“DEATH IS NOTHING IN COMPARISON TO DISHONOR”: SARAH MORGAN’S DIARY AND WOMEN’S ROLES IN SOUTHERN HONOR

by

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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate’s thesis advisor, Dr. Christopher Strain, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of The Honors College and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences.

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ABSTRACT

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In their studies of the code of honor in the Old South, historians such as Bertram Wyatt-Brown and Edward L. Ayers consider women incapable of possessing honor. However, the diary of Sarah Morgan, a young woman living in Baton Rouge and New Orleans during the Civil War, reveals the many ways that women actively engaged in the code of honor and even considered themselves to be honorable. In her diary, Sarah Morgan described her own reverence for any honorable gentleman and the ways in which women like her preached the ideologies of the code of honor to men. Women reinforced the code of honor by urging men to die rather than dishonor their family names, punished dishonorable men with their disdain while they celebrated their honorable heroes, and even adopted a feminized version of the code so that they too could possess honor.

“Death Is Nothing in Comparison to Dishonor”:

Sarah Morgan’s Diary and Women’s Roles in Southern Honor

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Introduction

Through her Civil War diary first published in 1913, Sarah Morgan revealed that women actively shaped, defined, and reinforced the code of honor in the South. Although historians of the southern code of honor such as Bertram Wyatt-Brown and Edward L. Ayers have defined it as an overwhelmingly male sphere, Sarah Morgan's writing proves that women engaged with the code of honor during the war. Women like Sarah actively participated in the code of honor by urging men to embody the values of the code, by criticizing or disdaining men who failed to comply, by rewarding honorable heroes, and even by considering themselves capable of being honorable through what historian Giselle Roberts has identified as a feminized code of honor. These manifestations of honor in Sarah Morgan's diary highlight the roles women played in this belief system during the Civil War, even though the practice of those honorable ideals often led to danger, pain, and death for the Morgan family. The code of honor, while male dominated, did not completely exclude women; women adapted the code to their own uses, and the women who preached honor suffered for their loyalty to such a potentially dangerous ideology. Recognizing women's participation in the code of honor is important not just in acknowledging a feminine influence within the cult of honor, but also in evaluating the complexities and problems with the code itself.

Bertram Wyatt-Brown and Edward L. Ayers have both analyzed southern honor in their studies, but they wrote of Southern honor as a quality possessed only by white men, and they have admittedly focused the scope of their studies to predominately reflect

the "white, male, hierarchical [vision of] honor."[1] Wyatt-Brown has discussed honor as being "the inner conviction of self-worth" that relies on the "evaluation of the public." He explained that "honor is reputation" for men and it "resides in the individual as *his* understanding of who *he* is and where *he* belongs in the ordered ranks of society" [emphasis added].[2] Ayers similarly excluded women, as well as many other groups of southern society from possessing honor, stating that "women, children, and slaves had no honor; only adult white males had the right to honor—and even they, if challenged, had to prove their worth through their courage."[3] While Wyatt-Brown focused primarily on male relationships to honor in his studies, he did differ from Ayers by granting women a separate sphere similar to masculine honor. This separate sphere for women related more to virtue than the concept of masculine honor which instead emphasized personal courage. Instead, women were considered honorable by upholding values such as remaining "poised, forbearing, and hopeful, especially when things went wrong."[4] Giselle Roberts, another historian who instead focused on the world of young women in the South in her book, *The Confederate Belle*, has built upon Wyatt-Brown's idea of virtue for women. She added that belles coming of age during the Civil War acted according to a feminized code of honor, which compelled women to obey societal expectations for young ladies. Following this code became more complex for Civil War-

[1] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War,1760s-1880s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), xii.

[2] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2007), 14.

[3] Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance & Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th Century American South*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 13.

[4] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 234-235.

era belles who had to learn to carefully balance their passionate (and sometimes un-lady-like) patriotism with the lady-like values that were considered to be reflective of the "honorable behavior" for women of their class and status.[5]

Sarah Morgan's writing reflects the various aspects of the southern code of honor as discussed by these historians. Charles East, the editor of the diary's 1991 edition, has his doubts about Sarah's devotion to these traditional ideas about honor after her brother's death in a duel led the diarist to question "Southern society and its code of honor." However, it is clear through her passionate writing on the subject in her diary that she was more opinionated, obstinate, and supportive of traditional conceptions of honor than East concluded from the early incident.[6] In fact, Sarah's diary expands women's roles within the code of honor beyond the scope of Wyatt-Brown, Ayers, and even Roberts' analysis. In many ways, Sarah preached the masculine code of honor to the men around her and modified it to her own situation so that she could attempt to follow it as well—actions that reveal her desire to cling to this ideology about honor and bravery despite its costs to her. Because women like Sarah inserted themselves into this male-dominated ideal, it is clear that women played a larger role in the Southern code of honor than just being extensions of male honor the men of the family must guard and protect. Because they were so involved in the code, it is important that women's actions and thoughts regarding the code of honor receive more than just a few paragraphs or chapters on the subject of honor in historical studies. The words of women like Sarah

[5] Giselle Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 3-6.

[6]Charles East, introduction to *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman* by Sarah Morgan (New York: Touchstone, 1991), xvi.

Morgan reveal that the code of honor was much more complex, diverse, and feminized than historians have previously considered. This analysis will emphasize women's important roles in shaping the code of honor and its practice in the South by examining both the ways that Sarah's diary incorporates women into an ideology traditionally considered exclusively a male system, and also by challenging the polarized gender spheres when it comes to defining who shaped and internalized the tenets of the code of honor.

Chapter One focuses on identifying Sarah Morgan's personal conception of honor and explaining how her personal definition of what characteristics shaped the "honorable gentleman" influenced her perceptions of the men around her. To Sarah, bravery was a key component of honorable conduct, and her own brothers became the standard of honor and bravery by which she judged all other men. The rest of the thesis analyzes the various ways that Sarah and other women acted on their personal beliefs about honor. Chapter Two examines the role of women as the enforcers of the code of honor as they shamed men into enlisting and told them to die before dishonoring themselves on the battlefield. In the third chapter, women's actions towards honorable gentleman and dishonorable men are compared, revealing that women treated the men who lived by the code of honor more favorably than they treated men who refused to serve in the Army or who acted cowardly during battle. Finally, Chapter Four expands women's place within the code of honor to allow them to possess their own feminized version of honor, as well as to reveal the moments when Sarah Morgan blurred the separation between male and female codes of honor. While Sarah never rejected the centrality of masculinity within notions of honor, her writing reveals that she was much more involved in the practice and

shaping of the southern masculine code of honor than Bertram Wyatt-Brown and Edward L. Ayers have previously acknowledged. Women like Sarah Morgan preached the code of honor to men, shamed them into obeying it, rewarded them for their compliance, and finally attained their own sense of personal honor.

The Diarist

On February 28, 1842, Sarah was the seventh Morgan child born to Thomas Gibbes Morgan and Sarah Hunt Fowler. She was not born into the planter elite that dominated the upper class in Southern society. Rather, her father, who "served as both district judge and district attorney," gained some elevation in status through his second marriage to Sarah's mother. Regardless of her seemingly lower position in society, however, Sarah's family did interact mostly with "the mercantile elite of New Orleans,"[7] considered themselves to be of higher class status, and the family was wealthy enough to own several slaves. At the start of the Civil War, she was twenty years old and living in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. When she wrote the first entries of her diary, she had recently lost her brother, Harry or Hal, the "one [she] loved best of all",[8] to a duel in April 1861. Adding to her earlier loss, her father died from an asthma attack in November that same year. Though her diary's first entry is dated January 10, 1862, she spends the beginning of her diary recounting her grief over the loss of both her brother and father.

After her initial sorrow-fueled diary entries, Sarah focused on the events of the war, her everyday experiences, and her opinions of the changes occurring around her. She

[7] East, introduction, xvi-xix.

[8] Sarah Morgan, *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, edited by Charles East (New York: Touchstone, 1991), 6.

described herself as a "strong Whig" who remained pro-Union during the secession crisis.[9] Even though her three surviving brothers were already enlisted in the Confederate Army or Navy, it was not until Federal troops occupied and then repeatedly shelled Baton Rouge that she began to grow more ardently Confederate over time since the war was literally coming to her front door. Because her journal was written during most of the war years (1862-1865), she devoted a large amount of her entries to describing the shelling of the city, the constant anxiety that defined their lives under bombardment by Union gunboats, and the struggle to maintain her composure under the rule of men like General Benjamin "Beast" Butler. After a carriage accident in 1863 left her an invalid for many months, she spent much of her recovery period at the Carter plantation named Linwood,[10] where, despite her injury, she was constantly surrounded by Confederate officers that were entertained at the home. Her sister, Miriam, was her constant companion through the majority of her diary, and the two girls were incredibly close as they relied on each other for support through the trials of occupation and becoming refugees.

After her family's home was looted by Yankee soldiers and the remnants of the Morgan family were forced to leave Linwood due to advancing Union troops, the women alternately lived between various smaller towns until they managed to secure a pass to join Sarah's pro-Union half-brother, Phillip Hicky Morgan, in occupied New Orleans. After a dramatic scene of being compelled to take the loyalty oath to the Union, the Morgan women stayed with "Brother," as Sarah called Phillip, despite the constant

[9] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 259.

