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The Education of a 'Learned Wife': Discovering the Reading Practices of Southern Women during the Rise of the United States

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“THE EDUCATION OF A ‘LEARNED WIFE’: DISCOVERING THE READING
PRACTICES OF SOUTHERN WOMEN DURING THE RISE OF THE UNITED STATES”

By

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For all the Southern women who found pleasure in their books
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .......................................................................................................................................... vi
Introduction ..................................................................................................................................... 1
Chapter 1 – Selections from the Bookshelf .................................................................................. 15
Chapter 2 – Visiting the Bookshelf ............................................................................................... 34
Chapter 3 – Filling the Bookshelf ................................................................................................. 52
Chapter 4 – Reacting to the Bookshelf ........................................................................................... 68
Conclusion .................................................................................................................................... 89
Appendix A ................................................................................................................................... 97
Appendix B ................................................................................................................................... 108
Bibliography ............................................................................................................................... 110
Biographical Sketch .................................................................................................................... 119
ABSTRACT

“The Education of a ‘Learned Wife’: Discovering the Reading Practices of Southern Women during the Rise of the United States” will explore the inner thoughts of women living in the South between 1790 and 1860 to better understand how women continued to educate themselves through literature. Many women did not keep diaries and through the ages the personal writings of those who did have been lost to historians forever. Those diaries, however, that survived through publication or archives allow the life and experiences of Southern women as a whole to continue to speak and allow historians to research their reading habits and lives. The words of these women uncovered or rediscovered will direct the course of this project, allowing an exploration and analysis to piece together the lasting influences and enrichment of the mind from their reading practices.
INTRODUCTION

In twenty-first century America, reading practices factor very little in the social hierarchy. People take for granted the ability to read and write. Children learn to read at a very young age, and their elementary and secondary education comes free of charge, through funding from the government. Many programs, scholarships, grants, and loans allow high school graduates to continue their education at colleges and universities around the world. Aside from educational institutions that promote reading, a plethora of reading materials is available from libraries, bookstores or even on the Internet. Their ready accessibility overshadows the fact that in the not so distant past these places did not exist as a means to acquire books. Early Americans in search of reading matter faced drastically different cultural circumstances and literary restrictions. The Southern region of the United States experienced even greater limitations than the North, but women there still accessed reading materials, thus creating the basis for this project.

During the rise of the United States, from 1790 to 1860, educational opportunities not only separated the various classes of the population, they also favored the sons, not the daughters, of wealthier families of the country. Educated men typically controlled their own monetary funds and used or built personal libraries which led to literary consumption of a wide variety of materials. As a consequence, publishers of books concentrated on marketing books appealing to the largest group of prospective buyers, namely men. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, women, especially Southern women, experienced few liberties and educational opportunities, thus affecting their chances of reading from a variety of literary materials. Those women who did read often faced problems in obtaining materials, particularly books of interest to the female audience.

While a rising interest and research in the reading practices of antebellum Americans exists, the Northern literary and publishing establishments dominate investigations in the subject. Many monographs regarding Southern life from 1780 to 1860 have been concerned only with the effects of slavery. The day-to-day activities of white women during this time have faded into history, hardly leaving a trail to recapture female reading habits. Emphasis on the Civil War has unfortunately created a scholarly void for persons interested in the literary experiences of women of the South. Although several diaries of females in the South have made their way into
published works, their editors focused upon the coming and completion of the war, not normal
daily life. This crisis may have inspired more ladies to write in their diaries; however those
living in years before kept daily journals as well, though their accounts often remain
unpublished. Luckily, acquisitions and donations to archives throughout the years preserved the
words of normal life written by ladies in southern American cities. Working with diaries and
letters of those women who enjoyed the ability to read and write along with the financial means
to purchase or borrow reading material, this project brings enlightenment about the reading
practices of Southern women in the United States.

This project uses Southern women’s own words to better understand what they read, why
they read, how they acquired materials and the effect reading caused on their lives and
relationships with family and friends.

Books abounded in the United States during the rise of the country, with imports from
England supplementing nationally and locally published books, almanacs, newspapers and other
items of reading interests. Historians Ronald and Mary Zboray explain “between 1850 and 1860
alone, the printing industry’s product value increased by 168 percent.”¹ This jump resulted in
profits of over thirty million dollars when the industry in the preceding decade previously
accumulated only twelve million.² The rise in production and profits followed the rise in reader
consumption. Scholars Barbara Ryan and Mary Thomas show how this alteration in
consumption patterns created other major changes as well. In Reading Acts, they drastically
revise the previous view of “readers as passive consumers of cultural products,” showing how
these production shifts changed readers into “active agents.”³ With readers influencing and
participating in the industry, the production and importation of certain materials for the reading
consumers widened the available resources for literate men and women in the antebellum period.

The degree to which women readers could affect publishing choices remains largely
unknown. All of these printed items captured the interest of an audience, though usually men
occupied the power positions in book shops, print shops and publishing houses. Rosalind Remer
highlights the competition between printers and publishers, helping to expand the items available

¹ Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, Literary Dollars and Social Sense: A People's History of the Mass
Market Book (New York: Routledge, 2005), xi.
² Zboray and Zboray, Literary Dollars and Social Sense, xi.
³ Barbara Ryan and Amy M. Thomas, Reading Acts: U.S. Readers’ Interactions with Literature, 1800-
“in the most commonly published genres” ahead of the actual demand for those books. With the men in charge of decisions of what to print, they had to carefully choose items which would sell, and focus on ones that could be completed in a timely manner which no one else currently had in publication. This complicated process created a fraternity of printers and publishers who “cooperate[d] broadly with one another in an effort to create and serve a national market.” These men spoke to their peers in the industry to decide what to import or publish. Thus the reading needs of women either remained unheard or only received recognition by filtering through the men in their lives and communities somehow connected to the industry.

Determining the types of items the women read also helps one unearth their mental abilities, interest in different subjects, and the flow of materials into their communities. Discovering what got read uncovers reasons why they chose to read the material, such as a recommendation from a friend, family member or other prominent figure in their lives. Maybe they secretly read the book because it was banned or criticized by prominent members of the community. Historian Scott E. Casper has stated “falling in with the wrong sorts of books…could ruin an individual’s character,” yet on the other hand, “proper reading…could strengthen…women’s…and girls’ morality, intellect, patriotism, and right habits.” Reading habits not only reveal personal interests, but deeper issues of importance to families and communities, like morality and dedication to the country.

When a woman took time to pen a paragraph or even just a line in her private papers regarding the books she secretly perused or openly studied, obviously the material significantly influenced her life. Researching the surviving words of the women under study helps explore not only reactions to the books they read, but how they obtained the items and why they wanted to read them. Most women who experienced education and social privileges imparted thoughts and feelings onto paper, thus excluding from this study women of lower classes. The expense of reading materials likewise favors women of means with the leisure time required to focus on their selections. Those working hard to survive and produce a healthy family may not have possessed the educational background to be literate, nor could they afford to purchase reading

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5 Rosalind Remer, Printers and Men of Capital, 40.
materials. If women were privileged enough they could read and obtain books, then they often were not criticized for spending fruitful hours on a “frivolous” activity.

Possession of books and other readable items for women came through various means. Husbands or fathers, or even mothers, offered items for their wives or daughters to read and often the material came with a message fitting the mindset of the family ideology. Borrowing from friends and neighbors became a gateway for ladies to expand their interests and learning. Choosing the material to read, however, may have presented less of a choice than a modern reader experiences. With few or no book-selling shops in small towns and trips to larger towns focusing on business or trade matters, women may have been forced to choose from the books available and ready to purchase in stores when they arrived in town, thus influencing their reading habits in less personal ways. If a bookseller needed to disperse a set number of titles, young ladies eager to read and in town only for the day could have presented the perfect opportunity to rid the shop of slow selling titles. All of these factors played into the accessibility of materials, along with cultivating future reading practices.

The effect of reading upon the women becomes clear during the book’s progression via the notes women wrote in their diaries or papers. The other implications of reading only revealed themselves in small bits of information concerning friends’ and family members’ reactions to the material they read and the ideas propagated through the readings. While these women enjoyed the liberty to read, they did not reign supreme in the social structure in which they belonged. Male dominance heavily influenced the material women could readily obtain and read within their household. Since fathers, and then husbands, expected compliance with their views of the world, these women may have disobeyed their male head-of-house to read some works, thereby increasing tension or secrecy in the household. On the other hand, recommendations from husbands or fathers may have encouraged a woman to acquire a certain book and increased harmony and communication between the family members. Reading then became a means for rising to equal footing or at least mental acuity with men in the society allowing women even to recommend books to the men in their lives. The various messages in the books the women read certainly had an effect on their views and ideas on issues not always considered appropriate for women in the antebellum period. This tension caused some men to question the ideas taught in the reading materials. Exploring the various male interactions and
reactions to female reading habits broadened the scope of this project, adding an important context for the research and conclusions outpouring from the women’s own writings.

The historical implications of reading upon the population of the United States have recently captured historians’ interest and an explosion of research sheds light on the reading practices of different generations of Americans. While the field of the history of the book gains popularity, unfortunately very few works delve into the reading habits among women of the South during the years between the forming of a nation and the division of that same country. *A History of the Book in America, Volume I: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* by Hugh Amory and David Hall narrates the history of print, script and speech in early America. One of the strengths of the volume is its plentiful textual artifacts, such as newspaper notices, catalogues, guidebooks, textbooks, but it was not particularly focused upon the words of women’s diaries.

A compilation of essays in *Perspectives on American Book History* also investigates the new genre of the history of the book, as well as pointing out influences upon the printed word and its historical reception by different kinds of readers. Scott Casper discussed in his chapter “Antebellum Reading Prescribed and Described” the rise in women readership and pointed out how this influenced the publishing industry. In his analysis, however, women’s reading preferences took a back seat to the industry’s other issues of this time, such as morality and the need for books to influence the morals of the readers. Casper also highlighted the changes in society with an emerging focus on education and the mother’s role in raising a proper citizen. Moral reading became important in early America because the items women read eventually influenced their children, either for their benefit or detriment. This project explores the reading practices of Southern white women, therefore adding another dimension to the overall history of the book by revealing the everyday influences upon women readers, particularly Southern women who did not reside in the populous book districts.7

The history of the South captures many books, articles and even popular discussions, though this intense focus usually omits the normal day-to-day routine of women in the past. The issues and events leading to the Civil War, and after, routinely are the center of attention in these works. For example, in W. Fitzhugh Brundage’s *The Southern Past*, women begin his story, but not as important players or even those with influence during the rise of the United States.

7 *Perspectives*, 155-161.
Instead, they figure largely in the South’s repair after the conflict, fulfilling “a duty peculiarly fitting to women” by fundraising and promoting the commemoration of the past immediately following the Civil War.\(^8\) Other works on Southern historiography give detailed accounts of many aspects of the region, starting with the colonial times and progressing through the aftermath of Reconstruction. *Writing Southern History*, a 444-page book chronicling various time periods, events and African slavery, deals with the influence of women in two sentences, relegating a reader to look to the footnote to find additional works on this topic.\(^9\) Some works touted as southern history actually utilize accounts of transplanted northern women and their view on the South; see, for instance, how women are portrayed in *Echoes from a Distant Frontier: The Brown Sisters’ Correspondence from Antebellum Florida*, edited by James M. Denham and Keith L. Huneycutt.\(^10\) Such an approach does not allow for the exploration of internal cultural developments because the differences between the regions overshadow the narrative and typically end with Southerners portrayed as slower or less intellectually inclined than their Northern neighbors. The continuing emphasis on Southern differences from the North led Wendell Holmes Stephenson to conclude that “historical literature might well begin by inquiring whether southern historians have discovered any great theme or pattern…that explains southern thought and action” other than regional distinctiveness. Certainly historians have not considered the small influences and impressions gained from reading which shaped the lives of the mothers and daughters across the region.\(^11\)

Although some works on Southern women detailed important issues, in exploring these issues the literary interests of the women are frequently overlooked. In Laura Odendahl’s chapter, “A History of Captivity and a History of Freedom,” she contemplated race among a household of single, white females and their black, female servants. Unfortunately for a study of the home full of females including literate, white women, reflections about reading rarely appeared. Instead, several pages are devoted to explaining how the two primarily researched ladies had obtained the financial means to own their own home and the few household servants

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they had prior to the war. While Odendahl did discuss aspects of the two white women’s daily life, the primary purpose of her scholarship concerned interactions with their slaves, not the literature they may have brought into the house.12

More recently, great strides by historians have begun to reveal the voices of Southern women, but many aspects of their lives remained unexamined. In Taking Off the White Gloves, a collection of essays by women historians, the scholars discusses various issues about the history of women and the women writing history, but reading habits are not among them. Virginia van der Veer Hamilton stated, “without doubt we need authors to rescue women from obscurity.”13 Studying women at different stages in their lives, however, is becoming a scholarly concern. Life for women in the South during the antebellum years progressed differently, based on their age groups, and historians have recently begun to explore these issues. Giselle Roberts, in The Confederate Belle, utilizes this technique and focuses on giving voices to the young ladies of the South. In her introduction, Roberts acknowledges the great strides of other women historians in studying the plantation mistress, but pinpoints the lack of research on the daughters of these plantation mothers. Pulling her research from the diaries and letters of belles from Louisiana and Mississippi, The Confederate Belle gave the reader a better idea of the home life of the young ladies. Reviving young ladies through their writings, Roberts found the daughters of plantation households were “not accustomed to domestic work of any kind.”14 Daily chores and managing house servants fell to the mistress of the house, the belle’s mother.15

Glorified, revered, remembered, but never fully understood, the Southern woman permeated history over time, but how did she become such a memorable icon of the past? Sometimes literary or film icons epitomized a class, race or group of people, and for Southern women, Margaret Mitchell’s Scarlett O’Hara did just that. Historians do not always take up the ideas of pop culture, but the broad effects of Gone With the Wind have reached even academic works. Giselle Roberts writes “it is hard to write a book about the Southern belle without mentioning Scarlett O’Hara.”16 So if Scarlett has inundated the minds of Americans, why should historians try to work against this icon? “Scarlett was anything but the embodiment of the

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quintessential belle…[she] was actually the antithesis of the exalted feminine ideal.”¹⁷ A lack of historical research into this subject permitted Gone With the Wind to shape popular views of this character. This could not justifiably represent the whole of the women in the South, but newer scholarship has begun to challenge this old icon.

Tara Revisited, Scarlett’s Sisters and Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore are three books which all deals with modifying the public’s idea of Southern women, replacing literary fiction with historical facts. In Tara Revisited, historian Catherine Clinton battles against the legend of Scarlett’s home, Tara, “to relocate the legend in a complex interweaving of myth and memories” especially concerning the lives of the women living on the plantations.¹⁸ Finally, the shroud around the everyday lives of Southern ladies begins to be torn away and even the mystique around Tara and Scarlett fades.

Anya Jabour, like Giselle Roberts, focuses her entire book on young ladies of the South, those who could rightly have been Scarlett’s Sisters. In this work, the author tried to battle against the ideal of Scarlett while showing that the young ladies’ lives included everything the fictional belle had: “romance and passion, grief and heartache, drama and pathos.”¹⁹ Jabour detailes every part of a young girl’s life, such as school, courtship, and of course marriage.

Laura F. Edwards also rallied against the Gone With the Wind image of Southern women. In Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore, Edwards hoped to change the way historians and even non-academics see Southern women and merge their story into the bigger history of the South.²⁰ Utilizing the pervasive pop culture idea while simultaneously rejecting it, the author battles against the misconceptions and proves to the reader how inaccurately the fictional work portrays history.²¹

Other historical works which focused on women or gender in the South dealt more with colonial or early national issues of sex, religion or race, while ignoring women as readers. Searching for Their Places detailed these issues in several chapters and dug deeper into the

¹⁹ Anya Jabour, Scarlett’s Sisters: Young Women in the Old South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 6
²¹ Laura F. Edwards, Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore, 70.
activities and motivations of women.\textsuperscript{22} However, reading or literary influences have little place in the larger issues of femininity and gender in the book. \textit{Taking Off the White Gloves}, another book interested in Southern women and women historians, discusses several important colonial or antebellum issues, such as suffrage, and again, sex, but not reading.\textsuperscript{23}

“The Education of a ‘Learned Wife’” adds an interesting and under-researched perspective to the works regarding the history of the book, Southern and women’s historiography.\textsuperscript{24} Adding to the history of the book by discussing which books the women read and how they accessed them will provide new information, expanding existing discussions of these subjects by shifting the focus from Southern men or even Northern men and women. The reactions Southern women recorded to the materials they read will also add to the study of the history of the book. Southern history will similarly benefit from this study by gaining new information about how men and women traded books and how families reacted to reading habits of young women. On the same note, historians will find the study appealing because it explores the educational and pleasure reading women partook of and the ways in which they built networks of friends and neighbors to share books. Also, historians will find the women’s reactions very exciting as it gives new insights into their mindset and their interests. This study offers many historians more information on an under-researched group by gleaning from women’s own thoughts, the evidence of the impact that the printed word had upon their lives and the culture around them.

Evidence for this project includes using both published and unpublished diaries, papers and letters written by Southern women, as well as previous researchers’ works on the history of literary fields and the consumption of the reading public in the United States. The papers available in archival collections located throughout the Deep South provide a wealth of information. This information creates the basis for research since the editing of published diaries of the more well known or articulate writers usually removed daily activities including the titles of books read. Several diaries of Southern women have over the years found their way into

\textsuperscript{22} Thomas H. Appleton, Jr. and Angela Boswell, editors, \textit{Searching for Their Places: Women in the South Across Four Centuries.}

\textsuperscript{23} Michele Gillespie and Catherine Clinton, editors, \textit{Taking off the White Gloves: Southern Women and Women Historians} (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1998).

\textsuperscript{24} The learned wife comes from a letter, “The Plague of a Learned Wife,” written by Obadiah Olive in 1798. In the letter, Olive complains about the reading habits of his wife and daughter. He states how their reading brings new words he does not understand into their household and that an acceptable suitor for his daughter chose not to pursue marriage because of her “learning.”
publication, especially those who lived during the build-up to the Civil War. While the editors’ focus in these volumes was not on the woman’s reading habits or journal entries about acquiring books, small snippets of information on these subjects make their way into these published accounts of their lives nonetheless. Exploring the holdings at the University of North Carolina, Duke University, The South Carolina Historical Society and the Florida State Archives provided an ample supply of diaries and letters written by Southern women. All of the archives contained holdings of women living in the South during the late 1700’s and early to mid 1800’s, which illuminated the central thesis of the project. Private correspondence and diaries allowed the study to include a range of culturally and economically diverse white ladies, giving a deeper understanding of reading habits and literary influences on women of southern locales.

Of particular significance was the microfilm collection “Southern Women and Their Families in the 19th Century: Papers and Diaries.” This collection includes women’s writings extracted from the holdings from The Earl Gregg Swem Library at The College of William and Mary, The Center for American History at The University of Texas at Austin, The Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections at the Louisiana State University Libraries, the Southern Historical Collection at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Virginia Historical Society, the University of Virginia Library and Duke University Library. Since the collection includes holdings at locations not searched in person, this microfilm collection allowed more sources to be scrutinized.

“The Education of a ‘Learned Wife’” explores the reading practices of women living in the South to better understand how women continued to educate themselves through literature. Beginning with 1790, the year the thirteenth colony ratified the constitution, this study delves into the personal diaries of women up to the eve of the Civil War, 1860. Utilizing two methods of research to tackle this subject encompasses as many ladies and their diaries as possible. Many women did not keep diaries and through the ages some of the personal writings of those who did have been lost to historians forever. The diaries preserved through publication or archives allows the lives and experiences of Southern white women to speak and permits research into

their reading habits. The availability of published diaries also supports close reading to explore any mention of reading practices, though most of the journals published have been edited to exclude the mention of daily activities deemed mundane or not relevant for the purpose of the publishers. Similarly, a close reading of unpublished writings aids the scholar in finding books listed in their diaries, along with other pertinent information included about their reading habits. The words of these women uncovered or rediscovered direct the course of this project, allowing an exploration and analysis to piece together the lasting influences and enrichment of minds from their reading practices.

This project explores the cultural, social and literary historical aspects of Southern reading habits among women. The history of book publishing, selling and reading practices takes the forefront of the project by utilizing women’s writings of their personal experiences of obtaining and consuming the products of the printing industry. This historical aspect creates the foundation of two chapters of this project: one on the actual items the women read and the other on how the women acquired their reading materials. Cultural threads weave themselves throughout the literary history and social threads sew their way into the narrative as well. The ways in which certain books moved from the print shop, to bookseller, to female reader reveal the cultural landscape of a rising nation, while highlighting some differences between the South when compared to Northern culture.

The first chapter details the titles which the women read and what other material besides books may have influenced their literary tastes. Each woman discussed in this chapter and the following ones recorded at least one instance of reading in the papers which she left behind. The women read a varied list of works, including classics like Jane Austen and obscure books which today do not appear in classrooms. This chapter discusses the materials such as newspapers and magazines which supplemented reading habits when novels were not readily available or that offered a change of pace from books. Also included will be an inside look at the women who will be the focus of the remaining chapters, giving the reader a better understanding of their lives aside from their reading practices.

The second chapter of this project focuses on when, where and why the young ladies or married women read. This look at written accounts of their reading habits reveals at what times the women read during the day. This chapter also uses the women’s memoirs and statements to discuss the motivations behind their reading habits. The reader may have chosen to follow the
popular trend and read a particular piece, or maybe a recommendation prompted her choice of reading matter. Education often inspired young women to obtain a work for their continuing mental or spiritual growth. The times of day the women read sometimes influenced their reasons for reading, while other times they found minutes to steal from their activities to partake of a few lines or a chapter of a book or novel. Lighting concerns caused the women to move through the house and even outside to save on candles while allowing them to continue reading. Some of the women read many books each month and the lack of new materials sometimes hampered their yearning to read. Availability of materials became an important issue in an avid reader’s quest to read.

Chapter three focuses on how the ladies obtained books since access to published works influenced the reasons for them to read. In relation to this issue, the movement of printed material throughout the country and especially the South factors heavily into the reading practices of both men and women. Once the books reached nearby market places, the ways in which women obtained them for consumption still must be dissected. Booksellers or bookshops offered one way for purchasing books, yet not all women gathered their books from this source. Ladies living in remote locations or with little money for expensive books relied on friends and family members sharing with them. While this dependence may have influenced their decisions for reading certain materials, even if the women acquired materials through secondhand sources, they did choose to read it anyway.

The fourth chapter explores how the women felt about their reading habits, whether important or on the periphery of the accounts of their lives. How family and friends close to the women responded to their reading habits gives even more historical relevance to the project. Socially, women of the South lived in the shadows of a male-dominated society. Moreover, their interactions with men, children and other women in their communities could be influenced by the various moral and social motivations in the books they read. Combining the reasons for reading certain material with the potential to alter or affect community views and even the social hierarchy becomes a major focus of this chapter. Sharing reading materials with husbands or family members showed the need to gain approval for literature women read. Many books may not have been suitable for everyone to read and lists of appropriate books for young ladies to read which came either from family members or school instructors regularly occupy their diaries.
Studying the reading habits of Southern women in the United States from 1780 to 1860 requires delving into many issues of family, society and economy. Understanding why women read or what they thought about a book requires studying their written memoirs. This study hinges on many factors such as the preservation of these notes and diaries and their accessibility to researchers. Yet, the single most important dynamic of this study relies on the women themselves: reading books and then writing about this activity.

