women enjoyed fashion, and playing up their best features was fun for them. In this way they were just like any other young woman. But their desire to alter their appearance puts them at odds with societal conventions. Wanting to change one's appearance was frowned upon, something only "fallen women" like Belle Watling did. Obviously, neither Mary nor Scarlett were prostitutes, but desiring to change their appearance made it seem like they accepted the beauty standards of one, and because of this opinion of beauty, they were most certainly deviant from conventional beauty standards of the antebellum South.

For women, fashion was always a central concern, for fashion enhanced their beauty and was a physical representation of their status as elite white women. Attractive dresses, like the one worn by Scarlett O'Hara at the Twelve Oaks barbeque helped attract the attention of potential husbands. Beauty was not only connected with the gentility of a woman, but it also attributed to her own self worth. Because of this connection, women and young girls were always attempting to improve their looks and constantly compared their wardrobes to other girls they were acquainted with. Fashion was what distinguished a lady, and her observation of the fashionable dress of the time was what made her different from poorer

⁶⁴ Bell Wiley, *Confederate Women* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975), 11.

classes of women.⁶⁵ Fashion was not only dress, but also a way of life. It represented standing in the world as well as a continuation of their years as belles, when women's only concerns were fashion. Women like Mary and Scarlett kept up with the latest European fashions not simply because they enjoyed it, but because wearing an outdated dress could potentially label them as someone outside the high social circle. Even married women needed to continue to keep up in the fashion circle, for on a given day, a woman could need "a morning dress, a dinner dress, an evening dress for teas, and a ball gown."⁶⁶ Some women lived quite a distance from towns and were therefore unable to find out about any new fashion or styles from Europe. Therefore, most females developed a network of friends who updated one another on the fashion of the time. Women who lived closer to the coast were better able to attain European imports, which dominated the tastes of antebellum women's apparel.⁶⁷ Mary enjoyed being the height of fashion, and even during the war years, she insisted on having a new dress to wear to parties, as did Scarlett. Before the barbeque, Scarlett frantically searched for dresses that would impress Ashley Wilkes, yearning for one that would emphasize her eyes. Both women knew proper dress was a testament to their wealth and status and therefore thoroughly enjoyed fashion. The more lavish, the better, for Mary and Scarlett, and this view fit perfectly with society of the time. It was encouraged for women to constantly have new dresses, and since having a new dress every few months was acceptable in the

⁶⁵ Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 79, 31; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 212.

⁶⁶ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 213, 215.

⁶⁷ Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 99.

antebellum years, this excited both Mary and Scarlett, and they were eager to fit into society in terms of their clothing.

There were also certain behaviors that even young girls had to conform to in order to fit in to antebellum Southern society. As women married and took on the responsibilities of the plantation, the list of proper behaviors lengthened. But, as young girls, belles had a specific set of standards as well. The prevailing Southern ideology emphasized the ideal Southern woman as gracious, fragile, and deferential to the men upon whose protection she depended, whether this man was her father or husband. The list of ladylike attributes for young girls went on and included “cleanliness, neatness, patience, industry, kindness, cheerfulness, modesty, politeness, respect for elders, and obedience.” Men wanted their future wives to be amiable, sweet, prudent, devoted, able to control a household with a kind but firm hand, able to cultivate their minds by reading, and manage her household with neatness, order, economy, and good judgment. Ladies were also taught to be cheerful, to present themselves with a gentle nature, and to provide service to others, and behaving in a ladylike manner would most certainly earn them social approval as well as a husband. Most importantly, young women were told to control their emotions and never be anything but pleasing and smiling. Young women were trained to subdue their tempers, and avoiding anger was essential to women to prove their femininity and gentility.⁶⁸ Girls were held to these standards not only to

⁶⁸ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 109; Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 36, 38-39; Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 6.

stand out as an ideal representation of Southern society but also to impress potential future husbands.

Mary and Scarlett certainly did not conform to these proper feminine standards. Scarlett was always speaking her mind, and frequently mentioned she did not care what others thought. In speaking with his daughter, Gerald O'Hara describes Melanie as "A sweet little thing...never a word to say for herself, like a woman should be," insinuating that his daughter is not like this, and therefore not a proper woman. Mitchell writes that Scarlett "found the road to ladyhood hard," and she certainly did not fit in to the world around her. Compared to the great ladies around her, Scarlett stuck out like a sore thumb. She complained about every aspect of womanhood she did not like, whining before the barbeque that "I'm tired of acting like I don't eat more than a bird...and I'm tired of pretending I don't know anything."⁶⁹ Likewise, Mary, it seems, was always cut out for a man's world. She was overly ambitious, enjoyed public affairs greatly, and did not find the life of a lady anything more than a drag. She was bored with sitting in sewing circles and engaging in small talk. Mary much preferred gossip, but her mother in law would not hear of it, and this infuriated Mary. She was growing into an adult in "a quiet, self-satisfied world that was fundamentally at odds with her gregarious nature and inquiring, somewhat iconoclastic mind."⁷⁰ Mary and Scarlett had conflicting views about what they felt was proper behavior and what Southern society called proper.

⁶⁹ Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 51, 75; Elizabeth Young, *Disarming the Nation: Women's Writing and the American Civil War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 250.

⁷⁰ Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 49, 50.

They did not share in the view that proper Southern women were held to certain behavioral standards. Mary and Scarlett did only what they wanted, and resisted doing what society saw fit for women. They would act in whatever way they wanted, and if others looked down on these two, well then that was just their own problem. Mary and Scarlett saw nothing wrong with not acting like a proper lady, even if the rest of society did.

As much as young women enjoyed congregating with one another at boarding schools and maintained that sense of community through their years of bellehood by means of visiting, letter writing, and autograph books, antebellum Southern women were born and raised to marry a wealthy planter and command a plantation of their own. Coming of age for Southern belles such as Mary and Scarlett involved adapting all the identities of a nineteenth century Southern woman. The period of courtship for women lasted anywhere from a few months to a few years, and the time they spent as single women was not insignificant.⁷¹ Both Mary and Scarlett had relatively short courtship periods. Mary at age thirteen met James Chesnut, her future husband, and although her father actually removed her from school in Charleston, he soon realized no better man than James could be had for his daughter, and she returned to school. Mary agreed to marry James just before he left for a six-month trip to Europe, and at age seventeen she was married. Scarlett married Charles Hamilton at age sixteen. Hers too, was a short courtship period, lasting only a few weeks.

⁷¹ Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 5,12, 85.

Because both women were so charming to men, their courtship experiences were in keeping with the standards of the time. Both women were too desirable to not quickly attract a potential husband, and they both jumped at the first opportunity they had to woo a man, playing up all the proper feminine qualities while attempting to mask the ones they were unable to accept. They put on airs of proper female behavior, but it was only to become more desirable, not because they agreed with it. They successfully made themselves into proper ladies, but only to attract a husband. After, it was back to the old Mary and Scarlett, who detested the behaviors encompassed in the definition of a proper Southern woman.

Many parents actually compiled lists of potential suitors for their daughters. Gerald O'Hara and Steven Miller never had such a list, but they certainly knew who was and was not an acceptable husband for daughters of their social standing. Men were added to the list based on their background, education, religion, wealth, character, and compatibility with their daughter. It was precisely because parents constructed these lists that they allowed their daughters so much freedom in choosing their husbands. Social rituals made sure their daughters would not come into contact with poor husband choices. Fathers had reason to want to control who their daughters married, for their potential mates stood to inherit a plantation with considerable numbers of slaves. Both Mary's and Scarlett's families owned plantations and dozens of slaves as well as land on which cotton, the staple crop of the South, was grown. Mary and Scarlett chose to exercise this freedom in selecting their husbands, and knowing they would never encounter a man who would be an unacceptable marriage partner--that is, someone not of their race or class--they

both played up their charms and began collecting male admirers, thus calling attention to their intense desirability⁷² Collecting men may not have been appropriate behavior, but Mary and Scarlett did so to prove how truly desirable they were, proving to reproachful women that despite their flaws as women, they could still get whatever man they wanted.

Belles played up their charms to all potential husbands. A typical belle such as Mary and Scarlett was beautiful and pious, educated in the classics, and able to converse with men on a wide array of topics. They sang, danced, and were accomplished musicians. Mary and Scarlett both enjoyed using their femininity to exact admiration from men around them, even though, as previously mentioned, neither girl was truly pretty. The paramount duty of a Southern belle was to “throw charm,” to make evident her availability without looking desperate. But most of all, belles were captivating for both men and women; men whose hearts they captured, and women who admired their gentility. Despite Mary and Scarlett not fitting in to certain areas of society, this was a skill they both had mastered. Mary loved the compliments heaped upon her by Southern gentlemen.⁷³ Men were strongly attracted to Mary, and she enjoyed the attention given to her. Here once again Mary and Scarlett use these feminine attributes only to further their own ambitions. They may have hated being kind, patient, gentle, and many other things it took to be a

⁷² Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 18; Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 20; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 108, 207; Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 133.

⁷³Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 93; Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 15; Wiley *Confederate Women*, 30.

proper woman, but if putting on these airs meant more attention from men, then they most certainly would play up these qualities, even if when all the men were gone, they reverted back to their old ways of rejecting such behaviors.

It was only natural for a woman to develop these aspects of her personality as she knew it would afford her a better chance of marrying a kind, wealthy, well-bred man, considering they were the ones who so coveted these particular traits. These were the tools that Mary and Scarlett used to enhance both their honor and the honor of their families through a favorable marriage, although family honor was probably the last thing on both of their minds when they agreed to marry their respective husbands. Because of all the tools a belle had in her belt, she commanded a host of male admirers, was the center of attention, and “trailed in her wake a gaggle of smitten suitors, each of whom offered undying devotion and marriage.” Nowhere is this more evident than at Twelve Oaks, where several glassy eyed men flock to Scarlett in the hopes that she would promise them a dance. Many of these men were willing to propose, and a great many of them did, but women easily rejected many proposals. Some rejected them because they felt they could find a better mate, and others rejected them simply because they could and enjoyed their bellehood too much to give it up so easily.⁷⁴ Mary had multiple other suitors, but it was always James she returned to, and certainly other men would have proposed to Scarlett on that fateful day, but Scarlett, anger welling inside her from her rejection

⁷⁴ Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 62; Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 16-17; Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 10; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 64.

by Ashley, said yes to Charles Hamilton, the first man she came across. These women certainly enjoyed capturing men in their web of feminine qualities, and yet again Scarlett and Mary played up these traits to gain popularity among eligible bachelors. In the company of other women or in private, this act was dropped in favor of their choosing to ignore all feminine traits and instead displayed their true colors.

Some women unknowingly violated the rules of courtship and bellehood. Some self-consciously played on their attractiveness. These women were schemers and created disgust and revulsion that many women--both other belles and married women, gossiped about. In addition, those women who reigned as the queens of beauty for too long could lose their appeal as they fell out of favor in both loveliness and good manners.⁷⁵ Here, Scarlett is the perfect example of a schemer. She collects boys at the Twelve Oaks barbeque, insisting she would be absolutely devastated if they did not eat with her. All around her, she creates disgust from other women, especially India Wilkes. Scarlett knew what she was doing, and even though she enjoyed collecting men, other women felt smited as she stole their beaux. Mary, too had her moments. As a married woman, Colonel Manning often visited her, and he most certainly took a liking to her. Mary walked with him on the battery in Charleston, and despite cries from her husband and other women, she refused to desist, mainly because it was so much fun for her. These actions may have stirred outcries from onlookers, but Mary and Scarlett so enjoyed themselves they did not

⁷⁵ Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, 11.

care what anyone else said. They were not behaving the way a proper woman should, and they knew it, but neither cared enough to change their actions.

Once a woman chose a husband, she found herself ill prepared for managing a plantation household. Most young girls were shocked by the sudden transition from the carefree life of a sought after belle to one restricted by matronly responsibilities. Most young girls entered their marriages with the firm identification as a daughter and not a wife. The new responsibilities of household mistress bewildered them. As young girls, these wives had seldom been taught to clean house, and even their education at female academies focused on “intellectual and artistic accomplishments.” They received little to no training of how to handle their new roles of authority either. Therefore, many women felt themselves to be inadequate for their new roles. And it was out of the sheltering system of Southern society from which this feeling rose. Women felt they were always to be dependent on men and under their protection, and they never thought they would have to work in exchange for this feeling of security.⁷⁶ A lack of training in household management was standard for antebellum society however. Training in domestic work was something many mothers did not teach their daughters, either because they wanted to hide from their daughters the true tasks of wifery, or because they felt their daughters would learn by years of observing their own mothers. The adjustment that women had to make to married life, including keeping house and becoming a mother, were important aspects of coming of age for these young wives.

⁷⁶ Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 27; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 110,113; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 19, 33.

Once these steps had been completed, a woman then achieved full status as a Southern woman.⁷⁷

Neither Mary or Scarlett needed to adjust to married life, nor did they confront these problems until after the Civil War destroyed everything familiar to them. As young wives, they did not have a plantation to run themselves. Neither woman had to manage the arduous tasks required of a plantation mistress. Ellen O'Hara certainly embodied the true plantation mistress, but her daughter was never asked to assist, and since Scarlett married a city boy, the tasks of running a plantation would never plague her in her early life. This was fortunate for Scarlett, who never found domesticity anything other than a bore. Mary did marry the son of a plantation master, but since she moved in to his father's house, none of the responsibilities of running the home fell to her. Often, by the time she woke up, all chores had been completed. She was not responsible for caring for the large slave community, nor did she participate in many of the feminine duties of the household. She often complained that she was not genuinely useful, and the fact that she was not the center of attention at her in-laws' plantation, Mulberry, greatly upset her. She found life to be superfluous, especially since she felt she was trained for the role of mistress. She spent many hours alone in her room, writing in her journal, complaining that "people are not like pigs; they cannot be put up and fattened. So here I pine and fret."⁷⁸ The restless and gregarious personality of Mary did not suit her life at Mulberry, and she found married life to be quite stifling. Scarlett also was

⁷⁷ Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 5; Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 9.

⁷⁸ Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 43, 44.

disturbed by how her life had changed. She was married and widowed within months, and for her “it seemed such a terrible waste to spend all your little girlhood learning how to be attractive and how to catch men and then only use the knowledge for a year or two.”⁷⁹ Scarlett found the road to marriage hard as well, preferring to be a belle forever, and if she could not, she would certainly act like one as long as she lived.

Being bored and useless was not something either woman was used to. Especially after the death of her first husband, Scarlett felt as though her life had come to a screeching halt. In fact, both women did not realize that courtship was the highlight of their lives, and once they were married, the fun of being chased by every eligible man of the county was gone from their lives. Scarlett was now the “clump of old hens” that she had noticed at the Twelve Oaks barbeque, dressed in matron garb, with whom she was disgusted only months prior.⁸⁰ Mary too had lost that excitement from her life, and in the period before the war, her life lacked its former drama. As a woman with a flair for the dramatic, this certainly upset and depressed her. The fact that both women never moved on to this next step of womanhood may help explain why they remained rebellious. Managing a home was part of growing up, a sobering experience, and since this never fell to Mary or Scarlett, they both continued to think that they could remain a belle without criticism from their community. Failure to conform as a wife helped to proliferate the unusually different attitudes of both women.