[10] East, introduction, xxi.

frustration of being surrounded once again by Federal troops. It was while living in New Orleans in 1863 that she learned of the fall of both Port Hudson and Vicksburg, two crucial campaigns that she followed in her diary extensively. After the fall of Port Hudson, many of the Confederate officers entertained by the Morgan sisters at parties or dinners only a few months prior were held as prisoners in the city. Many entries in the last book of her diary concern the prisoners and her attempt to balance the need to satisfy her brother's wishes that she not contact the men with the officer's attempts to see or hear from her.

However, the most devastating topic—yet shortest in length—of her final book of the five-volume journal concerned the death of two of her brothers, Gibbes and George, while in Confederate service. The two men died a little over one week apart from each other in January 1864, and the news shocked the Morgan women who dreamed so often of the day "the boys" would return. At the news of the death of a second brother, Sarah described the family's grief—the screams and tears of her mother and sister. Sarah said she "felt as though the whole world was dead," that "nothing was real, nothing existed except horrible speechless pain. Life was a fearful dream through which but one thought ran—'dead—dead.'"[11] In these last few entries, Sarah again turned to her grief and focused less on Southern society as a whole. There are few entries beyond the descriptions of her brothers' deaths except for news about her surviving brother, Jimmy, the surrender of Lee's Army, and the assassination of President Lincoln.

[11] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 602.

Though the diary ends shortly after the Civil War, unwed Sarah began writing again in the 1870s when she was encouraged by her future husband, Francis Warrington Dawson, the editor of the *Charleston News* at the time, to publish articles so she could earn her own income and lessen her dependence on her brother's family.[12] Though she was reluctant to publish her writing because of the stigma that would be attached to her if her identity was revealed, her post-war writing reflected many of the contradictions and concerns that plagued Sarah earlier. Though Sarah may have written about testing the limits of southern society's gender roles, she was either reluctant to actually break them herself or concealed her identity to protect her reputation. While she wrote articles urging unwed women to become "an economic provider rather than an 'unwanted dependent,'" as Giselle Roberts phrased Sarah's words, she wrestled with the anxiety of being discovered and shunned as she concealed her own identity as a writer.[13]

Married life may have rescued Sarah from what Giselle Roberts described as the "contradiction between work and gentility,"[14] but it also revived more tragedies in the name of honor. Sarah and her husband had two surviving children,[15] but Frank Dawson was killed in 1889 "in the cause of honor"—an ironic death for an "antiduelist" recognized by Pope Leo XIII for his anti-dueling editorials. Dawson tried to confront a Charleston doctor, Thomas McDow, for "stalking" the Dawsons' "handsome Swiss

[12] Giselle Roberts, "The New Andromeda: Sarah Morgan and the Post-Civil War Domestic Ideal," in *"Lives Full of Struggle and Triumph": Southern Women, Their Institutions, and Their Communities*, eds. Bruce L. Clayton and John A. Salmond (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 43-45.

[13] Roberts, "The New Andromeda," 44, 50.

[14] Ibid., 50.

[15] East, introduction, xxxviii.

governess," but ended up being killed for his efforts. McDow was arrested that day, but it was Sarah who was "ostracized from Charleston society, as if McDow were the hero and her husband the villain."[16] Clearly, through her own writings and her husband's death, notions of Southern honor continued to plague Sarah Morgan (Dawson)'s life long after the end of the Civil War. Following the "acquittal of her husband's murderer," a fight with his partner over financial issues, the deaths of her mother and sister Miriam, and some work as a fiction writer, she moved to Paris in 1890 to join her son, Francis Warrington Dawson II. It was there that she added notes to her wartime diary in 1904 and 1906 until her death in 1909. *A Confederate Girl's Diary* was published in 1913 with an introduction by Warrington Dawson. [17]

Though this brief biography reveals that the Southern code of honor manifested in Sarah's life post-war, this analysis is limited to the years that encompass her diary—which began on January 10, 1862 and ended on June 15, 1865. This analysis will only focus on Sarah's life as she explained it in her diary, except for the inclusion of Sarah's descriptions of her brother Harry's death in a duel before the diary started because his death continued to be the subject of many of her entries. While her writing for newspapers and the situation surrounding her husband's death are compelling examples of the flaws and tragedies of the code of honor, this analysis uses Sarah's own words and thoughts encapsulated in her diary to represent her evolving, passionate, and personal perspective.

The Diary

[16] Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture*, 279.

[17] East, introduction, xxxix-xli.

Sarah Morgan's diary spans five books and covers the beginning of 1862 to mid-1865. Though the diary was not published until almost fifty years after her last entry, the diary serves as an important insight on Civil War Louisiana. Firstly, historians (including Giselle Roberts and Bertram Wyatt-Brown) have cited the diary in their analyses of the war, and the gap between the diary's dates and its publication does not seem to impact their trust in the source. Additionally, Sarah E. Gardner has argued that Sarah Morgan's diary benefits historians because of its lack of constant editing by the diarist. In her book, *Blood & Irony*, Gardner described the events leading to Sarah Morgan's decision to prepare her diary for publication based on Sarah's son, Francis Warrington Dawson II's, introduction to the 1913 published work. According to Gardner, what set Sarah apart from other Civil War diarists who extensively edited their diaries such as Mary Chesnut was the fact that Sarah "left her manuscript untouched by the blue pencil." As a result Sarah "believed her diary to be a more accurate narrative of the war," and finally removed it from its hiding place in a wardrobe to settle a debate between herself and a northerner about a naval event she had happened to write about in her wartime diary. This discussion in the 1890s prompted her to transcribe her diary for the northerner, who then dismissed the work as inauthentic since a southern woman would have been incapable of having "opinions so just or foresight so clear as those here attributed to a young girl." Discouraged, Sarah put away the diary until her son decided to publish it in 1913 with the promise that he had "taken no liberties, [had] made no alterations, but [had] strictly adhered to [his] task of transcription, merely omitting here and there passages which deal with matters too personal to merit the interest of the public." According to Gardner, Dawson believed his mother's work to be "particularly susceptible

to charges of revision because her diary displayed such a rare degree of prescience and judicious temperament," and he aimed to convince readers that the revisions he made were minor.[18] For this analysis, however, it is the 1991 Charles East edition of the diary that is cited, and a further explanation of why East's edition was used for this thesis can be found following the Conclusion.

[18] Sarah E. Gardner, *Blood & Irony: Southern White Women's Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1937* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 178-179.

Chapter One

Sarah's Thoughts about Honor

He must be brave as a man can be; brave to madness, even. I would hate him if I saw him flinch for an instant while standing at the mouth of a loaded cannon.

-Sarah Morgan, May 6, 1862, writing about her "Beau Ideal"[19]

Civil War diaries are important primary sources for understanding women's personal thoughts and struggles during the conflict.[20] As Kimberly Harrison has discussed in "Rhetorical Rehearsals," diaries from the Civil War reveal the ways in which women sorted out their private anxieties through their writing. According to Harrison, women had to find a way to balance their new role as head of household in their male relative's absence with their societal expectations which continued to denounce women who stepped out of their traditional roles.[21] While it may seem like women were forced to "[suffer] needlessly in silence," voicing their concerns only privately through their writing, Bertram Wyatt-Brown claimed that silencing concerns in public did not solely reflect an "anxiety" about "shattering" the "myth [of] ladyhood." Rather, the "injunction to hold the tongue was a demand for stalwartness against adversity," an essential virtue

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[19] Sarah Morgan, *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, edited by Charles East (New York: Touchstone, 1991), 61.

[20] Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Norton, 1994), 258.

Kimberly Harrison, "Rhetorical Rehearsals: The Construction of Ethos in Confederate Women's Civil War Diaries," *Rhetoric Review* 22 (2003): 243, 259-260. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20058080

[21] Harrison, "Rhetorical Rehearsals," 247, 253.

for Southern women.[22] Sarah Morgan's use of her own diary reflects Harrison and Wyatt-Brown's arguments. Sarah Morgan did voice her opinions and doubts privately through her diary, but she was conscious of the fact that in public she must fulfill her community's expectations that she be socially acceptable while also maintaining personal strength in times of hardship. As Wyatt-Brown described, "women were expected to nurture a capacity to bear burdens with grace, courage, and silence,"[23] and Sarah matched that characterization by publically bearing the death of so many relatives and the destruction of the life she knew with unimaginable strength and reserve. Though neither historian specifically sites Sarah as an example, Sarah's diary perfectly reflects both Harrison and Wyatt-Brown's descriptions of Southern womanhood. Sarah wrote that unlike the "woman who would talk at the top of her voice" about her political opinions, she preferred to "'suffer and be still' as far as outward signs [were] concerned" and "give it vent in writing, which is more lasting than words, partly to relieve [her] heart, partly to prove to [her] own satisfaction that [she was] no coward."[24] This diary became for her both a refuge for her personal thoughts and a source of strength. Sarah confessed her inner struggles to the privacy of her diary's pages but maintained her composure to the public.