A few points bear noting, especially about how women are presented in this study. Obviously, women wrote their diaries at various points in their lives; rarely does one have a journal covering an entire woman’s reading career. For purposes of consistency and clarity, the names used throughout the study will be a reader’s first name and last or married name and then consecutive references will be first name only. The reader, however, should keep in mind that many of the women sometimes began their journals prior to marriage. This naming practice simplifies and helps the reader keep the identities of specific women clear, no matter what time frame the comments from their diaries are used. This is especially necessary for one writer, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, who read avidly over many years included in this study. She will be referred to as Ella Thomas in this study, although portions of her diary were clearly written when she was still Ella Clanton.

While the focus of this study remains with Southern women in various locales of the region and spanning the seventy years of the study’s time frame, Ella Thomas appears in every section. The great detail and selection of books and other reading materials which Ella obtained and commented upon in her diary provides a wealth of information and will be utilized at length. The extensive use of her diary is not an attempt to focus on this one woman, nor is it meant to overshadow the other Southern women in the study. However, the availability of sources in which female readers commented on their reading habits remains somewhat limited and the Thomas diary provides great insights that provide repeated illumination.

Background information on the studied women, when available, will be included throughout the study. Ella Thomas’s prominent role in the study suggests that she should be introduced first. Ella began keeping her journal in 1848 at the age of fourteen and continued after her 1852 marriage to Jefferson Thomas. She continued making entries until 1889. While her journal received attention and an abridged publication in 1990, the editor focused on Thomas’s prolific accounts of her life during the Civil War and especially her family’s hardships
afterwards. The portions of her life relevant to this study, from 1848 to 1860, were heavily abridged and the complete original manuscript has been consulted for more details on her reading habits. In particular, the journal reveals her love for reading, recounting specific details of when, why and what she read along with how she obtained the materials and her own reactions to the books as well as family reactions towards her reading. The many different titles which came into Ella’s hands and the hands of other Southern women are the focus of the first chapter of this study.
CHAPTER 1 – SELECTIONS FROM THE BOOKSHELF

A crucial element in exploring the reading habits of Southern women hinges upon understanding exactly what types of books or other materials the women read. It bears noting that the items the women read may not have been of their own choosing, but were the only items available in the home or the community. In the antebellum period, religion was a very important aspect of life and reading the Bible occupied much of the women’s leisure time. This tome was not the only religious material they found to consume during the time set aside for their literary pursuits. Books which discussed the people or events in the scriptures also found their way into the women’s homes, helping them to understand and appreciate the Bible even more. Some studied preachers’ printed or published sermons or Sunday school books which provided valuable religious lessons for the women. Other women turned to manuals on morals or explanations about faith to direct young believers.

Though many of the women read religious works, this was not an exclusive reading habit. Almost all of the women in the study turned to other nonfiction or fictional books. In the nonfiction category, several different types of materials captured the women’s interests. Historical literature occupied a prevalent part of some female readers’ time. Books based on American history ranged widely, covering topics from the landing of the Pilgrims to specific states in which the women lived. European history also figured largely among the women’s finished literary works. Some detailed the classical period of the world, teaching the women about Greece and Rome. Other publications revolved around modern European nations, such as Spain and England. This interest in nations abroad sometimes led women to seek out and even read travel literature to learn more about the countries which existed during their time. The women in this study split their focus between European, American and far off regions when it came to reading travel works. Some studied states in the South, while others perused books on Europe and distant places like the Far East or the Arctic.

History and travel were not the only types of nonfiction literature which filled the shelves of Southern female readers. Autobiographies and biographies were also of interest to them. The lives of the great leaders of Rome and Greece increased women’s familiarity with those regions and history. Kings of England or the great English poets helped the readers discover new and interesting details about important figures while placing the men (for almost all were ‘great men’) in context with the other literature available. Quite a few works detailing ordinary people
in extraordinary places or professions enthralled Southern women. While biographies of men were popular, the female readers also made time to read about their own sex. Well known women authors were an obvious subject of interest for the Southern women, but they chose to read about not so well-known women also. Works concerning women living in the nineteenth century or the South were listed in the diaries explored for this study, along with books about normal, everyday women like a minister’s daughter or Southern matron.

The women read fictional works alongside the nonfiction, and some apparently preferred novels to more educational offerings. Titles which even today are deemed classics filled the reading time of the Southern women from 1790 to 1860. Notations about reading Homer appeared in several of the women’s diaries. Other great authors filled the pages of the reading records of some women. William Shakespeare, with several of his plays, not only was read by the women, but was frequently deemed literature appropriate for women to read. Other items read by the diarists were published during the women’s lifetimes, but have gone on to become classics. Many of the readers commented about works by Sir Walter Scott, another author respected by current literary scholars and still exciting to modern readers. Some books like *The Baronette's Daughter* and *Jane Eyre* captured the women’s literary interests and led to them tracking down other works by the same authors. Popular works that appeared in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries provided many hours of reading pleasure for Southern women, though not all of the works can be linked to specific titles; partial titles sometimes cannot always be classified except based on a woman’s diary remarks. Another area of interest for most of the women in this study came in the form of reading fictional works by women authors. Most record keepers did not specifically mention this being the catalysts for their choosing books, but they often commented when a previously read title was written by a female.

Aside from the Bible, nonfiction and fictional works, antebellum women still found time to read other genres of literature. Poetry complemented the other types of fictional works Southern women consumed and many remarked on reading these pieces and copied them into their diaries to have them on hand to view again. For many of the young ladies in this study, school work included reading the provided material to prepare for their upcoming classes. Others, including women past school age, took magazine subscriptions, especially those which offered literary reviews and short stories, and read them thoroughly. Several women commented on reading articles in local or even Northern cities’ newspapers. Another item which one woman
remarked about reading was children books. A mother who was an avid reader commented about reading a book aloud to her son and looking over books before they were passed on to the children. While these items were not the focus of the study, their inclusion in the women’s diaries showcased the diversity of reading materials available to them.

The book most likely to be available to all women, no matter where they lived, was the Bible. Regardless of their location or social class, the Bible was an influential piece of literature for antebellum Southern women. The Holy Scriptures occupied many of the women’s reading time, especially those who did not find abundant time for the activity. Eliza Barksdale noted reading “three chapters in Samuel” one Sunday for her Bible study.  

Elizabeth Meriwether recollected her mother offering the tome to read, and though she did not mention if she read all or only part, Elizabeth did peruse enough of the stories to ask her mother questions about them. Grace Hunter read and recorded the Bible as her text on several occasions; however these actions listed in her journals included no elaborative comments, thus suggesting this was so much a part of her normal routine that written reflections were unnecessary. Mary Williams’s relative read in the Bible and recorded her activities in a letter to Mary. She wrote about how her time recuperating from an illness passed through reading and the scriptures.

For most Southern women, the Bible was a text that warranted repeated, and comprehensive, reading. Kate Carney turned to the Holy Book on many occasions and she even entered in her diary, “I finish[ed] the New Testament for the eighth time tonight.” She appeared to find this work suitable for multiple readings, as the next evening she wrote in her journal she had once again begun the New Testament. Ella Thomas set goals for herself to complete the New Testament like Kate Carney. Ella began at the beginning of each year and hoped to finish by the last day of December. Many entries in her diary over the years revealed her active

2 Elizabeth Avery Meriwether, “Recollections of Ninety-Two Years,” Microfilm of Transcript, 20, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
4 Copy of letter from a relative to Mary Williams in Mary Kearney Davis Williams book, James Payne Beckwith, Jr. Family Papers, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
5 16 March 1859, Kate S. Carney diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
6 17 March 1859, Kate S. Carney diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
7 27 July 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
pursuit of this accomplishment.\textsuperscript{8} She detailed reading the first three books of the New Testament in the first three weeks of April 1851 during her stay at a women’s school in Augusta, Georgia.\textsuperscript{9} Another time, Ella remarked she finished the religious text on the last days of the year, an accomplishment delayed because of confinement for the birth of her child.\textsuperscript{10}

Not every woman wrote of a specific goal to achieve, but read items of scriptural interest befitting their mood. In her Bible, Ann Kinloch read some of the Psalms, though this entry did not follow a pattern of reading through the Old Testament sequentially.\textsuperscript{11} Anna Lesesne also chose to read in the Bible, though most of her written comments only revealed the activity without details. On many evenings, Anna entered in her diary she had “read a chapter or [two] in the Bible,” especially doing so before she retired to bed.\textsuperscript{12}

The Bible, a very important book for many of the Southern female readers, did not complete the realm of religious materials the women utilized to sate their literary appetites. Sermons filled a special place in the women’s reading repertoires. Ella Thomas wrote in her diary about reading a sermon by Bascomb entitled “Judgment.”\textsuperscript{13} Elizabeth Perry perused \textit{Peabody’s Sermons}, a collection of several delivered discourses.\textsuperscript{14} Another item which was listed in Ella Thomas’s diary entitled \textit{An Easter Offering} could possibly be a published sermon for the holy day, but she did not comment on its content so its classification remains unclear.\textsuperscript{15}

Studying these sermons filled their time, but other religiously themed texts also found their way onto the women’s shelves. Kate Carney had two books, \textit{Bible and the Family} and a book about the Bible, which she remarked about choosing on many days, especially Sundays on which the family could not attend church.\textsuperscript{16} Ann Kinloch read quite a bit in \textit{Messiah}, another religiously themed book which helped her to better understand the Bible.\textsuperscript{17} Books detailing the lives or events occurring in the Bible also provided many hours of reading pleasure for Southern women. Ann Kinloch found the history of biblical events important to research and kept \textit{Sacred}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item 31 December 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\item 24 April 1851, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\item 6 April 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\item 1 May 1799, Ann I Cleland Kinloch diary, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
\item 17 January 1836, Anna Lesesne diary, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
\item 11 April 1851 and 17 October 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\item Undated entry, Elizabeth F. Perry diary, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
\item 4 April 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\item 2 January 1859 and 24 April 1859, Kate S. Carney diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
\item 2 April 1799, Ann Cleland Kinloch paper, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
History by Trimer readily accessible. Anna Lesesne commented on many days that she read about the various people listed in the Holy Scriptures based upon her study of Hunter’s Sacred Biography.

The readers found religious materials served as guides to better living and prosperity for members of their faith. Ann Kinloch read The Moral Library and, though she did not comment about whether it was specifically religious, she apparently thought this subject would assist in her religious pursuits along with conforming to the expectations of Southern society. Ella Thomas was given The Episcopal Manual to review after attending a local church and finding it appealing. Ella utilized a Sunday school book, Money on Eloquence, to further her religious knowledge and fill her daily life with correct guidance about her faith. A book entitled A Young Christian, though unclear if classified as a teaching book or an account of a young member of the faith, found its way into Ann Lesesne’s reading materials. Mary Bateman spent time reading Rector’s Experience, another book which from the title appears to impart both teachings of faith and personal experiences with life.

While religious materials, especially the Holy Scriptures, were important to the women, most also enjoyed reading other works including histories, travel accounts and biographies. Historical literature appealed to many antebellum women, both for educational purposes and entertainment. American histories provided the women with details about the country in which they lived. In her diary, Ella Thomas wrote about the book Legends of the Revolutionary War by Lippard, which taught her about the great events and the people involved in the conflict to gain American independence. Elizabeth Perry commented about reading George Bancroft’s History of United States of America. She also had access to a copy of History of the United States by David Ramsay. Both of these works were written by prominent scholars and were considered well known histories of the new country. The former was originally published in 1834 and the

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18 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 14 April 1799 and 1 May 1799, Ann Cleland Kinloch paper, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
19 24 January 1836, Anna Lesesne diary, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
21 11 April 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
22 2 March 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
23 17 January 1836, Anna Lesesne diary, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
24 19 May 1856, Mary Bateman diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
25 Undated entry, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
26 Undated entry, Elizabeth F. Perry diary, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
27 Undated entry, Elizabeth F. Perry diary, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
second work first appeared in 1817, although when Elizabeth actually read them remains uncertain. Elizabeth lived from 1837 to 1888, but she did not date her journal entries; however, the journal began with her husband’s request for her to keep her thoughts, so she was probably reading these histories in the 1850s.\textsuperscript{28}

With the abundance of literature published in London and imported into the United States in the antebellum period, many women found the subject of European history offered a great selection of titles. Elizabeth Perry read Herodotus, the famous Greek historian, regarded by many as the father of history.\textsuperscript{29} The Greek theme also carried over to Kate Carney. She wrote in her diary of reading \textit{History of Greece.}\textsuperscript{30} Kate Garland and Mary Ann Randolph both read Hume’s \textit{History of England}, though Mary Ann did not specifically mention the title only the author’s name.\textsuperscript{31} \textit{History of England} was published from 1754 to 1762. Mary Ann was reading this title sometime in the 1830s and Kate in the months between mid-1859 and early 1860. Another woman remarked on reading a historical account of the time during a monarch’s reign. Ella Thomas read the \textit{History of Charles II} by Abbott and another work presumably by the same author, \textit{William the Conqueror}.\textsuperscript{32} Selena Lloyd wrote to her family of \textit{Tales of a Grandfather}, a historical account of Scotland by Sir Walter Scott.\textsuperscript{33} Ella Thomas read \textit{Europe} by Bayard Taylor, most likely a history of the continent, which might have drawn together the various European countries she read about through the years.\textsuperscript{34}

Female readers documented reading works whose titles suggest their content could have been historical in nature, though classification sometimes remains difficult because the women entered few comments on the book contents. Other books specifically proclaimed their subject in the title, yet did not specify the region or country in the title. Ella Thomas remarked in her diary on reading several of these books. \textit{The History of Bess} by an unknown author proclaims itself as a book of historical materials, yet Ella did not remark about the contents or whether it

\begin{footnotes}
\item[28] Undated entry, Elizabeth F. Perry diary, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
\item[29] Undated entry, Elizabeth F. Perry diary, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
\item[30] 12 May 1860, Kate S. Carney diary, microfilm, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
\item[32] 15 March 1852 and 21 May 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\item[34] 14 March 1859, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\end{footnotes}
was indeed a nonfiction book. Ella also read Onley’s History, obviously a work befitting this category, yet again, neither the title nor the diarist indicated exactly what region was discussed.

Two other books, Chambers Information for the People and Statistics of Georgia by White, both of which appeared in Ella’s journal, could have been historical works, but she failed to give specific details about these titles to help decipher their content.

Books of a historical nature found their way into the hands of several of the Southern readers, but these were not the only nonfictional works circulating in the region. The slowness of travel in the early American period privileged the elite class, but through books, many women could vicariously travel around Europe and even far off places. Publications listed in the Southern women’s diaries revealed the broad range of areas they vicariously traveled to through their literary pursuits. Kate Garland read two books, one entitled plainly Travels, and another more descriptively named Travels in Switzerland. Elizabeth Perry commented on reading two books about European travel. The one title, Travels in Turkey, Greece detailed those two countries while the second book, A Year in Spain, remarked on the scenery and political scene of the country according to Elizabeth’s comments in her diary.

Ella Thomas read a book that covered both the European continent and other more distant locales. She wrote about reading Samuel Quanens Prime’s work about travels to Europe and the East. This literature on travelling to more than one country also correlated to another work Ella read, Letters from Three Continents. Arctic Explorations by Kane found its way into Ella’s reading repertoire as well. While she may have eventually visited Europe, she most likely would never adventure to the Arctic, so Ella lived vicariously through the travel literature she consumed. Elizabeth Lomax also studied works about travels to the Orient and South America. In her diary, Elizabeth remarked on July 25, 1856, that “I am reading the first volume of

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35 17 May 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
36 16 November 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
37 25 September - 25 December 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
39 Undated entry, Elizabeth F. Perry diary, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
40 30 January 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
41 27 June 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
42 12 February 1858, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
Commodore Perry’s book.”³³ This work, Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan, was published in 1855 and consisted of three volumes. While Elizabeth did not comment on obtaining the other two volumes of the work, she read at length in the first. The other book, Herndon’s Explorations in the Valley of the Amazon, showed the varied interest of Elizabeth in travel narratives.⁴⁴ These works could have helped expand her knowledge about various continents or provided information for discussion during local travels to Washington, D.C. from northern Virginia.

As with histories, travel accounts often did not supply their topic in the title, leaving the burden of providing details to the women’s diaries. Selena Lloyd wrote of reading Montmoth’s Excursion, but she gave no other details as to where the excursion took place.⁴⁵ Ella Thomas read Woodlawn Geography and Impressions of America, both of which suggest they pertain to journeys through certain parts of the country or even abroad, yet Ella did not comment on the specifics of the material included in either book.⁴⁶ Travel literature provided many opportunities for the female readers to learn about locations soon to be travelled to or never to be seen.

Histories and travel books offered hours of reading pleasure about the past and the landscape of the present, and other materials allowed Southern women glimpses into the lives of people in years gone by or still living at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Biographies or personal accounts of one’s life captured the reading interest of several women. The stories and lives of the great men of the ancient world appeared in many of the readers’ diaries. Plutarch’s Lives made its way into the hands of several of the women, expanding their knowledge of the prominent men of ancient times. Grace Hunter, Elizabeth Perry and Ella Thomas wrote in their diaries of reading in this book, while Kate Garland placed it on her list of books already read.⁴⁷
Other biographical works pertained to men in the distant past, especially those of European
descent. *Life of Columbus* by Irving offered the women a look into the details about the man
who discovered the country in which they were living. Kate Garland completed this work and
then placed it on her list of literary accomplishments; maybe proving to her parents or teachers
she had acquired knowledge about this great man important to America. Other books which
may have been biographical have already been speculated about as possible histories. Ella
Thomas read *William the Conqueror* by Abbott and *The Days of Bruce* by Grace Aguilar. Both
of these books, along with *History of Charles II* by Abbott and *Robert Macarrie in England,*
could have contained biographical information, alongside or instead of historical or travel
narratives.

The women also read about those living in the recent past or in contemporary times.
Women read books about famous men or those who made important contributions to their
country. Ella Thomas studied *The Life of Addison* by Aikins, while Elizabeth Lomax “[had]
been reading Irving’s *Life of Washington.*” Philipa Lee wrote to her father of reading *The Life
of R.H. Lee,* a man of importance in the Revolutionary War, and possibly a distant relative,
though neither Philipa nor her father mentioned this fact in their letters. Kate Garland studied
*European Poets* by Longfellow. She listed only the books she had completed in a set time
frame, so it is unclear if she read this to learn about poetry or to learn about the poets themselves.
Men, even though not particularly famous, still captured the attention of biographers, and women
read about them too. Caroline Davis read *Diary of a Physician* and remarked she had not read

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*Southern Women and Their Families in the 19th Century: Papers and Diaries,* Series E, Holdings of the Louisiana State University (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 2002), Reel 11.


49 12 June 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.

50 26 December 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.


anything since because of the sadness the book left in her.\textsuperscript{54} The vivid details of the sorrows and horrors of the sick and dying in Dr. Samuel Warren’s, the physician, diary were published into a book in 1844, approximately fifteen years before Caroline read the work.

The African continent and the Far East captured the women’s, or at least Ella Thomas’s, literary interests, especially when learning about the men who had worked or lived in those regions. Ella commented on the book \textit{Captain Canot or Twenty Years of an African Slaver}.\textsuperscript{55} While this 1854 book possibly detailed the locations where the man and his ship travelled, compiled from his personal journals, the book probably offered a more personal look at his life and especially his ocean passages. Ella also read \textit{The Private Life of an Eastern King}, published in 1855, which recorded the events of the life of King Nussir-U-Deen of Oude, a modern day region of India.\textsuperscript{56} Another man in a far off country, Burma, captured the attention of Alfred Spencer Patton. Patton wrote \textit{The Hero Missionary, or A History of the Labors of Eugenio Kincaid}, which detailed the life of the reverend who went on missionary trips to Burma in the mid-1800s. Kate Garland read about the missionary’s travels to that far off country and added it to her list of completed works.\textsuperscript{57} Ella most likely found the foreign lands and these men’s interactions with their surroundings appealing since she read works with similar, yet distinct topics, while Kate may have read for those reasons or because of the missionary slant to the work.

Books about the lives of women appeared in many of the women’s diaries as having been consumed. One work read by Ella Thomas, \textit{The Shady Side, or Life in a Country Parsonage}, occupied her time for a few days.\textsuperscript{58} Published in 1853 by Martha Stone Hubbell, the pastor’s wife recounted her life and that of her husband during their time in the rectory. Other women’s writings included in large compilations also found their way into female readers’ homes. Kate Carney read \textit{Women of the 19th Century}, and Kate Garland found time for \textit{Women of the South}

\textsuperscript{55} November 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library. 
\textsuperscript{56} November 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library. 
\textsuperscript{57} October 1859 – July 1860, Kate Garland Papers, \textit{Southern Women and Their Families in the 19th Century: Papers and Diaries}, Series E, Holdings of the Louisiana State University (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 2002), Reel 11. 
\textsuperscript{58} 30 May 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
during her time of examining many titles. Another woman’s tale also interested Ella Thomas, as she read *The Female Pirate Captain: A Tale of the Revolution*. This book was published in 1844 by Maturin Murray Ballou. Elizabeth Perry read *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montague*, the compiled correspondence of an English lady living abroad published in 1837. Kate Garland read *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* by E. Caskell, obviously finding the life of the great author interesting enough to complete the work.

Ella Thomas read quite a few biographical accounts of women, both written by the subjects themselves or commemorated by men. Ella commented on reading *The Life of Lady Blessington*, most likely the biographical work by Richard Robert Madden, published in 1855, detailing the life of an Italian woman. Ella also read another woman’s autobiography which was published in 1855 entitled *Mary Lyndon, or Revelations of a Life*. Anna Lesesne commented on reading a book, *Miss Hannah More’s Life*, though this appears to be a miswriting of *The Works of Hannah More*, published in 1847 by Hannah More herself. This book by More was also read by Kate Garland and Mary Bateman, showing this was a somewhat popular title among Southern women. Ella Thomas must have had an interest in reading about the lives of women as she read about yet another, Mrs. Mowatt. Ella commented on reading “the last work” of Mowatt in 1848, so her interest may have been in learning about the author as well. Anna Cora Mowatt published her *Autobiography of an Actress* in 1853. Ella partook of another book, *Rose Don Glass, the Autobiography of a Minister’s Daughter*, but she did not mention details of the age of the daughter, where she lived or when the book was published.

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60 6 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.

61 Undated entry, Elizabeth F. Perry diary, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

62 27 June 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.

63 5 August 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.

64 27 February 1836, Anna Lesesne diary, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.


66 14 March 1859, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.

67 14 December 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.

68 3 June 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
The great number of nonfictional works the women consumed should not overshadow the fictional items which found their way into the homes, in equal or, for some of the females in greater numbers than factual literature. Authors and works taught in today’s literature classes were popular among antebellum Southern female readers. The plays of William Shakespeare appeared in the diaries of many of the women as well as in lists of polite literature for young women to read. Of the women who recorded reading specific Shakespearean works, Kate Carney read *Macbeth* and Ella Thomas *Romeo and Juliet*. Kate and Ella recorded the particular plays they read, while other women partook of Shakespeare but did not mention the title of the work or if they read more than one. Kate Garland recorded Shakespeare on her list of completed works, while Mary Bateman wrote of his works in her diary. Selena Lloyd corresponded with her family via letters and included her recent study of at least one of Shakespeare’s works. Elizabeth Meriwether wrote of reading his plays for quite some time past in her memoirs, and though she did not list which plays, it is possible she read more than one and simply stated the author as a marker for his works.