⁷⁹ Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 180.

⁸⁰ Molly Haskell, *Frankly My Dear: Gone With the Wind Revisited* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 121.

Both women were frequently dissatisfied with their husbands as well. Scarlett found Charles to be weak and boring for the short time they spent together before he left for war, and Mary was always pressing James to ask for more in his position with the Confederate Army. Although Mary admired her husband and enjoyed his company, her remarks towards marriage were frequently negative. "What a blessed humbug domestic felicity is...But he is the master of the house. To hear is to obey...all the comfort of my life depends upon his being in a good humor." She went on to say that only in books do men fall in love with their wives, and although Mary did dearly love James, she struggled her entire life because she would never be considered his equal. "There is no slave after all like a wife," she concluded, indicating her frustration at always being second in command. She chafed at stereotypical notions of women's duties, and proclaimed "South Carolina as a rule does not think it necessary for women to have any existence outside their pantries or nurseries. If they have none, let them nurse the bare walls. But for men! the pleasures of all the world are reserved."⁸¹ She was convinced she was just as capable as a man, and as much as she forced her way out of the restraints placed on her by society, she still was angry that she would never be as good as even the worst man. These words may have been confined to her diary, but Mary's actions most certainly demonstrated these feelings. Like Scarlett, she felt trapped by marriage.

Scarlett remarked that the traditional methods for women to woo men were foolish. She declared that, "any man who was fool enough to fall for a simper, a faint,

⁸¹ Scott, *The Sothern Lady*, 57, 50; Clinton, *Tara Revisited*, 112.

and an 'Oh, how wonderful you are!' wasn't worth having."⁸² However, she also knew that men seemed to like it, and so she often carried on with doing so in order to attract men. Both women were too headstrong in comparison to the men they married, and it seems only a man like Rhett Butler could ever control a woman like Mary or Scarlett. Marriage was a burden for both women, and the fact that they failed as dutiful wives and redrew the lines for what they felt to be a proper wife indicates the dissent in which both women participated. Whereas most wives remained subordinate, Mary and Scarlett were different from them, further proving how the similarities in their lives prove the theory that Scarlett was modeled after Mary.

An ideal nineteenth century white woman was described as

A devoted mother, loving wife, and guardian of moral virtue. She was to be submissive to her husband, pious and pure, an example of virtue to her children, and a soother of her husband's cares. She was to be an angel in the house: selfless, virtuous, and good- all of which meant, of course, that she was never to get her hands dirty in the masculine public world.⁸³

But probably the most important "role" Southern wives played in the household from the description above was maintaining the subordinate position to her husband. Women who were submissive, obedient, and humble were rewarded with security, protection, and happiness from their husbands, but they needed to submit to his will fully and completely. Despite a woman's education, she was still supposed to follow the strict definitions of her social role in society. Most importantly, women were to refrain from discussing politics as it was considered both unbecoming and

⁸² Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 95.

⁸³ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 53.

unladylike for a woman to know such things. A Southern woman was a human representation of all that was good in society, and those traits were to manifest themselves in her. She was to be gracious and delicate, charming and nurturing.⁸⁴ Women had to tolerate their roles because all of society pointed to the same model woman. The message was to

Be a lady and you will be loved and respected and supported. If you defy the pattern and behave in ways considered unladylike you will be unsexed, rejected, unloved, and you will probably starve.⁸⁵

Women had to conform to this ideal, for there was no other choice for them. But it was by taking this subordinate position that women took an important step in accepting their inferior status that was assigned to Southern plantation women. A model marriage was one in which a husband and wife had distinct roles; a husband was to devote himself to his work, and a wife was to support him wholeheartedly.⁸⁶

Despite this requirement of wifely submission, both Mary and Scarlett defied their husbands frequently, refusing to accept the subordinate position, and they did so because they were often pursuing masculine goals. Scarlett rode around in her carriage frequently, much to the dismay of Frank Kennedy, her second husband. She continued to run her business, and often went behind Frank's back to collect debts owed to him. Mary disobeyed her husband frequently as well. She held lavish parties

⁸⁴ Paula A. Treckel, "'The Empire of My Heart': The Marriage of William Byrd II and Luck Parke Byrd," in *Lives Full of Struggle and Triumph: Southern Women, Their Institutions, and Their Communities*, ed. Bruce L. Clayton and John A. Salmond (Gainesville: The University of Florida Press, 2003), 13; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 59, 196; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 181.

⁸⁵ Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 20-21.

⁸⁶ Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 176, 180.

during the war, much to his dismay, and was often involved in conversations with fellow politician friends of James. He was often embarrassed by his wife for acting in a way that was not considered feminine, but there was no stopping Mary. Even after the war, Mary continued to exert control over her husband. She writes in her expense book, "taken from Mr. C's pocket \$9 in all to be returned when he asks for it." Mary did not trust James with the handling of money, and this small act served to defy his authority and emasculate him.⁸⁷

By refusing to submit to their husbands, Mary and Scarlett violated one of the most important rules of Southern society. Doing so took power from men and placed it in their hands. This single act of defiance is what makes Scarlett and Mary so radically different from other women of their time. Instead of accepting their fate as dutiful wives, Scarlett and Mary took their lives into their own hands. The control they had over their lives was most certainly rebellious, but it ended up serving them well, and they were better prepared for the collapse of one civilization and the birth of another. Refusing to accept subordination constitutes another way Scarlett was like Mary and therefore can be considered a model for her character.

The list of womanly traits continues. She was to be self-denying; if she was to suffer, it was to be in silence, which would endear her to men. She was to be submissive, yet maintain the authority necessary to oversee the plantation and the slaves while simultaneously conforming to the strict standards of womanhood. She was never to oppose her husband or show displeasure, no matter his actions.

⁸⁷ Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 140.

Husbands like Mary and Scarlett's often had an advantage over their wives in terms of age, experience, and education, and used this advantage to prove their dominance. Many women even expressed doubts that their husbands could ensure their happiness.⁸⁸ But for these women, any attempt to change their recognized roles and be anything but subordinate was not only a threat to their husbands but also a threat to society itself. Once again, Mary and Scarlett appear as women who challenged the rule.

If Mary and Scarlett were made to suffer, neither of them were women who would do so in silence. Both were vocal in their opinions that being a wife did not mean they had to embody all these womanly traits. Scarlett was not, as Rhett Butler told her, a silly little fool who believed everything she was told and she did not conceal her feelings and desires behind sweet words. Rhett also told her that she was the "only frank woman I know, the only woman who looks on the practical side of matters without beclouding the issue with mouthings about sin and morality."⁸⁹ While Rhett may have liked this about Scarlett, society dictated that behaving in such manners was against what husbands wanted from a wife. In fact, when Scarlett was attempting to conform to the ways of a proper wife, she boasted that "Some day I'm going to do and say everything I want to do and say, and if people don't like it I don't care."⁹⁰ That day came quickly, as Scarlett did and said things that were considered inappropriate for women almost from the first page, and despite doing

⁸⁸ Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 18; Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 4, 6; Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 89.

⁸⁹ Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 329.

⁹⁰ Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 191, 95.

so in order to survive, care for her family, and keep her beloved home, it was still in violation of the traditional male authority. Both women said and did whatever they wanted, showing they had control enough to override the authority of their husbands. Most women wanted to demonstrate the masculine traits of their husbands and therefore refrained from speaking and acting in ways that would emasculate them. But Scarlett and Mary did not. In fact, they rather enjoyed it, furthering their independence against the traditional rules of society.

The plantation mistress was modeled after the English gentlewoman, and her particular role was important to the identity of the South as a whole. She was a dependent, a childlike object that needed taking care of, “neither [a] master nor slave, she was dependent on both for her status.” She may have been a powerful woman, but she still served as a “deputy lieutenant” of all males, especially her husband. He controlled the finances, making his wife a virtual slave to himself. Because of this, many women found themselves trapped in a system over which they had little control and were unable to escape. Women were instructed to please their husbands, attend to their physical needs, cover any indiscretions, and give them no reason to worry.⁹¹ Scarlett and Mary were both dependent on men for their status, but they did not act in these proper ways. Often, they took control of situations where male authority usually reigned supreme, bowling over their

⁹¹ Paula A. Treckel, “‘The Empire of My Heart:’ The Marriage of William Byrd II and Luck Parke Byrd,” in *Lives Full of Struggle and Triumph: Southern Women, Their Institutions, and Their Communities*, ed. Bruce L. Clayton and John A. Salmond (Gainesville: The University of Florida Press, 2003), 29; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 63; Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden*, 29; Clinton, *Tara Revisited*, 42; Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 15.

husbands in the process. Both women ended up controlling the finances of their plantations in the end. Neither woman would in any way be considered dependent or childlike either. Both Mary and Scarlett had personal realities that were fundamentally at odds with the general disinterestedness that Southern women were supposed to display, and here again we see how both women act differently, speaking out against the standards of society.

Plantation women also frequently interacted with slaves. Most women read the words of abolitionists with disgust, and believed blacks were better off as slaves, and freedom would not mesh well with them. Young women were trained under the assumption that slavery would be the social system under which they operated. Most parents taught their daughters that the peculiar institution was responsible for their high socio-economic status, and slaves performed the labor necessary to maintain not only the household but also their position in society, and reputation in the community depended on membership in this society. It was this ideology that many women carried with them into adulthood. Most white Southern women lived in the same house or at a very close distance to virtually all of their slaves, and because of this close proximity, most women spent their days surrounded by men and women of a different, supposedly inferior race. The intimacy this created extended to create a personal circle-a real but also metaphoric family. But in this

“family,” slaves were forced to obey the commands of their mistress, and rarely received acknowledgement for their efforts and skills.⁹²

In her early years, Mary was considered an anti-slavery advocate. It was in school that Mary first came to the idea that the institution of slavery was not a benefit to both parties involved. She befriended a servant at school who was about her age, and it was from that point that Mary cited her anti slavery sentiments. However, as she grew older, Mary began to realize that the carefree, laid back life she enjoyed would not be possible without slaves. And on top of that, though Mary may have been anti-slavery, that did not mean she believed in racial equality. Both she and Scarlett respected blacks for everything they did, but would never consider themselves on equal footing with them. At one point, Mary wrote in her diary about blacks, “are they stolidly stupid? Or wiser than we are; silent and strong, biding their time?”⁹³ Here, Mary is implying that slaves were either stupid or planning an insurrection, but they certainly were not on the same level of equality as people such as her.

Mary and Scarlett may not have agreed with slavery, but they both enjoyed the conveniences the system offered. Scarlett relied on her Mammy for almost everything as a young girl. Mammy dressed her and cared for her and her sisters, and Big Sam, a field hand at Tara, saved her from almost certain rape. Mary, too,

⁹² Francis Butler Simkins and James Welch Patton, *The Women of the Confederacy* (Richmond: Garrett & Massie Incorporated, 1936), 1; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 81, 98, 112, 131, 138; Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 32.

⁹³ Spruill, et. al., *South Carolina Women*, 250; Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 30; Haskell, *Frankly My Dear*, 191; Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 48.

relied on family slaves for cooking and serving meals, as well as cleaning, washing, and dressing. Mary argued that slavery was more of a bother than a benefit, and the only persons who benefited were the blacks themselves and the Yankees who grew rich because of their labor.⁹⁴ Obviously, this one sided view was something that was most likely driven into Mary's brain from youth as an essential belief of the society in which she lived, but especially in her and Scarlett's worlds, this belief was important.

Even the kindest of mistresses could have a tendency toward violence. Some, although infrequently, resorted to the use of the whip to enforce their demands, and this potential violence lay beneath even the most tranquil surfaces of the plantation house, for it was part of the makeup of Southern society to take out frustrations on black servants.⁹⁵ Prissy's simpering whine of "Lawd Miss Scarlett, I don't know nothin' about birthin' babies" causes Scarlett to lash out, striking Prissy in the face, the first and only time Scarlett uses outright violence towards a slave. And she did so in a moment when she herself was terrified; the world around her was falling to pieces and she desperately needed help. Mary became very tight lipped in her opposition to slavery after she heard the death of her cousin, Mrs. Witherspoon, was because she was murdered by one of her own slaves. For weeks after, Mary forced her slave to drag a mattress into her room so she could have another woman in the room with her for protection. Although this was not violence, and Mary never

⁹⁴ Wiley, *Confederate Women*, 25.

⁹⁵ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 85.

recorded any violent acts towards slaves, it is clear that Mary distrusted those slaves to whom she felt closest.

Other women complained about the burdens slavery imposed upon them and the difficulty in controlling unruly slaves. However, these complaints cannot be taken as opposition to the institution. Even though a number of women saw a parallel between their situation and the position of their slaves, they knew that ending slavery would drastically change the course of their lives, and they enjoyed being waited on too much to even think about letting that happen.⁹⁶ Mary and Scarlett may have doubted its morality, but they both enjoyed the material benefits of slavery and could not imagine a world without it. Mary was unable to act on her beliefs, implying that white women like herself and Scarlett could do relatively little about the situation. Mary writes, “women were brought up not to judge their fathers or their husbands,” and although she certainly does place judgment on many men in the privacy of her journal, in this situation, her hands were tied. She could only reassure herself that women were not responsible for slavery, and left it at that.⁹⁷ Because it benefitted them, both women conformed to the traditional views on slavery in antebellum society. They treated slaves in ways considered appropriate, even if it meant the use of force. Slaves made Mary and Scarlett’s lives more comfortable, and going against the norms of society would not make their lives more enjoyable or give them more freedom to do what they wanted—in fact, it would

⁹⁶ Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore*, 2; Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 50; Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 5.

⁹⁷ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 97, 99.

have given them less. So they conformed to this aspect of Southern society because life without slaves posed a disadvantage to both Mary and Scarlett.

What many women considered to be the epitome of any woman's life was the production and rearing of children. Populating the South with young white children was one of the most important legacies a man could leave to his country. He therefore looked to his wife to fulfill her "biological destiny" as well as her duty to her husband to provide both him and his country with children.⁹⁸ Most young women did not view child rearing in this light, but nevertheless, many women produced at least one child, often more than five. Here again, Mary and Scarlett differ from what was considered average. Mary herself was childless, and Scarlett, despite having three children with three different men, was a terrible mother to them all. Women devoted a great deal of attention to becoming mothers, because having a child marked yet another stage of life. It was a rite of passage, and an event of self-fulfillment. Becoming a mother was considered necessary to achieve full status as an adult woman in the South.⁹⁹ To Scarlett though, having a child was simply a burden, and she frequently chided Wade for simply being a child and playing and wanting his mother when he was scared. Mary did consider motherhood a rite of passage, but because of her inability to have children, she always felt less than a woman. In a sense, neither Mary nor Scarlett were mothers, Mary because of her barrenness, and Scarlett because she ignored her children and was never a proper mother.

⁹⁸ Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 8.

⁹⁹ Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 217; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 65.