Perhaps because she was always mindful of fulfilling the role expected of her and often struggled to live up to the social standard imposed on her, Sarah Morgan believed that her male counterparts should live up to what society expected of them, too. She

[22] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2007), 234.

[23] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 235.

[24] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 142-143.

frequently wrote of her family's criticism and her own embarrassments of her occasional social faux pas, but she attempted to correct her actions in the future or, at the very least, recognized her infractions. However questioning Sarah could be about her own behaviors, she was adamant about her definition of a gentleman and unwavering in her condemnation of men who failed to act honorably. Sarah used the privacy of her diary to conceptualize her vision of the 'honorable gentleman' which she then used in the public sphere to gauge the honor of the men she encountered in her daily life. Her personal thoughts about honor reveal the first major way that women can be seen actively engaging with the code of honor. Sarah used her own definition of a gentlemen, her discussion of her "Beau Ideal," her high esteem for ideas of honor and courage, and her adoration of her brothers (whom she believed perfectly embodied those ideals) to project her own expectations onto the other men around her.

Sarah shaped her expectations of the ideal honorable gentlemen around the idea of bravery. According to Sarah, her "Beau Ideal,"[25] as she names her idealized marriage partner, must be brave—"brave as man can be; brave to madness, even." She added that she "would hate him if I saw him flinch for an instant while standing at the mouth of a loaded cannon. Let him die, if necessary; but as to a coward--! Merci! [In French: I don't want any of it!] I am no coward; it does not run in our blood; so how could I respect a man who was one? O what unspeakable contempt I would feel for him!" Clearly, from her assertive statement, bravery was a crucial characteristic of a gentleman in Sarah Morgan's mind. While she initially described other qualities, such as intelligence as "the

[25] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 60.

chief qualification in man," her strong language asserting the importance of bravery is hard to ignore.[26] Sarah stated that she could not respect a coward—in fact, she would rather see a man die than prove to be one. Since she believed that she "could marry no other than a gentleman," she clearly expected that gentleman to be almost inhumanly brave. Such an extreme view of bravery is hard to imagine and a difficult standard to live up to, since who could remain unflinching in the face of a cannon? Yet it is this unrealistic conception of bravery that became her standard by which she measured every man. Sarah repeated her personal reverence for bravery throughout her diary, and often tried to impress this worship of honorable courage upon the men and soldiers she met.[27]

No one seemed more honorable to Sarah than her own brothers. Repeatedly, she wrote statements such as, "Ah! there are no boys like the Morgan boys: why are not the rest of the men as good, noble and true as they?" The Morgan brothers were the standards by which Sarah judged all other men, and she seemed aware of the high cost they would pay for their status as honorable gentlemen. Though her brother, Harry, was killed in a duel by the time she wrote this particular entry on April 12, 1862, she continued to reminisce about his bravery and honorable conduct. She wrote that "courage is what women admire above all things" and that Harry:

> possessed [it] in the most eminent degree, in common with all his brothers. It was stamped in every line of his face, and all might see that he was a man who did not know fear. Months after he died, passing a group of gentlemen in New Orleans, Jimmy heard them mention Harry's name, and one said 'I saw him when he stood up, and I saw him fall, and I never saw as brave a man.' 'That is the way with all the men of that family; they are as brave as can be, and those girls are not an inch

[26] Morgan, *Diary of a Southern Woman*, 61-62.

[27] These expectations of bravery and honor that Sarah held for men will be discussed in the later sections of this analysis.

> behind them' returned another. No! there never was a braver man than Harry. New Orleans rung with the story of his death. Men talked of his coolness, and applauded his bravery, while his broken hearted mother and sisters wept over him at home.[28]

Though heartbroken and distressed over his death, she continued to celebrate her brother's bravery and his reputation for courage that "rung" throughout the city. For Sarah, Harry acted as the proper honorable gentleman, bravely facing the duel that would defend his reputation after being called a liar in a dispute. Such a charge could not go unsettled, since, as Sarah stated, liar was "a name that none of our family have either merited or borne with."[29] In order to defend his own name and his family's reputation, Harry had to face his challenger, a Mr. Sparks, in a duel that cost him his life. His ability to face his challenger with such bravery not only reveals Harry's actions complied with the expectations of the code of honor, but also reveal (through his conduct's lasting impressions on Sarah's image of what it means to act honorably) how significant and honorable bravery was in Southern society. This bravery at the end of Harry's life continued to comfort his sister, regain him the reputation he fought for, and earned him (and his family) higher regard in their city even after his death. According to Sarah, Harry's honorable actions granted him a sort of immortality in their community's collective memory.

Sarah considered her brothers to be the epitome of Southern honor, and she frequently wrote in her diary about how few men could measure up to the standard they set in her eyes. Her brother Harry was already sacrificed to the defense of his own and

[28] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 37-39.

[29] Ibid., 45.

the family's reputation, but she constantly referenced the bravery and honorable actions of her brothers George, Gibbes, and Jimmy. In describing the nervous reactions of the men in town before a coming attack, she wrote, "but I hate to see *men* uneasy" since "I have been so accustomed to brave, fearless ones, who would beard the devil himself, that it gives me great disgust to see anyone less daring than father and the boys."[30] In another entry, she compared her brothers to the men left in town such as the local militias of the home guard[31] saying "Thank Heaven my brothers are the bravest of the brave! I would despise them if they shrunk back, though Lucifer should dispute the path with them. Well! *all* men are not the Morgan boys!"[32] Later in the diary, when Gibbes was wounded after Antietam and briefly returned home, she admired him for his fortitude while his wound was dressed and also said that "he told me of some heroic deeds of his fellow soldiers; but of his own, not a word. For that very reason, I know that he has been among the bravest of the brave."[33]

Sarah idolized her brothers for their bravery and their eagerness to fulfill their duty to fight for the South while so many men remained in town. As the standard to which all other honorable gentlemen were weighed in her mind, she impressed her own unrealistic expectations of bravery upon her brothers as she did her imagined "Beau

[30] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 166.

[31] According to Richard Drake and David Williams, the home guard in the Confederate States were units that served as local militias, and were comprised of men often too old or too young to fight in the Army. Their purpose was to both track down deserters and act as a last line of defense for the home front. Throughout her diary, Sarah Morgan considered the members of the home guard to be cowardly, but she did not directly state why she considered them dishonorable if they were unqualified for military service because of their ages.

[32] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 182.

[33] Ibid., 293, 295.

Ideal." Despite the pain of already losing one brother to the code of honor, Sarah wrote that she would rather see all of her brothers dead than dishonored. After she received word that both Gibbes and George died in Confederate service, she compared their fate to that of Will Carter, an acquaintance who did not fight. She wrote: "Gibbes, Harry, and George, God's blessings he bestowed on us awhile—are dead. My brothers! my dear brothers! I would rather mourn over you in your graves, remembering what you were, than have you change places with that man [Carter]. Death is nothing in comparison to dishonor."[34] Despite the fact that following the code of honor cost her three of her beloved brothers between 1861 and 1864, she continued to take comfort in the knowledge that they fulfilled their obligations to the code while other men shrunk from their duty to fight for the honor of the South in the war.

According to historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown, the emphasis on "valor" and bravery is a reflection of what he has described as "primal honor" in his book *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*. Wyatt-Brown has contrasted "ancient" notions of primal honor with the later rise of "gentility" which has often been associated with the Southern planter class, and argued that one of the crucial elements of primal honor was the emphasis on an "immortalizing valor, particularly in the character of revenge against familial and community enemies."[35] He added that the "Southern demands of courage had ethnic sources" from the Celtic and English roots of the settlers

[34] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 598.

[35] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2007), 34.

of the American South, and that "these warrior convictions were ancient."[36] Referencing Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century writings about King Arthur, Wyatt-Brown quotes a statement from the Duke of Cornwall who feared that his men's turn to vices instead of 'no longer using their weapons' would 'without any doubt' make 'their bravery, honour, courage and good name all become tainted with cowardice.'[37]

Shifting his definitions of primal honor to its role in the South, Wyatt-Brown wrote that "courage in the Old South, as in ancient times, was a personal attribute, but it could not be wholly separated from the familial context." He added that it became crucial to have relatives that both needed "valorous protection" and other family members who could also "undertake justifiable revenge when the hero was himself slain."[38] While Wyatt-Brown does not cite the Morgan family as an example, his description of Southern honor's emphasis on bravery and family protection perfectly describes the ideology of the Morgans. These "ancient," "primal," and "familial" beliefs about honor reflect Sarah Morgan's emphasis on bravery being a fundamental characteristic of a gentleman and her dutiful brothers who would avenge any wrong done to her.[39] Bravery, in the defense of one's personal, familial, or regional reputation, was an attribute that Sarah celebrated and considered essential in the men around her. Her private praise of her brothers' bravery and her extremely high expectations for men to act

[36] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 36, 41.

[37] Ibid., 41.

[38] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 43.

[39] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 439.

without fear reveal the foundations for her personal conceptions of honor that would manifest through her actions towards men—the focus of later chapters of this analysis.