Other well-known authors, like Sir Walter Scott, found their way to the women’s libraries; however, Scott’s fictional works were popular alongside his historical ones. Scott published many novels and short stories in the early nineteenth century, and his popularity most likely allowed for the importation or reprinting of his works in the United States since many women had access to them. Ella Thomas read Scott’s *Castle Dangerous*, published in 1832 as part of the *Tales of My Landlord* series. Ella also partook of *Peveril of the Peak*, another Walter Scott novel. This installment was part of the Waverly series published in 1822. Selena Lloyd read *The Talisman*, another of the Waverly collection published in 1825, three years after

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70 See Appendix B.
71 7 February 1860, Kate S. Carney diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, Microfilm.; 25 September to 25 December 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
74 Elizabeth Avery Meriwether, “Recollections of Ninety-Two Years,” Microfilm of Transcript, 52, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
75 9 February 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
76 19 February 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
Peveril of the Peak. Selena’s remarks in a letter to her relatives suggested the reader had read this book and others like it, for she compared another work to this Scott novel. Two other women commented on reading Walter Scott novels. In her diary, Grace Hunter stated she continued reading Scott for several days, and Mary Ann Randolph wrote about her love of Scott and her yearning for her friend whom she was writing to join her in reading the novels.

Several other notable fictional works appeared in the women’s diaries a few times. Some of the women read works which had survived hundreds of years and originated in non-English countries. Elizabeth Avery commented about the memorable book, Arabian Nights, which she read when she was a young girl. Kate Garland read Don Quixote, the fictional account of the Spanish gentleman who believes himself a knight. Other recognizable titles appeared in many of the women’s diaries. Kate also listed on her account of books completed Charles Dickens’s Great Expectations. This Dickens novel appeared in her account of readings for the year 1860, but only started being serialized in December of that year. Kate may have only read the first installment, rather than the entire novel. The Deer Slayer, one of the Leatherstocking tales by James Fenimore Cooper, appeared in Ella Thomas’s diary. Ella also read Vanity Fair by William Thackeray, originally serialized in 1847, though Ella seemed to have a complete edition of the work. Another work by Thackeray, The Adventures of Philip, found its way onto Kate Garland’s list of literary accomplishments.

Male authors whose works have been less celebrated in today’s classrooms still held interest for antebellum women and frequently found their way into the hands of female readers.

81 16 September 1857, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
82 18 January 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
Ella Thomas read *The Three Sisters, or Rose, Blanche and Violet*, by George Henry Lewes.\textsuperscript{84} This book was published in 1848. Another work, *Doctor Thorn* by Anthony Trollope was published in 1858, closer to the time in which Ella read it.\textsuperscript{85} G. P. R. James appeared to be a popular author for women to read. He produced over one hundred novels in a short period of time, and many references in the women’s diaries simply stated the title and the words, by James. Ella Thomas commented on reading several of his works. *Cour de Lier or The Robber, The Gypsy, The Convict* and *The Hentic* are all works she listed by the author James.\textsuperscript{86} There were also more titles she commented on reading that were his, like *The Last of the Barons, One in a Thousand, Thirty Years Since or the Ruined Family* and *The Whim and Its Consequences*.\textsuperscript{87} The many titles by this one author suggested either Ella enjoyed his works, or those in her social circle did. Upcoming chapters will detail the many ways Ella acquired books like G.P.R. James’s and her reactions to reading them.

Fictional works by prominent male authors of the early nineteenth century or earlier occupied many hours for female readers. The women, however, were also interested in reading many titles by female authors as well. Two women read Charlotte Brontë’s works. Ella Thomas and Elizabeth Lomax spent time “absorbed in reading” *Jane Eyre*, and Elizabeth also partook of *Villette*.\textsuperscript{88} Another prolific female author, Elizabeth Caroline Grey, had many of her publications listed in the diary of one Southern woman in this study. In the pages of her journal, Ella Thomas described reading several of Grey’s novels highlighting yet again either her interest in this author’s work or greater local access to books by Grey. Ella read Grey’s novels *Alice Seymour* (published in 1831), *The Baronette’s Daughter* (in 1843), *Aline* (in 1848), and *The Gambler’s Wife* (published in 1853).\textsuperscript{89} Kate Garland read Mary Virginia Terhune, who wrote

\textsuperscript{84} 3 December 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{85} 18 November 1858, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{86} 13 November 1848, 14 March 1852, 18 October 1848 and , Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{87} 5 December 1848, 3 December 1848 and 8 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{89} 25 April 1855, 8 October 1848, and 25 April 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
Alone under the pen name Marion Harland (printed in 1857), and Augusta Jane Evans’s Beulah, which was published in 1860, and Macaria.  

Many other women authors were also read by several of the diarists. Ella Thomas, the young woman who read and notated her literary activities for many years, commented on reading “a book by Sarah Ann Hawes” and Currer Lyle by Louisa Keeder. Other titles described in her journal included Household Mysteries and Light and Darkness by Lissie Petite, Nathalie by Julia Kavanah, Ruth Hall by Fannie Fern and Seige of Deny by Charlotte Elisabeth. Another book, Recollections of a Southern Matron, by Caroline Gilmore was published in 1838 and Ella consumed this work over ten years later, so she may have been privy to its content being fictional, or she may have been interested in this book because the title presented itself as a memoir by a Southern woman. Anne Marsh wrote two works listed in the diaries of the women readers, The Deformed and The Admiral’s Daughter. Kate Carney commented on the former work and Ella Thomas the latter, though both were published in a two volume set in 1834. The women may have only had access to one of the volumes, thus they read one story or they may not have read or written about the second work if they had both volumes in their possession. Elizabeth Meriwether recounted her perusal of The Children of the Abbey by Regina Roche. Elizabeth Lomax documented studying John Halifax, while Kate Garland read Mistress and Maid, both of which were by Dinah Muloch.

Poetry stood side by side with fictional prose among the literature Southern women consumed. In particular, epic poetry still popular in the twenty-first century found its way into the early nineteenth century women’s selection of reading materials. Three of the women,

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90 October 1859 – July 1860, Kate Garland Papers, Southern Women and Their Families in the 19th Century: Papers and Diaries, Series E, Holdings of the Louisiana State University (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 2002), Reel 11.
91 9 October 1848 and 1 January 1857, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
92 1 January 1857, 16 September 1857, 11 April 1855 and 30 May 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
93 9 July 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
94 5 February 1860, Kate S. Carney diary, microfilm, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection; 17 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
95 Elizabeth Avery Meriwether, “Recollections of Ninety-Two Years,” Microfilm of Transcript, 19, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

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Elizabeth Meriwether, Grace Hunter and Elizabeth Perry, all read Homer; Grace and later Elizabeth specifically listed the *Iliad* as their selection. Elizabeth Perry occupied her time with another epic poem pertaining to a religious theme, *Jerusalem Delivered* by Tasso. Ella Thomas read *The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers* by Hemans, a poetical account of the ship full of settlers to America. Another woman, Selena Lloyd, read *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, originally published in 1667.

These historic epics were not the only poetical works which the women documented reading in their diaries. Byron’s poems supplied hours of pleasure for Mary Bateman and Kate Garland. Kate also read quite a few other poets, including Campbell, Scott, Tennyson, Longfellow and Coleridge. Ella Thomas examined Longfellow’s and Lords Alfred Tennyson and George Byron’s works, while also reading a book entitled *Extracts from British Poets*. Selena Lloyd commented in a letter about reading poems by Coleridge.

Published volumes filled the shelves of personal libraries, but the female readers relied on monthly or weekly publications to supplement their selections. Kate Carney “read a piece” in an issue of the magazine *Godey’s Lady Book*. Ella Thomas subscribed to a few magazines and she borrowed several other publications to expand her reading. Like Kate, Ella read *Godey’s Lady Book*, but in addition Ella listed *Peterson Magazine*, *Graham’s Magazine*, *Harper*

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98 Undated entry, Elizabeth F. Perry diary, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.


100 28 April 1856, Mary Bateman diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection; October 1859 – July 1860, Kate Garland Papers, *Southern Women and Their Families in the 19th Century: Papers and Diaries*, Series E, Holdings of the Louisiana State University (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 2002), Reel 11.

101 16 March 1852 and April 1855-June 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.


103 2 February 1859, Kate S. Carney diary, microfilm, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
*Magazine* and *The Eclectic* as part of her periodical reading. Another time, Ella wrote of reading “Catherine Clayton…in four of the [numbers] July, August, September and October” of a magazine she borrowed. The cost for subscribing to magazines limited their circulation to the middle or upper classes of society, and as chapter three will detail, Ella used many techniques to lessen her expense while still enjoying subscriptions to all five of these publications. Only two of the women during the 1790 to 1860 time period recorded in their journals that they routinely read newspapers. Ella Thomas wrote of leafing through the pages of *The New World* and her father bringing home “no paper but *The Constitutionist.*” Anna Lesesne commented on reading articles in *The New York Mirror* by a specific journalist, N. P. Willis. Other women may have read newspapers or magazines, but did not feel compelled to write about them in their journal, or they may have heard the information contained in newsprint via other members of their household.

Some of the women wrote in their journals of reading one other genre of books. Works published with children in mind appeared in the pages of both Ann Kinloch and Ella Thomas. Ann Kinloch wrote about *The Tales of the Castle,* a 1785 children’s book, but she did not make any other comments, such as whether she reviewed the item before giving it to her children or if the book simply happened to be on hand and she read it for that reason. Ella Thomas wrote in her diary about reading works before giving them to her children, though she never listed their titles, just mentioned looking over a book and then giving it to one of her offspring. Ella also described introducing the youngest members of the household to the Holy Scriptures. One afternoon “none of us could to go church…and [I] related some histories from the Bible to the children.”

This chapter has highlighted the various types of reading materials the women read, along with some of the titles specifically mentioned in their diaries. The Bible played an important role in reading, especially in the earliest time period covered by this study, for as Maria

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105 11 April 1855, 29 October 1848, 16 December 1848, 8 and 9 October 1848 and 17 May 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.  
106 8 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.  
107 16, 17 and 18 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.  
108 16 January 1836, Anna Lesesne diary, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.  
109 27 January 1859, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.  
110 8 May 1799, Ann Cleland Kinloch paper, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.  
111 16 February 1858, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.  
112 14 March 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
Campbell wrote to her relative, “in the days of our forefathers it was considered only necessary to learn [sic] a female to read the Bible.”\textsuperscript{113} By 1819 when Maria wrote that note, the educational expectations for Southern young women had changed, but the Bible remained a source of reading material for females and justifiably they continued to consult the text.\textsuperscript{114} The Holy Scriptures led the women to seek out other religious books, like Sunday school teachings, printed sermons or tomes detailing events or biographical information on people listed in the Bible.

With historical literature prescribed by both parents and tutors or school teachers, many of the women read these materials to become well educated and may have developed an interest in this subject which continued after their school days. Learning about American history, along with Great Britain’s and other European countries’, gave the women a historical basis to build upon, adding to their knowledge of more recent events of the last couple of centuries. Knowing more information about a country’s history often led Southern women to pursue travel literature to learn about the landscape and culture of contemporary, though foreign, regions. While some women may eventually have travelled to the regions they studied, most probably did not, especially when their reading lists included \textit{Arctic Explorations} or \textit{Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Sea and Japan}. Other nonfiction books included in many reading lists were autobiographies and biographical accounts. The lives of monarchs, important players in the American Revolution, or just everyday men and women occupied the women with reading material for hours.

Several of the women heavily tilted their reading repertoires toward fictional works. William Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott found places in many of the women’s homes and merited comments in their diaries. Other male authors like James Fenimore Cooper, William Thackeray and G. P. R. James produced works which the women read avidly, sometimes consuming multiple works by the same author. These were not the only authors of fiction read by antebellum women, as many female authors appeared in the listings of completed works of Southern women. Charlotte Brontë, still famous now almost two hundred years after her first publication, captured the attention of Southern diarists and they read and commented on her

\textsuperscript{113} 1819, Maria Campbell to Mary Hume, as quoted in Clinton, \textit{The Plantation Mistress}, 123.
\textsuperscript{114} 1819, Maria Campbell to Mary Hume, as quoted in Clinton, \textit{The Plantation Mistress}, 123.
works repeatedly. Other women authors, like Elizabeth Grey, Lissie Petite and Anne Marsh were found in several of the journal entries of the female readers.

Epic classics like Homer’s *Iliad* and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* complemented the other poetry several of the women consumed. Compilation volumes of excerpts from various British poets, along with individual authors’ selected works were included in quite a few of the women’s diaries. Other items, like *Godey's Lady Book*, *Harper's Magazine* and *The Eclectic* provided new monthly issues for the women to consume, if they had a subscription or could gain access to the material via other avenues. Newspapers, though not mentioned by many of the women, also provided the women with news articles along with reviews of literature and short prose or poetry works that was sometimes serialized.

This chapter has pointed out key genres and titles of the women’s accounts of their reading practices. Some of the women included extensive lists of their completed books, while others listed their literary consumption as part of the narrative of their day-to-day activities. Appendix A gives a complete list of the titles and authors the women in this study recorded in their diaries and journals. Some women read large amounts of materials in a short time, while some diaries only record limited reading behavior for a short period of time. Other journals, like Ella Thomas’s, listed a large selection of works read over years. Keep in mind the books and other items listed in their diaries were not always their personal choices but what the women could acquire for their literary pursuits. The subject of acquiring reading material will be discussed in a later chapter. Now, however, the focus shifts from what the women read to when, where and why they pursued their literary activities.
CHAPTER 2 – VISITING THE BOOKSHELF

The abundance of books read by the women in this study naturally raises the question of when did they find time to read and why they chose to read as opposed to engage in some other activity. Given the low literacy rates among women in the early nineteenth century, one might assume antebellum Southern white women were less likely to read. Numerous reasons existed for not reading such as the lack of education, or the inability to acquire books or magazines, yet there were many other factors which influenced the likelihood of women reading which did not pertain to their possession of skill or material. Time was also a factor in determining whether a woman read profusely or chose not to partake at all. Finding time to read for some of the women came easily, while others had to carve out time from their busy lives to indulge in their passion. For some women in the South, spending just a few stolen minutes of the day reading might be all they managed in a busy daily schedule. Precious minutes of time between cooking or other chores allowed the women to read while waiting for cakes to bake or preserves to cool in the kitchen. Other women, or usually more likely young ladies, pursued reading hours for hours, especially during the periods between school sessions or after completion of studies and before marriage. Daylight hours allowed the readers to choose various locations within the house to read and even the outdoors could offer potential locations for absorbing literature. Additionally, ladies chose to read in their rooms before their day began or at the completion of the day, even staying up past the household bedtime to pursue the activity. Then, however, the need for candles or lamps became an obstacle whereas daytime reading utilized natural lighting. Special occasions offered the women in this study more chances to read more extensively than during their normal routine. Travelling or restrictions due to illness or pregnancy also provided continuous hours for completing books.

Determining when women read sometimes illuminated their reasons for reading, but often the two questions do not intertwine. Motivations for picking up a novel or history book differed with each lady, but some experienced bad weather or boredom which led to the activity. Others did so for school, to participate in reading socials, or to pass time while another did household chores. Various motivations and occasions presented themselves, but regardless of their reasons the women in this study still set aside some of this spare time to record their actions, including when they read and how they found time to do so, leaving behind a record to help evaluate their reading practices. Problems with finding surviving diaries or utilizing
published diaries to evaluate the times women read and the reasons behind their activities can be best explained by the editor’s note on the published parts of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas’ diary. Virginia Burr, editor of her journal, wrote, “it was her [Ella’s] habit to copy poetry and excerpts from her insatiable reading…and to write commentary on books. Although these anecdotes are intriguing…[the editor has] reluctantly omitted most of them…though interesting in themselves, such passages do not contribute measurably to Thomas’s story.”¹ These omissions, however, influence Burr’s portrayal of this Southern woman, leaving the education and vast literary knowledge of Thomas hidden. Only by consulting the original, unedited diary are Ella’s notations about reading recovered. She may not have been a typical Southern lady in respect to her profuse comments on her readings, but the other notations in ladies’ diaries about reading as a part of their daily lives showed how similar Ella was to her fellow sisters of the South with respect to their readings being important enough to write about.

Looking at the words the women left behind, a nice place to begin unraveling their reading habits commences with the way the ladies started their day. Commencing the day with a good book became an important part of many Southern women’s lives. Rising early allowed ladies time first thing in the morning to accomplish some reading in a book or the Bible before facing the tasks of the day. This time provided natural lighting to read without using household supplies, like oil or candles. For Grace Hunter, reading before joining her family for the day became her usual ritual. If Grace rose early from bed, she read before prayers and breakfast, whereas other mornings when she awoke at a later time, she had to postpone her reading. Those mornings, the literary activity followed the morning prayers, and then breakfast continued afterwards.² Grace did not specifically write about where she chose to read, but it was likely done in her bedroom since she mentioned not joining the family. Her private bedroom would have allowed her to read without entering the common rooms of the house.

Other ladies also chose the dawn of each new day to begin reading. No matter what time she awoke in the morning, for Ella Thomas, reading commenced soon afterwards. Ella’s morning time was spent reading no matter the lateness of the hour she arose. One morning after she awakened later than normal she began reading immediately, delaying the task of dressing for

the day and skipping breakfast so she could fit in time to read before dinner, the midday meal.  
While her journal did not reveal if her normal routine included rising and then dressing, this note about pushing back her preparations for facing the day confirmed the fact on this one day she went against her usual habit.  Her entry revealed this literary activity took place in her bedroom, since she did not dress.  Some mornings Ella noted she “did little or nothing during the day especially the morning” for the time was spent reading various pieces of poetry or pages in a novel.  
Like Grace, Ella utilized the sun to illuminate her reading materials, thus emphasizing their pursuit to awaken once the sun rose to have additional time before joining the family.

Given the vast amount of reading Ella Thomas accomplished in the years between 1848 and 1860, a scholar would be well advised to examine her journal to discover her inspirations and circumstances for reading. Born to financially stable parents in Augusta, Georgia, Ella’s family owned slaves, though she did not detail the exact number or even the family’s social status as she opened her journal.  The extra workforce around the house afforded Ella the leisure time to pursue her interests of which reading occupied a great portion.  Ella read continuously throughout her day and most daily journal entries mention the activity at least once per day.

Though some ladies read early in the morning, the time right after breakfast had been served allowed several to find additional time in which to read books or magazines.  Anna Lesesne remarked, "I spent the rest of the morning in reading."  
Several days later, she continued in her journal, "This morning employed myself at home [as usual]."  
Anna was not the only one who found a constant need to continue reading at every chance presented to her.  Many of the diarists included reading as part of their daily routines and commented each day when or what they read.

Grace Hunter wrote in her journal about her activities, which on a regular basis included rising from bed, partaking of the family breakfast and then beginning her daily regimen of reading.  Most days Grace read the whole morning until dinner was ready, and no one in the household interrupted or requested her help with chores.  As the daughter of an affluent family, Grace apparently had no obligation to prepare the meals.  Grace’s daily chores, not considered significant enough to elaborate about in her diary, occurred before or after her reading time.

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3 16 March 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
4 5 March 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
5 Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
6 July 1836, Anna Lesesne diary, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
7 5 July 1836, Anna Lesesne diary, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
After breakfast, Grace must have chosen to move to common areas of the house for reading. The living area of the house probably provided more windows and a fire which could both offer lighting and warmth on cooler days. On occasion, Grace noted her normal reading routine was interrupted by visitors or other tasks needing to be completed before the midday meal.\(^8\) Visitors or other family members took up residence in the common areas and apparently started conversations or asked for Grace’s time.

Other Southern women faced the same problem of interruptions in their reading time due to household chores, family or unexpected visitors. The women who remarked in their journals about the intrusions must have viewed the disturbances as noteworthy and maybe even annoying since they included the fact of the interruption along with documenting which visitor stopped by the house. Once Ella Thomas married, household chores and tending to children took up more of her leisure time than when she had been a young girl living with her parents. One night she wrote in her journal, “reading in those books [I own] and those I have loaned [to] me occupy all my spare time,” of which she had little once her children were born.\(^9\)

Other tasks obviously took time away from reading, and even the act of writing in the women’s journals prevented the activity. Ella Thomas had a habit of writing on each New Year’s Day her reflections on the past year and her hopes for the new one. On her 1857 entry, Ella remarked she took up a book to begin reading, but realized it was January 1 and instead set the book aside to write in her diary as per her annual custom.\(^10\)

While obligations or chores could interrupt a woman or preclude reading when her attention was needed for other tasks, sometimes they also offered natural intervals for enjoying a book. Grace Hunter found time to pursue her reading among other such tasks, like baking. The kitchen provided sitting areas and lighting for cooks, but readers could partake of these accommodations while providing for the family’s meal. On many days, Grace remarked she made a cake and read until dinner or she read while baking a cake after her morning meal. Utilizing the time during the cake baking process allowed Grace to steal a few extra minutes out

\(^9\) 11 April 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\(^10\) 1 January 1857, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
of the day to pursue her pleasure.\textsuperscript{11} Likewise, Ella Thomas wrote in her diary that she had been working “in the kitchen where I was cooking my preserves and partook plentifully while reading at intervals.”\textsuperscript{12} After the midday meal, Ella had a chance to escape the constant household needs of her young children as they took naps or went outside to play. Ella took this opportunity to read a novel or other materials she possessed.\textsuperscript{13} These daytime intervals of literary enjoyment were possible because attention to a chore was not continuously demanding, and the need for lighting was negated by sunshine.

The downtime during daily or weekly chores presented a perfect opportunity for a busy Southern woman to read. Since the women writing in journals or diaries in this study usually came from homes with money and some even had servants or slaves, this extra time allowed for reading and keeping a diary. The women in less affluent circumstances could have taken the chance times of baking or children’s napping to read a magazine, book or newspaper without being distracted from the needs of their houses and families. Unfortunately, those same needs either prevented some from making note of the event or even from buying a journal to keep and preserve.

As the day progressed, the women found other opportunities to read appearing while lighting was not a factor. Afternoons frequently offered quiet time for young Ella Thomas to read in her family home. While still attending school close to her home in October 1848, Ella was loaned a book by a friend and began reading right after her mid-morning walk.\textsuperscript{14} While Ella did not specifically mention attending school that day, other days she did so and then read afterwards. Another young Southern woman, Grace Hunter, continued to read throughout the day, especially after finishing her schoolwork. With this task completed, she read by herself or sometimes she would sit with another family member who was reading and listen to a selection of the material read for a while.\textsuperscript{15} For Grace, on the weekend schoolwork was abandoned which allowed her more free time. Her newfound freedom usually included reading, right after

\textsuperscript{12} 23 June 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{13} 4 May 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{14} 6 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
breakfast until dinner time, or until some other activity interrupted her pursuit. Her diary shows how assignments and study for school did not fulfill the same literary need as pleasure reading. Young ladies finished their schoolwork as soon as possible so additional time before supper or chores could be spent reading for pleasure or self improvement.

As night began to approach, many of the women stopped and participated in the family’s evening meal. Time after supper, however, could be utilized to accomplish simple household chores or for other more enjoyable pursuits. Kate Carney continued her reading throughout one Sunday, but after supper her diary specifically mentioned that she returned to her book. Unfortunately, Kate did not write whether she lit a candle or sat by a fire, possibly because the family could afford candles for nighttime reading. Grace Hunter also utilized her free time at night to delve into the literary world. Many nights Grace would write in her diary that she read late in the evening. This activity usually precluded going to bed and sometimes prevented her from sleeping for many hours. Grace does not mention whether the act of reading kept her up late at night or if she preferred to go to bed late and decided to read to occupy her time. Day after day, Grace’s diary noted her many late nights reading. Again, Grace made no mention of candles or lamps for her illumination, but she had to either sit in the living room or parlor by a fire or candle or take a candle into her bedroom.