Almost all women described pregnancies in terms of illness, and few left the house or were seen in public once they found out they were pregnant. Most women called it “their condition,” and considering the medical technologies of the time, childbirth was very dangerous for both the baby and its mother. If it was a “condition” to Scarlett O’Hara, clearly it didn’t bother her as she went out in public daily while pregnant with her second child. However, once these women had their children, they associated children with increased responsibility and happiness.¹⁰⁰ Scarlett certainly found her children brought more responsibility, and it was something she detested. Motherhood confirmed the place of a woman in society and in generations of family; she developed a new sense of identity based on the feelings she had for her child. Mary felt a piece of her identity was missing, and she often found the presence of the children of her sister to be comforting, filling a void she found ever present in her life. And although nature gave women a strong instinct to motherhood, this instinct depended on the social relations it was embedded in as well as the character of women. Mothers grew to be a part of their children’s lives, and successfully socialized and supervised their children. However, most women served only as a figurehead instead of a direct influence, leaving their children to be raised by faithful mammies.¹⁰¹ Of these two types of women, Scarlett was certainly the latter. She was never a part of her children’s lives, and her instinct to mother was dwarfed by her instinct to survive. It was not until their children reached maturity that mothers had a direct influence on their children. Mothers were often

¹⁰⁰ Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters*, 223, 237.

¹⁰¹ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 280-281; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 39-40.

too busy with the housework to have time to monitor their children, leaving their care instead to a faithful servant, often one who had helped raise the mistress herself. Again chafing against what was considered normal, Mary and Scarlett can be viewed as inadequate women due to their lack of mothering skills and this can be seen as an indirect form of independence. Not caring for a child also provided them with more time for their personal lives, wheedling their way into spheres that society told them were forbidden to women. Being a poor example of a proper mother also shows the parallels that support the theory of Mary as a model for Scarlett.

As the dawning of the Civil War drew near, women became some of the strongest proponents for the Southern cause. They knew that the system of Southern patriarchy protected them and afforded them with a comfortable and safe life. Even if, like Scarlett, they grew tired of war talk, they would always support their beloved South. The belief that the South was unconquerable because of the superior fighting qualities of its armies was more pronounced in women than in men, and both Mary and Scarlett frequently commented on how the Yankees could be licked by the Confederate soldiers. Most women felt that secession was simply a passing concern, yet they insisted their men enlist because it was their patriotic duty not only to society but to the South as well. In the months after Fort Sumter fell, the roles for women changed as they encouraged civic involvement and outspoken support for the cause. Some of the wiser women like Mary and Scarlett realized the war would not be over in a few months, realized their lives would be changed forever, looking with apprehension upon the tasks that would soon

confront the South.¹⁰² What they did not realize was that this would be an opportunity for them. Both women had already violated many of the norms for women, speaking out about many aspects of proper feminine behavior, and war afforded them the ability to touch the reality they of which they had only dreamed. Finally they were able to break out of their prescribed roles without being seen as selfish or self-promoting, and be more than objects, but masters of their own fates.

¹⁰² Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 36; Simkins and Patton, *Women of the Confederacy*, 5, 7.

CHAPTER 3

“HERE IN THE PRETTY WORLD, GALLANTRY TOOK ITS LAST BOW. HERE WAS THE
LAST EVER TO BE SEEN OF KNIGHTS AND THEIR LADIES FAIR, OF MASTER AND
OF SLAVE...”

It was only during the war when the acceptable roles for women changed, and the ground the pedestal of white Southern womanhood stood upon began to shake. It became increasingly acceptable for Mary and Scarlett to act in the ways they did. Increased responsibilities were thrust upon unsuspecting women, and although some at first attempted to handle this with delicate feminine hands, they soon realized that it would be impossible to do so. The Civil War mobilized women in a variety of ways, from simple civilian support, to boosting morale of their soldier relatives, nursing, textile production, government work, and management of the house, its finances, and slaves.¹⁰³ The image of the Southern woman was changing as armies marched through the South, and try it may, the South was never fully able to recover the image of the Southern belle. Indeed, the Civil War can be considered for women an event that allowed them to break free from the confines Southern society and, for Mary and Scarlett, allowed for their personalities and actions to become more acceptable as women began to play a greater role in their lives, the lives of others, and their country.

¹⁰³ Drew Gilpin Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War,” in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992), 172.

One way Mary and Scarlett, as well as other women, were asked to take on more responsibilities was in assisting Confederate armies. This assistance from women, dubbed “volunteerism,” encompassed a wide range of the experiences from 1861-1865.¹⁰⁴ One of the most popular and widely held experiences of this volunteerism was participation in relief associations, and especially volunteering as nurses to help Confederate armies. The main way women assisted these regiments was their active participation as nurses, caring for sick or wounded soldiers. At first, many men protested women nurses, claiming women had no business caring for strange men, and especially not the crude, lower class men they encountered in hospitals. They feared women would be exposing themselves to dangerous and unpleasant situations, and the thought of destroying the purity of women angered many men.¹⁰⁵ At the beginning of the war, women went to work dressing wounds, arranging pillows for hospital patients, making slings, visiting patients, reading to them, writing their letters, and praying both with and for them. This work was considered too delicate for men and therefore appropriate for women.¹⁰⁶ However, as the war dragged on and casualties mounted, relying on women to serve as nurses became the only feasible option for the Confederate army.

¹⁰⁴ Jean E. Freidman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 106.

¹⁰⁵ Bell Irvin Wiley, *Confederate Women* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 143; Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 44.

¹⁰⁶ Francis Butler Simkins and James Welch Patton, *The Women of the Confederacy* (Richmond: Garrett & Massie Incorporated, 1936), 87.

Mary and Scarlett both served as nurses for brief periods during the war, and neither woman enjoyed doing so, but with the mounting numbers of sick and wounded soldiers, they were needed badly. Scarlett found nothing romantic about nursing, and to her it meant “groans, delirium, death and smells. The hospitals were filled with bewhiskered, verminous men who smelled terribly and bore on their bodies wounds hideous enough to turn a Christian’s stomach.”¹⁰⁷ In the movie version of *Gone With the Wind*, Scarlett runs from the hospital during an amputation scene because she can no longer stand death all around her. Mary also served as a nurse in the Wayside Hospital in Richmond, as well as in Columbia, but she as well made a poor caregiver. Like Scarlett, she was too squeamish to deal with nursing the wounded, and was too invested in her own vulnerability. Ironically, they both argue that being around these men was not the “ladylike” thing to do, even though their entire lives up to this point had been filled with unladylike things.¹⁰⁸ Not enjoying nursing further proves that both these women wanted to be treated like ladies, even though they rarely acted the part.

By becoming nurses, experiencing the death and devastation, witnessing and even assisting in amputations without the use of anesthesia (which was always a test of women’s dedication and composure), these women made people feel they were displaying disturbing masculine traits. They regarded nursing as deviant, and the behaviors required of female nurses were inconsistent with the prevailing

¹⁰⁷ Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind* (New York: MacMillan, 1936), 165.

¹⁰⁸ Marjorie Julian Spruill, Valinda W. Littlefield, and Joan Marie Johnson, ed., *South Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, vol.1 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009) 240; Molly Haskell, *Frankly My Dear: Gone With the Wind Revisited* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 219.

gender and class expectations of the antebellum times.¹⁰⁹ Women were becoming more independent, and hence, more “male,” at a time when Confederate men were realizing that they depended upon these women to keep them alive. The notions of proper womanhood were beginning to change. Fiercely independent, headstrong women like Mary and Scarlett were becoming more numerous, and therefore more acceptable. Ladies aid and volunteerism challenged the most traditional assumptions about female delicacy as well as challenging their complete subordination to men and their decision-making. Women were becoming more independent, and felt that in actively supporting the war, it was their decision alone how and where that support should be directed.¹¹⁰ The war created an outlet for female expression, a chance for Mary and Scarlett to break free of the chains that bound them to antebellum society. They had been acting in these deviant ways before, but now, people would not look upon them with the contempt that they had in the previous years. They were able to a greater degree to make decisions, control their own lives, and participate in ways that were formerly relegated to men only. Women did break free of their subordinate positions and participated in massive organizations, but the purpose of these organizations was not for the improvement

¹⁰⁹ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 106; Drew Gilpin Faust, *Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War*, in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992), 184, 186.

¹¹⁰ LeeAnn Whites, “The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender,” in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992), 17; Nina Silber, *Gender and Sectional Conflict* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 44.

of their position, but rather to provide mothering and womanly assistance to men, many of whom they nursed because they saw in the common soldier a representation of their own loved ones serving in battle. Nursing for them was an extension of caring for their own sons and husbands, and they nursed the wounded to alleviate the concerns of other women and in the hope that a woman would be there to do the same to their cherished loved ones.¹¹¹

Mary's and Scarlett's experiences as nurses both reflect common experiences while also showing unique aspects of their characters. They both were active participants in nursing because of the intense demand for women nurses. Neither woman realized nursing afforded them greater independence because they both had already entered realms where women were not permitted. Mary and Scarlett only grudgingly took up nursing, and although they did conform, neither of them enjoyed it. Unlike other women, they did not gain greater independence from nursing because they had already penetrated the barrier into masculine society. Nursing may have afforded other women more freedom, but Mary and Scarlett had already achieved this level of independence. But now it was more appropriate, and Mary and Scarlett's actions came to be more accepted. The similarities of both women's nursing experiences provides further evidence to support the theory that Mary's life was used as a model for Scarlett.

¹¹¹ Lee Ann Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1995), 12-13, 93.

There were other ways in which women assisted soldiers, both directly and indirectly. As more and more male family members left for war, women were willing to partake in war work and expressed willingness to sacrifice for the cause.¹¹² To express their commitment, women directed their energies sewing flags, uniforms, and underwear, writing patriotic songs, submitting designs for the national flag to the Confederate congress, and raising money through relief organizations or other performances. If the South were to survive, women had to become patriotic. They had to assume the same political interests as men and repress certain womanly feelings for the good of the cause. It was through their contributions to the cause that women could enter the heart of the struggle and begin to define themselves as independent Southern Women. Mary Chesnut ripped up her own curtains to make shirts for soldiers, and often brought fresh fruit to recovering soldiers daily.¹¹³ Their former private domestic tasks were thrust into the public sphere, a disturbing fact for many women who cherished their former private lives, but it was a necessary step in sustaining the Confederacy. Ladies' aid work ultimately compelled women to challenge the most traditional assumptions about femininity, especially that women maintain unquestioning support for male decisions. In supporting the war, they felt they should have input on how their support was to be directed. In this process, women challenged male leaders, both in government and on the battlefield, in the public roles they held.

¹¹² Victoria E. Ott, *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age during the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 46.

¹¹³ Elisabeth Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut: A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 115.

Mary and Scarlett both participated in this aid work. Since Mary was such a poor nurse, much of her efforts to aid the Confederate cause were through this material assistance. After what Mary called “fainting fits” in Richmond, she “deemed it wise to do my hospital work from the outside.” She raised supplies, knitted, made shirts for soldiers and sandbags for coastal defense, as well as collected supplies and food from local families to donate.¹¹⁴ Scarlett was a member of multiple committees. As a member of Mrs. Merriweather and Mrs. Meade’s committees, she met four mornings a week to hand out clothes and food to men in the hospital.¹¹⁵ In the movie version, Scarlett and Melanie prayed with soldiers as well as helped write letters to loved ones when soldiers were beyond saving.¹¹⁶ Since both Mary and Scarlett had already challenged the traditional assumptions of female femininity, aid work merely consisted of them putting to work their sewing and knitting work for the soldiers. Unlike other women, Mary and Scarlett had already made their presence known in the public sphere. Both women had already challenged male authority and the traditional female notions. During the war, more women challenged these traditional notions, and thus Mary and Scarlett did not seem so different. Participating in aid societies *furthered* their independence, it did not bring

¹¹⁴ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 106, Edward T. James, *Notable American Women 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1971), 1: 329; Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 112.

¹¹⁵ Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 164-5.

¹¹⁶ Drew Gilpin Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War,” in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992), 175; Faust, *Mothers of Invention* 17; LeeAnn Whites, “The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender,” in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992), 15; Silber, *Gender and Sectional Conflict*, 44.

it. Most women were taking the first steps toward independence; Mary and Scarlett had already taken those steps years prior. This shows their similarities to one another as well as their differences from the majority of Southern women, providing further evidence that Scarlett was modeled after Mary.

A common way women raised money for Confederate troops was the bazaar, a social gathering in which the remaining men of the town and all the women gathered to sell jewelry and other items, and give their profits to their local battalion. Without balls or parties, the bazaar was a form of entertainment for the women, simultaneously raising badly needed funds and filling the long, weary hours of the day.¹¹⁷ Often, these events involved much frivolity and dancing, but once the toll of the war began to be felt, these events happened less and less often. They were most common in the years 1861 through early 1863, and as women had less and less to give and all men of the town were off fighting, they became less common. The traditional female pastime of coming out parties was given a new, patriotic face in the bazaars.¹¹⁸ These events were usually held at a school or courthouse or another public building. The booths were “handsomely decorated with flags, bunting, flowers, and evergreens. Articles to be sold or raffled were secured by the ransacking of old chests, the sacrifice of family valuables, and by the ingenuity of the women in devising vendible items of food and wearing apparel.”¹¹⁹ There was usually a speaker at these events, often a soldier home on furlough or a local politician, and “in front of the speaker’s desk was placed a huge booth garlanded

¹¹⁷ Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 51.

¹¹⁸ Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 71.

¹¹⁹ Simkins and Patton, *Women of the Confederacy*, 201.

with evergreens and Spanish Moss, and surmounted by a banner emblazoned in letters of gold with 'A Tribute to Our Sick and Wounded Soldiers.' On either side of this structure were semicircles of other booths, each marked with the shield of one of the Confederate states and managed by representatives of these respective commonwealths."¹²⁰ While most women participated in these events because they harkened back to the days of old, some others put on a happy face and threw their support to the Confederate cause because they were actually masking the fact that their hearts were bleeding, fearing the loss of their loved ones. At the moment of their loved ones departures', they were forced to face the fact that their lives may be sacrificed for the cause, and rather than being empowered, men may end up disabled or dead.¹²¹

For women like Mary and Scarlett, the bazaar was the most enjoyable form of showing support for the cause because it harkened back to years of barbeques, town gatherings, and extravagance that was lost in wartime. One of the most famous scenes in *Gone With the Wind* is the bazaar, where Scarlett, recently widowed, watches dancers longingly. Both she and Melanie gave their wedding rings to the cause, to be melted down into gold and sold. Then, scandalously, Dr. Meade announces bidding on women for dances. Like so many other things, this was only considered appropriate because it was to benefit the soldiers. The scene of the bazaar in the movie is such that bunting and flags adorn all the booths, and the speaker's podium is covered with greenery and banners. Mary, too, attended

¹²⁰ Simkins and Patton, *Women of the Confederacy* 201.

¹²¹ Ibid., 205; Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 12.

bazaars, and she enjoyed them thoroughly because of the social interactions they provided her with. She met many new friends here, often the wives of other politicians, such as Varina Davis. Mary enjoyed dancing as well, both she and Scarlett did not often consider they were being held for the benefit of the sick and dying, but instead regarded them as a social gathering in a time where parties and balls were becoming less frequent. Both Scarlett and Mary did not see the bazaar as a way to assist soldiers but as a social outing. Mary was able to participate, but Scarlett sat sidelined. Neither women felt supporting the war was the main purpose of attending the bazaar, and they both attended them because they were essentially a social gathering with dancing and merriment.