Additionally, Bertram Wyatt-Brown wrote that "in regard to primal honor as personal bravery, Southerners of the nineteenth century boasted that they stood next to no other people."[40] However, Sarah's writing proves an interesting exception to Wyatt-Brown's claim since Sarah continued to respect the men whom she felt embodied these gentlemanly, honorable ideas whether that person was a Northerner or Southerner and even when it damaged her position in society. Sarah frequently displayed Southern pride in her writing, but she completely rejected the idea that Northerners could not also be honorable and brave gentlemen. In fact, in some instances, she even praised the Yankee officers for being more honorable in their actions than the Southern men around her. In May 1862, when describing the Federal officers that started to appear in town, she wrote:

> Fine, noble looking men they were, showing refinement and gentlemanly bearing in every motion; one cannot help but admire such foes. They set us an example worthy of our imitation, & one we would be benefitted by following. They come as victors, without either pretentions to superiority, or the insolence of conquerors; they walk quietly their way, offering no annoyance to the citizens, though they themselves are stared at most unmercifully, and pursued by crowds of ragged little boys, while even men gape at them with open mouths. They prove themselves gentlemen, while many of our citizens have proved themselves boors, and I admire them for their conduct.[41]

While many of her friends and neighbors reflected Wyatt-Brown's statement that only Southerners were honorable and resorted to calling the officers lowly names, Sarah both

[40] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 34.

[41] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 68.

jumped to the officers' defense and uplifted Southern honor at the same time. Sarah said that she and her family:

> were unwilling to *blackguard*—yes, that is the word—the Federal officers here, and would not agree with many of our friends in saying they were liars, thieves, murderers, scoundrels, the scum of the earth, etc. Such epithets are unworthy of ladies, I say, and do harm, rather than advance our cause…*If* they conquer us, I acknowledge them as a superior race; I will not say we were conquered by cowards, for where would that place us? It will take a brave people to gain us, and that the Northerners undoubtedly are. I would scorn to have an inferior foe; I fight only my equals. These women may acknowledge that *cowards* have won battles in which their brothers were engaged, but I, I will ever say *mine* fought against brave men, and won the day. Which is most honorable?[42]

Clearly, Sarah is adamant about her belief that it is more honorable to win against "a brave people," and would not belittle the northerners in this case to appease those around her.

Yet Sarah suffered severely for following her personal belief in respecting the honorable gentlemen of both sides of the sectional conflict. Rumors spread around town about the Morgan girls "turning Yankee" because of their sympathies for the gentlemanly Union officers, and despite the frustration this gossip brought her, Sarah resolved that she will not "be rude to any one in [her own] house, Yankee or Southern, say what they will."[43] However noble Sarah's aim to be respectful to gentlemen regardless of their loyalties was when the rumors first started, she and her family continued to be more severely attacked by both suspicious Confederate and Union sympathizers. Though the rumors about town plagued her repeatedly, one of the most devastating effects of being caught between both sides was the destruction of the Morgan home—which Sarah

[42] Ibid., 73.

[43] Ibid., 108.

described as her "Holy of Holies."[44] She claimed that the cause of her home's destruction could be traced to her complicated alliances, writing that hers "was the most shockingly treated house in the whole town." Sarah placed the blame for the attack on her "misfortune to be equally feared by both sides, because [she and her sister] will blackguard neither." Her home served as an example for the other citizens of the town and curious onlookers from elsewhere. She wrote that "from far and near, strangers and friends flocked in to see the ravages committed. Crowds rushed in before, crowds came in after, Mother and Miriam arrived, all apologizing for the intrusion, but saying they had heard it was a sight never before seen." In fact, some even took "mementos" of broken furniture to show as "[specimens] of Yankee vandalism."[45] The Morgan family was not only ostracized by Southern society for their respectful attitudes towards the Yankee officers, but also the Union troops distrusted the Morgans for their Confederate sympathies. Clearly, maintaining her belief that it was honorable on her part to treat the gentlemen of either side with respect severely backfired on Sarah Morgan, and her reputation and home paid the hefty price.

Through the privacy of her diary, Sarah could navigate the personal opinions she held while also fulfilling her expectation of exterior fortitude during hardship. Her personal beliefs about the value of honor and bravery were subjects that she articulated in her writing, and it is impossible to ignore the significance she placed on these ideals. With her description of her "Beau Ideal" and her adoration of her brothers, she revealed her respect for only those men who personified her definition of brave, honorable

[44] Ibid., 80.

[45] Ibid., 235-236.

gentlemen. However strongly she felt about the code of honor and its manifestations in both society and in her family, her loyalty to the code came at a high price. Three of her brothers died either defending their honor through a duel or fighting for the honor of the South in the war. Additionally, she jeopardized her reputation and lost her home because she refused to insult the men of either side that she considered to be honorable gentlemen. Sarah Morgan's personal beliefs about honor were sharply defined in her diary, and her unwavering loyalty to that code was rewarded with tragic losses of life, reputation, and property. Such a cruel repayment for her devotion reveals one of the many ways that the code of honor proved flawed and costly for Southern women like Sarah.

Chapter Two

Women: Honor's Enforcers

Death is nothing in comparison to dishonor.

-Sarah Morgan, March 1864[46]

Edward L. Ayers wrote in his study *Vengeance & Justice* (1984) that "honor…offered women nothing except prestige by association with a male relative," and that "women played the crucial roles of *audience* and *reward* for conflict between honorable men, but nothing more [emphasis added]."[47] However, southern women like Sarah Morgan did more than passively watch or reward honorable men: Sarah used shaming, pressure, and criticism to enforce the code of honor in the actions of the men around her. Sarah frequently wrote about her efforts to urge and even shame civilian men and soldiers around her into playing the role of the honorable gentleman she envisioned, and she also recorded some of their mixed responses to women's involvement in the code of honor on the pages of her diary. Ultimately, through this pressure and shaming, women like Sarah Morgan were the enforcers of the southern code of honor—inserting their influence into civilian and military worlds considered to be dominated by men.

On November 2, 1862, Sarah detailed in her diary that there was an ongoing and often hostile exchange occurring between her and William Carter, Gibbes Morgan's brother-in-law. She explained in that entry that "some time ago," Carter claimed he

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[46] Sarah Morgan, *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, edited by Charles East (New York: Touchstone, 1991), 598.
Giselle Roberts, *The Confederate Belle* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2003), 109.

[47] Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance & Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 29.

heard a joke about her and that he "had laughed all night at it." Sarah was "mortified beyond all expression at the thought of having [her] name mentioned between two men," and she insisted that he either explain the joke or apologize "for the insult" in case the joke was "not fit to be repeated." Though she later convinced him to admit that part of the joke he told her was a falsehood, her reaction to his explanation and his apology reveals not only the sensitivity of insults among gentlemen and gentlewoman of the southern upper classes, but also the power of women to pressure men into fulfilling their expected roles as honorable defenders of women from physical or (in this case) verbal harm. She wrote:

> This was the joke, he said. Our *milkman* had said that that Sarah Morgan was the proudest girl he ever saw; that she walked the streets as though the earth was not good enough for her. My milkman making his remarks! I confess I was perfectly aghast with surprise, and did not conceal my contempt for the remark, or his authority either. But one can't fight one's milkman! I did not care for what he or any of that class could say; I was surprised to find that they thought at all! But I resented it as an insult as coming from Mr. Carter, until with tears in his eyes fairly, and in all humility, he swore that if it had been anything that could reflect on me in the slightest degree, he would have cut the man's heart out; and that if I would forgive him, he would thrash the next man who mentioned my name.

Sarah considered his complicity with the milkman's alleged joke an insult, so Carter rushed to defend his inaction and promised to protect her reputation in any future encounters. By revealing her contempt over the remark and her disappointment that he did not retaliate but instead laughed along with the milkman, Sarah seemed to check Carter's failure to uphold his duty to act honorably and protect her name—inspiring him to change his thinking so that he could alter his behavior in the next such situation.

However, the fallout over the joke did not end after Carter's apology and Sarah's decision to "let it pass," for she was intent on exacting vengeance on Carter for not

defending her honor. The manner in which Sarah chose to exact punishment from Carter for his inaction and inability to stand up for her allowed her to further shame him. Sarah came up with a joke of her own, one that she deployed every time she was around Carter:

> I had but to cry 'Milk!' in his hearing to make him turn crimson with rage. At last he told me that the less I said on the subject, the better it would be for me. I could not agree. 'Milk' I insisted was a delightful beverage. I had always been under the impression that we owned a cow, until he had informed me it was a milkman; but was perfectly indifferent to the annimal [*sic*] so I got the milk. With some such allusions, I could make him mad in an instant. Either a guilty conscience concerning the lie told, or the real joke, grated harshly on him, and I possessed the power of making it still worse. Tuesday I pressed too far [Sarah explained earlier that he went home "in a fit of sullen rage"]. He was furious, and all the family warned me that I was making a dangerous enemy. [48]

Yet these warnings did not stop her, for only two days later,

> …at supper, when I insisted on his taking a glass of milk, his face turned so red that Mrs. Carter [his mother] pinched my arm blue, and refused to help me to preserves because I was making Will *mad*! But Waller helped me, and I drank my own milk to Mr. Carter's health with my sweetest smile. 'Confound that milkman! I wish he had cut his throat before I stumbled over him,' [Carter] exclaimed after tea.[49]

In this milkman encounter with William Carter, it is clear that Sarah held high expectations for men to act honorably in all situations and to be especially ready to defend a woman's reputation at all times—even over such a seemingly minor remark. In punishing William Carter with her own joke, Sarah essentially shamed him, gaining a power over him while reinforcing the tenants of the code of honor in the process. Failing to act honorably was not without its consequences, for Carter implies that if he were to remember Sarah's reaction and teasing the next time he heard a man joke about a woman

[48] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 320.