Evenings were also spent reading in company with others, either family members or visitors. One Tuesday evening, Grace Hunter read aloud to her mother before going to bed, with entertaining family as yet another reason to read. This shows not only when Grace had a chance to read, but also why she decided to choose that night’s activity. This communal activity may have also allowed Grace additional candles since the family was using the item instead of just her. As with Kate, Grace considered nighttime a perfect time for reading. Night after night her diary remarked, “at night I... read some" and "read till I went to bed." There was even a distinction made between reading in the evening and at night. The time before bed presented the

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17 2 January 1859, Kate S Carney diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, Microfilm.
perfect opportunity to continue with the evening’s reading. Grace wrote, "In the evening I commenced Homer's *Iliad*, at night read in Homer." These distinctions were not elaborated, but may have been based on when or where in the house she was during the activity. Evenings may have been spent in the common areas with the family, while her night reading occurred in her bedroom. Another possible definition was that evenings were the lighted time after the midday meal and nights after the sun set and supper was served.

While most of the women mentioned writing in their journals and reading at night, few discussed whether lighting presented a hindrance to these tasks. For reasons of both safety and economy, younger readers especially needed permission to use household supplies, like candles, to see written and printed words. Available lighting highlights some reasons why a woman would read all day, or why she could not read throughout the night. Elizabeth Avery Meriwether recollected the many nights her family sat around the small table with the tallow candle which provided the light for the whole room. Sitting together in the common room of the house allowed everyone to share the illumination the limited candles could provide. Elizabeth’s remarks showed her father and mother placed themselves on either side of the table for maximum light to read and the children “crowded around as close as [they] could so that [they] might get some of that dim light and read or study.” For most Americans, not just Southerners, tallow candles provided the most cost effective source of illumination. Made from waste items in the kitchen, a household could create their own candles thus saving money by not buying the more expensive beeswax candles. However, these candles were consumable and therefore young girls or even married women could not use them continuously. Elizabeth used a potato lamp she learned to make from her aunt to extend the amount of time she had to read at night. She remarked how her sister, with whom she shared a bedroom, would always fall asleep first. Once the little bit of candle the children were allowed for preparing for bed burned away, Elizabeth “would creep out of bed, [get underneath the bed to shield the light,] get [her] potato candle from its hiding place, light the wick and then read for another hour or two until the potato

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21 Elizabeth Avery Meriwether, “Recollections of Ninety-Two Years,” Microfilm of Transcript, 21, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.


23 Davidson, “Early American Lighting,” 34.
lamp also was burned to the socket."²⁴ Obviously, Elizabeth read hidden in her bedroom by the lamp’s light, but she had to use this improvised light because the family did not, or could not, provide additional candles for late night reading.

Young women read for school, but also to entertain themselves, their family or to stave off loneliness. Sometimes one person in the house read to the rest, so that doing simple tasks would not seem dull and boring. Grace Hunter’s mother read to her on many occasions, usually during simple activities like when Grace was drawing, baking or preparing for bed.²⁵ Often household chores were halted so the then unmarried Ella Thomas could pick up a new novel. One day while sewing, her sister mentioned a new book from an author they both enjoyed. Ella immediately “sent for it and when it came sewing instantly was abandoned for the delightful pleasure of pursuing a new romance.”²⁶

For women released from household chores or with slaves to take care of these responsibilities, reading became one of their primary activities during the day. Elizabeth Perry noted, "I have read a great deal[..] [S]taying in a boarding [house] allows you so much leisure, and if you did not spend it in reading, time would hang heavy upon your hands."²⁷ The boarding house, which took care of most of the household chores a woman would normally perform if she maintained her own home, allowed Elizabeth extra time, but this also seemed to be a burden for her. In another entry in her journal, Elizabeth noted the position reading filled in her life: "if I had not such an interesting book to read, I think I would" and she stopped her entry without completing the written affirmation of her internal thought. This comment seems to go along the lines of her inability to cope with boredom; however, she did not clearly state what she would do if she did not have such a book to read. For her, reading seemed to fill a necessary part of her life, acting as a mechanism for staving off unwanted feelings, which surrounded her during difficult times.²⁸

Reading fulfilled a need for pleasure at various times in Ella Thomas’s day. In one journal entry she remarked, “I will now conclude writing and commence reading something

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²⁴ Elizabeth Avery Meriwether, “Recollections of Ninety-Two Years,” Microfilm of Transcript, 22, Southern Historical Collection. University of North Carolina
²⁶ 23 March 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
²⁷ Undated entry, Elizabeth F. Perry diary, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
²⁸ Undated entry, Elizabeth F. Perry diary, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
interesting.” Separation from her husband also caused Ella to turn to books to escape the boredom and uneasiness his departure caused. One poignant notation showed her despair at her husband’s absence and the void reading filled during this difficult time: “Mr. Thomas’ prolonged absence caused me so much uneasiness that I…commenced reading [a new work] hoping to while away the time until Mr. Thomas return[ed].”

While many factors influenced women’s choices for when and why to read, sometimes events took the choice out of their hands. One such phenomenon came in the form of rain or snow. Elizabeth Lindsay Lomax, of northern Virginia, chose to read for several reasons, but the weather seemed to play an important part in her decisions about which days she should read. On February 3, 1854, Elizabeth noted in her journal "raining, snowing, blowing -- storming without but cozy within -- a perfect day for reading by one's own fireside." On one Sunday morning in January, the weather promoted reading religious materials at the Lomax household. Though the South often experienced moderate winter weather compared to the North, the weather some of the women faced was daunting and hindered their normal activities. With temperatures dropping and the snow blowing very hard, Elizabeth chose to remain at home instead of going to church because the snowdrifts were too deep. Instead, the family read their prayers at home.

Anna Lesesne of South Carolina experienced difficulties with her normal activities due to weather, though her winter weather was of a less harsh variety. One Sunday, constant rains prevented her from venturing to Sunday school or to church in the morning or afternoon. This hindrance afforded Anna time to pursue other passions, such as reading. On the rainy Sunday, she "employed [her] self in reading part of the day... the most delightful book.” Later in her diary Anna mentioned a week-long, early spring rain confined her to the house and she occupied

29 15 March 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
30 November 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
33 24 January 1836, Anna Lesesne diary, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
time by reading for one whole day. On the next Sunday, she again spent most of the day reading because heavy downpours kept her away from Sunday school or church.

Rainy weather hindered normal activities, allowing for the enjoyment of more frivolous pursuits. Soon after the bad weather passed, effects of the storms still presented prime opportunities for reading. Kate Carney mentioned that one Sunday after church, when the rain had finally stopped, the roads and fields were now in a very muddy condition. This kept Kate inside the house and prevented her from visiting friends or neighbors; she spent the extra time that afternoon reading. While plans for the visits may not have been set in stone, Kate and other ladies rearranged their days because of inclement weather. Precipitation played a factor in the reading habits of Ella Thomas as well. She mentioned one morning she remained in the house because of the appearance of impending rainfall. Ella spent these hours reading a book she previously had read and enjoyed, one she chose to read once again since rain hampered her other plans. As the women’s own words revealed, chores and weather delayed, prevented or encouraged reading.

Like the unpredictable weather, visitors and socializing additionally played an important role in young women’s reading habits. While Ella Thomas enjoyed reading, other responsibilities sometimes interfered with her ability to continue pursuing her passion. One notation in her diary indicated, “having been visiting a good deal this week[,] I have had little time to read.” Sometimes visitors offered new books from which they recited passages, thus allowing the women to hear works which they otherwise may not have accessed. Kate Carney spent her days sewing and reading, but she thoroughly enjoyed the treat of having her brother visit the family and read to everyone while there. One reason Ella Thomas eagerly stopped her reading when visitors arrived was the fact they came bearing new books. While the principles behind the women acquiring reading materials will be discussed in the next chapter, it should be noted here that visitors sometimes lent or gave books to their hostesses, allowing avid readers to happily welcome guests, even if the visit was unexpected. Ella did not always lose the hours spent with her guests, because occasionally her need to devour the new materials they brought

34 28 March 1836, Anna Lesesne diary, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
35 28 March 1836, Anna Lesesne diary, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
36 5 February 1860, Kate S. Carney diary, microfilm, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
37 11 March 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
38 23 January 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
39 29 March 1859, Kate S. Carney diary, microfilm, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
40 13 November 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
caused her to read late into the night, even “[sitting] up until two o’clock” after everyone in the house had presumably gone to sleep.\footnote{13 November 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.}

Reading parties or social groups discussing literary works explained why many ladies chose to read. Harriet L. Powell wrote in a letter to her sister about her daughter Rebecca’s attendance at a weekly reading party. Attendance at this party required either reading a book beforehand or reading at the event; Rebecca’s reading habits altered to conform to this schedule, and it gave her a reason to immerse herself in books.\footnote{29 December 1849, Harriet L. Powell to Rebecca Powell, Powell Family Papers, \textit{Southern Women and Their Families in the 19th Century: Papers and Diaries}, Series C, Holdings of the Earl Gregg Swem Library, The College of William and Mary (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1994), Reel 4.} Gatherings of several interested readers could justify additional candles to be used if the party was held in the evening, though Harriet’s letter did not specify when the group met. Harriet also remarked about the frequency of the parties and the pleasure her daughter received from attending the meetings. She wrote her sister and explained that her daughter was so enamored with the reading party that Rebecca “wishes they would have it twice a week.”\footnote{29 December 1849, Harriet L. Powell to Rebecca Powell, Powell Family Papers, \textit{Southern Women and Their Families in the 19th Century: Papers and Diaries}, Series C, Holdings of the Earl Gregg Swem Library, The College of William and Mary (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1994), Reel 4.} Though it is unclear exactly what went on at the parties besides the presumed discussion of books, they may have offered Rebecca the perfect reason for her parents to allow her additional time to read, since they would not want their daughter to be unprepared for a social gathering to discuss books. Harriet most likely experienced residual effects from the party as well, since her daughter may have discussed the events with her mother. Harriet understood her daughter’s intense appreciation and yearning for more frequent meetings, and at the same time knowing her mother cared about her reading habits may have intensified Rebecca’s reading efforts.

Sharing with family the pleasure one found in certain reading materials similarly motivated Ella Thomas. In 1852, she chose one afternoon to read aloud to her aunt and mother some poetry she appreciated. She stopped not long after beginning the recitation because, much to her disappointment, “they evidently were not prepared for the enjoyment of the concord of sweet words and ideas” of the works of Byron which Ella recited.\footnote{16 March 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.} Their lack of interest in this reading allowed Ella to excuse herself and finish reading a book she had started earlier in the
morning. Thus another chance to read came from sharing poetic works with family, though in contrast to Rebecca, Ella’s family obviously did not share her passion for this specific subject.

Pursuing an education presented another reason young ladies chose to read. School work provided a motivation for Ella Thomas to read while she was away at a women’s college in Augusta, Georgia. One teacher, Mr. Myers, loaned Ella numerous reading materials to help his young pupil find a topic for her composition. This required composition was a final step towards graduating from the school, and Ella needed ideas for its topic. Ella chose to read all the books in hopes of finding among the selected books her professor offered an idea appropriate for a writing subject.

While education could prompt a young lady to read, other women were motivated because of their religious devotion. For some of the women, Sunday became a day to read religious materials, such as the Bible. They would set aside the romances and historical works in favor of the biblical works. Grace Hunter chose to read the Bible after rising on Sunday morning before breakfast was served. Kate Carney read a religious book, The Bible in the Family, one Sunday when the family could not attend church. Others in this study did not limit their Bible reading to Sundays. During her stay at the women’s college in Augusta, young Ella Thomas’s need for devotional studies continued throughout the week. Leisure time at school offered Ella Thomas time to study biblical material. Ella noted in her April 24 entry “after…dinner I came to my room…and [laid] down on the couch…and read several chapters in the New Testament.” Ella must have spent several evenings in the same occupation because she remarked she began reading the New Testament at the first of April 1851 and by the 24th she had “read through Matthew[,] Mark[,] Luke and…[had] commenced reading Saint John.” One entry in her journal mentioned her mid-morning Bible reading. Ella wrote that she “requested to be excused before twelve and [came] up [to] read again in the New Testament until twelve.” This compulsion to read in the New Testament was allowed by the school teachers, though any

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45 16 March 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
46 15 May 1851, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
48 2 January 1859, Kate S Carney diary, microfilm, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
49 24 April 1851, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
50 24 April 1851, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
51 15 May 1851, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
specific reasons Ella gave her instructors for wanting to return to her room at that time were not mentioned. The teachers may have let Ella return to her room because she wanted to read, because she specifically stated she wanted to read the Bible, or she may simply have given another reason for requesting her early dismissal from class.

While home and school life allowed for reading time, travelling presented even greater expanses of responsibility-free time. Sometimes a trip to a neighbor’s house or into town allowed women to read a few chapters, while other women utilized longer trips to cities to read during the ride. In Ann Cleland Kinloch’s diary for 1799, she discussed that traveling was an opportune time to spend reading. In May of that year, she noted she brought a book on a trip into town and “read all the way home, which made the ride very agreeable.”52 The time spent in the carriage could become boring or monotonous, especially depending on how far from town the family lived. Bringing along a book allowed the women a more pleasurable way to spend the trip.

Trips to visit nearby neighbors provided time for Ella Thomas to consume literature. During a buggy ride with her husband to visit friends who were going out of town the next day, Ella “read most of the way” to the house.53 Ella presented this activity as a normal one on these particular occasions, for she did not mention her husband questioning the activity or lack of conversation along the way. Ella did not remark about reading on the return home but she mentioned they stayed at the neighbors for a while, so the return trip may not have offered the light needed to indulge in the same pursuit.54

Special events such as picnics allowed time to read among the social visiting and dining which encompassed the occasion. Kate Carney of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, mentioned a picnic with a party of nine of her friends which began with a short boat trip to Burlington. With not too many other passengers aboard, the young ladies “did what seemed most pleasant to [them] selves…talked, laughed [and] read.”55 She continued detailing the event and their activities, saying that reading may not have occupied a great portion of their trip, but most of her companions brought books on the picnic. This suggests reading and bringing books for such

52 8 May 1799, Ann Cleland Kinloch papers, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
53 4 May 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
54 4 May 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
55 2 June 1860, Kate S. Carney diary, microfilm, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
activities were normal behavior, not an odd suggestion. Some of the ladies, if not all, spent at least a small amount of time reading on the boat.\textsuperscript{56}

Longer trips gave the women more than enough time to examine reading materials brought along for the ride. A trip to the countryside to stay with family suggested to Ella Thomas there would be ample time for her passion of reading. Packing such items seemed a normal occurrence for her. She wrote about bringing several novels for reading and letters to write on the trip, yet she scarcely had time to even begin a chapter.\textsuperscript{57} While she did not read much during the stay, the books could have helped pass the time on the trips to and from her destination because she mentioned other trips when this occurred. Ella later mentioned she travelled to Philadelphia a few summers earlier, probably near the time of the trip to the countryside during which she read a novel she purchased in the northern city.\textsuperscript{58} Since she purchased new reading material, this suggested she either finished hers on the way north or had not brought along anything and found time for a more pleasurable pursuit during the return trip.

The ladies may have read magazines to find additional titles they would attempt to borrow or purchase for their consumption. Many of the magazines which ran off the presses were presenting reviews of novels available to the general public. The magazine industry began to boom in the 1840s: whereas only 125 American magazines existed in 1825, the industry skyrocketed to at least 600 by 1850.\textsuperscript{59} Ella Thomas borrowed and purchased several magazines and mentioned the reviews she examined in them. The publications such as \textit{Godey’s Lady’s Book}, \textit{Peterson’s Magazine}, \textit{Harper’s New Monthly Magazine}, and \textit{Graham’s Magazine}, all four of which Ella and her sister subscribed to and eagerly read, are included in Nina Baym’s top seven periodicals based on the greatest number of literary reviews for the early part of the century.\textsuperscript{60}

Travel presented an opportune time for some women to read, but other occasions also supplied the necessary quiet time a reader would prefer. Illness, though a seemingly unlikely time to begin reading, actually offered busy ladies additional opportunities to read and escape their sick bed. Miss J. Williams wrote a letter to her relative Mary Williams and discussed her

\begin{footnotes}
\item[56] 2 June 1860, Kate S. Carney diary, microfilm, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
\item[57] 14 April 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\item[58] 4 May 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\item[60] 11 April 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Collections; Nina Baym, \textit{Novels, Readers and Reviewers}, 14-19.
\end{footnotes}
particular reasons for reading. At the time she was staying in the hospital with her friend or relative Betsy, and she mentioned they hardly ventured out of the sick room, but they "amuse[d] ourselves in reading." While she did not mention her reasons for staying in the hospital in this letter, she enjoyed the time spent reading, either because she could not allow herself the luxury when at home or because it helped pass the time until she recovered enough to return home.

Pregnancy and childbirth could cause a woman to be confined to bed with sickness or recovery after delivery, sometimes allowing extra reading and other times preventing the activity completely. Ella Thomas experienced both situations while pregnant with her second child. She wrote about her circumstances in relation to reading through the New Testament in 1856. She began at the first of the year and had almost completed the testament “when [she] was confined with my little boy[.][D]uring the earlier period of my sickness I was not permitted to read.” For an avid reader like Ella, the sickness which prevented her from reading must have been especially hard. Not only did she feel unwell, but one of her most pleasurable activities remained unavailable to help soothe the pain and pass tedious hours. Yet, after her child was born she took up the activity again, even though she and the child were not in the best of health. She remarked that she finished the New Testament before the end of the year: however, the circumstances were heartbreaking for the new mother. Ella explained, “I was reading in bed while my babe lay dying…God grant that its finishing chapter may never be read under similar circumstances.” Completion of the biblical work may have eased Ella’s mind by achieving a goal she had set for the year and helped to ease the pain of knowing her newborn son was extremely ill and she could not help him.

When sickness struck, women in the household usually had to assist with the additional workload unless they themselves became unwell. Other family members often travelled to help, offering their assistance when women fell ill. Time during an illness thus allowed women who were sick extra time to indulge in reading since household tasks were being completed by others while they rested and recuperated. Ella Thomas completed several novels a neighbor brought over for her to enjoy while she recuperated. Following another illness, Ella likewise recuperated by completing a book that she afterwards returned by walking a short distance to a

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61 Undated, Letter from Miss. J Williams to Mary Kerns Williams, James Payne Beckwith, Jr. Family Papers, microfilm, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
62 6 April 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
63 6 April 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
64 January 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
friend’s house. Never wasting an opportunity, while there, she borrowed several other books. While this may not have been a planned trip and the illness may have induced the need for more books, Ella still enjoyed the borrowed selection and noted she found the book interesting, a reaction she would appreciate if she was trying to distract herself from sickness. While illness hampered a lady’s ability to browse through reading material personally, other family members sometimes helped ease a woman's pain by reading aloud next to her bed. The mother of Grace Hunter sat at her daughter's bedside one evening while Grace was confined to bed with a bad headache, and she soothed Grace into sleep by reading from the book her daughter had begun earlier.

Personal sickness could promote reading or hamper the activity, while illness among other family members prompted some women to read. Kate Carney chose to read a religious book one Sunday when the family could not travel to church due to severe colds affecting her mother and sister. Their sickness motivated her to choose the activity, and she explained in her diary that she spent a good portion of the morning and afternoon reading the religious material.

While the women's journals revealed the reasons why they chose to read when opportunities arose, sometimes reasons for not reading also appeared in the pages of their diaries. Ann Kinloch wrote in her journal that she was "too unwell to read or do anything with comfort or pleasure to myself." This notation helps reveal her thoughts and feelings towards reading even when she could not. The activity, obviously, gave her pleasure or she would not have noted that her condition prevented her from picking up a book. Another reason a lady could not read occurred when she became overwhelmed or distracted by events taking place in her life. Reading for Ella Thomas appeared to be a pleasurable activity which could not be accomplished if she had a lot of things on her mind. One day she wrote, “there are a few things which trouble me…I could not read.”

These Southern women do not differ greatly from their Northern counterparts in relation to the motivations and time spent reading. A study of the Hamiltons, an Indiana family in the nineteenth century, discussed how female family members remembered each other as always

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65 4 March 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
67 2 January 1859, Kate S. Carney diary, microfilm, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
68 10 May 1799, Ann Cleland Kinloch paper, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
69 2 June 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
reading. Edith Hamilton expressed her wish to see her family while she was at school and mentioned her longing to “watch her closest cousin Jessie reading,” while Jessie fondly remembered her cousin “reading a book in Greek while combing her hair” at the age of thirteen.\(^7^0\) Most of the Hamilton family women read, and they all credited their paternal grandmother for their shared passion. Emerine Holman Hamilton, a “woman who ‘lost herself’ in books,” instilled the love in her descendants, and her granddaughter remarked Emerine “loved reading passionately…[she was] often in the library…crouched over the fireplace where the soft-coal fire had gone out without her knowing it, so deep had she been in her book.”\(^7^1\) This absolute devotion to reading in a Northern lady parallels the many entries in journals of Southern women who read in the same manner and wanted their families to experience a love of reading as they did.

Through the words of these women, it becomes clear that reading was important in their everyday lives. For many of the women, this action became part of their daily routine and their families accepted the schedule they had made for themselves. Some women set aside time to complete readings, whether they did so right after rising or late at night when the house was asleep. Other young ladies and women spent part of their day pursuing their passion of reading and did so after breakfast, in the afternoon and into the evening. Often, late at night, the ladies enjoyed a quiet house and time alone to pick up a novel or their Bible. No matter when or in what part of the house the women chose to read, lighting was a factor which they had to overcome. Sunshine provided free illumination during the daytime, but at night they had to use the house’s supply of candles or oil or improvise with handmade lanterns. Other occasions gave them an opportunity to read and they usually took these chances eagerly, especially when they occurred during the day. Travelling to neighbors, into town or on longer trips such as to the country or far off cities gave the women plenty of travel time to complete chapters, if not complete books.

Even though they had opportunities, motivations for reading also influenced the women’s practices. Many ladies utilized Sundays or even weekdays to absorb the teachings found in the Holy Bible. Others needed to read to accomplish educational goals or participate in reading

\(^7^0\) Barbara Sicherman, “Sense and Sensibility: A Case Study of Women’s Reading in Late-Victorian America,” in Reading in America: Literature & Social History, ed. Cathy N. Davidson (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 204.

\(^7^1\) Barbara Sicherman, “Sense and Sensibility,” 203.
clubs. Sometimes, the act of reading gave the women pleasure, and they utilized that coping mechanism during times of illness or distress. Being away from husbands or family caused some of the women to become bored and lonely, so escaping through reading in some cases appeared to ease the insufferable separations.

Exploring through their diaries when the women read also revealed reasons for why they were unable to do so or why they stopped the activity. Daily chores and children occupied the waking hours for some of the women, leaving them with no time to read on certain days. Other times, they slipped in precious minutes of reading while baking or during times of rest. Sometimes sickness promoted or prevented their pursuit of the activity. Some women benefitted from more free time when relatives helped with household duties; others lost valuable reading time when doctors or other family members restricted the woman’s activities during her illness. Further reasons affected reading habits, such as those women who could not focus on reading during times when they carried a heavy mental burden, thus leaving them longing to be rid of the problem and return to their normal routine. Even the availability of lighting hampered the ability to continue reading in the nighttime hours, preventing the completion of a book one desperately wanted to finish.

All of these issues, and even more which remained unrecorded by the women in this study, affected time for reading and women’s motivations for reading. Understanding when and why women decided to read books in their possession adds another dimension to the study of what they read. Yet another factor influenced their choice to read: the availability of materials. This subject will now become the focus of this study, building upon what they read and the reasons why and when women read.
CHAPTER 3 – FILLING THE BOOKSHELF

Women of the South read from a profuse selection of books, but the question of how they obtained these materials comes to the surface. Published works, especially those printed in the United States, continued to increase in number throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Especially in the thirty years prior to the Civil War, the industry boomed and women eagerly consumed the products of this industry. The women mentioned in this study acquired their books and magazines through various sources. Borrowing allowed individuals within a family or network of close friends to pass a single copy of a work to many people without the great expense of multiple purchases, which could have been an even greater hardship in remote areas. For individuals living close to town, they could patronize shops which carried books, booksellers, or even lending libraries, so their selection broadened, though one lady commented in her town the selection was not as plentiful as her previous residence boasted.