Mary and Scarlett saw no problem in participating in these social functions and indulging in selfish impulses as long as they could claim their attendance was helping contribute to the Confederate cause. A common attendee of these bazaars was the “ladybird,” a wealthy, frivolous, fashionable creature who thought only of the excitement war brought, and she was considered a disgrace to the community of Confederate women. Her social life consisted of attending lavish parties, including “starvation parties” in which no refreshments were served, calling on friends and devoting little time to nursing either because she felt it below her or because she chose to spend her time doing other things, namely spending time in large cities where more men were.¹²² Scarlett would certainly have been the ladybird had she not been dressed in mourning clothes, but even still, she stole the show by scandalously accepting Rhett’s offer to dance. Mary, too, flaunted herself at these

¹²² Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, 243, 248-9.

events, and even remarked of herself in her diary, "I went like a ray of warmth and sunshine. Pretty good for a woman of my years," and that she could "make anybody love me if I chose. I would get tired of it."¹²³ Both women used these events to flaunt their intense sexuality and desirability, just as they had when they were belles. Other women of the bazaar remained the proper lady, but Mary and Scarlett, so desperate they were for a social outing, went overboard in their excitement. Even though roles for women were expanding, acting in such ways was still considered inappropriate. Here again, Mary and Scarlett both violate the rules of a proper Southern woman, and even though wartime dictated different standards, acting like a ladybird was not appropriate, nor was dancing with another man and publicly acknowledging beauty and ability to win the hearts of men. The mirroring patterns of dissent shown through Mary and Scarlett acting in such ways furthers the argument that Mary's life was so similar to Scarlett's that the former could be considered a model for the latter.

Most Confederate women did all they could to support their men at war as well as the cause. The more the domestic labors of women were called forth, the more the war transformed from a struggle of men defending their country and way of life to an opportunity for women like Mary and Scarlett to lay claim to a "more reciprocal basis for gender relations." The demands of war brought the previously privatized domestic labor women performed into the public, opening up the

¹²³ Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 19, 27.

possibility of shifting relationships with men to a more equitable position.¹²⁴ The public expressions of women represented discontent and dissatisfaction with the confines of the female sphere. Mary lamented in her diary, "To men-glory, honor, praise, and power-if they are patriots. To women-daughters of Eve-punishment comes still in some shape, do what they will."¹²⁵ Mary clearly is frustrated with the limited role she was allowed to play in the war, and was upset that men were the ones who received recognition because they were the only ones allowed to fight, and therefore women did not even have the opportunity to play a role where they were acknowledged. Scarlett too has the desires of taking matters into her own hands, expressing shock and anger when she learns that General Johnston had let the Yankees make it all the way to Atlanta. Scarlett felt if she were in charge, of course the Yankees would never have made it into Georgia, much less threaten her precious Atlanta.

Confederate women held the conviction that they hated the Yankees, and were frustrated that they could not fight, and therefore encouraged their men to do so. They saw it as their responsibility to serve their nation, but bemoaned the limitations their sex placed upon them. They were presented with fewer opportunities to imagine themselves as part of the national experience, and found it difficult to think about their patriotism as anything other than helping to sustain the cause, not amplify it. The separation of men and women meant the two lived very different wartime lives, and women struggled to make the Confederacy a common

¹²⁴ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 54.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

cause and find a place for themselves in a world that seemed increasingly masculine, pushing women to the fringes of society.¹²⁶ They were enthusiastic about the serious duties that action involved, and continuously held an aggressive state of mind by believing that the North was in conspiracy against the happiness and social welfare of the South. They always imagined the South to be unconquerable due to its superior morale, and of course, the high caliber of men in their armies. They hated Northern women almost as much as they hated the Northern armies, for they felt that women were perpetuating the wrongs of the war, and that Northern women supported the war and invasion of the South only so that their soldiers could send home the lovely dresses, jewelry, and other valuables stolen from their own homes.¹²⁷

Some women, including Mary and Scarlett, even held the conviction that they could do a better job executing men's duties than they were doing themselves. Still others berated men and placed the blame on those in power for their problems, speaking on subjects considered by many to be too indelicate for women, especially in front of mixed audiences. Women thus were beginning to lose their femininity. They were adopting military lifestyles and becoming interested in both the weapons and methods of war. They began to express political opinions and participate in politics, threatening southern patriarchy and leaving women vulnerable to feminism and other subversive doctrines. Women held strong views on the military and were readily willing to express these views to friends and family. As the war began to

¹²⁶ Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 47; Silber, *Gender and Sectional Conflict*, 19; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 10.

¹²⁷ Simkins and Patton, *Women of the Confederacy*, 10, 12, 13, 41, 42.

affect women personally, they did not hesitate to criticize politicians and even share their own opinions on how to conduct a wartime nation. And when the Confederate officers turned to women to help provide the needs war brought with it, women also received leeway to define themselves as individual defenders of the Confederacy rather than dependents of Southern men.

Men were not there to protect women like they previously were, and women had to play the supportive female role, caring for their homes, enduring enemy attacks and hardships, all while doing work previously considered for men only. The war affected women in fundamentally different ways than men, and from the outset, women like Mary and Scarlett saw the war differently, in terms of their own economic and social position and that their place in the social hierarchy was at issue. Men realized they could not sustain prescribed gender roles without the assistance of women, and while women agreed to support the cause to defend their position as dependents, it soon became clear the civilization they knew was becoming extinct, being replaced with a new life in which women played a more prominent role. Women realized men could exhibit poor judgment, even cowardice at times, and as women took over the reins for men, many Southern males felt emasculated by their women. In a way, Southern women rebelled not only against the Union but against traditionally prescribed femininity, becoming markedly less

ladylike in taking on roles of men and participating in arenas previously considered unacceptable for women.¹²⁸

For years Mary and Scarlett had been criticizing men, claiming that they could do a much better job at just about everything. Scarlett proved she could run a business better than both Ashley Wilkes and her second husband Frank Kennedy, and after both men failed in their first attempts, Scarlett took the reins from them, demonstrating to both men their failures and how she had to compensate for their inadequacies. Mary as well frequently criticized men, especially men in command of the military. Since she had an inside and personal point of view because of the position of her husband in the Confederate government, she “often exploded with impatience and disgust at the incompetence, stupidity, and inertia she witnessed at high levels.” She went on to proclaim, “If I were a man, I would not sit here and doze and drink and drivel-and forget the fight going on in Virginia.”¹²⁹ She chided not only men in command, but also men who idled their time and did not fully commit themselves to the cause. Throughout her diary, she frequently continues to berate men and express her intense desire to be a man: “If I had been a man in this great revolution-I should have either been killed at once or made a name and done some good for my country,” and “Oh, that I was a man,” are just two examples of her

¹²⁸ Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 135; Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 69, 72; Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 5, 53; Campbell and Rice, *A Woman's War*, 51; LeeAnn Whites, “The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender,” in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992), 21; Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 263.

¹²⁹ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, xxxix, 65.

intense desire to participate more in the war effort.¹³⁰ Both Mary and Scarlett, like other women of the time, were entering the masculine world. But Mary and Scarlett took this idea much farther than other women. Whereas other women may have discussed these things in private, Mary and Scarlett both went public with their opinions. They both displayed their independence strongly, and actually insulted the men fighting for the Confederacy, something other women would never dream of doing. Their opinions were much stronger than those of other women, and in this way, they deviated from what was considered standard for women of the time. Although standards were changing and women had more leeway in which to define themselves, Mary and Scarlett, when given an inch, took a mile, overriding traditional authority figures and giving their opinions on what they would do and why it would be a much better idea than what their male leaders had decided. They took this newfound ability to challenge authority a step too far, and it most certainly is considered deviant from the traditional female standards. Refusing to conform to the limited increases in female participation in society and expanding their own spheres too much were what set them apart from other women, and thus prove that their similarities are near enough for Mary to be seen as an excellent model for Scarlett.

The intense displays of patriotism began to wane as the war that was supposed to last only weeks dragged on into months and years. There did exist some women who, in their minds, separated “the cause” from “the war.” And it was by separating these two entities that women could express anguish at the deaths of

¹³⁰ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 217, 224.

their loved ones without compromising their loyalty to the Confederacy. In this way, their expressions of loss became a reaction against the war, but not a reaction against the Confederacy. But a few women were able to make this distinction, placing all blame on the war the Confederacy had brought on, thus coupling the two.¹³¹ Both Mary and Scarlett blamed male leaders for the troubles the South faced, unable to separate the cause from the war. Mary pined to be a male, because it would mean she would be in command. Scarlett, too, possessed so many masculine qualities it was hard for her to accept the fact that she could not control the war and the results of war on people like her. She felt that if she was in charge, her world would not be collapsing around her, and she would be living a carefree life back at Tara.

By the end of the war, both Mary and Scarlett had left their girlhoods behind them, and had grown into women. Nowhere is this more definitively evident than when Scarlett returns to Tara and vows, "As God as my witness, I'm never going to be hungry again." She and Mary are transformed by the war, and go from being explosive young girls to intensely determined women under the wartime conditions that left this transition open to interpretation.¹³² Like most other young women who were coming of age as the first shots were fired, the world they knew was gone forever. During the war, both women experienced a loss of innocence, feelings of insecurity and abandonment, terror of ending up alone, and also heard the calling to a wider horizon. War released Mary and Scarlett from the conforming rules and

¹³¹ Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 118.

¹³² Catherine Clinton, ed, *Half Sisters of History: Southern Women and the American Past* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 157, 169.

petty standards of their former lives.¹³³ And since both women refused to be confined to these rules, the war not only allowed them to continue in their outspoken ways, but also allowed their defiance to be more acceptable, but not completely so. What both Mary and Scarlett did not realize was that these old lives they were wishing for would never have suited them. War was a blessing in disguise, for it allowed both women to act and speak their minds without worrying about what other people said, and without worrying about breaking with the tradition of Southern society and the proper place of women. In war, there was no proper place.

The same women who had smuggled pistols, medicines and other scarce items hidden in their dresses through enemy lines became angry at the loss of life they found wasteful. Even the more ardent women patriots wavered in their support as they were forced to send the very young and very old men of their families off to a most certain death.¹³⁴ It often seemed to them that their sons, husbands, and brothers were dying needlessly, and the anxiety for news and the dread upon receiving bad news led many women to put limits on how far they would be willing to go to support the cause. Mary wrote:

When I remember all-the true hearted-the light hearted-the gay and gallant boys-who have come laughing singing-dancing in my way-in the three years past-I have looked into their brave young eyes-And helped them-as I could every way-And then seen them no more forever-they lie stark-and cold-dead

¹³³ Haskell, *Frankly My Dear*, 92, 118.

¹³⁴ Wiley, *Confederate Women*, 143; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 13.

upon the battle field mouldering (sic) away in hospitals or prisons...my heart might break too.¹³⁵

Although she did not have direct family that perished in the war, losing her friends and neighbors was just too much to bear. Scarlett's heart broke too when she heard of the death of the Trelton twins, Mr. Wilkes, and almost all other boys and men in Jonesboro. She felt, as did other women, that the South was headed for a complete moral collapse due to the lack of strong, brave men.¹³⁶ Little did either woman know that they did not need men; they could live and thrive by themselves, so strong was their will to survive, not caring what others thought. The loss that both Mary and Scarlett experienced was a common occurrence for practically every Southern woman, and their reactions were perfectly in keeping with those of others. Without knowing it, Mary and Scarlett conformed to the proper standards of mourning the Confederate dead. They looked to the past wistfully, remembering better times when these men were still alive, and mourned the losses in a way a proper woman should.

In antebellum times, the watchword of women was submissiveness. During wartime, that word became sacrifice. Girls and women exchanged frivolity for a life of work and material hardship in the name of Southern Independence.¹³⁷ Women's roles expanded not only to sustain Confederate armies but also keep alive the economic life of a war ravaged South, as new patriotic requirements dictated in addition to their traditional roles. Overnight, women were expected to tighten their

¹³⁵ Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 120.

¹³⁶ Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 218.

¹³⁷ Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 135.

budgets and give up all sorts of items they once considered necessary, from food to medicine. Taught to believe in their own weaknesses and sheltered from ever performing some of the tasks now required of them, women felt crippled by how unprepared they were for these new lives. After a brief adjustment period, women began to display an intelligent resourcefulness and knew the importance of succeeding in their efforts of penny pinching.¹³⁸

This theme of sacrifice is evident in the lives of both Mary and Scarlett. Certainly giving up the luxuries they were used to was something that Scarlett and Mary had to adjust to. Like all other elite white women, they were used to being served a meal three times a day, having money available for them to buy the best of fabrics and products, and being given whatever they wanted. The war changed that. Despite the fact that Mary and Scarlett rebelled against authority, they certainly did not protest lavish things or the attention they received in years past, and they too were unprepared for living a life of scarcity and sacrifice.

Armed with only the most basic of training, women were thrust into an arena with which they were not at all familiar. They found themselves in a variety of new arrangements as they simultaneously struggled with the loss of their men. Trying to uphold the image of paternal provider with little money, high inflation of food costs, and controlling slaves were some things young girls never learned in school. They struggled to define their new wartime place in a world where food, clothing, and

¹³⁸ Simkins and Patton, *Women of the Confederacy*, vii; Clinton, *Tara Revisited*, 149; Simkins and Patton, *Women of the Confederacy*, 138; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 78; Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 6; Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 107.

possessions no longer distinguished one woman from another. Both Mary and Scarlett struggled a great deal with this, as possessions were the only thing they had to distinguish themselves. Their actions in previous years set them apart from other women, and now that the only thing they had left was their reputations, the fact that they were tarnished once again made them both stand out as different. Although Mary and Scarlett attempted to preserve remaining vestiges of domestic life, they were no longer able to hole themselves up in their rooms and read all day. They rose from their beds and moved to the center of the household, despite frequently becoming overwhelmed with daunting responsibilities placed upon their shoulders. They worked tirelessly to acquire the skills needed to run their homes, and these tasks increased daily with the departure of slaves, but still clung to whatever remained of their old life for as long as they could.¹³⁹ Finally Mary and Scarlett took control of a household, and doing so was a sobering experience that forced them to grow up quickly. A tension arose between Southern gentility and patriotic sacrifice, with sacrifice almost always winning out. Because sacrifice always entailed hard labor from the hands of women, many females in the Confederacy were apt to declare, "I was too delicately raised for such hard work."¹⁴⁰

Initially, women like Mary and Scarlett were willing to take on these increased responsibilities to preserve their own class and racial privileges, believing that when the war ended they would return to their prewar roles. They met the calling, but it was out of necessity instead of preference. But the passing of time,

¹³⁹ Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 55, 58, 62, 64, 66, 70; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 33.