[49] Ibid., 325.

of the upper classes, he would react more severely that he did with the Morgan's milkman.

When it came to honor's role in the war, Sarah expected both her brothers and other men of eligible age for military service to defend the South even if it cost the men their lives. She urged any men who were able to join the army and fight the Yankees. When writing to her brother fighting in Virginia, she told him not to worry about the family when Union troops were bombarding and then occupying New Orleans, but instead told him to "'fight, George fight!' until the repetition was perfectly ludicrous" and added that she "was so anxious for him to remain where he is, and defend [them]."[50] Sarah extended this plea for men to defend the South when she encountered strangers as well, such as when she met a man at a guerilla camp as she fled Baton Rouge in May 1862. In her record of their brief exchange, she wrote that "he cried, '*You* are ruined, so am I, and my brothers too! And by ----- there is nothing left but to die now, and I'll die!' 'Good!' I said. 'But die fighting for us!' He waved his hand black with powder and shouted 'That I will!' after us, and that was the only swearing guerilla we met; the others seemed to have too much respect for us to talk aloud."[51] In one of the rare moments when Sarah actually talked to a soldier she came across, she pressed him to fight no matter what the personal risk to him, reinforcing his duty to the code of honor that required him to fight and defend the city under bombardment. Whether the men were her

[50] Ibid., 50-51.

[51] Ibid., 291.

brothers or strangers, Sarah wasted no time urging them to rise up to the Yankee challenge when Union gunboats threatened their homes and lives.

Throughout her diary, Sarah constantly extolled the idea of 'death before dishonor,' or that "death is nothing in comparison to dishonor," [52] believing that there can be nothing worse that the shame of displaying cowardice or passivity when one's honor is tested. Returning to a passage quoted in Chapter One, Sarah wrote of her recently deceased brothers that she "would rather mourn over you in your graves, remembering what you were, than have you change places with [Will Carter, who did not serve in the army]."[53] When venting against the Yankee occupation of her city, she felt that southerners "have lost all things, honor included" because they are "serfs" and "bondsmen" in their own homes. She exclaimed that "this degradation [was] worse than the bitterness of death," and asked whether "death or exile [would] be preferable" to living as "outcasts without home or honor."[54] Sarah even imagined herself willing to be sacrificed for honor's cause. While writing about her longing for peace in May 1862, she also refused to let that peace come from surrender: "O for peace! If it were not for the idea that it must dawn on us before many more months were over, I would lie down and die at once. Hope alone sustains me. Yet I do not say give up; let us all die first. But Peace--! what a blessing it would be!"[55]

[52] Ibid., 77, 142, 146, 344, 598.

[53] Ibid., 598.

[54] Ibid., 142.

[55] Ibid., 77.

Sarah was not alone in her sentiment; historians of the Old South have written that many southerners indoctrinated by the code of honor thought that dying honorably was preferable to a cowardly life. Over a century later, historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown wrote that those who valued the idea of honor did not fear death because "dying with honor would bring glory." He added that southerners did not fear "the prospect of damnation in the life hereafter," for they saw that decision as being in God's hands. Instead, the "public humiliation" and the "vulnerability" that came with admitting the shame was what terrified these honorable men.[56] Historian Joseph T. Glatthaar has explained the reasons why men enlisted and continued to fight in his book *General Lee's Army: From Victory to Collapse* (2008). One reason that Lee's men remained soldiers was that they were "sustained" or pressured by honor, realizing:

> that if they survived the war, they had to live with their wartime behavior. Soldiers joined companies and batteries with neighbors and friends, and they could not endure the shame of returning to that community, having deserted or shirked their duty. Personal reputation meant more to them than life itself. 'I expect to be a man of Honor to our country at the risk of my life,' wrote [a Georgian] in autumn 1863. 'I don't want to be a disgrace to myself or my relations.[57]

The soldiers off at war realized that their actions were constantly watched for signs of cowardice, and realized they had to protect their family's name with their lives or live with the shame of dishonor.

Yet, southern men of the antebellum and Civil War eras were not the only ones proclaiming to prefer death to dishonor. Wyatt-Brown described women across many

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[56] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press,1986), viii.

[57] Joseph T. Glatthaar, *General Lee's Army: From Victory to Collapse* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 32.

generations and nations—from Tacitus' reports of Germanic tribes to mothers from the American Revolution and the War of 1812—as acting as the "moral [arbiters] of bravery," preferring (as Sam Houston's mother told him) that "all [their] sons should fill one honorable grave, than that one of them should turn his back to save his life."[58] These examples reflect a tradition of honorable death in battle, and southerners continued to manifest this sentiment in the War Between the States. Returning to the Civil War, Wyatt-Brown quoted a relative of diarist Mary Chesnut in 1865, asking: "'Are you like Aunt Mary? Would you be happier if all the men in the family were killed?' To our amazement, quiet Miss C took up the cudgels—nobly. 'Yes, if their life disgraced them. There are worse things than death.'"[59] He also acknowledged the power of women to "sustain the common principle of honor" in his book *The Shaping of Southern Culture* (2001) by citing a letter from a soldier to his wife in Mobile. That soldier wrote his wife: "I glory in war, and I know that you would rather have me now under the sod of Shiloh, than clasp me to your bosom a living coward—for you have told me so."[60] As these examples reveal, men who were expected to live honorable lives had female relatives who preferred that they never return from the battlefield rather than disgrace the family by saving themselves. Just as Sarah repeated similar stern sentiments to push men to defend the South in the war, these women of earlier times or other families enduring the Civil War echoed the same desire for death before dishonor.

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[58] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2007), 51.

[59] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 35.

[60] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War,1760s-1880s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 211.

Sarah was not the only southern woman urging and shaming men into fighting. Across the South, women pressured men into enlisting through various schemes intending to shame their beaus and brothers into the army. In *Women in the Civil War* (1966), Mary Elizabeth Massey wrote that women's "first task was to encourage men to enlist" when the war came, and added that "Northern journalists, foreign observers, and others stressed the part played by Confederate women in getting their men into uniform." Through methods like promising to "favor them when they returned" or "reserve their charms" for those who fought, a Union woman like Sarah Emma Edmonds realized that "Southern women were 'the best recruiting officers,' absolutely refusing to 'tolerate, or admit to their society any young man who refuses to enlist.'"[61] Bell Irvin Wiley in *Confederate Women* (1975) wrote that men were pressured to enlist by methods such as these from Selma, Alabama, in which, "in response to an editor's suggestion, [the young ladies] put on a 'pout and sulk' campaign to stimulate volunteering." He cited specific, individual actions of women in Selma, writing that "one of the town's belles announced that she would not keep company with a civilian. Another stated that she would become an old maid rather than marry a slacker. A third broke her engagement to a suitor who was slow to enlist and sent him a skirt and petticoat with the message: 'Wear these or volunteer.'"[62] These women in Selma made it clear; an honorable man enlists.

However, not all men shared Sarah's (and other Southern women's) passionate belief in "death before dishonor" or the value of enlisting. The members of the home

[61] Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War* (University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 30.

[62] Bell Irvin Wiley, *Confederate Women* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1975), 141-142.

guard militias, the town's citizens of service age who refused to join the army, and doubting soldiers she encountered all became the victims of Sarah's harsh pen and tongue. Her criticisms of these men were often brutal, stripping some of their title as gentlemen in her eyes, equating them with "trash."[63] Although the differing treatment women gave to men of honor and men of dishonor in Sarah's diary will be discussed more in depth in the next section, it is important to recognize that following the code of honor may have been the ideal, but it does not appear to be a perfectly universal belief among men in the war-torn South. Rather than wishing to fight to the death, men in harm's way considered saving themselves through surrender or even retreat. However, Sarah was appalled by this attitude when she asked a soldier about the likelihood of Port Hudson falling to the Yankees. She wrote on November 16, 1862:

> Port Hudson, I prophesy, will fall. I found my prediction on the way its defenders talk. I asked a soldier the other day if he thought we could hold it. 'Well if we don't, we know so many bypaths that we can easily slip out,' was the answer. I was shocked. That is no way for our soldiers to talk, 'Slip out!' I expected the answer that always makes my heart swell with enthusiasm, 'We'll conquer or we'll die!' Fancy my disappointment! Defended in that spirit, Port Hudson is lost.[64]

Though Sarah may have felt like all men should be ready to fight to the death, it is clear that some (if not many) soldiers were less willing to agree that their lives were worth sacrificing to a code or to an impending military defeat. For example, Wyatt-Brown described an incident in Winchester, Virginia when "General Jubal Early's army momentarily disintegrated" and "regiments fell backwards like dominoes to the town in

[63] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 182-183.