Travel also presented the perfect opportunity for new materials to be acquired for a lady’s library. Women travelling with family members to parties, weddings or other excursions used the opportunities to explore the selections offered in the cities and regions visited. When the women met new friends or relations on these trips, this only added to their reading circle, increasing the number of friends lending books, often sharing them through the mail over long distances. When visiting stores in unfamiliar towns, the women might discover a varied offering of books based on regional preferences or interests giving more choices than in their hometowns. If they had the means to purchase books, ordering titles which received high praise from visitors or reviews in magazines broadened not only their literary tastes, but their lending group’s as well. Each woman utilized one way, if not several different ways, to acquire new materials to read, defining her place within the structure of the South and her own social circle in the process.

The ease of sharing literary materials made borrowing from family members quick and simple. Mothers, fathers, and older siblings often lent the young ladies materials which would express an important meaning, though sometimes the books lent were intended just as enjoyable reading. Grace Hunter wrote in her diary that her sister Elvira currently was reading a book, which once completed would allow Grace to begin the first volume of the work. Whether or not

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Grace and Elvira had only volume one is unknown, but certainly they shared their books with each other.\textsuperscript{2} In her childhood, Ella Thomas, née Clanton, and her sisters also shared reading materials, even though Ella was three years younger than her sister Anne and seven years older than Mary, nicknamed Mamie. Ella often made short notations about reading a book Anne possessed and borrowing or lending a book to Anne or Mamie, an acknowledgement of the unspoken agreement between the Clanton sisters to share reading material at their disposal. On one occasion, during a visit after Ella lived with her husband Jeff, Ella began reading a book which a neighbor had lent to her sister Mamie.\textsuperscript{3} This process of sisters sharing books was true even after marriage separated the women into different households. Magazines, as well as books, continued to be shared by the three sisters. After her marriage, Ella commented she and her sister Anne subscribed to four magazines per year. To conserve money and to indicate the importance of sharing reading material, her diary entry states, “I [Ella] take Harper and Graham. She [Anne] takes Peterson and Godey.”\textsuperscript{4}

Another woman in the Thomas household who shared a passion for reading with Ella was Isabella, a slave whom Ella interacted with on many occasions and who followed Ella to the Thomas household after Ella’s marriage. Usually the practice of owning slaves would not factor heavily into the reading habits of these Southern women since many states had laws banning the education of slaves. Ella, however, mentioned her bondswoman Isabella several times, usually when she carried a note to a neighbor requesting to borrow books or certain titles. No stranger to labor, Isabella resided in the family home and continued after Ella’s marriage to help with Ella’s children as a nursemaid. Ella spoke of Isabella, the family’s slave, as having highly developed literary tastes. Isabella must have been an educated woman with literary knowledge similar to the young ladies of the house, because Ella mentioned Isabella reading a work by Bulwer one evening, which Ella intended to begin the next day. Either Isabella completed the book before the evening ended, or Ella expected her to finish it by morning to allow Ella to commence reading. On several occasions, Isabella loaned Ella multiple books at a time, which Ella eagerly

\textsuperscript{3} 25 April 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{4} 11 April 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
read and returned to her. Sisters and nursemaids may have shared similar reading tastes, yet they were not the only household members offering books to young ladies.5

Mothers and daughters shared a familial relationship which reading and the exchange of books heavily influenced. Elizabeth Avery recounted how her mother gave her novels to read as she grew into a young lady. One time her mother gave her the Bible to read instead of a novel. This action may have been to counter the teachings in the novels or because Elizabeth had consumed all the other available works and the Bible would entertain her for many hours.6 Another possible scenario prompting her mother to produce a copy of the Bible for Elizabeth may have been at the request of the young girl to read the religious book. Family members, but especially parents, would take requests for reading materials seriously, especially when the materials held spiritual or moral teachings the family encouraged. Elizabeth remarked how her mother whole heartedly believed every word of the Bible, so she would have encouraged her daughter to read such an influential work.7

One young lady from the Webb family appealed to her mother via a letter for reading material which she could not obtain locally or could not afford. She and her sister, both away from home attending school, requested their mother to ask their brother to send his Courier’s for them to read. She showed their desperation for entertaining readings by saying “it matters not about the age of them, so [long as] they are interesting.”8 She repeated this same type of request in a later portion of a letter, asking if their brother could spare an ancient geography text along with a small dictionary which the family owned.9 This last book might have been less for their pleasure and more to help their schooling and to save the expense of purchasing another one. In these brief glimpses, however, mothers played an important role in acquiring or lending books to young women, both at home and away at school.

Husbands and fathers also participated in the exchange of reading materials, either actively or by adding to the family library to which wives and daughters had access. After Ella

5 17 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
6 Elizabeth Avery Meriwether, Recollections of Ninety-Two Years,” Microfilm of Transcript, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
7 Elizabeth Avery Meriwether, Recollections of Ninety-Two Years,” Microfilm of Transcript, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
8 19 January 1848, Letter to Momma from Daughter, Webb family papers, Series 1, 1847-1849, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
9 19 January 1848, Letter to Momma from Daughter, Webb family papers, Series 1, 1847-1849, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
Clanton married Jeff Thomas, she mentioned a book of his which she read upon occasion, but found dull. Her husband had received the book from a scholarly friend and the work of poetry did not seem to hold much interest for Ella. She stated she read a piece by Alfred Tennyson in a magazine and enjoyed it, but had “never read much” in the volume of Tennyson’s work which her husband owned. Another time, on January 1, 1857, Ella mentioned she should begin reading a book her husband had purchased for her the previous summer. Jeff Thomas understood his wife’s fascination with reading and made the unexpected acquisition to please his spouse. Fathers provided works for their children to read and they returned the favor, as was evident by one exchange between father and daughter. Philippa Hopkins’ father wrote to her in December 1825, mentioning her previous letter in which she described recently reading a book about the life of Richard Henry Lee, the notable Revolutionary era patriot. J. W. Hopkins requested his daughter send the book to him by any person coming his way once she finished the work, as the local social circle of literary minds did not have a copy of this work which he could borrow to read. Showing the interest this book held for him, Mr. Hopkins reminded Phillipa later in the same letter to be sure and send it with the next person after she completed her reading. Fathers and daughters shared books and the anticipation of reading together, as evidenced by the entries into a North Carolina young lady’s journal. Bessie Lacy, a woman attending school in Greensboro, wrote to her father back home in Raleigh about all the various works which they could commence reading once she returned from her education. She proposed an ambitious program for them both: authors such as Locke and Bacon would be the formative works, but pleasure would be included with Shakespeare and Milton.

Household borrowing still limited the women to materials within the family’s budget and library. Utilizing the libraries of nearby neighbors and even far off friends, the women who appear in these diaries and papers developed an even larger collection of works from which they could make their reading selections. Reaching beyond her sisters and husband, Ella Thomas created a vast social network in which the flow of borrowed books and magazines fueled her

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10 August 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
11 1 January 1857, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
literary tastes and kept her supplied with materials at a never ending level. Other female
neighbors offered the teenager many books and even magazines to read and in return Ella
exchanged her books with them as well. Her father’s friends and acquaintances also brought
books when they visited the Clanton home. Ella enjoyed these new additions and eagerly began
reading them, sometimes while the visitor was still socializing in the family’s home. Often while
visiting family Ella read the books which they owned, and she noted one aunt who mentioned
hiding their books when Ella came for a visit in order to make her talk.14 After her marriage, the
neighborhood matrons accepted Ella into their fold, and she continued to utilize the older ladies
to supply her with vast amounts of reading material. These books sometimes arrived by
servants, either upon request or spontaneously. This wonderful exchange, however, did not
always produce new materials to read. One day, Ella requested Mrs. Harris to send over some
books and she received “a basket of books all of which I had read with the exception of [two].”15

Ella did not rely just on the older generation to supply her literary needs. Young ladies in
the neighborhood also participated in this exchange of books. The usual method with the ladies
of her own age included reciprocal exchange. On one occasion, Ella noted, a friend name Pattun
visited and “she loaned me The Gypsy and I loaned her The Legends of the Revolution.”16 Many
books passed through Ella Thomas’s hands, and quite a few came from other young ladies in the
vicinity. As years passed, it becomes harder to distinguish lenders her own age from older
women. This difficulty became most noticeable when Ella switched from using a young
woman’s first name when she married to calling the same young woman ‘Mrs. Smith,’ for
example. An entry noting a ‘Mrs. Smith’ lending a book could refer to an elderly neighbor or a
newly married young lady related to the elder in the community.

For those young ladies who may not have belonged to families of readers prior to their
school days, “their schooling introduce[d] them to the world of reading.”17 Teachers and school
masters advised young ladies trying to become learned women on the multitude of works
available for consumption. As education changed for females in the antebellum period, reading
came to be seen as an acceptable female enterprise, encouraged through the gift of books, the

14 16 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
15 5 August 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
16 15 March 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
17 Mary Kelley, “Reading Women/Women Reading,” 59.
establishment of literary societies at female institutions, and the lending of books by teachers. Attending school both at home and at a college in nearby Augusta, Georgia, did nothing to curb Ella Thomas’s need to expand her literary loaning circle. No matter where Ella found herself, she always continued borrowing and loaning books to friends and neighbors to increase the titles available to her. Walking to local schools allowed young ladies to talk, which created discussions about the assortment of books each had to lend. Ella Thomas and her schoolmates utilized this new resource by exchanging books before and after school. After she began attending school in Augusta, her teachers also recommended and loaned books to the avid reader. Sometimes these titles incorporated an assignment, such as Ella’s graduation composition. Ella began reading books lent to her by Mr. Myers, one of her teachers, for the sole purpose of finding a subject on which to focus her writing for that ultimate composition. Evidently, these books consisted of a more scholarly tone than the novels which Ella and her schoolmates traded back and forth during their time at school.

School books increased a personal or family library and many times these items were lent to family members and friends after the school year or after the completion of the person’s education. Olive requested a dear friend, Anna Mercur, search for a philosophy book she had used in school. Olive at that time had borrowed the work, returned it, and now, at least a few years later, wondered if Anna remembered the title or still possessed the book in question. Olive asked for the publisher’s information at the very least, but if she “[did] not set much store by the book” to send it via the mail. An interesting note in this same letter included Olive’s instructions on how to mail the book. Anna should “let the edges of the book be seen – the postage will not be much” for mailing it if sent in this fashion. Olive clearly had knowledge of posting books in this manner, possibly even sending her own books to others, and passed along this money saving tip.

Other ladies relied upon any person they met to increase the availability of materials for their reading pleasure. Miss J. Williams wrote to her relative, Mary Kearney Williams,
requesting books while recuperating at a sick house. Miss J. Williams had a friend or relative, Betsey, also staying at the infirmary, but even this situation did not diminish the lack of availability of reading materials. Indeed, this time may have emphasized the need for books to distract the two invalids during their recovery. Meanwhile, the doctor attending Miss Williams and Betsey, Dr. Dorsey, and his wife sent many books over for the patients to occupy their time. Books were a necessity because J. and Betsey “very seldom go out, [they] amuse [them]selves in reading.”

Doctors who visited many homes while conducting their duties appeared to have embraced the function of book traders, even providing books to the relatives of sick people. Ella Thomas’s grandmother needed the local doctors to come to her house several times to attend to her medical needs. The family travelled to the grandmother’s house to visit with her during her illness and while there Ella continued to broaden her literary lending network. When Dr. Nieson visited the house, Ella borrowed several books, which she eagerly began to read that night. A few days later, another doctor, Dr. Eve, stopped in to see the sick lady and lent the eager reader of the house three more books which she had not read.

Dr. Eve also lent Ella copies of the *Eclectic*, a literary review magazine. Ella continued to utilize this source for the magazine after her marriage and noted that one evening she carried a couple books to the doctor and in return received the past two months’ issues of the *Eclectic.* Medical professionals presented a perfect opportunity to lend books to various households throughout the areas which they serviced, and though diaries do not always mention this convenience, the doctors probably carried books between households for their patients.

Another way ladies learned about which books to request and how others in the community knew to send books their way came through word of mouth. Ella Thomas noted how she told her cousin that she liked the service at the church she attended while visiting. Her cousin later spoke with another member of the congregation and Mr. McLaughlin sent over *The Episcopal Manual* for Ella to read since she had expressed an interest in the church. While not the type of literature Ella must have typically requested, she did read the book either because of

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24 Undated, Letter from Miss J Williams to Mary Kerns Williams, James Payne Beckwith, Jr. Family Papers, microfilm, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
25 13 November 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
26 August 1855 – August 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
her interest in learning about the faith or just because her appetite for this activity never seemed to be satiated.  

Other young women casually mentioned lending and borrowing books in their papers, but they did not record specific details of this practice or with what frequency they partook of the activity. Mary Webb wrote to Ann, a family relation, mentioning sewing items she would send her, but continued “I will wait until I can get a good opportunity to send you the book you lent me.” For Mary, returning the book required more attention than small sewing creations since she needed to wait for the right opportunity to present itself. The value placed on books was not lost on those borrowing them and the care Mary gave Ann’s volume showed her appreciation to the lender as well. The book could be returned by a traveling friend or if Mary made a personal trip, but she did not say in later correspondence which method she used. Some women mentioned borrowing a book to read, which gives evidence of this practice, yet the details of the book’s return remain forever lost. Other ladies indicated that someone lent them a book without clearly announcing their relationship to them. Elizabeth Lindsay Lomax mentioned a Chandler who brought her a new novel to read. This man seemed to hold a special connection with Elizabeth, but whether he was a relative or a close family friend was unclear.

Suitors who called at their homes presented another way in which young ladies expanded their literary accumulation. Since most young women eagerly announced their reading habits and borrowed from family members, friends and older neighbors, young men looking to capture their affections may have offered books to endear their hearts. Elizabeth F. Perry wrote of a past occasion when her suitor (and future husband) visited and took walks with her. She explained what events took place during their courtship and remembered their discussion “on different books.” Elizabeth fondly recollected that he eagerly returned “the next morning after breakfast, [and] brought over two or three to read.” Major Perry knew that these books would show his affection towards Elizabeth and at the same time offered at least two more chances for the young couple to see each other: when the books were initially received and later upon their return.

27 April 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
28 January 27, 1838, letter from Mary Webb to Ann, Webb Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
30 Undated entry, Elizabeth F. Perry diary, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
31 Undated entry, Elizabeth F. Perry diary, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
Additionally, young men not romantically interested in the young Ella Thomas sometimes visited her family home and exchanged books. Male friends around the age of the daughters of the house helped facilitate the exchange of reading materials. William Anthony visited the Clanton home in 1848 and promised to lend a Pickering novel to Ella on his next visit.\(^{32}\) Midge Merriwether, the son of a neighboring family, borrowed books from Ella at some point and on an October day in 1848, she noted, “he brought the books home I loaned him.”\(^{33}\) No romantic undertones appeared in the diary’s entry about young Merriwether. While it may not be certain if he was inclined towards Ella or her sisters, reciprocal feelings were not expressed in her diary and so his literary interests only indicated book sharing between the younger generations, no matter their sex.

While direct borrowing provided literature for the women, indirect borrowing from libraries may also have been utilized. No mention was made in the diaries and journals, yet by the mid-nineteenth century the rare but increasing presence of libraries in Southern towns provided new means for men to access books. Open only to paying male members, for the focus period of this study, the men in these women’s lives may have accessed materials for their family and friends.\(^{34}\) Since many of the women mentioned borrowing books from doctors, ministers and neighboring families, these men especially if their professions took them to major cities with subscription libraries could have memberships and borrowed certain titles or items appropriate for women in their reading circles.\(^{35}\)

Borrowing allowed greater consumption of literary works without the expense of purchasing every book a woman might read in her lifetime, yet someone had to make the initial purchase that brought the copy into the circle of a borrowing community. The purchasing power of readers increased and “between 1850 and 1860 alone, the printing industry’s product value increased by 168 percent, from nearly twelve to over thirty-one million dollars a year.”\(^{36}\) Women had several ways to purchase books, depending on their proximity to town and the frequency with which they travelled to various cities. One lady, Olive, wrote to a friend about a book she was trying to remember from their mutual school days. She later noted she had come

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32 6 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
33 11 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
36 Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, Literary Dollars and Social Sense, xi.
across this title in an advertisement for books. Olive did not mention if the book appeared in a newspaper or a magazine advertisement, but since she now knew the name, she proceeded to supply herself with the book. Whether she purchased the book through the advertisement or found the title at a local store was unclear, but she had ready access to purchase the book because she quickly obtained the title once she recollected the name.\textsuperscript{37}

Olive’s letter revealed her familiarity with booksellers as a source for reading materials. Booksellers were not prevalent in the United States, even in the 1850s and 1860s: “There were only 1,720 booksellers among the 23 million Americans” in the 1850 census and the average number of years a bookstore remained in business steadily dropped in the twenty to thirty years prior from almost eleven to only a year in 1840.\textsuperscript{38} The bookselling business, therefore, was precarious in nature, and even well established shops could quickly close down, thus leaving their patrons without a local book merchant. Accessibility to book stores varied throughout the regions of the South. Thus, the ease with which a Southern woman might acquire books could vary dramatically during her lifetime and depending on her location. Despite the simplicity with which Olive purchased the advertised book, getting books in Cumberland compared poorly to other locations where she had previously lived and shopped. Writing to her friend Anna, she noted “this is the poorest place to get books that ever I saw.”\textsuperscript{39} Anna obviously also visited at least one bookseller in her life, as both Anna and Olive knew the seller she mentioned in the next sentence of her letter when she explained the nearby bookseller was “worse than our dear friend O.D.”\textsuperscript{40}

Ella Thomas visited bookstores and purchased reading materials in town throughout her life. Many entries in her diary discussed trips to town and purchasing one book at a time or even acquiring several books while visiting the shop or gathering other materials she needed.\textsuperscript{41} On one trip to town she “bought a book at Mr. Greenville…then I changed it for James’ last novel.”\textsuperscript{42} This interesting comment showed how the young lady utilized the shops in her town to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37} 18 December 1860, letter to Anna Mercur from Olive, Anna Mercur papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, \textit{Literary Dollars and Social Sense}, 141.
\item \textsuperscript{39} 18 December 1860, letter to Anna Mercur from Olive, Anna Mercur papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
\item \textsuperscript{40} 18 December 1860, letter to Anna Mercur from Olive, Anna Mercur papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
\item \textsuperscript{41} April – July 1852, February 1857, January 1858, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\item \textsuperscript{42} 3 December 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\end{itemize}
expand her library of titles. If one store did not have a certain title, competing booksellers would exchange a newly purchased book for one in their shop. While none of the women in this study documented the price they paid for any of the purchased books, studies on the printing and publishing industry in the United States show the different movements from colonial importation of British works to the mid-nineteenth century practice of pirating, or reprinting copyrighted British works cheaply, which brought ample titles from England for consumption. This same practice, however, led American authors along a hard and unprofitable path if they wanted their works published. Fortunately for the women trying to increase their libraries, by the mid 1840s, this cutthroat industry led to competitive pricing and abundant supplies of books, which may have allowed the women to purchase with less impact upon their household budgets.

The movement of books was poorly portrayed in women’s diaries and therefore cannot be fully understood. On many occasions, Ella Thomas noted she sent for a book though she did not mention if the request was by mail or by requesting a travelling acquaintance to acquire the item on a trip. Sometimes this book immediately arrived, so she must have requested it from either the local store or a neighbor, but she almost never recorded how she received a new title; the book simply appeared in her diary for the first time.

Books not available locally could be sought in nearby towns or even from far off distances. On one occasion, Ella sent for a book from Augusta; however, the book was not

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45 Peddlers often travelled from the North into the South selling books and subscriptions for upcoming publications. The sparse population density of the South made the probability of a small merchandise store profiting and remaining in business unlikely; however, according to Paul J. Uselding, the peddler could profit from this low density of residence. While the women’s diaries do not discuss peddlers, they did mention doctors and church officials bringing books. Paul J. Uselding, “Peddling in the Antebellum Economy: Precursor of Mass-Marketing or a Start in Life?” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 34:1 (Jan. 1975): 58-59. According to Rosalind Remer’s *Printers and Men of Capital*, ministers were often employed by Northern publishers to sell their books while travelling. The diaries reviewed for this study made no outright mention of women buying from travelling peddlers, but this practice was utilized for distribution and the women probably knew of peddlers, even if they did not purchase literary works from them. Rosalind Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital: Philadelphia Book Publishers in the New Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 125-148. Lewis E. Atherton’s article, “Itinerant Merchandising in the Ante-Bellum South,” details the largest portion of the Southern customers for the Northern peddlers came from small farms, not the plantation class. Atherton found a diary entry from a Vicksburg plantation wife who noted her order for no peddlers to be admitted, because, Atherton concluded, she probably thought a peddler could incite slaves to leave their master or revolt. The article makes other mentions of peddlers distributing abolitionist papers, so Southern white women may not have purchased from Northern peddlers, but relied on men of the South selling items, like books, in addition to their other professional activities. Lewis E. Atherton, “Itinerant Merchandising in the Ante-Bellum South” *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 19:2 (Apr. 1945): 36, 53.
46 23 March 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
available. The local bookstore and shops that traded books appealed to Ella as well as others eager to increase their library, but avid readers used any means available to exchange books with others to expand the amount of reading material available to them. Bookshops and even lending libraries helped the women near towns and cities expand their literary pursuits. Unfortunately, female readers living far from populous regions did not have access to these outlets. They, like Olive, may have appealed to friends or family members living in areas with bookshops, libraries or even larger personal collections to send works via the mail or travelling acquaintances.

The amount of time between a new work’s publication and its arrival in a household, finding its way to the woman who wrote about her reading habits, sometimes remained a mystery. Elizabeth Lindsay Lomax, who lived in Virginia, wrote in her diary about recently reading Charlotte Bronte’s *Villette*. This entry on January 7, 1854 appeared soon after the publication of the work in 1853. Lomax, a lady of means, probably bought the book so its recent publishing would not hamper her access to the title. This example shows just how quickly well-to-do women purchased the newest works and began the spread of literary works through their borrowing networks.

Trips out of the local region provided a great opportunity to increase one’s library, especially if travelling to the larger cities of the country. Ella Thomas noted that one rainy day she entertained herself by reading a book which she “bought in New York and one which [she] prize[d] very much indeed.” Whether she prized the book because of its content or because of the place of purchase is unclear, but her entry illuminates the fact Ella took great care to increase her library especially when travelling to far off places with better resources than her Georgia hometown. Another entry into her diary discussed a work which someone had recently sent to her. Ella expressed her great admiration for the book and revealed she owned it and had read it many times since she “bought it in Philadelphia two summers since and read it traveling.”

If a young lady did not routinely visit cities, local townspeople she knew travelling to various places could act as couriers for the purchase and transport of books. Mary Bathman wrote in her journal that the local bishop travelled to a shop and was employed to pick out books

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47 13 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
49 7 March 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
50 4 May 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
for the family. Mary recounted that “after breakfast we received the books Cousin M[argaret] had asked Bishop Green to select at Connella’s.”

Although Margaret had requested books for herself, Mary continued her account with “there was one from the Bishop for all of us girls.”

The bishop used this opportunity to present the young girls of the house with a book he had selected. This may have been a kindness for the young ladies, so everyone received a new item to read, or the bishop may have used this opportunity to present a work containing moral or social ideals that would shape their young minds.