¹⁴⁰ Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 72, 75.

losses of key battles, and retreating soldiers signaled to women that this dream would never come to fruition, and their positions would be forever altered.¹⁴¹ Women took over plantation management in the most demanding of circumstances, often in situations where domestic help was no longer guaranteed. Any assistance women may have come from slaves, who could either leave in the middle of the night, or be carried off by Northern armies. This stress often brought out “wicked, malignant feelings” that many women “did not believe could dwell in a woman’s heart.”¹⁴² And as women realized that there would be no going back to their old way of life, they gained a feeling of self-reliance as they learned how to perform essential tasks such as baking, quilting, cooking, and harvesting. This new usefulness contrasted with their idleness, and many women felt a sense of self-fulfillment in their new positions.¹⁴³

It is quite obvious that these “wicked” feelings already were burning in the hearts of both Mary and Scarlett, but they were now stirred by anger at being forced to relinquish forever their former tranquil, privileged lives. Mary and Scarlett were upset because they had lost the chance to prolong their bellehood even more than they already had. Now, their life was full of work, chores, and management, and they did not like that one bit, and knowing this life would never fade to the background was what angered them most. Other Southern women were also upset by this, but

¹⁴¹ Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 74; Silber, *Gender and Sectional Conflict*, xiii; Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, 4.

¹⁴² Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 77; Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters*, 266; Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 140.

¹⁴³ Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters*, 267.

they also did not have quite the leisurely lives that Scarlett and Mary had. Thus, the acceptance of this new life was especially difficult for both Mary and Scarlett, once again putting them at odds with other Southern women. Although this was a mild form of rebellion, it was still present, and once again it can be seen that not conforming and accepting their new roles was another way their lives were similar, and these similarities suggest that Mary was Mitchell's model for Scarlett.

Some of these new roles women took on were previously considered inappropriate for white women, but were permitted because they were cloaked under the guise of patriotism. Traditional roles remained, but new roles were added to the old, and women became accountants, managers, and even overseers- tasks that went well beyond the accepted boundaries of women's work. And women, after years of being encouraged to embody gentility and femininity, felt these new roles were an assault on their honor and status. The demands of war undermined the ideological commitment to appropriate female roles. The departure from custom spawned a new environment in which women could redefine themselves by accepting new responsibilities for basic economic survival, changed configurations and emotional attachments, and thus altered the relationship of the peculiar institution of slavery. The reality of war intruded on women's lives and the stylized narrative that had been carefully woven about them. Assumptions about women

were challenged as masters left for military service and failed to provide for their families. As a result, many women felt abandoned and betrayed.¹⁴⁴

Scarlett sat at the desk of her mother and carefully calculated the money that would be needed for taxes on Tara. She also became an overseer of Tara and helped picking cotton, planting, and cooking meals. Mary also acutely felt the impact of the new roles she had to take on. The dwindling number of slaves left at Mulberry meant that Mary had to take on more household tasks. She set to work gardening, and since she found it too cumbersome to do in a dress, she donned her husbands' pants for the job. She needed money badly, and sold many of her family possessions, and began to sell dairy products to neighbors. These were responsibilities both women took on in the name of economic survival, but many women did not go as far as Mary or Scarlett. Propositioning Rhett Butler by offering to become a prostitute was about as far as any woman would ever go, but Scarlett was so desperate it was all she could do. For all women, the traditional narrative had been changed. Mary and Scarlett took this change to the next level, doing very unladylike things, even at a time when the definition of ladylike had broadened. Although previous assumptions about the roles of women were overturned, they never went to far as to say it would be acceptable for a woman to wear pants or sell her body for tax money. Once again we see Scarlett and Mary deviating from what normal women did, and are provided another example as to how their similarities can exemplify Mary as a model for Scarlett.

¹⁴⁴ Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 181, 183; Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 6.

Alone and afraid, women redrew the lines of womanhood as they assumed responsibility for the household, family reputation, honor, and patriotism at home. For women like Mary and Scarlett, who had never had to do a thing for themselves all their lives, this was difficult. Mitchell narrates about Scarlett that “there had always been someone to do things for her, to look after her, shelter and protect and spoil her. It was incredible that she could be in such a fix.”¹⁴⁵ Women gained control over their own labor as well as other aspects of running a household that had been previously delegated to men. The significance of domestic labor was also amplified, leading to a more independent position for women who previously felt they needed to be dependent on their men in order to survive.¹⁴⁶ The empowerment attached to their new roles reversed the position of men and women in wartime, and most certainly changed their relationship in the years following surrender.¹⁴⁷ Because it meant more autonomy for them, Mary and Scarlett conformed to these positions. If they could not go back to the days of old, at least they could hold more responsibility for their new lives. Becoming more independent was easy for Mary and Scarlett, who both demonstrated years before the war that independence was their strong suit. They were glad that they did not have to rely on men anymore, and especially since the men in Scarlett and Mary’s lives up until the end of the Civil War were both relatively weak, it meant they did not need to give up their power just because their husbands returned from the war. They defined empowerment differently than other women, and their definition meant that they did not have to relinquish *any* of

¹⁴⁵ Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 350.

¹⁴⁶ Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 38, 56, 71; Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 126.

¹⁴⁷ Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 13.

the power they held in war years. Whereas other women allowed their returning husbands to return to some of their old responsibilities, Mary and Scarlett both had a tight grip on what they controlled, and no man could pry their fingers from the control they held tightly. Once again, Mary and Scarlett conform in that they took a more independent position and re-drew the lines of proper Southern womanhood, but their lines were much longer, their independence much more encompassing. It was because of their variations of definitions that both women were rebelling in their new roles. Differing this much from what other women did and what was considered acceptable put them at odds with society once again. However, these differences serve to highlight how similar they are to one another, furthering the argument that the life of Scarlett was based on the life of Mary in the war years as well.

Federal blockades of Southern ports made products that were plentiful in normal times incredibly scarce, and those that were available were so expensive it was impossible to purchase them even when they were available, furthering the hardships of women. Women were outraged at being asked to pay two dollars for a pound of butter, twenty dollars for a pound of tea, and fifteen dollars for a barrel of corn, and denounced merchants who demanded these prices as speculators. Mitchell narrates, "Even the cheapest cotton goods had skyrocketed in price and ladies were regretfully making their old dresses do another season . . . there were webs of homespun to be found in nearly every parlor." Items women felt they could

not live without in early 1861 became a ridiculous luxury by 1865.¹⁴⁸ Even Scarlett, the belle of the South, did not care about her shabby dress and patched shoes by the end of the war.¹⁴⁹ Women also found new uses for old things, and came up with clever ways to make do without. Mary found a substitute for lighting and heating, writing “Thank God for pine knots. Gas and candles and oil are all disappearing in the Confederacy.”¹⁵⁰

Women were proud of their skills of converting old garments into new ones by re-dying material or cutting up dresses to make other, more practical clothing. Hoops were either reduced or abandoned because the yards of fabric required to cover them found better use elsewhere. Women wore their clothes until they were threadbare, and were no longer financially able to keep up with the fashion of Europe. Still others bought used clothes or wore dresses out of material they would never have touched before the war. Even the most fashion conscious belles could not purchase fabric, lace, ribbons, or trim, even if they were available. Federal blockades brought in only the most essential of items, and whatever remaining fabric was around was too expensive to buy. But women were proud of their ingenuity and inventiveness in finding or making replacements for unavailable items. And clothing family members took a great deal of both these qualities.

¹⁴⁸ Simkins and Patton, *Women of the Confederacy*, 129, 130; Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 10; Drew Gilpin Faust, *Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War*, in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992), 197; Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 75; Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 217.

¹⁴⁹ Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 274.

¹⁵⁰ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 221.

Scarlett demonstrates this ingenuity, and as she touched the moss green velvet curtains in the drawing room of Tara, and that's when the idea came to her. "Scoot up to the attic and get my box of dress patterns, Mammy . . . I'm going to have a new dress," she declares triumphantly.¹⁵¹ After the curtains were ripped and brushed, Scarlett did indeed have herself a new dress. Women all over the South converted draperies, rugs, bedding, and other items into apparel. Linens, tablecloths, and sheets reappeared in homes as underwear, petticoats, or other necessary items. Although the makeshifts they devised were usually crude and imperfect, it was better than doing without items women needed to keep the household running.¹⁵² Perhaps it was because they had been so accustomed to finery in the years before the war, perhaps because all any woman ever wanted was to look pretty and never have to do without, but Mary and Scarlett both turned over new uses for old things. More than likely though, it was out of necessity that Mary and Scarlett wore dresses that were not the fashion of the current year and used sorghum gum to sweeten their coffees. Here, they were like every other woman because they had to be. The blockade meant that goods, even at extremely high prices, were not available. They had to conform, simply because there was no other option.

Some women found time in their busy schedules to keep a diary. Although the entries were often infrequent, short, and monotonous, women confided things to their diaries they dared not say aloud. Women recorded their daily lives and

¹⁵¹ Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 513.

¹⁵² Wiley, *Confederate Women*, 168; Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 75; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 51, 222; Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 66; Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, 205; Simkins and Patton, *Women of the Confederacy*, 138, 148.

struggles as well as their sins, and many asked God for guidance in a world where they felt lost. While some women in public took on their new roles with noble resignation, often their diaries were filled with words of complaint.¹⁵³ They found a special satisfaction in their dairies, beginning them for deeply personal reasons. Most women kept these journals and diaries for their own records only, never intending for anyone else to read them. In fact, many women kept their diaries hidden, not only because of its contents but also because of the unladylike spirit that formed in the words women inked permanently on its pages.¹⁵⁴ Scarlett may have kept a diary, but again it is something that is not included in Mitchell's story. Instead, the story of her life is in fact a form of a diary, for *Gone With the Wind* records Scarlett's every feeling, action, and behavior. Mary's greatest legacy is her diary, and she made almost an entry a day for three straight years. So that she could write candidly, she kept her diary locked, and did not allow anyone to see or read it. Thus, she could record all her private thoughts and opinions, especially about men and women she encountered and people she considered her friends.¹⁵⁵ She was very critical of people, and her diary contains blunt, harsh words towards her friends and even members of her family. Many women kept diaries, but contained the bluntness and fiery words of Mary's actual diary and Scarlett's diary of thoughts, as evidenced through her own private thoughts in *Gone With the Wind*. Once again, these women conformed to the standards of keeping a diary, but their private thoughts were

¹⁵³ Haskell, *Frankly My Dear*, 218-9; Clinton, *Half Sisters of History*, 41.

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 247, 347.

¹⁵⁵ Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 100.

much more opinionated and hateful than most women's. Again, they show their deviance from societal norms, and again, through this dissent it is evident that they are similar in such a way that Mary can be seen as the model for Scarlett.

There came a point for many women when they were unable to defend their homes against the rising threat of Union soldiers and were forced to become refugees. As a general rule, women living in invaded areas suffered greater hardships than women in locales not penetrated by Federal forces, but even the threat of Union troops coming through caused some women to leave their homes. Women often elected to flee rather than face Federal troops, but travel was both difficult and expensive, and some women had to move more than once to avoid the enemy. Travel was more common for women during the war, and trips were usually made by train, which were crowded, dirty, slow, and uncomfortable. Many women found themselves as refugees in unfamiliar surroundings or with little or no domestic household slaves, living in unfamiliar surroundings among strangers who had few comforts of life to share with them. Scarlett was fortunate enough that Tara was still standing, and she took refuge in her native Jonesboro during the siege of Atlanta. Mary was also fortunate to have friends in North Carolina when she was forced to evacuate Columbia as Sherman approached. Both women waited until the last possible minute to leave their homes, and as a result had uncomfortable journeys, Scarlett in a rickety carriage hitched to a sick old mule, and Mary on a crowded train where she was packed in with sweaty strangers.

Leaving home meant moving with few attendants through desolate regions where they were subject to harm from outlaws, Federal raiders, and others who occupied the Confederacy. Further, highways were scarce and when they did exist, they were poorly constructed, and horses and vehicles on which to move were scarce and expensive. Scarlett's road to Tara was filled with these obstacles. Both fire and rain, and Union and Confederate troops, posed a threat to her on her long journey home. Often, the places women went were unable or unwilling to provide them with adequate support, but remaining at home often meant acceptance of whatever fate invaders chose to inflict on the helpless, non-combatant population. The food at Tara was gone, and Mary likewise complained of hunger while in North Carolina. Fleeing also meant leaving homes and other valuables to be potentially plundered by enemy troops. Mary's remaining servants actually helped her bury the family silver in the backyard of Mulberry, and Scarlett took with her the items she felt were of most importance, including Charles' sword. Both Mary and Scarlett developed a growing hatred for invading troops and a burning desire to see them come to harm. These opinions were incompatible with standard guidelines for female propriety or submission and a nurturing outlook. Mary and Scarlett both looked upon these men with a deep hatred that was not supposed to dwell in a woman's heart. Both women wished ill upon those who had forced them into refugee life, with little food, uncomfortable living spaces, and none of the comforts they were used to. Women were not supposed to think such horrible things, much less say them, and the fact that Scarlett and Mary did both puts them at odds once again with the proper rules for Southern women. Killing a man, as Scarlett did, was

certainly not in keeping with being a proper woman, and these feelings and actions put both women one step further towards the masculine world. It is true that many women fled their homes as refugees, but most suffered in silent submission. Mary and Scarlett both voiced their displeasure, both at their uncomfortable situations and for the men who had put them in such a position in the first place. Once again we see both women doing things most Southern women did, but their reactions to refugee life were incompatible with what most women did. Their attitudes towards the independence of women set them apart, making them unique and different, although not in a good way, and once again showing how these similarities further drive home the theory that Mary's life was used as a model for Scarlett's.¹⁵⁶

In both very subtle and very obvious ways, the lives of women like Mary and Scarlett were changed during the war. Increased responsibilities were thrust upon them, creating a sense of individuality, autonomy, and power, which were not acceptable in Southern society before the war. Had every woman described how she experienced the war, no two accounts would have been the same, but one general theme would have run through their accounts: how the Civil War allowed women to redraw the lines of acceptable female behavior. The war heightened the activism of women and created new spaces in which they could express their political beliefs without receiving backlash from the community, and this atmosphere allowed public affairs to invade the domestic arena. The war allowed Mary and Scarlett to act in ways that broke with traditional gender practices, and they were thrust into a

¹⁵⁶ Wiley, *Confederate Women*, 150, 151, 169; Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 164; Simkins and Patton, *Women of the Confederacy*, 40, 100, 103; Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 257.

more public and prominent position, something they had both been desiring for years. Caught up in a carnival like atmosphere, Mary and Scarlett were able to participate in ways they never had before, express their opinions, and be more articulate, all without losing their position as ladies. The link between politics and masculinity was relaxed as all citizens were encouraged to participate in nationalist thought. Mary and Scarlett could now affirm their commitment to the war and flaunt their accomplishments without threatening their femininity.¹⁵⁷

Although they did not immediately recognize it, the Civil War brought a great deal of benefits to Mary and Scarlett. Unprecedented and often welcome opportunities to translate resistance to the status quo arose as they continued their rebellion against the ideal of the Southern lady. The Civil War offered daughters of the Confederacy an opportunity to embrace a changed identity in the rapidly changing South, as it became increasingly acceptable to replace submissiveness with self-reliance, dependence with independence, and frailty with strength. The war provided a sense of purpose that Mary and Scarlett had craved before the war. In showing their support for the war, Mary and Scarlett were allowed, even encouraged abandon their pedestals forever and replace submissiveness, now a disgraceful word, with independence, rebelling against the Union but also against prescriptions of Southern femininity.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, xxi, 27, 163; Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 9; Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 36; Silber, *Gender and Sectional Conflict*, 13, 16; Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 39, 52.