[64] Ibid., 344.

complete panic." Another general reported that "'The Ladies of Winchester came into the streets and begged them crying bitterly to make a stand for their sakes if not for their own honor,'" but the men did not stop.[65] Clearly, not all men thought that abstract notions of honor were worth more than their lives.

Sarah recorded the reactions of two soldiers who were impacted by the pressures of women to obey the code of honor's dictates. One soldier she spoke with was grateful, as Sarah said, "that Southern men had every encouragement in the world, from the fact that the ladies welcomed them in equal kindness in victory or defeat, insinuating [that] he thought they hardly deserved our compassion after their failure on the Arkansas." Because they were honorably fighting, fulfilling their duty to be soldiers, Sarah said that he need not be so disappointed in asking him, "Had they not done their best? … [In] defeat or victory, were they not still fighting for us? Were we the less grateful when they met with [the] reverse? O didn't I laud the Southern men with my whole heart!—and I think he felt better, for it, too!"[66] Though the men had to destroy their gunboat after an engine failure, the young soldier's spirits were uplifted by Sarah's support, praises, and affirmation of his efforts despite the loss. However, only a few days later, Sarah recorded in her diary the reaction of a man who blamed the women for getting them into the war. Though the information came to Sarah third hand, from the victim's daughter to Sarah's sister before Sarah heard it herself, she believed the report to be true. Sarah wrote that Mrs. Turner:

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[65] Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture*, 212.

[66] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 197.

> attempted to enter town after the fight [the Battle of Baton Rouge] to save some things, when the gallant Col. Dudley [of the 30th Massachusetts] put a pistol to her head, called her an old she devil, and told her he would blow her d------- brains out if she moved a step; that anyhow, none but we d------ women had put the men up to fighting, and we were the ones to blame for this fuss. There is no name he did not call us…Among all those who have done their best to disgrace their cause and country, Col. Dudley's name has the honor of standing first on the list of infamy.[67]

From these two differing statements in Sarah's diary, it appears that men are responding to "female involvement" in the affairs of war in different, opposing ways. While the Southern soldier who just lost his gunboat is depicted by Sarah to be appreciative of her support and reassurance, a Union officer who just won a battle in her city places the blame of the conflict on women. Whether the story of Colonel Dudley's reaction is completely accurate or not, Sarah's belief in its truth reveals that she was aware of the power women could have in influencing men to rise to action.

Women in the South did not just 'watch and reward' the honorable men around them as historian Edward L. Ayers suggested. Rather, they inserted themselves into the idea and practice of the masculine code of honor and pressured the men around them to embody those ideals. Whether in the civilian or military world, from the writings of men at war and Sarah's record of their reactions to her or other women's input, it is clear that men recognized this feminine enforcement of the code of honor, and not all of them responded positively to it. Though Sarah Morgan may have been only one of these Southern women urging men to stand up for women, defend their homes, fight the Yankees, and even die with honor, it is clear that women were not excluded from the honor system altogether or restricted to solely passive or background roles. Instead,

[67] Ibid., 202.

women actively pushed and pressured men to act honorably and shamed them when they failed to do so. They became a part of the code—its eager and strict enforcers—and men responded to their pressure.

Chapter 3

Women: Rewarding Honor, Punishing Dishonor

Ladies are naturally hero worshippers.

-Sarah Morgan, July 3, 1863[68]

Most of the books that examine the experiences of women during the Civil War emphasize the various ways women contributed to the war effort. Whether on the home front or along the battlefield, it is women's actions as nurses, fund-raisers, temporary heads-of-households, and seamstresses that are the efforts traditionally repeated by historians. Sarah Morgan was no exception; she scrapped lint for bandages, sewed many shirts, and provided food and conversation to soldiers. However, what makes Sarah's actions important for this study is how her treatment of men reflected her personal beliefs about honor. Beyond trying to enforce the code of honor among men, Sarah and other women also sought to *reward* men for following the code. Through her treatment of the men around her, Sarah was clearly favoring and rewarding the honorable men (embodied by soldiers), at the expense of the less honorable (the men of the home guard or men who did not enlist). Her disparate treatment of these two camps of men suggests that Sarah is using her personal perception of these men's devotion to the code of honor to reward honorable soldiers for their efforts, while punishing (at least in her mind) the men who we unwilling or unable to risk their lives for the Southern cause. Because women like Sarah eagerly devoted themselves to worshipping the honorable while out-casting and

[68] Sarah Morgan, *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, edited by Charles East (New York: Touchstone, 1991), 523.

shaming the dishonorable, they were inserting themselves into the South's code of honor and pressuring men to live up to the code's ideals or face the consequences of female contempt, mockery, or shunning.

Sarah and the other women she described in her diary treated soldiers differently than non-soldiers, lavishing various acts of kindness onto them simply because of the fact that they were soldiers. Being a soldier was such a point of high status in Sarah's mind that she frequently was willing to overlook her usual class prejudices to extend her respects to the men in the military. In one encounter, Sarah was blinded by a soldier's uniform to the point that she unknowingly allowed "the brewer's son" to put on false airs and criticize her brother off at war. Though she became enraged and defended her brother after the man suggests her brother was a coward, she became even more upset once she discovered his 'true identity' as someone from "the basse classe" [lower class]. In fact, she comforts herself with the knowledge that "the man's respectability was [seemingly only] derived from his [numerous gold and cloth] buttons" on his uniform.[69] Usually, when it came to soldiers, Sarah seemed to forget her classism. Though the homes she stayed in frequently entertained upper-class Confederate officers, she was also generally kinder towards *any* soldier than an upper class, civilian male not off fighting on the battlefield.

When it came to the soldiers, Sarah's pride gave way to an eagerness to serve the army whenever she could. In the aftermath of the Battle of Baton Rouge, Sarah offered not only encouraging words to soldiers as discussed in the previous chapter, but she also eagerly offered them food, supplies, and hospitality. Though Sarah could not allow

[69] Ibid., 229-232.

soldiers to enter freely the plantation in which she was staying because its owner, Dr. John T. Nolan, was on parole, it seems like the young women of the house conspired to find a way to assist the men from the *Arkansas*. She explained:

> We all met at the steps, and water was given to our cavaliers who certainly enjoyed it. We could not ask them in, as Dr. Nolan is on his parole; but Phillie [Nolan's daughter] intimated that if they chose to order, they might do as they pleased, as women could not resist armed men! So they took possession of the sugar house, and helped themselves to something to eat, and were welcome to do it, since no one could prevent! But they first stood talking on the balcony, gaily, and we parted with many warm wishes on both sides, insisting that if they assisted at a second attack on [Baton Rouge], that they must remember our house was at their service, wounded, or in health. And they all shook hands with us, and looked pleased, and said God bless you, and good bye.[70]

Though Dr. Nolan's status as a parolee barred the girls from granting the men access, it seems the Nolan daughters and Sarah were eager to help the soldiers and may have induced them to use their rank to enter the home when social propriety forbid it. Had the women been forced to shelter the men without their consent, they most likely would not have parted with all of the "well wishes" and handshakes she described.

Sarah also wrote with pride that she was able to assist "Withers' battery," the 1st Mississippi Light Artillery, when they stopped for water. Joining the servants, Sarah started to fill the men's canteens. She wrote that she "felt ever so important in [her] new situation as waiting maid" for the soldiers. In fact, she stated that "there is very little we would not do for our soldiers." She continued her thought with specific memories of female assistance, writing that "There is mother, for instance, who got on her knees to bathe the face and hands of a fever struck soldier of the Arkansas, while the girls held the plates of those who were too weak to hold them and eat at the same time. Blessed is the

[70] Ibid., 197-198.

Confederate soldier who has even [a] tooth ache, when there are women near! What sympathy and remedies are volunteered!"[71] Similarly, Sarah's mother and sister volunteered the family to be seamstresses for two officers they did not know who were purchasing cloth. According to Sarah, being strangers did not matter to the women or the officers, for their statuses as soldiers and ladies, respectively, led to a mutual sense of trust and goodwill. Because the men were leaving in the morning, the women worked the rest of the day, until past dark sewing by candlelight, and then continuing again in the early morning to finish the shirts for these strangers in time. Though this act of kindness and generosity seemed like a great burden, Sarah explained that they were eager to help and that the men's "appearance recompensed [them] for [their] trouble." They even volunteered to make more for the men, for she believed that they "cannot do too much, or even enough for [the] soldiers," and she "[believed] that [was] the universal sentiment of the women of the [S]outh."[72] Not only was Sarah willing to assist men with their canteens and sewing or extend her sympathies to the soldiers, but she was also quick to surrender her own comfort. In the entry directly following her retelling of the canteen-filling, Sarah wrote that two soldiers came to the home in which she was living and requested to "remain all night." For Sarah and the other young girls, "the word 'soldier' was enough," and they "gladly surrendered [their] room" for the soldiers' use.[73] Soldiers were treated with an elevated respect by Sarah and the women she was surrounded by, and she is clearly aware of her own tendency to treat these men with such reverence.