Well travelled visitors offered the women new selections, but women did not have to sit at home waiting for new materials to arrive. Many of the women started or at least joined a group of other women meeting to discuss books and magazines. Reading parties and literary societies offered a chance for women to join other readers to discuss works and share materials, either orally or by trade. Selena Powell of Leesburg, Virginia, wrote a letter to her daughter, Rebecca, who currently lived in Alexandria, Virginia, about a reading party. While Selena did not attend this event, her husband and other daughter Harriet did attend what must have been a common occurrence because Selena did not include a detailed explanation of this event or how it came to be organized. Rebecca probably attended or knew of such literary parties when she lived at home, so Selena did not need to explain a familiar event.

The events at this reading party remain a mystery, but another diary reveals how literary works were consumed at another informal party. Kate S. Carney described another way in which literary works were made known to some Southern women via an impromptu reading party in her home. At the age of seventeen, Kate spent her days sewing and reading but the treat of having her visiting brother read to everyone one night made March 29, 1859, very special. The friends and family members gathered to hear the material he brought read aloud while they sat in the room, and this party allowed one work to be heard by several individuals simultaneously.

Literary societies allowed women a place to expand their reading circle and promote the activity to others in the community. Bessie Lacy, a Raleigh lady, formed a society in Charlotte where she resided after her marriage to Thomas Dewey. In the Social Reading Club, “women

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51 19 May 1856, Mary Bathman diary, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
52 19 May 1856, Mary Bathman diary, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
54 29 March 1859, Kate S Carney diary, microfilm, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
and men gathered to read fiction, history, and travel literature” and Lacy also promoted a Ladies Tract Society for dispersing religious materials around the city. In congregating to read, the participants either read aloud works for discussion or they purchased and traded books with one another so everyone could read a particular piece before a meeting.

While Southern women had a great variety of ways to access reading materials, their actions did not vary dramatically from their Northern counterparts. In the many published memoirs and biographies of Northern women from affluent families, their reading habits greatly influenced their daily lives, just like the Southern women. In histories of reading in the United States, several examples of Northern women in the late eighteenth century mentioned how they gained access to books. The familiarity these women had with borrowing and lending literary works may indicate Northern women had greater access to books and embraced reading at an earlier time than Southern women, or this may only indicate better preservation of diaries of the Northern women starting at an earlier time.

Existing records do not make clear if Southern women gained access to published works at the exact time as their Northern counterparts, but a correlation between where both Northern and Southern women located items to read can be gleaned from the written accounts of both groups. A Northern woman, Hannah Adams, indicated through her diary that she read throughout her entire life, but as a young child she found books in “her father’s library, where Adams spent much of her childhood.” Other Northern women also utilized some of the same ways to obtain books as the Southern women discussed in this study. Martha Laurens Ramsay and Catharine Maria Sedgwick, both Northern women readers, also pursued their education via reading in their homes, since schools for women did not emerge in abundance until the early nineteenth century. Ramsay was “indefatigable in cultivating an acquaintance with books” and promoted reading amongst her friends and relatives even as she married and aged. Her husband wrote about how she often gave books, thus helping expand the reading circle around her while promoting books she felt worthy of introducing into a lending network. Sedgwick, in contrast to Adams and Ramsay, was offered an education in New England schools, but she considered her reading in the family home provided her with a better education. She learned by

55 Mary Kelley, “Reading Women/Women Reading,” 54.
56 Mary Kelley, “Reading Women/Women Reading,” 57.
57 Mary Kelley, “Reading Women/Women Reading,” 58.
58 Mary Kelley, “Reading Women/Women Reading,” 58.
reading, and by hearing her father read aloud to the family when Catharine was a young girl. This inspired her to begin reading novels and other light works before she gradually moved on to more serious educational subjects, like ancient histories.59

The Hamilton women, Edith, Alice and Norah, from Indiana obtained their reading materials in much the same way as the Southerners. Their aunt’s frequent trips to New York City, on which she encouraged her nieces to join her, offered the young women a chance to explore the bookstores in the large city. However, the most common source for the young Hamiltons’ reading material came from within their household: their father. Montgomery Hamilton would bring books back from his travels for each of his girls, and he allowed them access to his generous library. He continued to give his daughters books and magazine articles to read and memorize, showing how the girls’ preferences for literary works hinged on their father’s. Alice claimed the Bible was the book she knew best, but her father was “more interested in theology than devotional practice, [and] taught religious texts like any others.”60 While the women in these examples differed in the regions in which they live, they have striking similarities to the Southern women in this study. All of the women shared books, heard literature read aloud by family members, and found books in the home and through educational outlets.

Several different options presented themselves to women wanting to read from a varied range of texts without always having to extend funds to purchase new books and magazines. Extending a warm welcome in a family’s home encouraged visitors from the neighborhood and from great distances to make repeated social calls. This same openness encouraged visitors to bring presents, even if they were only lending the books for the family to read and then return. If possible, women supplemented books brought by visitors with books purchased at stores or booksellers or through magazine and newspaper advertisements. The newly acquired purchases not only allowed for entertainment during their reading for the whole family but also offered items to lend to friends and visitors. Lending also transpired across vast distances either by mailing the items or sending materials with travelling family or friends. Another method in a woman’s quest to add to her library came in the form of trips to various towns, either visiting family or on vacations. New towns offered different stores and possible regional titles not

59 Mary Kelley, “Reading Women/Women Reading,” 58.
60 Barbara Sicherman, “Sense and Sensibility: A Case Study of Women’s Reading in Late-Victorian America,” in Reading in America: Literature & Social History, ed. Cathy N. Davidson (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 204.
available in their hometowns. Group readings, reading parties and literary societies advanced the knowledge of different works and helped many women gain access to works unavailable prior to their joining. Although limited funds and restricted opportunities placed basic restrictions on expanding a personal library, Southern women found numerous ways to circumvent those boundaries. Now, our discussion turns toward how the women and their families reacted to the items they read and to the very act of reading.
CHAPTER 4 – REACTING TO THE BOOKSHELF

The wide variety of literature the women read affected their consumption of written material which spanned the emotional and literary gauntlet, and reading required them to devote hours to the activity each week. Considering the energy women spent weaving a complex network to access materials, the very act of reading must have held special importance or conjured some type of reactions in the readers. The most obvious response one would expect from an avid reader might come in the form of happiness and enjoyment of reading. This light-hearted feeling led to deeper responses, such as pleasure and even displeasure with some of the literature. While these sentiments influenced the women, some works could produce more intense reactions. Books brought about sadness or sorrow for some of the readers, while others experienced fascination or found beauty in the written language or imagery the authors used. Many diary entries revealed the women possessed interest in certain pieces of literature, usually in varying degrees and even ranging into disinterest or disbelief. Some women, like Ella Thomas, read many works in rapid succession or even simultaneously utilized comparisons for comments. This sometimes revealed how one work generated greater interest while a second one might only be mildly enjoyable, or even boring when compared. While these comparisons positioned the books in order of the woman’s preference, they also allowed the reader to shift into critique of the characters, writing style and the authors.

The women’s reactions even venture into how they felt about the very act of reading and its effects. Some women found educational value in their literary pursuits. Others revealed their thoughts about the ways certain types of literature or even choosing reading were not constructive to their mental formation. At the same time the women were reading to themselves, they occasionally proffered selections to their friends and family members. The readers wrote in their journals about the listeners’ reactions to the selections, sometimes finding their positive views were shared and other times, their choices criticized. Family members also expressed thoughts about what or how often the women read and the diarists were impacted enough by their attitude to record the sentiments in their journals.

Although a wide range of reactions was available to readers, many looked forward to a piece of literature giving them a sense of joy. Happiness came in several variations, however, and the women wrote about this response using many different phrases or descriptions.
Enjoyment was a reaction Kate Carney expressed for many of the works. She remarked that she began a book one Sunday afternoon and she already enjoyed it considerably.\footnote{1} Another female reader, Anna Lesesne, found pure happiness from her literary adventures, even with non-fictional writing. Anna remarked about reading Hunter’s \textit{Sacred Biography} and described it as “a most delightful book.”\footnote{2}

Highlighting the fact that time spent reading provided enjoyment, Kate Carney’s diary entries detailed bringing a book along to read on a boat trip. In her remarks, Kate stated, “in case [the] trip should prove tedious,” she would escape the boredom through reading.\footnote{3} This joy produced in a woman acted as a distraction along with the uplifting feeling. In a letter to Mary Williams, a relative staying in a sick house mentioned how the activity of reading helped pass the time. She wrote “we very seldom go out we amuse ourselves in reading.”\footnote{4} This activity allowed these two women to circumvent or alleviate times of monotony or confinement with the brightness of reading a book.

Stronger emotions of happiness often appeared in light of a woman’s literary pursuits. In a letter to Selena Lloyd, Mary Ann Randolph wrote about her reactions to reading in very poetic terms: “I think if there [is] a perfect bliss upon earth it is to read.”\footnote{5} Mary Ann continued in her letter to Selena mentioning how wonderful it would have been for the two of them to read Scott’s novels together since Selena was an “enthusiastic and interested” reader as well.\footnote{6} This bliss Mary Ann experienced upon reading came across clearly in her letter. In fact, she desired to share the novel with another passionate reader to enhance reactions to the literature on a greater scale.

Amusement was another reaction reading could provoke, which was especially evident in Ella Thomas’s journal. Ella wrote about perusing \textit{Georgia Scenes} by Longstreet. She recorded...
her reactions with the line “a more mirth provoking work I have seldom seen.” This response was not an isolated event, and she wrote another entry about how reading brought her great entertainment. Ella remarked she sent over to her neighbor “a very amusing book… called Widow Bedott Papers.” She continued with her comments on the title as she stated “it [was] indeed one of the most mirth provoking things imaginable. Some of the poetry is sick [sic.].” Again, she described the ways in which she reacted to this work and indicated the delightful she experienced while reading and even felt afterwards. Another piece of literature produced this same reaction for Ella Thomas, even though it was of a different genre. The first volume of Kane’s Arctic Explorations invoked delight among its reader, enough so that she noted the reaction when she finished her reading.

The happiness and joy these women felt varied compared to other women’s reactions, or even their own to different writings. Sometimes, a less vivacious feeling of simple pleasure presented itself to female readers. Ella Thomas reported reading a novel called Edward Austin, and she “liked it very much indeed.” This reaction did not inspire lines and lines in her diary, but she reacted to the book favorably and commented on that fact. Ella used sedate descriptions to remark about certain books, while others brought her pleasure in which she expressed her favor in more enthusiastic terms. Ella continued her discussion about a collection entitled The New World and stated the piece she liked the most was “Beatrice.” The work included Italian names and Ella “was very much pleased with it.”

Magazine articles also provided enjoyment for Ella Thomas. She remarked about reading “Catherine Clayton” in a borrowed magazine and finding pleasure in each section. Ella read the entire piece in one sitting, even though it was published monthly from July to October. Written in her October 8 entry, Ella possessed all four issues at the time of her reading. She did not comment on when she received the magazines and it is unclear if she held off reading until all parts were in her possession or if her lender waited to share all four issues until the story was complete.

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7 29 February 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
8 17 April 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
9 17 April 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
10 12 February 1858, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
11 6 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
12 18 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
13 8 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
Just as the books brought happiness to the female readers, this same pleasure distracted from unpleasant times. Grace Fenton Garnett found books pleasant and soothing, both of which are noted in her journal. Grace recorded she had a headache one evening and her mother read to her until she fell asleep. Grace found this activity relaxing and helped take focus off the pain, but there were other reasons a woman turned to a book for distraction. Reading provided pleasant entertainment for monotonous journeys. A complete day’s entry in Ann Kinloch’s diary dealt with the family’s trip to and from town. Ann and her family found distraction in a book about a castle and “read all the way home, which made the ride very agreeable.”

One reason books offered a pleasant diversion appeared in a letter Mary Ann Randolph wrote to her friend. Mary Ann remarked she reacted with her body to reading, especially a Scott novel she had recently finished. She recounted how “every faculty is absorbed.” She described her great joy in reading with the comment, “what pleasure or rather what delight [emphasis hers]” she found reading this book. Another reaction Ella Thomas had to reading came in the form of daydreaming, which provided a pleasant interruption from day to day life or even school assignments. Ella mentioned reading in Grahams Magazine a work entitled “Grace Fleming.” The entry continued that, after reading this piece, Ella “was indulging in the habit [she had] formed of building castles in the air.” She delighted in this pastime, which was inspired by her literary pursuits.

Many other reasons pleasure were found in reading materials. For some women, religious texts provided satisfaction, especially when weather or illness kept them from attending church or Sunday school classes. Kate Carney enjoyed reading The Bible in the Family because one Sunday she could not attend church. She added this work to her reading of the Bible, using the literature to learn more about the religious beliefs since she remarked the day should be spent in such pursuits. Other reasons to find literary gratification did not involve religious materials,
but dealt with the way fictional works had been created. Anna Lesesne found pleasure both in the technique of an author and in learning about a character’s life. During her reading of the book *Miss Hanna Shore’s Life*, Anna expressed great delight at the character of Hanna and enjoyed the “easy and beautiful style” of the “very interesting and beautifully written letters” in the book.\(^{20}\)

Most of the reactions the women experienced during their literary activities were immediately sensed and were then written in their diary or journal. Other reactions lingered and came forth some time later. Ella Thomas wrote in her journal about a novel lent to her. She stated, “I am certain I have read it before but will take pleasure in reperusing it.”\(^{21}\) Yet, reactions about books did not just spring forth during the initial reading. The interest created during the woman’s initial reading of the work was not the only effect of this hobby, but long-lasting impressions resulted for the diarist’s looking back on her literary activities. In her diary, Elizabeth Meriwether wrote about *Arabian Nights*, which she had found “intensely interesting” when she first read the work.\(^{22}\) She remarked how she could still remember parts of the story years later. She commented on the wonderfully styled romance and inventiveness of this particular book, which struck her as memorable and unique, even though she had read many other works in her lifetime.\(^{23}\) Another piece had a similar effect on the young Elizabeth. She wrote in her memoirs years later about the impact a piece of poetry had caused when she was a young girl. She remembered the poetry as “grand,” and even after 75 years she wrote four lines of the piece from memory.\(^{24}\) Elizabeth carried the pleasure the poetry elicited in her for years and continued to react to the memorized lines. Another reaction to these four lines of poetry when she was a young girl came in the form of her belief that she understood their true meaning. This belief helped create the long-lasting impact of the poetry; they may have even inspired the young Elizabeth to commit the lines to memory. Elizabeth, however, remarked at the age of 92, she then possessed the wisdom which came with living and realized she could not have fully understood the poetry as a young girl. She wrote the piece was about coming to the end of your

\(^{20}\) 25 January 1836, Anna Lesesne diary, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.

\(^{21}\) 9 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.

\(^{22}\) Elizabeth Avery Meriwether, “Recollections of Ninety-Two Years,” Microfilm of Transcript. University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, 19.


life, which a young girl of 12 or 14 could not appreciate like the aged woman she had become now fully understood.\textsuperscript{25}

Reactions of happiness, joy and pleasure all encompassed positive responses to the literature the women read. Yet, avid readers came across works which they did not find pleasing or enjoyable. These instances of displeasure in a book or short story also filled the pages of their diaries. Ella Thomas wrote in her journal she had recently read a new writing by Mr. Smythe and stated “the moral sentiments are very fine and the whole tone of the book very pure.”\textsuperscript{26} Despite the accolades, Ella disapproved of the work, stating “it did not strike me favorably.”\textsuperscript{27} So even though Ella found the content to be acceptable, the completion of the entire writing ultimately displeased her and therefore she wrote negatively about the book.

Some works took longer to invoke an emotional response or even an interest. Ella Thomas wrote in her journal about having already finished three or four chapters in a G. P. R. James novel, but she declared she had “not read enough to become interested in it yet.”\textsuperscript{28} Later in her writings, Ella noted she finished the book, \textit{The Whim}; however, her reaction was disappointment as she “was not as much pleased with it as [she] expected to be.”\textsuperscript{29} This delayed reaction to the work may have been from a lack of interest or Ella may have postponed recording her feedback since the book was not prompting a positive reaction from her.

Another instance of displeasure in what Ella read came from a journal entry about reading \textit{The Convict}, another work by James. She remarked she “was not much pleased with it and [she] did not finish it.”\textsuperscript{30} For an avid reader like Ella, her displeasure at the work had to be unbearable for her to stop reading this novel. This illuminated her displeasure with more than one of James’ works. Ella’s interests or preferences for the subjects or author’s writing styles may have been opposite to what James writings had entailed, which caused her to find his works unpleasant. Her seemingly continued interest in his works could have been a result of a neighbor’s reading preference since Ella utilized borrowing to acquiring her materials as seen in the previous chapter.

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\textsuperscript{25} Elizabeth Avery Meriwether, “Recollections of Ninety-Two Years,” Microfilm of Transcript. University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, 20.
\textsuperscript{26} 20 September 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{27} 20 September 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{28} 10 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{29} 12 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{30} c. 18-29 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\end{flushright}
While displeasure balanced out enjoyment, another response the women experienced during their readings included more melancholy emotions, like sadness or sorrow. Upon reading an account of the siege of Jerusalem, Ann Kinloch remarked in her diary about the “most dreadful calamities did that wretched unhappy infatuated people undergo.” Ella Thomas remarked in her diary a neighbor had lent her a book entitled *Cynilla* and having previously read the book concluded, "it is a fine work... although different from most novels in terminating sadly[,] it is interesting."

Both Ann and Ella remarked about the sadness and sorrow the subjects in a book or a whole work provoked in them, yet neither appeared deeply moved. Another woman, Caroline Davis, wrote of reading the *Diary of a Physician* in which she reeled from the force of the grief the literature created. She made this observation about the mood of the novel: the work “was so sadly interesting that I have hardly had the heart to commence another book.” Caroline’s intense response to a piece of writing was not the only one recorded in the pages of the women’s diaries. Elizabeth Avery wrote in her memoirs her reactions to reading *The Children of the Abbey*. She remarked how she remembered even over 70 years later her reaction to the book: “I wept over the sorrows of Amanda.” She wrote how later in life she tried to read this work again, but found it uninteresting and nothing to cry about, but at a young age she “certainly did think this now quite forgotten story well nigh perfect.”

The aura surrounding a book sometimes gave the female readers an insight into the author, or a false idea of the writer’s personality. Ella Thomas remarked about the works of a female author, Letitia Landers, commenting that “a spirit of melancholy pervades her whole works.” She continued to describe this feeling she experienced during her reading of Landers’ works as haunting and sorrowful. Ella concluded the author must have been a very melancholy person, but wrote she had learned from a reliable source the author was “of a very gay, lively

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31 13 May 1799, Ann Cleland Kinloch paper, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
32 4 May 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
34 Elizabeth Avery Meriwether, “Recollections of Ninety-Two Years,” Microfilm of Transcript. University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, 19.
36 10 June 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
temperament.‖ Ella admitted being disappointed by this revelation and her imagined state of the author must have affected the way in which she read or viewed the work after she had finished it.  

While pleasure or even displeasure might prompt an emotional response from the women, another reaction to the literature came in the form of simple expectation, or imagined future interest. In a letter to her mother, a young woman requested the family send some of her brother’s books to read as long as she would find them interesting. The daughter expected the family to provide books which they had read, or at least had some type of knowledge about the book’s content, thus the family would be able to decide if their relative would find them appealing. While this young woman relied on her family to provide interesting works, other women wrote about the books they already had in their possession. Ella Thomas entered in her journal that one evening she sat to peruse Ravenscliff, “a new and interesting novel.”

Other instances of reading moved the women, yet they only spent one line of their journals documenting the reaction. Elizabeth Lomax commented about reading a volume of Commodore Perry’s book, remarking that she found “it most interesting” but wrote nothing more. On another occasion she remarked that she had “been reading Irving’s ‘Life of Washington’ and enjoyed it thoroughly.” Ella Thomas also used short notations to express her interest in a particular book she had read. Grace Lee was a work which Ella declared to be “of thrilling interest.” One night, Ella entered in her journal her reluctance to record the day’s events because it meant she had to stop reading to do so. Ella “reluctantly laid down the last vol[ume] of Gordon Cumming’s Travels…how interesting I find it.” This same dilemma of needing to stop reading, yet being so involved in the work the woman could not stop, happened to Ella on another occasion as well. Household Mysteries by Lizzie Petite was, according to

37 10 June 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.  
38 10 June 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.  
40 2 March 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.  
43 21 May 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.  
44 12 June 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
Ella, “one of those thrillingly interesting works.” Ella continued to examine the book, stating “the plot … is so well conceived and the interest sustained that one cannot lay it aside till it is finished.”

Interest could evolve into other reactions for the readers. Appreciation for a book came easily to Ella, especially in the case of Stanfield Hall, which she described as a historical romance novel. Ella wrote, “I found [it] extremely interesting.” Ella also commented about the book Which or the Right and the Left, stating it was “creating quite a sensation among literary aides,” which piqued her curiosity about the book. The Bible also created responses from Ella. She wrote “as a literary production it must command the admiration of the skeptical mind.” As was obvious from her entry, Elizabeth Lomax had a high appreciation for a recently read work. She stated Herndon’s Exploration in the Valley of the Amazon “was fascinating – like a fairy tale.”

These brief mentions about books which interested female readers allow one to discover their literary appetites, but longer entries in their journals help explain how they reacted to the topics conjured up by the works. Elizabeth Perry mentioned reading A Year in Spain and found it “very interesting.” She then went on to discuss her reactions to Spain’s government, stating the country “under a good government would be the most delightful country in the world…but I should doubt if it would ever regain its former state of prosperity and happiness.” Obviously Elizabeth had enough knowledge about the history of this country to make a comment about the government and the ability or inability of Spain to return to its past affluence.

Anticipation of interest in the future reading of a work, at least for Ella Thomas, came from experience with the author’s other works. A neighbor brought The Iran Cousin to Ella and based on the author, Mary Cowder Clarke, Ella expressed interest in reading the proffered work. In her journal, she wrote about remembering that Clarke wrote The Girlhood of Shakespeare

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45 20 February 1857, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
46 20 February 1857, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
47 11 April 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
48 5 August 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
49 2 January 1858, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
51 1 March [no year], Elizabeth F. Perry diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
52 1 March [no year], Elizabeth F. Perry diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
Heroines, “a series of books…[I] read a few summers since with a degree of interest.” Ella continued her explanation, stating her appreciation for the book was “owing from a mingled feeling of love for the subject, and admiration for the admirable style of composition.” Ella wrote she “anticipate[d] a rich intellectual treat in reading” The Iran Cousin. Sometimes a brief glance at a work would allow the woman to make a judgment on the content, even if she had no experience with the author. Ella Thomas borrowed Our Cousin Veronica from a neighbor and recorded that “from the glance [she] … had of its contents [she] … judge[d] it to be interesting.”

Many consumers judged works based on the author’s reputation, publications or from a quick overview of the work. At other times interest for a work was not preconceived and surfaced upon actual commencement of the book. Interest in a volume could come after a few short chapters, according to Ella Thomas’s diary. She remarked, “I have also read a few chapters in an interesting work.” She wrote this comment about the book Captain Caust or Twenty Years of an African Slaver, which she began late in the day of her journal entry. At other times, the beginning of a book did not offer the woman enough information to judge whether it would be of interest to them. The Private Life of an Eastern King was “very highly noticed” in a literary magazine which Ella Thomas consumed. She began reading the literature, but commented she had “not read enough of it as yet to form an opinion of its merit.” Later on in her diary, Ella recorded she had finished this book and stated it was very interesting.

Not all works were guaranteed to hold women’s attentions; sometimes reading women found books to be uninteresting. Ella Thomas found an autobiographical piece in a magazine entitled “Rose Don Glass” to be “decidedly uninteresting.” Disinterest in a book could cause various reactions, but Ella also recorded one she experienced. She began reading a book one afternoon when her husband was in town, “but not being particularly interested in the book…[she] fell asleep on the sofa in the sitting room.” Ella read many books and wrote about

53 15 April 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
54 15 April 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
55 15 April 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
56 4 March 1856, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
57 November 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
58 November 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
59 November 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
60 3 June 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
61 27 June 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
them in her journal, yet the comments about the works she enjoyed far outweighed those she did not like. This may have been a result of her not writing detailed comments on items she did not find interesting, choosing rather to use her ink and paper to record those which pleased or interested her.