¹⁵⁸ Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 240, 243, 245, 255, 258, 261.

It is clear that the definition of womanhood shifted during the Civil War. Women no longer saw themselves as passive victims. There was much more expected of them than ever before in the history of the South. And so it became that women were guardians of domestic life in the wartime South, exercising their power in a variety of ways. The Civil War was not only a political crisis but also a personal one as women measured all the lessons they had learned about womanhood against the war. Gender roles became more fluid as standards of appropriate dress, sphere, and activity melted away. It became acceptable for women to violate the confines of the domestic sphere in the name of the cause. They gained control over their own labor, and began to control finances and other distinctions that previously resided with males. They fought against the Union, and in doing so, violated notions of womanhood, but in a manner that was acceptable for them to do so. This behavior was new for most women, but for Mary and Scarlett, who had been acting and thinking in these ways for years, their ways finally became acceptable. Certainly they still acted in ways considered inappropriate, garnering harsh words and stares from women who were reluctant even to conform to this new definition of womanhood, but many of their actions were in proper keeping with the new world of which they were a part. Mary and Scarlett conformed in some ways, but also deviated in others, setting them apart from other women. These similarities in their lives need to be recognized, especially when theorizing that Mary's life was a model for Scarlett.

The new interpretation of Confederate womanhood paved the way for women like Mary and Scarlett to enter a new realm of Southern life, one in which

they could enter the realm of political and civic participation and navigate their own relationships and households in a way that was considered unacceptable before the war. Both women had already entered this male sphere, but it was only now considered acceptable for them to do so. Women were becoming independent, modifying the definitions of womanhood, and taking control of their fate, and because of this Mary and Scarlett meshed with society better. They embraced this new role, standing as a pillar of strength when the world around them was crumbling, rising from the ashes like a phoenix, ready to build a new life from the ruins surrounding them.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ George Rable, "Missing in Action': Women of the Confederacy, in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992), 137, 176, 177; Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 71, 84; Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 6; Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 40, 56; Paula A. Treckel, "'The Empire of My Heart': The Marriage of William Byrd II and Luck Parke Byrd," in *Lives Full of Struggle and Triumph: Southern Women, Their Institutions, and Their Communities*, ed. Bruce L. Clayton and John A. Salmond (Gainesville: The University of Florida Press, 2003), 17, Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 6.

CHAPTER 4

“LOOK FOR IT ONLY IN BOOKS, FOR IT IS NO MORE THAN A DREAM
REMEMBERED, A CIVILIZATION GONE WITH THE WIND...”

The end of the war brought the hopes and dreams of Southerners crashing down. Not only did they lose the war, they also lost their homes, and slaves, and the society in which they lived was unrecognizable. One woman remarked of the war torn South, “Oh! The utter desolation of a city in ashes and its people wanderers! Even the very landmarks were lost, and you stood a stranger on your own threshold. Nothing was left but smokeless chimneys, keeping ward over widespread ruin.” Mary Chesnut also lamented on the destruction of her home, stating, “when this establishment at Mulberry breaks up, the very pleasantest easygoing life I ever saw will be gone.”¹⁶⁰ Scarlett, too, broke down in tears upon returning from Atlanta, finding Twelve Oaks still smoldering and her home damaged and plundered. Southern women were also at the mercy of outsiders-- Yankee “carpetbaggers” who were running the government. In addition, Southern women had to deal with men who returned from the war with physical disabilities and psychological shock, if they had men who came home at all. ¹⁶¹ Thus, women became the backbone of the South, rebuilding their homes and their lives, creating for themselves a new identity: a strong new Southern woman who was more independent and relied less on the

¹⁶⁰ Francis Butler Simkins and James Welch Patton, *The Women of the Confederacy* (Richmond: Garrett & Massie Incorporated, 1936), 239; Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 250.

¹⁶¹ Simkins and Patton, *The Women of the Confederacy*, vii.

assistance of men and more on her own resourcefulness. Despite the destruction and devastation, this new world was one in which Mary and Scarlett finally fit. Their expressions and actions were no longer deviant. The world was changing, and for women like Mary and Scarlett, previously seen as outspoken and headstrong ladies, they finally fit in. What they had been doing and saying all along was finally considered acceptable in this New South in which they became a part.

As the war ended and Federal occupation began, many women encountered former Union soldiers, to whom women bore too deep a hatred to put on any airs of friendliness. They remembered too well the cruelty and other physical sufferings, as well as the plunder of their homes they were subjected to during the war, and women were not likely to soon forget the treatment they received by these soldiers, nor was forgiveness in the cards for the men in blue. The bitterness and antagonism were unmatched, even by returning Confederate soldiers, for the men had not seen the devastation of their homes like women had. Women made few gestures in the direction of reconciliation to occupying soldiers. In fact, the Northern presses declared Southern women “she-devils,” and the veil of gentility they wore was lifted as they assaulted occupying troops with both physical and verbal attacks.¹⁶² Indeed, when Scarlett encountered her first Yankee, she shot him dead. After that initial meeting, she managed to deceive the second group of Yankee visitors at Tara, hiding

¹⁶² Bell Irvin Wiley, *Confederate Women* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 152; Simkins and Patton, *The Women of the Confederacy*, 237, 244, 248; Nina Silber, *Intemperate Men, Spiteful Women, and Jefferson Davis*, in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992), 295; Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), x.

most of her food supplies and valuables in the diaper of Melanie's baby. Angry and spiteful, she was enraged when these men attempted to take the sword of Charles Hamilton, which had survived the siege of Atlanta, and she shared with these men just how she felt- that they were thieving scoundrels who preyed upon those who had nothing. Mary too shared in Scarlett's view of Yankees. She returned to Mulberry, and although it was still standing, it was damaged and pillaged by a raiding party of Yankee soldiers, who had also burned all the cotton. Mary wrote that they felt that the misery she endured was a fit punishment for her "sinful hatred" of the Yankees, and went on to call them "dogs, with eager eyes watching a man eating with mouths open, watching to catch any bone."¹⁶³ There were very few Southern women who existed who lived through the war and did not show some type of displeasure at the Yankees. Scarlett and Mary had similar experiences in that Yankee forces badly damaged their homes, and they, like other women, expressed their hatred and distaste for these Federal soldiers and occupiers.

Women tried to cling to their old way of life, desperately snatching at the straws that remained. Determined to recapture their old way of life, some women never quit trying, even after they realized the new society in which they were living was not a nightmare, but there to stay. This is true of both Mary and Scarlett, who, despite their outspokenness and liberties they took regarding proper female behavior, had truly enjoyed their leisurely lives before the war. Now, doing things for themselves, having their own hands, now rough and calloused, doing the labor

¹⁶³ Elisabeth Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut: A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 128; Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 223-4

instead made them nostalgic for years gone by. Many women also clung to pre-existing racial and class notions, searching for even the smallest ways to assert their elite status in a world that no longer looked upon class the same as before. Scarlett never respected Mammy and Pork, the only two slaves that remained at Tara, and certainly never paid them for their work, demonstrating that Scarlett was still stuck in the past in regards to opinions on race and class. Mammy or Pork would never be her equals, and Scarlett continued to treat them as less intelligent, servile beings for the rest of the book. Here too, Mary demonstrated her racial biases in a world in which blacks were supposedly to be on equal footing with whites. When someone told Mary “a Georgia negro was now freer than a Maryland legislator,” Mary found the words so upsetting that she “grew angry I was so utterly in despair.”¹⁶⁴ Mary and Scarlett attempted to shut out all reminders of the war and the world that became a daily reminder of defeat. After four long years of war, women often felt that their advantages of race, class and gender were the only things that remained, and they were unwilling to relinquish these things, as they were all that remained of their former lives.

One of the biggest changes in post-Civil War life was adjusting to living without the assistance of slaves. Elite Southern women like Mary and Scarlett had much more invested in the system that gave them their superior status, and these women grudgingly accepted the defeat of this system and its privileged rights. The Civil War reduced this privilege and their affluence, thus transforming the social identities to which these women were accustomed. Now, Scarlett was poorer than

¹⁶⁴ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 184.

that “white trash” Emmy Slattery, and she did not like that one bit. The destruction of slavery also made many women angry, not only because the foundations upon which their wealth was made had crumbled, but also because their superior status was no longer a given.¹⁶⁵ Former familiar sentiments white women had for their nurses, cooks, and mammies were exchanged for more racist perceptions, and women no longer saw these slaves as extensions of their families but as members of a race that was indolent, immoral, and incapable of living as free people.¹⁶⁶ In addition, many women were still under the delusion that slaves had enjoyed their position as such, and the departure of many faithful slaves angered these mistresses. Drawing upon the image of the Sambo, the “contented, docile, childlike slave,” women felt blacks were unfit for freedom. Now that slaves were free, those that remained, like Mary’s faithful Molly, and Scarlett’s Mammy and Pork, relied on Mary and Scarlett to provide food for them. This reversal of roles caught both women off guard, and for both women, it seemed to them that outstretched hands and pleading eyes drove them to madness, for often Mary and Scarlett were just as hungry as their former slaves. This apparent inability of former slaves to care for themselves furthered Mary’s and Scarlett’s belief that theirs was a race unsuited for freedom. Mary called them “a horde of idle dirty Africans,” and she insisted that free blacks

¹⁶⁵ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 246-7; Edward D.C. Campbell, Jr and Kim S. Rice, *A Woman’s War: Southern Women, Civil War, and the Confederate Legacy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997), 1.

¹⁶⁶ Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 154, 162.

would never be able to survive without the assistance of whites like her.¹⁶⁷ Like most other women of the time, Mary and Scarlett were upset by the loss of their slaves, and with freedom came their belief that former slaves would destroy Southern society and wreak havoc on the traditional class structure. Here again they conformed to the ideas and beliefs that were held by other Southern women, and these similarities show how Mary can be considered a model for Scarlett.

Surrender and emancipation transformed the central figure in antebellum society, the household, and as a result, many of the issues of Reconstruction played out in the region's homes.¹⁶⁸ The end of slavery meant that women lost their entire labor force, and were compelled by necessity to start doing things for themselves.¹⁶⁹ They worked hard at unaccustomed labor created by the dislocation of their domestic economy and lack of workforce. Scarlett lamented "nothing her mother had taught her was of any value whatsoever now and [her] heart was sore and puzzled. . . Ellen could not have foreseen the collapse of the civilization in which she had raised her daughters, could not have anticipated the disappearing of the places in society for which she trained them."¹⁷⁰ Women like Mary and Scarlett were now forced to do things they formerly had done for them, things they took for granted.

¹⁶⁷ Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind* (New York: MacMillan, 1936), 447; Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 246.

¹⁶⁸ Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 120.

¹⁶⁹ Marli Frances Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-1880* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 164.

¹⁷⁰ Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 413.

These women neither accepted the situation nor embraced the new order, but instead sought new ways to define their status in a world without slavery, the quintessential defining element of Southern society.¹⁷¹ As much as women had longed for the end of the war, they never wanted to be defeated. With that defeat went the foundations of who they were and why they were important, and they were dragged kicking and screaming into the post-war era. They may have lost the war, social standing, and most of their possessions, but women refused to give up their status of proper Southern women, and would never consider themselves equal to their former servants.¹⁷² The independence and headstrong personalities of Mary and Scarlett may have helped them get through this difficult time, but neither woman accepted her fate. If it were up to them, they would still have been living the carefree life they enjoyed before the war. They were not upset that their thoughts and actions were more accepted, or that the sphere for women was expanding. They were upset that because if this, they now had to take on additional responsibilities. Both women realized they could not have their proverbial cake and eat it, too. They had to work, changing their lives, in order to secure a position in this new sphere, and this was a fact neither woman enjoyed.

Slowly, women accepted the fact that their slaves were not going to return, and they began to rebuild their racial and class identity around a particular kind of domesticity in which they played a much larger and more significant role than

¹⁷¹ Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 121.

¹⁷² Simkins and Patton, *The Women of the Confederacy*, 255; Jean E. Freidman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 92; Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 5; Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 121.

before. Women learned to negotiate new relationships with servants and former slaves who remained on the plantation, but were now paid employees. They also learned new ways to deal with the housework that confronted them.¹⁷³ Women without any assistance were forced to cook, clean, wash, care for other family members, iron, clean, and garden. Despite women taking on these roles in wartime, the underlying assumption that things would “go back to normal” after the war kept them from bemoaning their fate. What they once considered temporary became permanent, and elite women soon discovered that the four years of war had destroyed the economy of the South, and without slavery, the world of dependence they were accustomed to would never be seen again. Without servants to attend to their every need, women began to take a very active role in the household, redefining gentility in a world where racial hierarchy had been turned on its head.¹⁷⁴ The demise of slavery forced women to take on unfamiliar domestic chores, and women eventually adapted to their positions in the house. They learned to cook, how to keep house, how to care for family members, and how to adapt to new physical demands placed on them. Some women took on the role of financial manager and caregiver to older parents, and women learned to rely less on slavery and more on their own domestic abilities, the likes of which some women never knew they possessed.¹⁷⁵ Loss of slaves, coupled with economic stagnation, left white women with very little money, and low prices for cotton in the years following the

¹⁷³ Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 182; Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 7.

¹⁷⁴ Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 165, 154; Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 99.

¹⁷⁵ Campbell and Rice, *A Woman's War* 3; Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 88, 98-99.

war left many women bemoaning their fate. Certainly, then, elite white women had less than they did before the war, and this fact was what stood out most to them. Nonetheless, they certainly had more than most Southerners. Housework and penny pinching were new to these women, which was what led to the gnashing of teeth for many.¹⁷⁶

Women were also responsible for maintaining the home, which meant they now had to attend to taxes, mortgage payments, and other rents. Women like Mary and Scarlett worked hard to retain the houses they managed to save from plundering Yankee troops during the war, and they fought tirelessly to prevent foreclosures on the only semblance of their former lives that remained. Mary and Scarlett were forever concerned with the moneymaking potential of their plantations, and it no longer served as an icon of relaxation and peace. From these additional tasks rose complaints from many women who were overwhelmed with the extra burden that had been thrust upon their shoulders. Even though the typical plantation mistress was able to do many of these tasks before the war, Mary and Scarlett most certainly did not, and there was no woman more pitiful than the one who had always had everything done for her and now had to do it herself.¹⁷⁷

Mary Chesnut took over the responsibilities of running the cottage industries that supplied the plantation at Mulberry, and oversaw farming affairs. She also managed the finances, and kept a detailed account of how much money was spent

¹⁷⁶ Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 176, 178.

¹⁷⁷ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 212; Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, 203, 204, 205, 207, 201, 315; Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, 136.

and how much revenue the plantation generated. Mary herself made about twelve dollars a month selling dairy products, and watched every penny. Mary was the one who took on the role of managing the accounts, and from her account books it is evident that after the war, she and James lived on a tight budget. She often wrote in her diary of “scraping and saving” to afford small purchases or to repay small debts.¹⁷⁸ Scarlett too was forced to take up these new roles. She planted and picked the cotton from Tara, and foraged for vegetables and other types of food in order to feed her family. It was left to her to control the finances as well, which led her to realize that the hundreds of dollars needed for the taxes on Tara would be practically impossible to find. Scarlett was upset by this increased responsibility, and felt women should “know nothing about this busy, brutal world.”¹⁷⁹ These were things both women took for granted, part of the inner workings of a system they previously did not understand, but were forced to comprehend just how it functioned when necessity dictated it. Once again, we see both women conforming to the standards of their life because of necessity. Neither of them wanted to do this extra work, but had to in order to keep their homes running. Here again, Mary’s life mirrored the experiences of Scarlett, furthering the theory that Scarlett’s life was based on the life of Mary.