[71] Ibid., 228- 229.

[72] Ibid., 256-257.

[73]Ibid., 229.

Not only were women quick to volunteer their services, but Sarah remembered a time when she was *too eager* to assist what she assumed to be a wounded soldier. When she saw a man being supported by two other soldiers, she immediately cried out in sympathy for others to take notice. Other women did take notice, responding with "tears and exclamation [that] flowed abundantly." It was not until one of the men said nothing was wrong with the 'wounded' soldier that Sarah realized he was suffering from "laziness, or perhaps something else."[74] It seems Sarah's willingness to aid her Confederate heroes was sometimes a little too eager. Regardless of her occasional bouts of silliness or naivety in assisting the soldiers, Sarah viewed her contribution to the war effort as crucial in boosting morale—and she was always at the ready to reward the Confederate soldiers for their honorable defense of the South.

While women may have lavished both needed and unnecessary kindnesses onto their honorable soldiers, women like Sarah Morgan could be cruel in their actions and thoughts about the men they considered dishonorable. The men who did not choose to add themselves to the Confederate ranks were exposing themselves to the wrath of or belittlement from women like Sarah Morgan. Whether these men were civilians of military age or members of the home guard, Sarah refused to hide her contempt for these seemingly dishonorable men in her diary, occasionally stripping them of their titles as "gentlemen" or claiming that the city's women would display more bravery than these men. By seemingly punishing these non-soldiers for their "dishonorable" actions, Sarah is emasculating them in ways that only put more pressures on men to live up to the code of honor or face the consequences.

[74] Ibid., 229.

One particularly telling entry dated July 31, 1862, reveals Sarah's low opinions of both the civilian male population that remained in the city and the home guard. She recalled the first night that she and her family had to seek refuge at the Deaf and Dumb Asylum when the city was threatened and how an encounter there had "struck [her] with extreme disgust." At the Asylum, she said she saw "more than one man who had no females or babies to look after, who sought there a refuge from the coming attack," and one man in particular enraged her. She described him as "dapper young man" with "a neat carpet bag in his hand," who she suspected did not "[expect] to meet two young ladies at that hour" since she "shall always believe he meant to creep away before anyone was up." Though she saw him pretend to "[assume] an air of indifference," she is certain that he looked "embarrassed" when he saw their eyes upon him. Clearly, Sarah was quick to judge the man that she speculates was "some little clerk in his holiday attire," and yet she "can't say what contempt [she] felt for the creature." While her language alone could reveal her disgust, since she uses "creep away" and "the creature" to apparently dehumanize the man, she continues to rail against the other men who are in the city instead of being with the army. She added sarcastically that:

> They tell me cowards actually exist, though I hope I never met [*sic*] one. The poor men that went to the Asylum for safety might not have what Sis calls 'a moral backbone.' No wonder then they tumbled in there! Besides, I am told half the town spent the night on the banks of the river on that occasion; and perhaps these unfortunates were subject to colds, and prefered [*sic*] the shelter of a good roof.

She continues in the next paragraph to belittle these men, sounding very similar to the accounts of other Southern women who "provided" men with female clothing when they were hesitant to enlist:

> Poor little fellows! How I longed to give them my hoops, corsets, and pretty blue organdie in exchange for their boots and breeches!—Only I thought it was dangerous; for suppose the boots had been so used to running, that they should prance off with me, too? Why it would ruin my reputation! Miss Morgan in petticoats is thought to be 'as brave as any other man;' but these borrowed articles might make her fly as fast 'as any other man,' too, if panic is contagious, as the Yankees here have proved it is.[75]

Sarah is anything but sympathetic to these men who have refused to fight and instead sought protection. Though her personal disdain may not have been publically projected so that these men who 'flew to the river' could feel ashamed by her commentary, it is clear that at least her gaze inspired embarrassment in the man at the Asylum.

The home guard—local militia-like units of men often too old or too young to fight who served to both track down deserters and act as a last line of defense for the home front[76]—were similarly belittled by Sarah, despite the fact that they were in some respects acting as 'informal' soldiers, almost like an army of the home front. Any man not associated with the Confederate Army was subject to her criticism in the entry from July 31st, as she wrote:

> Honestly, I believe the women of the South are as brave as the men who are fighting, and certainly braver than the 'Home Guard.'…One consolation is, that all who could go with any propriety, and all who were worthy of fighting, among those who believed in the South, are off at the seat of war; it is only trash, and those who are obliged to remain for private reasons, who still remain. Only ask Heaven why you [Sarah, writing to herself] were made with a man's heart, and a female form, and those creatures with beards were made so bewitchingly nervous?[77]

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[75] Ibid., 182-183.

[76] Richard Drake, *A History of Appalachia*, (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2001), 104.
David Williams, *Bitterly Divided: The South's Inner Civil War*, (New York: The New Press, 2008), 124-125.

[77] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 182-183.

Continuing to belittle the humanity and masculinity of male civilians and the home guard with words like "creatures" and "trash," and even claiming that the women of town were braver than them reveals Sarah's attempt to at least punish in the privacy of her diary these "dishonorable" men that chose to protect themselves instead of fight.

However, even if they did enlist in the army, the men had to continue to act honorably and bravely—for as historian Joseph T. Glatthaar explained in his book about the men of Lee's Army, the soldiers who flinched in battle were equally exposed to criticism. Glatthaar wrote that "nothing galled those men who had fought in various battles like accusations or rumors at home that they had dodged combat," since the "hometown community buzzed with tales, often false or exaggerated, of how local men measured up in combat." He used the case of a soldier named Rawley Martin as an example. Martin's female cousin "heard that he had behaved badly" and thus "she severed her communications" with him. Yet, Glatthaar wrote that Martin "did not blame her" but instead explained to his cousin that she "'…very properly determined you would have nothing to do with a coward,' but he insisted that the scuttlebutt was untrue."[78] Though a soldier could have acted bravely in battle, he was still susceptible to gossip about his conduct that could eventually reach the home front.

Sarah revealed a similar attitude in her diary, describing dishonorable actions among Yankee officers that threatened their status as gentlemen in Sarah's eyes. On August 17th, 1862, when Sarah feared that her home will be burned along with other portions of the town already in flames, she recounts tales of other women whose

[78] Joseph T. Glatthaar, *General Lee's Army: From Victory to Collapse* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 325.

possessions were given by Yankees to African-Americans. She claims that this woman, a Miss Jones,

> …had the pleasure of having four officers in her house, men who sported epaulets and red sashes, accompanied by a negro woman, at whose disposal all articles were placed. The worthy companion of these 'gentlemen' walked around selecting things with the most natural airs and graces. '*This*,' she would say, 'we *must* have. And some of these books, you know, and all the preserves, and these chairs and tables, and all the clothes, of course; and yes! the rest of the things.' So she would go on, the 'gentlemen' assuring her she only had to [choose] what she wanted, and that they would have them removed immediately. Madame thought they really must have the wine, and those handsome glass goblets.[79]

While she expressed her contempt towards the black woman essentially shopping from among Miss Jones' possessions, what is important about her tone in this passage is her treatment and condemnation of the Yankee officers assisting the women. No longer are they gentlemanly officers; for their theft, Sarah has reduced them to the status of being gentlemen only in quotation marks. Their assistance in dispossessing Miss Jones of her household items had rendered them dishonorable, and in Sarah's mind their status drops.

Ironically enough, a similar moment occurs in Sarah's diary only a few days later, recorded on August 25th. This time, however, Sarah's home had been sacked by the Yankees, and one of Sarah's black servants, Margret, was involved in the effort to protect the family's items from the Yankee thieves:

> Mother's portrait half cut from its frame stood on the floor. Margret who was present at the sacking, told how she had saved father's. It seems that those who wrought the destruction in our house, were all officers. One jumped on the sofa to cut the picture down (Miriam [Sarah's sister] saw the prints of his muddy feet) when Margret cried 'For God's sake, gentlemen, let it be! I'll help you to anything here. He's dead, and the young ladies would rather see the house burned than lose it!' 'I'll blow your damned brains out' was the 'gentlemans' [*sic*]

[79] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 214-215.

> answer as he put a pistol to her head, which a brother officer dashed away, and the picture was abandoned for finer sport.[80]

In this example, Sarah reports that her slave rescued the portrait of her deceased father from Yankee officers at a personal cost to herself, for the officer placed a gun to Margret's head. Similar to the last example, this man was stripped of any sense of prestige, again becoming a gentleman only in quotation marks. Instead, Sarah allows her slave Margret to become the hero of this account at these white officers' honor's expense. Clearly, one's status as a gentleman is flexible in Sarah's eyes, and yet her use of the title reflects her belief in the honorable actions of its name bearer. It seems significant that while Sarah extends the title of gentleman (without quotation marks) to a black slave who rescues her and some friends from a stubborn pony on a cart ride only a few entries earlier,[81] she refuses to permit these white Yankee officers to maintain that same station.