Reading a classic like the *Iliad* presented Elizabeth Perry a chance to critique literature and give her reactions. She wrote she felt “rather disappointed” at this great work, citing “too great a sameness, the repetition of the same thing over and over; so many battles are described, and all precisely alike.”62 She did find parts of this epic story interesting, which may pinpoint her reading interests because she found “the parting of Hector and Andromache is the most interesting part.”63 On another day’s entry Elizabeth notated, “I am *trying* to get through ‘Homer’s Iliad’ but it is too uninteresting.”64

Ella Thomas occasionally compared two books, usually with one interesting her and the other not holding her attention. Ella Thomas recorded her reactions to two pieces she had recently finished reading: *Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake*. She remarked “*The Lady of the Lake* I have read often and admire very much indeed – *Marmion* I am not so much pleased with.”65 She did point out one portion of *Marmion* that pleased her: “the description of the trial of Constance is particularly fine.”66

Certain books brought pleasure to Ella while others aroused her distaste. In a journal entry, Ella received two books from a visiting doctor, the first *The Doom of the Torys Guard* and the second *The Iron Mask*. She wrote about the novels, “I liked the first very well but did not like the latter.”67 Ella also wrote in her diary of reading two loaned books, *Praise and Principle* and *Valcruiese*. Of the first she stated, “I was very much pleased with it,” yet for the latter work she only expressed tolerable interest.68 These entries show the variety of Ella’s selections and reveal that lenders did not always furnish items which would be pleasing to their literary friends.

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62 Undated entry [c. 20 March], Elizabeth F. Perry diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
63 Undated entry [c. 20 March], Elizabeth F. Perry diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
64 Undated entry [c. 28 March], Elizabeth F. Perry diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
65 20 September 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
66 20 September 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
67 13 November 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
68 30 December 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
In another diary entry, Ella recorded mixed reactions to her day’s readings. In one entry she wrote she liked *Changes and Counter Changes* very much, yet *Robert Macarrie in England* only received a “liked it pretty well.” While she did not go into detail about why she liked one more than the other or any points of contention she had with the books, her entry showed she did not enjoy everything she read with the same enthusiasm, making her comments of thorough enjoyment of some works more powerful.

Beauty was another common element which Ella Thomas found in many of the literary pieces she consumed. One day she read *Henry De Crons* and commented, “tis quite pretty I think.” Along those same lines, she noted another book, *Ellen Middleton*, “tis beautiful,” yet she only mentioned the title of this book and added the simple statement, offering no other comments. Ella wrote she had recently read in *The New World* and “there [were] some beautiful pieces in it.” The exquisiteness Ella found in the short pieces among this one collected edition was not a onetime occurrence, just like the loveliness she found in several books. Again, another collection of works captured Ella’s interest and she recorded her reactions in her diary. She remarked *The Annual of 1849* had pieces she deemed “quite pretty.” Ella did not comment on the reasons she found these works beautiful, so one can only speculate whether it was the style of writing, the storyline or other elements which combined to impress Ella with their magnificence.

Literary works could also prompt a woman to discount them as unbelievable. Elizabeth Avery’s reaction to most of her readings came in the form of questioning everything, including the Bible. She mentioned her disbelief about some of the stories in the Holy Scriptures, which “greatly grieved” her mother who had given her the book to read. Another reader, Elizabeth Lomax, remarked in her diary about the heroine of *Villette*. Elizabeth expressed great disbelief that a woman could have such “ecstasies over the receipt of a letter of cold friendship – nonsense!” Ella Thomas also revealed her critical reading of some pieces when writing in her

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69 26 December 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
70 22 December 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
71 26 December 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
72 17 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
73 28 December 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
journal. She mentioned reading several items from *The New World* which provoked other emotions beside interest, pleasure or beauty. One piece entitled “Ambition” Ella described as “a very laughable farce.”

The three women all found certain elements of their readings as unbelievable or so distant from real life that they needed to comment on this fact in their diaries.

Various reactions were produced among the female readers based on their different literary pursuits; however, some women received educational enlightenment from reading a particular book. Selena Lloyd wrote a letter to Charles Powell in which she remarked her reading of *The Sorcerer* gave “an interesting picture of the times of the crusades and is somewhat similar to the *Talisman.*” Similarly, Ella Thomas wrote of reading several pieces by Grace Aquilar and commented the author “writes such charmingly interesting books. It is really a very instructive and pleasant employment reading them.” Ella continued to relate the ways Aquilar described the battles between Robert Bruce and Edward of England and reported the scenes were “so graphic! One could almost imagine they had witnessed it.” Ella reported after reading a dozen chapters in the work about Bruce, she was “affected.”

Just as some works expanded a woman’s education, other works or even types of literature were not always deemed a profitable action, even to the reader. Ella Thomas wrote in her journal about her literary tastes and noted, “I have no novels to read. I wish that it were possible for me to refrain from reading one for six months or a year.” Ella continued to explain that if she could eliminate novels, she was confident her school studies would progress with greater ease. This hindrance to her studies did not appear a consideration for Ella, however, for her use of the words “I wish that it were possible” implied she could not keep herself from picking up a novel to entertain herself. Whether this idea of reading novels being detrimental to her school studies was her own or came from an outside source is unknown. This comment did not seem to prevent Ella from consuming many novels as noted throughout the rest of her diary, even when she went to a college in Augusta.

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76 17 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
78 12 June 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
79 12 June 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
80 12 June 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
81 16 November 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
82 16 November 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
Criticism of an author was another effect which came from reading books. Anna Lesesne critiqued the work of a journalist writing about travelling in Europe. She remarked the “descriptions are very pretty and [the journalist] writes in [a] very easy and pleasing style.”\textsuperscript{83} Ella Thomas remarked in her journal about reading *Light and Darkness* by the author Lissie Petite. Ella objected to this book, continuing on about the problems she had with the author stating, “that any unmarried woman should write so freely, and express herself, on certain subjects so independently” was unfathomable for the Southern woman Ella had become.\textsuperscript{84} She then continued with a discussion of the book’s character of Marion. Ella concluded the author “evidently has no sympathy for [Marion], uninteresting as she is drawn.”\textsuperscript{85} Ella, however, confessed that her sympathies were more aligned with this character than with the “brilliant, though erring Florence,” who was the book’s main female character.\textsuperscript{86}

Not alone in her critique of authors and their writing styles, Elizabeth Perry mentioned reading travel literature and expressing her interest in the regions represented in the books. She claimed that along with finding these books interesting, they were less tedious than *A Year in Spain*, another book of this genre she had recently read.\textsuperscript{87} Sometimes the critique was brought about based on previous knowledge of the subject in the work, such as an important monarch. In a letter to Selena Lloyd, Mary Ann Randolph reported reading a piece about the reign of Charles I. She continued the letter stating the author of this version was “not powerful enough” in his portrayal of the king, for the man who was the subject of the work had more clout than expressed in the book.\textsuperscript{88} Ella Thomas wrote of a borrowed work she looked over during her stay at school in Augusta. She remarked in her journal, “Mat Oliver loaned me a little work called *The Light House* by Miss Bumer, rather a poor thing.”\textsuperscript{89} Another mention of poor literature according to Ella used the same phrase, but for a piece called “The Persecutions of Olivia.”\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{83} 16 January 1836, Anna Lesesne diary, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
\textsuperscript{84} 16 September 1857, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{85} 16 September 1857, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{86} Undated entry [c. 20 March], Elizabeth F. Perry diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
\textsuperscript{88} 10 April 1851, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{89} 11 April 1851, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
At other times, assessments were based on the creation of the personalities of the characters or how the author’s other works had been constructed. Elizabeth Lomax wrote of reading *Villette* and expressed some disappointment in the novel. She criticized the main character, stating “the heroine was too transcendental for my taste, too credulous[;] perhaps experience and a more intimate knowledge of life may have changed the romance,” which she concluded would have made the work more feasible.\(^{91}\) Critiquing an author’s portrayal of her characters can be found in Ella Thomas’ recorded reactions to the work of Aquilar. Ella expressed pity that the author wrote so eloquently about a character in her historical work that this character overshadowed the hero of the piece.\(^{92}\)

Reactions to an author’s work sometimes were based on assumptions of the book’s nature. Having read *The Gamblers Wife* and *The Bosom Friend*, Ella found *Alice Seymour*, another of Elizabeth Caroline Grey’s works, quite different from her previous writings. Ella wrote “it is a religious work differing very much from such works as I have seen from the pen of Mrs. Grey.”\(^{93}\) Ella also compared books against one another and remarked that she found one work lacking. Having read *Ruth Hall* and *The Beauties of Fanny Fern*, the “answer to Ruth Hall,” Ella entered in her journal that “the latter [I] consider inferior,” evidently faulting *The Beauties of Fanny Fern*.\(^{94}\) She went on to “condemn the course Mrs. Farrington has pursued…however great the fault of her parents…and as such should be honored.”\(^{95}\) Reactions to books sometimes hinged on how a reader respected the author. Ella recorded her recent purchase of *Violet or the Cross and the Crown* by McIntosh and remarked, “judging from the author’s reputation [it] must be good.”\(^{96}\) Obviously, reactions were not limited to the literature, but encompassed the authors and their personal objectives for writing the works. Similar reactions could be inspired by anthologies. Ella Thomas enjoyed reading a collection of works in *The New World* and spent several days reading and writing in her journal about its offerings. She remarked on its contents, “what a quantity of excellent reading.”\(^{97}\)

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\(^{92}\) 12 June 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.

\(^{93}\) 25 April 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.

\(^{94}\) 11 April 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.

\(^{95}\) 11 April 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.

\(^{96}\) 27 February 1857?, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.

\(^{97}\) 18 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
Reading led women to write positive and negative critiques about the works or their authors, yet sometimes the production quality of the copy garnered criticism as well. Ann Cleland Kinloch discussed someone reading aloud a book discussing the Sermon on the Mount and other biblical events. She remarks the discussion was “admirably written, it most assuredly is a most invaluable book.” She also remarked she was reading in the Messiah and commented how “the language [was] very beautiful, but the print so bad that [she] could not read it with the attention it deserved.” While no other women mentioned examples of good typesetting or printing—perhaps taking those for granted—this one example of poor craftsmanship did receive a mention in Ann’s diary.

Family members also reacted to literature, either through reading aloud or sharing the same book. Reading out loud provided entertainment for multiple individuals, but it also could elicit differing responses as well. Kate Carney read to a young lady named Fannie a book entitled The Old Stone Mansion. On the day they began this work, Kate noted that Fannie “liked it very much,” but Kate did not remark her own reactions to the novel. Another young Southern woman anticipated sharing her love for literature with her father, who must have been fond of reading as his daughter wrote to him. She proposed upon her return from school in Greensboro, North Carolina, they would “take their ‘recreation’…in ‘the beauties of Shakespeare, Milton…[and] Scott.’” She continued on, mentioning that their reading agenda would include the old Classical writers for old time’s sake. Her obvious happiness with both the materials and her future companion in reading was clear from her comment, “won’t we have a fine time reading together.”

Reactions to literature varied among the members of the same household, as proven by an entry in Ella Thomas’s diary. Ella reported she “made a laughable attempt” to read Byron to her mother and aunt, but according to the young woman, the two “were not prepared for the enjoyment of the concord of sweet words.” Ella herself experienced a happy reaction to Byron and wanted to share the feeling, yet her family members did not share the joy and either clearly showed their lack of enthusiasm for the reading or asked her to stop. Her college friends

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98 2 April 1799, Ann Cleland Kinloch paper, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
99 2 April 1799, Ann Cleland Kinloch paper, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
100 28 January 1860, Kate S Carney diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, Microfilm.
101 Mary Kelley, “Reading Women/Women Reading,” 54.
102 Mary Kelley, “Reading Women/Women Reading,” 54.
103 16 March 1852, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
seemed to better understand Ella’s love for reading. Ella Thomas’s consideration of a quote for her graduation composition expressed her love of books and their importance in her life. Ella remarked the subject she and her teacher decided would provide an excellent backbone for her paper came from the line “books are a real world – Round which with tendrils strong as flesh and blood – our pastimes and our happiness may grow.”\textsuperscript{104} This subject had been proffered by a schoolmate and Ella embraced the idea and requested this be the basis of her very important graduation paper.

So far, the women’s diaries have revealed their reactions to specific materials they read, but they also wrote down their feelings about the general activity of reading itself. Ella Thomas wrote in her journal about reading and how this activity even produced a physical response. She stated, "often an expression -- an idea would strike an answering tone and cause my heart to vibrate with emotion and pleasure."\textsuperscript{105} Ella remarked about how her reading also affected her writing, how a sentence or a book "would produce an indelible impression."\textsuperscript{106} At the start of 1849, Ella Thomas listed the books she had read since September of 1848 and included a comment about her reading: “all these books I read…I borrowed most of them, eagerly read any thing and only regret that my reading had not been directed by some one.”\textsuperscript{107} She also commented on her expectations for starting a new work, which she expressed as, “what a charm there is in a new book.”\textsuperscript{108}

When this pleasurable, important activity was interrupted, some women experienced enough irritation or aggravation over the occurrence to remark about it in their diaries. Kate S. Carney enjoyed reading and even preferred this activity to socializing with visitors. She wrote in her journal, “I had rather read, than go in the parlor” so she moved upstairs to continue her reading.\textsuperscript{109} As her sister was not well that day, Kate had to visit with the three young gentlemen who had stopped by to see the young girls. Kate wrote she was glad when they left because “I did not feel like entertaining three of them, besides I had not finished my book.”\textsuperscript{110} An entry in Ann Kinloch’s diary remarks how reactions to books could be hampered by physical complaints.

\textsuperscript{104} 11 April 1851, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{105} 27 April 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{106} 27 April 1855, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{107} C. 1 January 1849, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{108} 16 September 1857, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
\textsuperscript{109} 2 January 1859, Kate S Carney diary, microfilm, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
\textsuperscript{110} 2 January 1859, Kate S Carney diary, microfilm, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
One day while hearing a book read aloud her habit of remarking her observations could not be included because she was “in too much pain to make any.”

A woman could also experience anticipation or temptation at the thought of reading a certain work or just at the activity in general. Ella Thomas wrote in her journal her unwillingness to record her daily activities in her diary that night because she had earlier begun Bayard Taylor’s *Europe* and “the temptation to read a little more is irresistible.” She did not write whether she decided to read more, but she only wrote one additional sentence, which was about the author’s work, before stopping for that day’s entry. When she was unable to read due to a lack of reading materials, Ella responded in the same manner as if the activity were interrupted or halted due to visitors or nightfall. She divulged her lack of outings one day and continued her complaint with, “I have had no new book to read. I wish I had.” It is unclear if she could not venture out due to weather or if she was unable to visit a neighbor or store to find a new book to commence.

Not every woman who read felt the activity was beneficial or something one could do unendingly. Elizabeth Perry’s reaction to continued reading came in the form of depleting one’s tolerance for the activity. She wrote in her journal that while living in a boarding house and while her husband was away, she did not “know what to do. I have no one to talk to, I am tired of working, I am tired of reading, I am tired of having nothing important to do.” Elizabeth expressed her need for books to read while staying in this boarding house as well as her unhappiness at her living arrangements. Her comments could have been less about the activity of reading and more about the growing uneasiness of not living in her own home. On the subject of reading works when compared to attending church, Elizabeth, being a religious woman, wrote in her journal about whether a person not paying attention gained anything from attendance at church on Sunday. She remarked a person had more chance of benefiting while sitting in church than “at home reading some trifling book.”

While the women responded to what they read and the activity itself, in addition their family and friends expressed their opinions about what the women read and how they reacted to

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111 7 May 1799, Ann Cleland Kinloch paper, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
112 14 March 1859, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
113 13 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
114 Undated entry [c. 28 March], Elizabeth F. Perry diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
115 Undated entry, Elizabeth F. Perry diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
reading material. Elizabeth Meriwether mentioned her disbelief in some of the stories in the Holy Scriptures, which “greatly grieved” her mother who had given her the book to read.\textsuperscript{116} This reaction from Elizabeth and her staunch young beliefs troubled her mother and caused the two to grow apart.\textsuperscript{117} Philipa Lee’s father reacted to her reading while away from home in a negative manner as well. He stated “I have no particular fondness or solicitude for your reading Hume [illegible] Gibbon and though they are consummate historians and very proper to be read” he would prefer Philipa to read other histories with which he would “be perfectly satisfied.”\textsuperscript{118} He continued in his letter to suggest that though those authors were famous and worthy of attention, he recommended she read them only when she found it convenient. He then turned his attention to novels and stated, “you know I am not fond of novels yet I will not inhibit you, but I would warn you to be cautious in the selection of those you do read.”\textsuperscript{119} He advised that historical novels “are not only interesting but instructive and I would recommend such alone to your consideration.”\textsuperscript{120}

While both Elizabeth’s and Philipa’s parents commented on what the young ladies studied and what they derived from the experience, some people reacted only to the act of reading. Family members and neighbors’ reactions to a young woman’s literary habits were also revealed in the women’s diaries and letters. Ella Thomas, along with her sister and grandmother, visited a Mrs. Wood, and that lady clearly expressed her opinion of Ella’s literary habits. Ella wrote on the next visit, “Mrs. Wood says she intends hiding all her books…to make me talk some.”\textsuperscript{121} Obadiah Olive complained about the education reading was inflicting on his wife and daughter. Obadiah wrote a letter and remarked about this “plague,” which had spread from his

\textsuperscript{116} Elizabeth Avery Meriwether, “Recollections of Ninety-Two Years,” Microfilm of Transcript. University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, 20.
\textsuperscript{117} Elizabeth Avery Meriwether, “Recollections of Ninety-Two Years,” Microfilm of Transcript. University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, 20-21.
\textsuperscript{121} 16 October 1848, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
spouse to their child and the detrimental side effects. Reading, according to Obadiah, brought new and unfamiliar words into his household and resulted in “learned” women. This education made a prospective beau decide not to court his daughter. His closing remarks not only express his concern about his own family but warn others to “take special care how they venture upon a bookish woman.”

Family members may have disapproved, but others sometimes sympathized with the need to read. This is the case for Elizabeth Meriwether’s father. One night she read by the light of a potato lamp until she was very cold. When her sister awoke and found a freezing Elizabeth, their father was alerted. Her father figured out her temperature was not from illness, but her nighttime literary pursuits. The discovery of this forbidden activity ended with the confiscation of the potato lamp, but Elizabeth remarked “as my father was himself very fond of reading he had more sympathy for me in such matters than my mother.” He acknowledged how hard it could be to stop reading due to the lateness of the hour, but commented Elizabeth should obey the house rules for her health and out of respect to her mother, who had ordered no reading after bedtime.

As has been evident in this chapter, the women responded in vastly different ways to the many different works they consumed. Experiencing happiness, joy, or sadness brought deep felt emotions to the surface and the women were moved enough to comment on how reading prompted these emotions. Other less volatile sentiments, such as pleasure, interest or even disinterest showcased the ways in which the women classified various works. Comments about authors, their writing styles or even the way one work compared to another helped explain the women’s responses and critiques concerning content or overall feel of the books. Just as the women reacted, so too did their families. When the women recorded family and friends’ observations about works the women read, the diarists helped correlate a comparison between their own interests and those of their literary circles. While expressing concern or affection about

125 Elizabeth Avery Meriwether, “Recollections of Ninety-Two Years,” Microfilm of Transcript. University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, 23.
particular works gave more insight into the mind of the female readers, responses to the activity of reading also helped delve deeper into their mindsets. Ranging from loving the action and having difficulty stopping to discarding the activity as unconstructive, the readers crossed the spectrum of responses. Their family and friends also experienced these same reactions to the women’s reading habits and expressed them clearly enough for the women to record them in their diaries. Mary Kelley wrote in her study about reading women and what those women read, that “books might provoke laughter. They might secure relief from loneliness. They might bring a glimpse of the sublime.” 127 The last facet of this study helps bring together what materials the readers possessed and why they continued to read and find new sources for obtaining items to read.

127 Mary Kelley, “Reading Women/Women Reading,” 62.
CONCLUSION

The impetus for this study came from Obadiah Olive’s complaints about the effects reading had on his wife and daughter, basically making them “learned” women.¹ In this study, the diaries and personal papers of the Southern women between 1790 and 1860 revealed the obstacles they had to overcome in order to pursue literary works. There were many reasons women in this region and time period may not have chosen to read. Lack of education hampered many people, not just women, from consuming the classics alongside the newly released works. Others may have had the skill but lacked the funds needed to purchase luxury items, like books. Even borrowing reading materials may not have been an option for women living in remote areas of the region. These documented issues and many others prevented or curbed Southern women from reading. The surviving memoirs of some of the women revealed going to great lengths for the act of reading.

The first chapter discussed the types of literature and the various titles the women accessed. The assortment of reading materials the women actually read showed the diverse selection and genres available in the South, along with the varied interests of the female readers. The Bible was a favorite among many women, especially since most homes had a copy of this important work. This may have been the only book a family owned and while the women leaving behind their journals were from families of financial means, those readers lost in the past may have taken up the Bible and read, even if no other literature was available. This was not the only religious themed material the women in this study recorded as reading. Women like Kate Carney and Ella Thomas read books concerned with religious themes or a particular faith, like The Bible and the Family and The Episcopal Manual. The focus of this study was not biblical or even religious, and the women studied offered many other literary selections to help develop the reading habits of the Southern women.

Nonfiction items, especially the items of historical accounts or travel narratives, entertained and educated the women. Many of the women picked up a book and learned of great battles and figures in European history, such as the French Revolution and Robert of Bruce or Charles I. Other works detailed the American Revolution or a comprehensive study of American

¹ Obadiah Olive, “The Plague of a Learned Wife” (The Weekly Magazine of Original Essays, Fugitive Pieces and Interesting...May 19, 1798, APS Online, pg. 89).
history, both of which the readers and others considered important for the country’s citizens to know. Titles like *Arctic Explorations* and *A Year in Spain* offered the women knowledge about far off places where they had not and probably would not ever travel. These works helped broaden their knowledge and offered the women a varied outlook on their own landscape, especially since travel was costly and infrequent. Others read about the lives of people, both in the past and those living during their time. Famous biographies gave the women insight into the minds and lives of figures like Americans, R.H. Lee and Patrick Henry, or Europe’s Napoleon. Many other people with fascinating lives portrayed in books appealed to the women as well. *Twenty Years as an African Slaver* and *Tales of a Grandfather* showed their interest in a variety of people and their adventures. The lives of ordinary people appealed to the women with many biographies of ministers’ daughters, southern matrons, and women of the South providing hours of reading for the women.

The women also turned their literary interests toward fictional works and commented about these items extensively in their diaries. Well known classic authors, such as Plato, Plutarch and Homer occupied many days’ readings and were deemed suitable for young women to read.\(^2\) Other authors and works which have persisted into the twenty-first century filled the Southern shelves. Shakespeare, Scott, Thackeray and Charlotte Brontë constituted many of the works the women read and recorded comments about in their diaries. Poetry from Byron and Tennyson was interspersed in some of the women’s literary regimen with various reactions. With the great number of books some of the women, like Ella Thomas, consumed throughout their lives, they also read works popular at the time. This included reading magazines and newspapers that regularly critiqued or reviewed literature. Ella Thomas found many short stories to read in magazines she subscribed to or borrowed, along with finding titles to remember for future consumption. Sometimes, the women even read their own journals, either to check for accuracy or to remember past activities or literary pursuits.