The end of the Civil War demanded much of women in the form of management and organization, especially in the plantation home. Between 1860 and

¹⁷⁸ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, xlii, xliii.

¹⁷⁹ Marjorie Julian Spruill, Valinda W. Littlefield, and Joan Marie Johnson, ed., *South Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, vol.1 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 241; Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 634.

1870, Southern wealth declined a whopping 60 percent, and reduced circumstances caused considerable tensions in former elite families. That, coupled with shortages of goods and inflated prices for what was available, made it difficult for women to come by even the most essential of household necessities. Hardships during the war made many white females, Scarlett especially, determined to “never go hungry again.” In order to fill this void in the economy, women like Mary and Scarlett devised new methods, making crude drugs, donning homemade dresses and shoes, substituting many articles for factory-made original ones, and making coffees and teas that certainly did not taste as good as manufactured drinks, but at least provided their families would have something to drink.¹⁸⁰ Mary’s and Scarlett’s style of living was drastically reduced due to inroads of their wealth, and all types of visiting and entertaining, as well as basic comforts, were a thing of the past. Many women had trouble dressing appropriately on such a limited income, and often expended a great deal of time and energy to devise ways to clothe their families, some of which included turning draperies into dresses. Many managed to card, spin, weave, dye, and sew their own clothes as well as clothes for their entire family.

Their retreat to the household was expected, for it was where their lives had been anchored before the war, and rebuilding all that was familiar to them seemed like the best thing to do, and they soon became active agents in the New South, even if it meant they had to do the work themselves. The change in women’s work had begun as a condition of the war, and when hard times continued, they remained in

¹⁸⁰ Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden*, 127; Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 93; Simkins and Patton, *The Women of the Confederacy*, 105, 158; Campbell and Rice, *A Woman’s War*, 13; Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, 84.

their homes to support themselves, their families, and often their men who returned from war unable to offer assistance. Often, Mary and Scarlett carried on their tasks with great skill, suggesting that they both knew more about the operations of a plantation and that they were quick learners. But even as they carried on these tasks, it did not mean they enjoyed their new position. The majority of women, Mary and Scarlett included, would no doubt have preferred less work. After sacrificing so much, most women did not want to suffer from the endless round of domestic chores. To sacrifice for the cause was one thing, but to be forced into a permanent role of domestic life and poverty was another, and they grew frustrated at the widening gulf between their lives as antebellum belles and their postwar lives as “servants.”¹⁸¹ Mitchell narrates, “Everything in their old world had changed but the old forms. The old usages went on, must go on, for the forms were all that were left to them. They were holding tightly to the things they knew best and loved best in the old days, the leisured manners, the courtesy, the pleasant casualness in human contacts.”¹⁸² For both Scarlett and Mary, all the joys of their old lives had been replaced with the endless work of the new, and although they soon learned what work was necessary to maintain their homes and support their families, neither woman, when given the choice, would have chosen manual labor over a life of leisure.

¹⁸¹ Campbell and Rice, *A Woman's War*, 53; Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, xix; Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 124, 34; Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 173; Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, 205.

¹⁸² Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 569.

Women eventually came to terms with the increased physical demands placed upon their shoulders, and knew that shirking their duties would mean neglecting their families, even though most of them realized the labor they were performing was, in effect, helping to degrade their former social position. Mary and Scarlett may have lost their prosperity and confidence, but the one thing they refused to lose was their pride. They spent less time worrying about keeping servants than their mothers did, and began to realize that all the work that had to be done, they would have to do. Mary and Scarlett violated the former moral boundaries that were considered acceptable for a woman, but at the same time they also clung to the remnants of pre-war values of honor to keep themselves from collapsing.¹⁸³ All Southern women were increasingly violating these boundaries, and therefore the entire face of the Southern femininity changed. Women, including Mary and Scarlett, began to rebuild their racial and class identities around this type of domesticity into which they were forced. They were exchanging the managerial functions of their mothers for actual physical labor. Whereas before it was considered improper to see a woman do physical labor around the house, now, a proper woman was chided for *not* laboring on her farm. In their new role as workers, women grew to appreciate their own personal independence, and came out of Reconstruction with a new sense of themselves as self-supporting women. Indeed, the “necessities of changed economic and social circumstances and the self-

¹⁸³ Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 88; Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 173; George Rable, “‘Missing in Action’: Women of the Confederacy, in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992), 147; Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, 323; Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, 64.

knowledge gained from four years of crisis gave white [S]outhern women the basis for inventing new selves erected firmly upon the elitist assumptions of the old.”¹⁸⁴ Both Mary and Scarlett were independent before the war, but now that independence was an acceptable standard for Southern women, these two were seen as conforming to the standards of society. Neither of them changed, but since society changed what it viewed as acceptable for women, Mary and Scarlett now fit into society in which they were previously seen as deviant.

Some women were in such dire need of money that they took work outside the home. Before the war, this would have been considered unthinkable, but the changed landscape war created allowed women like Mary and Scarlett to become laborers in a very narrow field of jobs without ruining their status as women, especially white women. War and necessity prompted women to adapt a lifestyle outside the traditional boundaries of womanhood, and women realized that marriage to a husband no longer guaranteed them lifelong financial stability. To save face, many women, including Mary and Scarlett, worked out of their homes, and household industries sprang up as women began to sew, alter clothes, make hats, bake, can jams and other fruits, and make other foods to sell. In order to sell their products, though, women relied on the old Southern charm, tactics that sometimes involved women in embarrassing and difficult situations. Even normally

¹⁸⁴ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 215; Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 182; Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 277; Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, 69; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 254.

simple problems like finding something to eat had become a major difficulty for Southern women.¹⁸⁵

Mary began a butter and egg business that she, with the help of her maid, ran as her only source of income. She not only sold her products in Camden, but also had an outlet in Charleston.¹⁸⁶ Mary's account books reveal the revenue of this business being about twelve dollars a month, totaling one hundred and forty four dollars per annum. Her entire yearly income equaled the cost of the capes of Alençon lace she purchased in 1859.¹⁸⁷ The death of Mary's father-in-law in 1866 put her and James in an even more strained financial situation, as James was left all his father's land, which included taxes, and since his father had invested all his money in Confederate bonds, little in the way of monetary funds was left to James. In 1871, Mary purchased a sewing machine for twenty-five dollars and began to sew garments not only for herself, but also to sell to local friends and neighbors. Her account book devotes two entire pages to listing the garments, describing them, and estimating their retail value, indicating her meticulous attention to family finances.¹⁸⁸ Scarlett too ran a business, although it was much more lucrative than Mary's small setup. After marrying Frank Kennedy, she took over his general store and eventually ran a lumber business herself. Scarlett's businesses probably generated much more revenue than Mary's small business, but all the same, both women took to working outside the home, displaying themselves in a public manner. They had to in order to

¹⁸⁵ Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 92; Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, 212-3, 234.

¹⁸⁶ Edward T. James, *Notable American Women 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1971), 1:329.

¹⁸⁷ Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 212.

¹⁸⁸ Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 139-140.

maintain their households, in order to be able to afford daily expenses, and in order to attempt to recoup some of their old life. Most women did end up having to take work outside the home, and Mary and Scarlett were no exception, even if their work was more public, and they were much more involved than typical women. Their similar experiences further demonstrate the reciprocity in their lives, revealing further how Mary's life could be seen as a model for Scarlett's.

Other women decided to take up the pen in order to try to earn extra money. The literary world was where women could achieve their goals without suffering from the criticism from the public for entering the public sphere. They justified publishing as a way to earn money because of the precarious financial situation of their families. It was part-time work they could do from their home, and a simple way to make money in a time of need. Women, including Mary, published all kinds of writing, everything from fiction and poetry to opinion letters, sketches of famous or admirable people, religious literature, etiquette manuals, and letters to editors. Some women recorded their wartime experiences and continued to keep a diary of their innermost thoughts and feelings and never intended to publish it, but often death or necessity made the journal end up on the desk of a publishing company. Much of this writing grew out of the fact that daughters were encouraged to write daily as a means to foster gentility, and during the war, keeping a journal often seemed to some women like the only way to remind themselves of where they came from.¹⁸⁹ Women were able to gain a new, powerful voice in their writings. What was

¹⁸⁹ Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, 225, 220, 221, 210; Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, 175; Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 11.

once a private diary became an important document by which to remember the Civil War, and those women, like Mary, who lived through it became iconic for future generations. Women not only wrote about their daily lives but also the need and demands of the new nation, and the experience of war allowed women to express their opinions.¹⁹⁰ Mary kept writing in her diary until mid-July of 1865, when the burdens of housework overcame her and occupied too much of her time. If we look upon Mitchell's narrations for *Scarlett* as a type of diary, then Scarlett kept her "diary" for years after the war as well.

Most of the women, including Mary, who took up writing were from privileged families and had owned slaves before the war. They were often teenagers when the war began. Some were older than that, but the older women tended to be less successful. Many of these women, regardless of age, translated their love for reading into an aptitude for writing, and found the transition from journal writing to published work quite easy. These were the same women who enjoyed reading as young women, and their words cast a spell over generations of readers who had not experienced the war years firsthand.¹⁹¹

There were a few themes that were very popular for both women writers and their readers alike. One of the popular themes was in dealing with Northerners, who captured the attention of Southern readers as a kind of foreign civilization that most Southern readers had limited knowledge of.¹⁹² But the most popular theme

¹⁹⁰ Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, 211.

¹⁹¹ Censer, 215, 217, 218, 241-2.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 246.

was that of sectional reunion, which was often pursued via gender relations and interactions among different classes. Women writers were attempting to claim a victory in the battle over public memory, promoting the history of the lost cause, where women were the main figures who upheld the Confederate cause. In addition, newly formed organizations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy provided women writers with guidelines to promote a development of the “collective memory” of the war. The reverence for the Old South began an obsession of the celebration of the plantation legend and the romance of Confederate lore.¹⁹³ The best selling novels and most popular monographs were about glorifying the Confederacy and remembering the past in a way that depicted Southern society as the model society representing the perfect life that once existed. And the number of women who wrote for a living suggests the demand for sentimental fiction after the war was incredibly high.¹⁹⁴

Mary decided to try her hand at writing after the war, but chose not to pursue any of these themes. She had a close personal acquaintance with local editors in South Carolina, and began to regard herself as a potential writer. Her first attempt at writing was translation, and she worked to translate works of French to English. When this failed, Mary began her work on two novels, both of which she worked on at the same time. “Two Years of My Life” was a largely autobiographical

¹⁹³ Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, 244; Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 131; Nina Silber, *Gender and Sectional Conflict* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 77; Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 13; Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), xi.

¹⁹⁴ Anne Frior Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 118.

work in which Mary chronicled her experiences in school in Charleston. Her other novel was entitled "The Captain and the Colonel," and was a war novel which focused on a family, but also satirized the social themes of the time-another way Mary was able to show her displeasure at the confines of society. She had hoped this second novel would be an outlet for her to tell her own personal story of the war in a fictional form. She never completed either novel, nor did she ever attempt to present it to a publisher. Instead, around 1875, she began working to revise her diaries and journals, and her first major effort at revisions took her over a year, but she was still dissatisfied. She continued to edit the diaries until the day she died, and never considered them as a satisfactory item for publication. In fact, the only thing Mary published in her entire life was a small piece of her journal. She entitled it "The Arrest of a Spy," and it was published in 1884. Mary was paid ten dollars for her work.¹⁹⁵

Although Scarlett did not write, it is important to note that Mary was an avid writer. Again the reader can only speculate as to what Scarlett did with her free time, but if her thoughts, as penned by Mitchell in *Gone With the Wind*, can serve as an accurate depiction of what she would have written about, her diary would have been quite similar to what Mary's potential books were about. What is important to see is that work was something new for women, and both Mary and Scarlett were already pushing the envelope on what acceptable work could encompass. Scarlett rode around town pregnant, hired convicts, and refused to hand over authority to her husband, or any man, for that matter. Mary too teetered on the brink of what

¹⁹⁵ Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 137, 141-2, 158

was considered acceptable for women. Writing about something so personal, and doing so in the straightforward manner in which she did was borderline unacceptable for women writers. Most were encouraged to write about topics less politically charged, less biased, and less personal. When Mary and Scarlett were given an inch, they took a mile. A new opening for women's freedom emerged, and both women jumped on this opportunity quickly and in ways that were not truly appropriate for women to be acting, or, in this case, writing. Once again, it is evident that Mary and Scarlett conformed to the actions of women in society, but rebelled in regards to the limits which they were confined to. Mary and Scarlett both wanted no limits placed on their lives, and since there were proper boundaries for women in work, Mary and Scarlett immediately chose to ignore them. Once again, these women deviated from what is considered normal, proving their outspoken attitudes against the new proper standards of women, and providing further proof for the hypothesis that Mary's life was used as a model for Scarlett.

Women entering the workforce, albeit in ways that were subtle, provoked a new way of thinking, not only for Southern men, but also for the entire Southern society. Women became renowned for accomplishments *outside* the home, thus entering the public sphere in a very abrupt manner. Both Scarlett and Mary though had already been a part of that world before the war, so for both of them, this transition was not so radical. Women, including Mary and Scarlett, were now able to work without forfeiting their social standing or how they were viewed by society. This affected the ways in which young women imagined themselves and changed how they envisioned their lives. They wanted to be celebrated and admired. Once

they were able to break free from the domestic confines of the home, women were reluctant to go back to that old way of life. There was a new ethic in the South, one that praised economic self-sufficiency and independence among women, and the new kinds of work that women took touched upon parts of life that discomfited many men. Their position as caretakers of women was uprooted, and it appeared that women had no intention of letting them take over the patriarchal throne they once occupied.¹⁹⁶

The absence of men and the inability of men to care for and protect women was another huge change in the post-war South that women had to cope with. The practice of women doing the work of men became even more widespread after the war was over. Not only did women like Mary and Scarlett have to run plantations and farms in the absence of their husbands during the war, they also had to plant crops, plow fields, reap the harvest, kill the hogs, cure the meat, cut the firewood, and perform all other chores related to farming. During the war, they had performed a certain amount of domestic labor, but after the war, they did far more than they had ever done before, and labor of a physically demanding sort to boot. Mary and Scarlett had to perform duties that had previously been the exclusive duties of the other sex. The war transformed their roles, and women had to take on responsibilities not only of the slaves and parents but also of the men who could no longer provide for families. It was economic necessity that propelled women into these positions. In doing so, the patriarchal structure of the South was weakened,

¹⁹⁶ Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, 228, 179-180, 278; Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 128.

and on the verge of destruction.¹⁹⁷ The experiences of war blurred the gender boundaries of the workplace. Women began to assume responsibilities previously considered for males only, and at the same time, they lost the entire world in which their female identities were formed, and they not only had to take on additional work but also had to redefine who they were in a world with which they were unfamiliar.¹⁹⁸ In 1865 especially, women felt relief would never come, as crops were planted late and yielded terrible harvests, and they had no draft animals, supplies, or food. Women who lost husbands were especially pitiful, for they found that even with the increasing demands placed on them, all the work in the world could not fill the void in their hearts for dead husbands.¹⁹⁹

Mary and Scarlett both had already penetrated this male only world, but now they had to take on the responsibilities that came with living in a man's world. James was ruined by the war, and his political career was ruined. He attempted to start a private law practice, but had few clients, and, since he was an inexperienced plantation manager, Mary took most of the responsibilities for tasks that he was supposed to be completing. Scarlett, too, triumphed over the men in her life. After the war, Ashley Wilkes was the only man at Tara able to perform labor, and, taking a break from chopping logs, he lamented that "I am out of place in this new life, and I

¹⁹⁷ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 163, 213, 163, 199; Wiley, *Confederate Women*, 147; Simkins and Patton, *The Women of the Confederacy*, 111; Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 74, 81.