The second chapter focused on the important questions of when, where and why the women decided to pick up a book. Finding time to read could be problematic for some women, while others, especially daughters of affluent families, had several hours each day to devote to the activity. As recorded in their diaries, many women started their day with reading, indulging even before breakfast or dressing. Several wrote of continuing their pursuits after the morning

\(^2\) See Appendix B.
meal straight through until the afternoon meal. With the afternoon laid out before them, they
continued to read only stopping when guests arrived or time for supper. Even though lighting
could hamper their literary activities, many women recorded reading at night until bedtime or
even staying up past. While most did not comment on whether they used candles, lamps or a fire
to read, Elizabeth Meriwether recounted reading by candlelight and once it burned out, utilizing
a handmade potato lamp to continue her book well into the night.

Several of the women, especially those responsible for a family or the task of baking,
used time between chores as a chance to read, even if only for a few minutes. In the kitchen,
time between making preserves and baking cakes allowed the women to sit and read while
waiting for goods to need attention again. Children required the mothers to spend a lot of time
away from literary pursuits, but when they napped during the day the women utilized this quiet
time to accomplish tasks. Reading may have been difficult, if not impossible, while their
offspring were awake, but the short reprieve while they napped allowed the mothers to steal time
for themselves to turn to their books. At other times, illnesses or pregnancies allowed time for
the women to rest without responsibilities for the family’s upkeep. In turn, they used this quiet
time to recuperate and indulge in a novel or studying the Bible.

Finding time at home to read may have been difficult for women, but travelling to and
from town or trips to visit friends offered time perfectly suited. Many of the women found the
trips in carriages provided uninterrupted stretches of time with no other commitments. Often,
during extended stays at relatives or while away at school, the women found themselves
consuming more literature than usual since the amount of responsibilities was less than at home.
For those avid readers, time could and would always be found in their day for reading, even if it
amounted to only a few stolen moments in the kitchen or right before bed. Interestingly, the
recording of their daily events, including their literary habits, came from these same moments
and some women commented how writing in their diary had prevented or interrupted their
reading.

The issue of time usually overlapped into the locations the women read, either in the
house or outside the home. Women reading first thing in the morning chose to stay in their
bedrooms, likely near the window to use the natural lighting. When the diarists noted dressing
and then eating breakfast before picking up their book, they did not specifically state they now
rested in the common area of the home. They probably were seated near the hearth or parlor
windows, though since they lived in the South, many could have enjoyed nice spring or fall weather and chosen to sit outside. The women, however, did not always choose their location, but took advantage of the situation in which they found themselves. Reading in the kitchen or on a carriage utilized free time while illness caused confinement to bed and became a location in which to read.

Along with the decisions as to when and where to pursue literary adventures, the reasons why the females chose that activity over others intertwined to help explain their reading practices. Many times, the location and time dictated why someone chose to begin or continue a book. Time spent in bed or in a sick room while recuperating from an illness or pregnancy motivated women to choose reading since many other activities were restricted. At other times, literary pursuits during a trip helped stave off boredom. For Elizabeth Perry, reading during her stay at a boarding house helped alleviate the monotony of staying in a place where she had nothing to do and probably did not know many people to visit. Reading while at neighbors’ houses was a favorite activity of Ella Thomas, maybe because she went along with her mother on visits but did not have any common interests with the older women in attendance.

Many of the women, however, chose to read at home and their reasons why varied day to day. Some chose to read the Bible or other religious materials on Sundays since circumstances prevented their attendance at church. Other times, a reader set a goal of finishing the Bible or one testament during the year, and she steadfastly pursued that achievement. For young ladies, the Bible was not the only required reading which needed completion. Schooling created reasons why they chose to read, either for assignment purposes, studying or because schoolmates recommended a title of interest. Many of the women, however, chose to read not because of school but because they had a hunger for literature. Several noted reading while others in the family sewed or cooked, or their family members read aloud during their activities. This helped pass the quiet time which would have enveloped the women, but also allowed the reader to share the literature with family and friends. Sharing also contributed to women attending reading parties, motivating them to read the work under discussion at the next meeting of the group.

Sometimes, conditions dictated the need for indoor activities due to inclement weather. Spring rain showers and summer storms prevented many walks and trips normally taken by the women, thereby leaving them with few options to fill the time during the bad weather. Reading was an activity which could be easily started at the first drop of rain and stopped if the storm...
passed and allowed for the walk or trip to commence. Winter weather also caused women to choose reading, especially in the colder regions of the South like Virginia where snow storms were not out of the realm of possibilities. Staying indoors near the fire not only kept the women warm, but the illumination allowed for activities like sewing and reading. Unlike needlecrafts, which could not be repeated without extra supplies, many of the women did not mind reading a book they had read previously so this activity worked well with unplanned periods of indoor confinement.

The various reasons why the women read explained one facet to this study, but chapter three focused on how the literary materials were obtained showed interesting methods utilized to reduce costs and expand access to books. The women utilized various methods of borrowing to gain greater access to materials with little or no cost. Of course, family members were a likely source of loaned books. Mothers and fathers offered readings to their children, possibly beginning the passion at an early age. Sisters began borrowing from each other during childhood, and the practice continued even when they matured and married. With the prospects of marriage came suitors presenting books to young women to endear their hearts. This afforded the young men with an excuse to see their sweethearts again when the items had to be returned. Husbands provided another avenue the readers could look towards for materials. Occasionally, friends loaned the husbands items which the women in turn read before their return.

The female readers created vast networks of acquaintances which became ready sources for literature. Schoolmates, locally and from stays at colleges, created close friendships lasting over time and distance. They traded materials by travelling or through the mail. Neighbors and friends living nearby provided easy access to personal libraries and the women usually visited each other often. Upon each visit, they brought along a book or two to lend to their friends and in return received other titles for trade. Visitors who were not part of the women’s social circles offered materials as well. Doctors or preachers would bring items to those visited and possibly acted as intermediaries in the borrowing circle by returning or requesting titles from others they saw in their professional capacity.

Borrowing saved the expense of buying, especially if access to a wide selection of titles was limited, but the items being traded were initially purchased by someone and the women supplemented their own libraries with purchases. Women living in larger towns often had a bookstore or merchant which offered books for purchase. Those not lucky enough to have a
shop purchased items from magazines, subscription plans or on trips out of town. Another possible option allowed for those travelling to purchase books for their friends and neighbors back in their home community. These same professionals, who travelled like doctors, also presented an opportunity for side jobs or for untrained men to fill a void. Peddlers frequented the South, especially in areas distant from towns with low population density. While the women in this study did not mention this option, many lower income or rural families may have relied on peddlers for most of their purchases, not just literature.

Female readers obtained and read various materials from many different sources, but they experienced the readings through a wide range of reactions. Chapter four detailed the written records of the experiences of these women and even their families. For many, responses ranged from enjoyment to disbelief upon reading a work. Some reactions came from historical or biblical literature. The women expressed enthusiasm for a particular location and commented on the regions political or historical implications. Ann Kinloch wrote of her distress for the Jewish people when reading a biblical history of their trials and tribulations against their enemies. Elizabeth Meriwether commented she read skeptically in the Bible, unsure if everything could have transpired as written. Elizabeth Avery entered her thoughts about the political decisions made in Spain after she had read an account of the country.

Just as with nonfiction, fictional works garnered reactions, with the same or sometimes even greater force. Many novels pleased their readers, enticing the females to look forward to future works from an author. Pretty or pleasing comments about the books showed the reactions caused by the activity. Sadness overtook some after reading, so much so they could not read anything else for quite some time. Occasionally a work disappointed, leaving the women writing about the unappealing nature of the book or author. Other times, the novels would provoke laughter and mirth for enjoyment. Some works caused the women to express outrage or utter disbelief, such as Elizabeth Lomax who could not stop her disgust towards the character of Lucy Snow, especially the way the author portrayed her reaction to a friendly letter.

The books also came under critique from the avid readers. One woman commented on the terribleness of the print in her book, but most criticism came in the form of reactions to the content of the items read. Ella Thomas criticized the authors’ tone or storyline. Comparison between two books acted as another form of critique. Ella Thomas made comparisons and stated
she liked one more so than another recently read or a particular work appealed to her over the
author’s other works.

Relief was a common response to reading, though it seems unlikely at first. Many young
women from affluent families read to appease boredom during their many days at home. Ill or
pregnant women also used reading as a deterrent for boredom, since they were often confined to
their home or even to complete bed rest. Even temporary maladies like a headache were soothed
when a family member read aloud to the sufferer. Married women suffered from loneliness
when their husbands had to attend to matters away from home. Reading helped pass the time
apart and eased anxiety over the separation until their loved ones returned.

While all these reactions occurred in response to reading, the women and their family or
friends had a reaction to the very act of reading as well. The type of material they were reading
often changed the women’s minds about the suitability of their actions. None of the women
studied commented on the benefits or lack thereof when reading the Bible; however, novels
produced the reverse experiences. Several women wrote in their journals about the time spent
reading novels as compared to other works deemed more appropriate. Ella Thomas suggested
great benefits could come to her mind and school studies if she could refrain from reading
fictional works for a month, yet she could not resist and kept reading them. Many times
prescribed literature for young women consisted of a biographical or historical nature deemed
informative and educational and did not include novels. These ideas may not have originated
with the women, but rather with their parents and teachers. Family reactions and responses to
women’s reading practices were revealed through the diaries. Some family members, like
Elizabeth Merewether’s father, sympathized with the need to read. Others, like Ella Thomas’s
neighbor, openly commented Ella’s absorption with reading went too far and would hide her
books upon Ella’s next visit.

The reading practices of Southern women after the birth of the country and during its rise
come into focus more clearly than before; however, this study cannot contain all the information
on their habits. While through this study female readers were discussed based on the documents
of several women from various regions and time periods, it does not discuss all Southerners.
Most, if not all, of the writers of personal memoirs used in this study came from families with
financial means. The focus of this research did not include poor farm wives, Native Americans

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3 See Appendix B.
or black slave women. Many other Southern women read the Bible if they were literate; however, the use of diaries which commented on further literary pursuits were the focus of this study. It is not the intent of this research to suggest every Southern woman read, especially with such diversity or over their whole lifespan; however, the reading practices of the women of this region should not be overlooked because the region suffered from low literacy rates and less prominence in printing and publishing versus the North. If anything, this study highlights the rich literary interests of women from the American South before the Civil War. Further studies into the materials available and various ways the women obtained them would expand the knowledge about the region and the ways in which society functioned. Discovering the reasons Southern women yearned to read and become “learned” women is an important step in rediscovering their lives from 1790 to 1860 in the Southern United States, and how they influenced their families, children and the region even today.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{4} Obadiah Olive, “The Plague of a Learned Wife.”
APPENDIX A

Using the diaries and letters, this is a listing of the books the women mentioned reading. This listing only includes those books or magazines mentioned in the pages reviewed and only if a woman specifically notated she had read the item. Some book titles were mentioned in passing or as items lent to the diarist; however the women never stated they read the book. Such titles were omitted to ensure the listing included only items read.

<table>
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<th>Reader</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bateman, Mary 1</td>
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<td>Cotton is King</td>
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<td>Hannah More's Works</td>
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<td>Bible and the Family</td>
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<td>Book about the Bible</td>
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<td>Vernon Grove, (Mount)</td>
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<td>Vicar Wakefield</td>
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<td>Women of the 19th Century</td>
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1 Mary Bateman diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
2 Kate S Carney diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, Microfilm.
Davis, Caroline Kean Hill\textsuperscript{3} \hspace{2cm} \textit{Diary of a Physician}

Garland, Kate\textsuperscript{4} \hspace{2cm} \textit{Advancement of Learning}
\textit{Adventures of Philip, The} by Thackery
\textit{Alone} by Marion Harland
\textit{Aspiration} by Manners
\textit{Autocrat of the Breakfast Table} by Holmes
\textit{Bacon's Sacred Meditations}
\textit{Beulah} by Evans
Byron's Poems
Campbell's Poems
Coleridge's Poems
\textit{Corinno}
\textit{Daydreams}
\textit{Don Quixote}
\textit{Earley Choice, The}
\textit{East Lyon}
\textit{Enoch Arden}
\textit{Ernest Maltraverse} by Bulwer
\textit{European Acquaintance, The} by Forest
\textit{European Poets} by Longfellow
Grace Greenwood's Poems
\textit{Grace Womanhood} by Neal
\textit{Great Expectations}
\textit{Hannah Moore} [sic.]
Haps and Mishaps
\textit{Henry Gentlemen} by John E. Cook
\textit{History of England} by Hume
\textit{Kincaid the Hero Missionary}
\textit{Life of Charlotte Bronte, The} by E. Caskell


\textsuperscript{4} October 1859 – July 1860, Kate Garland Papers, Southern Women and Their Families in the 19th Century: Papers and Diaries, Series E, Holdings of the Louisiana State University (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 2002), Reel 11.
Garland, Kate — cont’d

Life of Columbus by Irving
Lillian Grey or Woman’s Trials and Triumphs
Lord Byron
Loves of the Poets
Lucille
Mabel Vaughn
Macaria by Evans
Marryate’s Novels
Mistress and Maid by Muloch
Mrs. Halliburton’s Troubles
Mysterious Cash Box by Wilkie Collins
Novum Organum
Old Stone Mansion, The by Peterson
Plutarch’s Lives
Pride and Irresolution
Prime
Professor at the Breakfast Table, The by Holmes
Pulian Home or College Life
Scott’s Poetical Works
Shakespeare
Tennyson
Tennyson’s Poems
Thomas Moore
Travels
Travels in Switzerland
Way It All Ended, The
Women of the South

Hunter, Grace Fenton Garnett

Anna of Brittainy
Bible
Iliad
Library of Entertaining Knowledge
Plutarch

Hunter, Grace Fenton Garnett – cont’d
Scott's Novels
Wish Ton Wish

Kinloch, Ann Cleland
Adelaid and Theodore
Bible
First Volume of the Turkish Spy
Messiah
Moral Library, The
Sacred History by Trimer
Tales of the Castle, The

Lee, Hannah Philipa Luowell Hopkins
Life of R. H. Lee, The

Lesesne, Anna
Articles in New York Mirror by N. P. Willis
Bible
Hunter's Sacred Biography
Miss Hannah More's Life
Young Christian, The

Lloyd, Selena
Bridgewater Treaties
Coleridge
Conduct of the Understanding by Locke
Montmoth's Excursion
Paradise Lost by Milton
Shakespeare

6 Ann Cleland Kinloch paper, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
8 Anna Lesesne diary, South Carolina Historical Society Archives.
Lloyd, Selena – cont’d

Sorcerer, The
Tales of a Grandfather
Talisman, The

Lomax, Elizabeth Lindsay

Bulwer Littell's Novel
Explorations in the Valley of the Amazon
First Volume of Commodore Perry's Book
Jane Eyre
John Halifax
Life of Washington by Irving
Vallette

Meriwether, Elizabeth Avery

Alonzo and Melinda
Arabian Nights
Bible
Children of the Abbey, The
Homer
Jules Verne
Les Miserable
Shakespeare
Young's Night Thoughts

Perry, Elizabeth F.

Bancroft's History of America
Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson
Herodotus
History of the United States by Ramsay
Iliad
Lady Mary Wortley Montague's Letters
Peabody's Sermons
Plato on the Imortality of the Soul
Plutarch

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12 Elizabeth F. Perry diary, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.
Perry, Elizabeth F. – cont’d Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered? Travels in Turkey, Greece by A. Slade Year in Spain, A

Randolph, Mary Ann13 Hume Reign of Charles the First, The Scott's Novels


14 September 1848 – December 1860, Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas diary, Duke University Special Collections Library.
Thomas, Ella Gertrude Clanton – cont’d  Castles in the Air by Gore
Catherine Clayton
Chambers Information for the People
Changes and Counter Changes
Charley O’Malley by Lover
Chestnut Wood
Child Wife, The
Christine or Womans Trials and Womans Triumphs
Cloth of Gold, The
Constitutionist, The
Convict, The
Count De Mont De Cristo
Countess of Bussington
Cour de Lier or The Robber by James
Cowpers Task
Currer Lyle by Louisa Keeder
Cynilla
Danin or the Merchant Prince
Days of Bruce, The by Grace Aguilar
Deans Daughter, The by Small
Deer Slayer by Cooper
Doctor Thorn
Don Sebastian or the House of Braganza
Doom of the Torry Guard
Doomed Lady, The of Dooma
Double Witness of the Church, The
Dove, The, a response to Poe’s Raven
Drayton
Dream by Byron
Dreamer and the Worker, The
Easter Offering, An
Eclectic, The
Edward Austin or The Hunting Flask by Ingraham
El Dorado
Ellen Middleton
Episcopal Manual, The
Thomas, Ella Gertrude Clanton – cont’d

*Eugene* by Bulwer

*Europe* by Bayard Taylor

*Eveline Trevor*

Extracts from British Poets

*Faulkenburg*

*Female Pirate Captain, The*

*Florence Jackville or Self Dependence*

*Fortune Hunter, The*

*Francesca Canara* by Landon

*Fright, The* by Pickering

*Funley Manor*

*Gamblers Wife, The*

*Gathered Leaves* by Gould

*Gentlemen of the Old School, The*

*Georgia Scenes* by Longstreet

*Girlhood of Shakespeares Heroines, The*

*Godey's Lady's Book*

*Gold of Ophis, The*

*Grace Lee*

*Graduated, The*

*Graham's Magazines*

*Gypsy, The*

*Harper Magazine*

*Head of the Family, The*

*Hearts and Homes* by Ellis

*Henry De Crons or the Man at Arms*

*Hentic, The* by James

*History of Bess, The*

*History of Charles II* by Abbott

*Horseshoe Robison* by Kennedy

*Household Mysteries* by Lissie Petite

*Hyperion* by Longfellow

*Impressions of America*

*Insurgents, The*

*Iran Cousin, The*

*Iron Mask, The*
Thomas, Ella Gertrude Clanton – cont’d

Jane Eyre
Jaoni by Bulwer

Keepsakes
Knaves and Fools or the Friends of Bohemia by Whitly
Knick[er]boc[k]ers New York
Knight, The by Pickering
Lady Bird
Lady Felicia
Lady of the Lake
Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers, The
Last of the Barons, The by James
Last of the Vestals, The
Lay of the Last Minstrel, The
Legendary, The
Legends of the Revolutionary War by Lippard
Letters from the Three Continents
Letters to Young Ladies
Life of Addison by Aikins
Life of Lady Blessington, The
Light and Darkness by Lissie Petite
Lighthouse, The by Bumer
Lily by King
Longfellow
Lord Alfred Tennyson
Lucretia or The Children of Night by Bulwer
Marcus Warland or the Long Moss Spring by Hentz
Marmion
Mary Baston
Mary Lyndon, an Autobiography
Matchgirl, The
Maurice Tinnay
Minnie Grey by Smith
Mob Cap and other Tales, The
Money on Eloquence - A Sunday School book
Moredum
Mrs. Mowatts Autobiography

105
Thomas, Ella Gertrude Clanton – cont’d

Nathalie by Julia Kavanah
New Cones, The by Thackery
New World, A
 Nobodys Son or Percival Mayberry
Nun of Saint Ursula, The
 Olive Branch, The
One in a Thousand by James
 Onley’s History
Ordeal by Touch or the Assasins Doom
Ormand or the Secret Witness
Our Cousin Veronica
Oxonions, the Signet to the Bond, The
Paul Jones
Peterson Magazine
Peveril of the Peak by Scott
Plutarch Lives
Poetry of the Affections
Praise and Principle
Private Life of an Eastern King, The
Puelechaise or the Cemetary of the East
Rambles and Sketches by Headly
Ravenscliffe
Recollections of a Southern Matron by Gilmore
Red Revenger, The
Rena or the Snow Bird by Hentz
Robert Macarrie in England
Robin or the Magnolia Vale
Romeo and Juliette
Rose Don Glass, the Autobiography of a Ministers Daughter
Roxabel by Sherwood
Ruth
Ruth Hall by Fannie Fern
Sacario by Bulwer
Samuel Quanens Prime - Travels to Europe and the East
Seige of Deny by Charlotte Elisabeth
Shady Side, A Life in a Country Parsonage, The

106
Thomas, Ella Gertrude Clanton – cont’d

Sketch Book, A
Sketches of Virginia and North Carolina by Porte Crayon
Smike
Stanfield Hall
Statistics of Georgia by White
Sunbeams and Shadows
Temptation or the Unknow Heiress by Smith
Thirty Years Since or the Ruined Family by James
Thomson's Seasons - Spring and Summer
Three Guardsmen, The by Deman
Three Sisters or Rose, Blanche and Violet, The
Two Years Ago
Valcruiese or the Lily of the La Vandee
Vanity Fair by Thackery
Violet or the Cross and the Crown by McIntosh
Wanderers or The Haunted Noblemen, The
Washington Irving
Where Art Thou Mother Dear
Which or the Right and the Left
Whim and Its Consequences, The by James
Widow Bedott Papers
William the Conqueror by Abbott
Woman and Her Master
Woodlawn Geography
Yeast
Young Governess, A
Young Marconers, The

Williams, Mary Kearney Davis

Bible

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15 Mary Kearney Davis Williams book, James Payne Beckwith, Jr. Family Papers, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, Microfilm.
APPENDIX B

This information was listed in the diary of Anne Page, dated around 1830 and located in the Central Piedmont Virginia. It is unclear if a teacher or parent wrote this information or directed its writing, but it does illuminate the types of literature deemed proper for young women to read.

“Idea of a course of polite literature for a young lady.-

I. History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle [sic.] Works</th>
<th>Subsidiary Illustrative Works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. British History –</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. American History –</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robertson’s America</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ramsay’s United States</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Harrin’s American Revolution</td>
<td>Cooper’s Historical novels, The Spy, the Last of the Mohicans, &amp;c. &amp;c. Lives of Signers of Declaration of Am. Ind. Wirt’s Life of Patrick Henry, &amp;c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ancient History –</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell’s Ancient Europe</td>
<td>Shakespeare’s Historical plays – Julius Caesar, Coriolanus &amp;c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillie’s Greece</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anacharsis’ Travels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferguson’s Roman Republic</td>
<td>Roman nights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibbon’s Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire</td>
<td>Middleton’s life of Cicero Cicero’s Letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plutarch’s Lives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Modern History –</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell’s Modern Europe</td>
<td>Scott’s History of the Crusades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robertson’s Charles the Vth – 2 3 Vols only</td>
<td>Scott’s Life of Napoleon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voltaire’s Louis XIV in French</td>
<td>Marmontel’s Memoirs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voltaire’s Charles XII in French</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mignet’s French Revolution</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As a supplement to the above course of History, it would be proper to read the most approved books of Travels, voyages and descriptive geography – such as the following – Cook’s voyages – Moore’s view of Italy and France – Beydone’s Tour in Sicily – Carr’s Tour’s – Johnson’s Tour to the Hebrides – Aikins England delineated &c.

II. Miscellaneous prose literature

III. British Poetry

I would recommend under this head the entire works of Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Goldsmith and Gray, and such works of the other British poets from Spenser down to Beattie as are to be found in Dr. Aikin’s selection, together with the later poets, Scott, Byron, &c. as an accompaniment and guide in this course of poetical reading, I would strongly recommend Dr. Aikin’s letters to a young lady on English poetry, and Stinson’s lives of the poets.”¹

¹ c. 1830, Anne Page diary, Southern Women and Their Families in the 19th Century: Papers and Diaries, Series G, Holdings of the University of Virginia Library, Part 2: Central Piedmont Virginia (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 2002), microfilm, Reel 36, Frames 336-338.
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Lesesne, Anna. Diary. South Carolina Historical Society Archives.


Secondary Sources


116


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kerry M. Cohen was born and raised in Florida and attended Florida State University, earning her B.A. and M.A. degrees.