¹⁹⁸ Campbell and Rice, *A Woman's War*, 68; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 137.

¹⁹⁹ Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, 121-2; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 161.

am afraid.”²⁰⁰ In fact, most of the men in *Gone With the Wind* are similarly weak-minded. Ashley was a man living on Scarlett’s charity, and in contrast to the vivacious and hot blooded Scarlett, Ashley’s masculinity pales in comparison. But Scarlett has harsh words for other men as well, calling Charles Hamilton a “sissy,” and Frank Kennedy an “old maid in britches.” The fate of these men was inseparable from the fall of the Confederacy, though. The destruction of the Confederacy is linked to the weakness of its men, and it took a strong woman like Scarlett to rebuild her life after the “sissies” and “old maids” failed in their duties as men.²⁰¹ The success both Mary and Scarlett achieve after the war is a testament to the weaknesses of men, and also demonstrates their many achievements in the face of the failures of their men. Both women saw masculinity begin to slip from the hands of these men, and they were there to catch it, and certainly saw no point in returning it to them if these men were only to let it fall again.

During the war, the contradiction of women doing the work of men was assumed to be temporary, and would eventually retreat back to the private sphere. However, once the war ended, it became apparent that the retreat of women from the public sphere was not to be. Still, as women like Mary and Scarlett expanded their role as laborers, they were expected to be subordinate and dependent on the household head and other men of their towns. Neither woman liked this, and they felt that since they were doing the majority of the work to uphold the home, then they should not have to respond to anyone, especially a man who was unable to

²⁰⁰ Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 498.

²⁰¹ Elizabeth Young, *Disarming the Nation: Women’s Writing and the American Civil War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 252-4.

show he could provide for his wife. They both demanded an expansion of their rights and wanted recognition for the work at keeping their homes together for four long years of war, and having to continue doing so indefinitely. Being forced into the role of domestic laborer was not their choice, but if it was a permanent position, women wanted it to be known how much effort they had put in to keep their homes standing. With the enlargement of their sphere, they also wanted an enlargement of their rights, which was not always a welcome direction to their husbands.²⁰²

Both women felt they should be allowed to take on a more active role in society. For Scarlett that meant participating in the operation of her business, and for Mary this meant being more active in politics. Mary was always very interested in her husband's political connections, and enjoyed debating politics with James. When he was gone, she insisted that he "make time to write me long letters as I am *intensely* curious," and she had always taken an active role in James's career. She was extremely ambitious for her husband, and she often lobbied for his promotion to a higher position herself, much to James's alarm. She was always a more astute politician than he, and as a result, many men were drawn to her knowledge of politics, and some even asked her opinions on certain matters.²⁰³ Her diary further showed her frustration, especially in the fact that she was not a part of choosing her leaders: "Oh if I could put some of my reckless spirit into these . . . cautious, lazy men." She was never confident of the abilities of male leaders, outraged over the

²⁰² Lee Ann Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1995), 188-189, 22; Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 133, 190.

²⁰³ Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 59-60; Spruill, et. al., *South Carolina Women*, 237.

antics of the men in authority, and always found a way to mention that fact. She found the quarrelling of leaders to be their principal fault, and she was not afraid to let these men know how she felt. "Today I have written: to the president, Jeff Davis, 1; to Benjamin, secretary of war, 2; Mallory, secretary of the navy, 1; to Warren Nelson, 1, to Henry Gourdin, 1," she writes. The purpose of her letters is most certainly not friendly acquaintance, but instead to reprimand them for their actions and decisions.²⁰⁴

Women were also less willing and able to trust men. Many considered the Confederacy an integral part of their lives, and when Southern leaders surrendered, women accused them of shirking their masculine duty and handing them over to "Northern despotism." Mary and Scarlett no longer trusted men in whom they had placed their complete faith, and not to mention thousands of dollars, to defend their homes and families. The confidence they once had in men had eroded, and doubt about men's abilities to care for women was what propelled many women like Mary and Scarlett to take on these additional roles, but also rethink the most fundamental assumptions about the world they knew. Thus, the woman who was created out of the ashes of the Confederacy doubted men, was highly aware of the need to be independent, and saw the world with a new sense of realism and a deep sense of bitterness.²⁰⁵ Mary and Scarlett were angry at the fact that men did not care for them, and saw it as their chance to express themselves and gain more rights, for it

²⁰⁴ Muhlenfeld, *Mary Boykin Chesnut*, 113; Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 282; Spruill, et. al., *South Carolina Women*, 238; Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 322.

²⁰⁵ Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 70; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 195, 234, 247.

was they, after all, who held the world together in the wake of devastation and destruction. Men were upset, but many also realized that these accusations women were making against them were true, and hung their heads in humiliation as women took up the reins of the new South.²⁰⁶ Since men's position as heads of households were legitimized by their ability to protect their dependents, when they were unable to do this, the entire system fell into disarray, and women became more outspoken with the realization that there was a way they could advance themselves in a society which was both new and unknown.²⁰⁷

Mary and Scarlett both embodied this woman who grew out of men's inability to protect her. Neither woman trusted the men in their lives in the years following surrender, and they justified the lack of protection men offered them as an excuse to emasculate them. Both women wore the proverbial pants, and took over responsibilities for running the home, making money, and also participated in arenas formerly designated as for men only. Both women took on these new roles, as did many other women, mainly because it was necessary for them to do so. But, Scarlett and Mary took it one step further. They took over the roles of men and refused to give men their positions back. Mary and Scarlett both felt they should be afforded with the privileges of a man in exchange for doing a man's work. Whereas other women were more forgiving, Mary and Scarlett were ruthless. Neither woman trusted the men in their lives, and she chose to infiltrate the lives of men, further emasculating them. The similarities in their actions regarding treatment of men

²⁰⁶ Campbell and Rice, *A Woman's War*, 53, 183-4.

²⁰⁷ Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 143; Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 60.

after the war are uncanny, and another excellent example of how Mary's life was similar to Scarlett's, and how the former can be used as a model for the latter.

Women like Mary and Scarlett learned that expectations of acceptable behavior were modified by the war, and there were alternative ways to traditional Southern life. Reconstruction allowed them to consider, for the first time in their lives, the ways in which they could shape their lives without fearing social consequences. For the first time, women began to debate politics, and they did not necessarily confide their opinions only to their diaries and other women, but were publicly vocal in their opinions. Most of the women who did so were young and frustrated by watching their family members go off to war and be killed while they remained home sewing. Women wanted to play an active role in the new life in which they were living. They acquired a new public voice via their new role in society and celebrated the new notion of womanhood, especially since it meant more freedom for them. The steps they took towards political activism symbolized a rupture from the Old South's patriarchal tradition that would have shocked and appalled people of a generation ago.²⁰⁸ Still with one foot in the domestic sphere, but also with the other in the public sphere, women fused political, familial, personal, and racial identities of the private and public in a post-Civil War America. Women maintained the dress and demeanor of women, but their words and actions were those of men. Mary and Scarlett both possessed this voice, acted in these ways, and had broken with the tradition of patriarchy in the years before the war, but now this

²⁰⁸ Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 233, 160-161, 162; Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender*, 14; Silber, *Gender and Sectional Conflict*, 95.

conduct was becoming acceptable. Mary and Scarlett were ahead of their time, and only now was society catching up with their progressive actions and ideas.

Women regarded themselves as individuals with rights and desires, not just duties and obligations. They began to discover a new sense of self within them, and often this sense of self was born out of the need to survive in a post-war world. Their former selves were modest, demure, and quiet, but circumstances forced women to shed this skin. Their existence depended on their very ability to fit in to the new standards of society.²⁰⁹ Both Mary and Scarlett had already discovered this self, and they were finally understood as normal in this new world. Women's new independence was the result of defeat, but it was the visions these women had for their future that reshaped Southern womanhood. They developed new ideas about their roles in society, incorporating political opinion, social action, and personal independence in their new definition of Southern womanhood. Since Scarlett and Mary had already developed these ideas and opinions, they were both unlike the women who were just now realizing their true potential. The women who had already accepted new roles were ready to adjust their identities to reflect their increased importance in Southern society.²¹⁰ Their experiences in the war provided the framework for groundbreaking change in the definition of Southern

²⁰⁹ Karen L. Cox, "The Rise of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, 1894-1914," in *Lives Full of Struggle and Triumph: Southern Women, Their Institutions, and Their Communities*, ed. Bruce L. Clayton and John A. Salmond (Gainesville: The University of Florida Press, 2003), 137; Warren Ellem, "'The Worst Results in Mississippi May Prove the Best for Us: Blanche Butler Ames and Reconstruction,'" in *Lives Full of Struggle and Triumph: Southern Women, Their Institutions, and Their Communities*, ed. Bruce L. Clayton and John A. Salmond (Gainesville: The University of Florida Press, 2003), 67; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 219, 242-3.

²¹⁰ Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 280, 282.

womanhood, and this change helped Mary and Scarlett, their actions, thoughts, and opinions become more acceptable. It took a war, but finally these women were understood. They were transformed from protected belles to managers of the home, civic-minded participants in a society whose landscape was drastically altered by four years of war. Some women, Mary and Scarlett especially, even began to look on the war as a blessing in disguise, for those four years of war left women at least fifty years in advance of the position they would have held if peace had endured.²¹¹

Despite the hardships and shortages women faced after the war, they ultimately benefited from surrender at Appomattox. It was an opportunity for them to assert their independence, pursue their own goals and dreams, and live a life apart from men. Some women, like Mary and Scarlett, acted in such ways before the war, but it was only after the war that it became acceptable for Southern society for women to behave in these ways. Women were becoming more masculine in their thoughts and actions, and without the war as an excuse for their civic activism and participation in the public sphere, many women would still be sitting in their homes, bemoaning their fates as helpless, childlike figures tied to their homes with nothing to occupy their time. Mary and Scarlett both had similar experiences and reactions to those experiences after the war. Many of those actions were similar with those of other women of the South, proving that finally the headstrong thoughts and actions of these two women were becoming acceptable in society. The similarities in the lives of both these women are uncanny, and certainly after the war, their

²¹¹ Simkins and Patton, *The Women of the Confederacy*, 177; Ott, *Confederate Daughters*, 167-168; Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, xix.

experiences working, struggling to maintain a home, and taking on the burdens of men are so similar in a way that, if their lives were looked at side by side, the overlaps in their experiences and reactions to these experiences would be extensive. This overt likeness in their lives solidifies the idea that Mary's life could definitively have been used by Mitchell as a model for her beloved Scarlett in *Gone With the Wind*.

CONCLUSION

The similarities between Mary Boykin Chesnut and Scarlett O'Hara are unquestionably present. Both women lived through one of the most turbulent time periods in American History. They both possessed fiery personalities, were not afraid to go against what society dictated, and for both of them, the Civil War was an opportunity for them to enter into the public sphere without being looked upon as less feminine.

There has been some speculation that Scarlett O'Hara was based on Mitchell. While there are some similarities in their lives-- like Mitchell arriving home the day after her mother died-- there is little else to prove Mitchell based her heroine on her own life. For one, Mitchell never lived through the Civil War, immediately refuting this theory. She had not survived the experiences of her character, not felt the real fear of hunger, not possessed the fear of losing her beloved home, nor witnessed the burning of Atlanta. Mitchell was generations removed from the life of Scarlett, and she most certainly could not have based Scarlett on her own life unless she had experienced the exigencies of war as well. Certainly both Mitchell and Scarlett were modern women in their own sense, but Mitchell was a flapper, a product of her generation, and Scarlett possessed none of the elements of a thirties debutante. For Mitchell's generation, it was popular to be different, and most girls were shortening their hemlines, drinking, smoking, and dancing. Scarlett stuck out of her society for acting in the rebellious ways of the 1860's, further proving the dissimilarities between these two remarkable women.

It is much more feasible to see Mary as Mitchell's model for Scarlett. Mitchell did copious amounts of research for *Gone With the Wind*, so it is entirely possible she stumbled over Mary's diary in the course of her visits to the Atlanta library. Mary Chesnut was slightly older than Scarlett when the war broke out, but both women experienced the war in similar ways. Even before the war, the patterns of their lives run parallel to one another. Both women were educated at female academies, they both thoroughly enjoyed being belles, so much so that when they got married, they felt the need to proliferate the life of a belle, and charmed many a men besides their husbands, despite the fact that neither woman was considered a beauty for her time. Neither women possessed the skills to mother a child, and they both were outspoken about their beliefs, refusing to conform to the societal standards of the time.

During the war, both women provided aid to soldiers, and learned to make do with much less than what they had been previously used to. They found new uses for old things, and both women became skilled at making clothes from other pieces of fabric or re-using old dresses, although both women bemoaned this fact. Neither woman had a penchant for slaves, and both found them to be a burden upon themselves. They both fled from their homes in the late years of the war, and upon returning, found their homes still standing, but barely, and they were both virtually penniless as they began to rebuild their homes.

After the war, both women went to work in order to make money to support their families. They became more interested in business and politics, and were

unable to put trust back in the men in their lives, for these were the same men who allowed both women to end up in such a dire situation in the first place. Finally though, a world opened up for women like Mary and Scarlett. They could express themselves, boast their personalities, and share their opinions without fearing backlash from the community. The Civil War was a blessing in disguise for both, and although they had to endure horrendous conditions, and their lives were turned on their heads, Mary and Scarlett were able to enter a world in which they were more accepted. Women began to take a more active role in their lives, and upon entering the public sphere, they were not forced to live a life where sharing their opinions and expressing their personalities was considered a faux pas. The definition of womanhood changed, and Mary and Scarlett emerged from the war town South the victors, finally being allowed to be active agents in their own lives. They were ahead of their time, and with surrender came the chance for Mary and Scarlett to live their lives openly.

I believe this theory about the basis of the character of Scarlett to be the most plausible, backed up by copious amounts of research and evidence. Many more theories do exist, but none garner as much proof as the theory that Scarlett O'Hara was based on Mary Boykin Chesnut. Since John Marsh burned all his wife's *Gone With the Wind* papers, no one will ever know the truth about where Scarlett came from. Perhaps she was a figment of Mitchell's imagination. Perhaps she was a real person. Perhaps she was indeed based on Mary Boykin Chesnut. But like the return of Rhett Butler, some things will forever remain a mystery.

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