Women were not the only ones "punishing" cowards and devious soldiers for their actions (or inaction). Glatthaar explained that "even as early as mid-1861, soldiers began to draw distinctions between those who served and those who remained at home, and they wanted no rewards or advantages to go to those who refused to fight for hearth, home, and cause."[82] Male relatives seemed to extend these feeling to their female relations, such as in the case of both Rawley Martin, as already described, and in the case of another soldier from Georgia writing to his sisters. Martin was not angry with his female kin for shunning him when she suspected cowardice, and he instead insisted that

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[80] Ibid., 232-233.

[81] Ibid., 223.

[82] Glatthaar, *General Lee's Army: From Victory to Collapse*, 40-41.

she had acted 'properly.'[83] Similarly, Glatthaar cited a Georgia solider who reflected the same insistence on separating those who are dishonorable from the honorable. In his letter, the soldier wrote: "My dear sisters…I as an elder brother want you not to name [for marriage] no young man whoo [*sic*] will not volunter [*sic*] any fight for the [rights] of his country, but wait and take one whoo has faught [*sic*] for the liberties and freddom [*sic*] of thier [*sic*] country."[84] For those men seeking to marry this soldier's sisters, honorable service to the Confederacy was a requirement. By making service a requirement for marriage into his family, the soldier and his female relatives were conspiring together to uphold the code of honor and punish those who fail to live up to its ideals.

Sarah wrote that "ladies are naturally hero worshippers,"[85] and her actions and thoughts towards the honorable soldiers clearly reflect her own tendency to idolize the men serving the Confederacy. She gladly assisted men by filling their canteens, sewing shirts, offering her encouragement, and even over-eagerly extending them her sympathy if they appeared to be wounded. She recorded in her diary that the women around her participated in this hero-worship as much as she did (if not more so), and that they all felt like they could not do enough for these honorable men. However, on the flip-side of this sentiment, women like Sarah punished men who acted dishonorably with their criticism, belittlement, and judgment. Though most of her thoughts were locked secure in her diary and not blatantly expressed to the men she criticized, Sarah recorded the embarrassment

[83] Glatthaar, *General Lee's Army: From Victory to Collapse*, 325.

[84] Ibid., 41.

[85] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 523.

of a young man who sought shelter at the Asylum among the city's women and children, and historians like Joseph Glatthaar has cited statements from soldiers that depict the efforts of women in punishing dishonor. While the rewards for honor from Confederate women could be great, their punishment for dishonor could be brutal, revealing yet another role women played within the code of honor and the pressures they imposed upon men to embody the code's ideals.

Chapter Four

Sarah's Honor

Pshaw! there are no *women here! We are* all *men!*

-Sarah Morgan, May 9, 1862[86]

Historians like Bertram Wyatt-Brown have granted women a *semblance* of honor by explaining that they embodied a sort of virtue reflective of their entire household's reputation, which serves as their honor equivalent. Others, such as Giselle Roberts, have granted women their own code of honor—which rendered a woman honorable as long as she fulfilled her societal expectations and eventually fulfilled her calling to be a wife and mother (again keeping a woman's honor within the family sphere).[87] While Robert's explanation at least allows women some possession of honor, Sarah Morgan's writing complicates these previous interpretations of women's place in either the male or female codes of honor. Instead, Sarah Morgan believed she was capable of having honor and, even more radically, she occasionally blurred the gender boundaries between these historians' clearly defined masculine and feminine codes of honor to try to protect both her own personal and her family's honor. Whether having to come to the defense of her reputation, expressing anxiety about lying, trying to stop a duel, or repeating her desire to fight in the army to defend her home, Sarah was challenging this exclusion of females from the masculine code of honor.

[86]Sarah Morgan, *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, edited by Charles East (New York: Touchstone, 1991), 65.

[87]Giselle Roberts, *The Confederate Belle* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 4-5.

Historians who study southern honor tend to agree that only white men were capable of having honor in the antebellum South. In *Vengeance & Justice*, Edward L. Ayers explained that "women, children, and slaves had no honor," that "only adult white males had the right to honor—and even they, if challenged, had to prove their worth though their courage."[88] Similarly, Bertram Wyatt-Brown has explained the same idea in his book *The Shaping of Southern Culture*, claiming that the white men of the South protected their monopoly on honor because "honor could not be wholly relinquished unless they were ready to accept women and blacks, most particularly, on a level of equality"—a step the white men of the South were clearly not ready to make in the antebellum and Civil War eras.[89] While the question of women's place in the code of honor is mentioned, these historians conclude that honor is predominately a male sphere.

And yet male historians are not the only academics limiting women's connection to honor since female historians also seem to cap the presence of women within the code of honor. Combining the description of Wyatt-Brown's feminine version of honor being a virtuous fortitude with her own analysis of belles from Louisiana and Mississippi, Giselle Roberts discussed women as having a sense of their own honor, only that honor was associated with both aligning oneself with societal expectations and being the ideal wife and mother. For Roberts, any deviation from the gender separation, such as "matronly" duties as household supervisors or being required to "defend family honor,"

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[88] Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance & Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 13.

[89] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War,1760s-1880s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 103.

was only the result of the circumstances of the war and the absence of male relatives.[90] Yet, while Roberts cited episodes from Sarah Morgan's diary throughout her book, *The Confederate Belle*, which examines the culture of "bellehood" as a whole, Sarah's position within Robert's arguments about the code of honor seem jeopardized by the fact that while Sarah was writing her diary, she was not married, much less a motherly figure. She was only in her early twenties, still young and dependent on her family to support her. Despite not being in a position to embody the honorable wife and mother and pushing the boundaries of what was acceptable for young "belles", Sarah was clearly engaging in some version of the code of honor—alternating between both of the spheres described by historians like Bertram Wyatt-Brown and Giselle Roberts.

In many respects, Sarah obeyed this modified code of honor for females, recognizing that obedience to societal expectations of women was an important reflection of a woman's honor. One example of her connection between honor and the expectations of society was her sharp criticism and disdain for "political women" which is repeated throughout her diary. Sarah did not see these women as honorable representations of the women of the South, and she wrote that, while she used writing to express *her* thoughts privately, she felt "disgust" when she had to listen to other women's political opinions. She explained that this disgust would:

> …forever prevent me from becoming a 'Patriotic woman.' In my opinion, the Southern women, and some few of the men, have disgraced themselves by their rude, ill mannered behavior in many instances. I insist, that if the valor and chivalry of our men cannot save our country, I would rather have it conquered by a brave race, than owe its liberty to the Billingsgate oratory and demonstrations of

[90] Giselle Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, 3-6.

> some of these 'ladies.' If the women have the upper hand then, as they have now, I would not like to live in a country governed by such tongues.[91]

Much like she did when she was criticizing the officers who raided and robbed southern homes, Sarah questioned the status of these women as ladies through her use of quotation marks. To provide an example of their dishonorable conduct, she referred to the tendency of women to "spit in a gentleman's face merely because he wore United States buttons." While she wrote of the "contempt" she held for these "'loud' women" and their "vulgarity" since they cast aside their honor with their unruly behavior, Sarah demonstrated respect for the Union officer as he did not provoke the attack and then had "the sense to apply to her husband and give him two minutes to apologize or die," a response that revealed him protecting his own honor as a gentleman.[92] Though this is only one example of her disrespect for these women, Sarah revealed that she did subscribe to the feminine code of honor which would condemn these political women because of their public expressions of opinions and their unwomanly confrontations with these officers. In the eyes of Sarah Morgan, whether these women were confronting an invading force or not, they should not have compromised their honor in the process.

When she violated the feminine version of the code of honor, Sarah criticized herself, as well. Early in the occupation of the city by Farragut's men, Sarah decided to prove her allegiance to the Stars and Bars rather than the American Flag that was "flying from every peak" in town. She made a miniature flag, five inches long, and pinned the small flag to her shoulder. On May 10th, 1862, she expressed her pride in her defiance

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[91] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 121-122.

[92] Ibid., 122.

and the "great excitement among women & children" she created by her display. She described herself and her companion wearing a similar flag on her skirt as the ones who "have set the example, [and she supposed] the rest will follow."[93] However, the next day's entry reveals Sarah's regret and even "[disgust] with [herself]" over her behavior. The encounters that made her realize her erroneous behavior came was when she ended up wearing the flag in a crowd that gathered around fifteen to twenty Union officers. Because she attracted "attention by an unladylike display of defiance, from the crowd gathered" at the State House, she "felt humiliated, conspicuous, everything that is painful and disagreeable" since these Yankee gentlemen noticed her. She then found herself caught between the decision of whether to remove her "colors in the face of an enemy" (to which she replied "Never!") or continue to be the subject of condemnation by these gentlemanly, honorable soldiers. While she kept her flag, she internalized her personal shame over the incident so that she could let it be "a lesson to me always to remember a lady can gain nothing by such displays."[94]

Despite these examples, Sarah did not remain solely in the realm of feminine honor. Rather, she blurred the gender spheres as she engaged in actions considered to representative of the masculine code of honor in the South. Roberts does grant women of the South a little leeway to defy gender roles during the war since there were fewer men left to defend women, and Sarah clearly proved an example of one of these women actively protecting her own sense of honor. For example, if men were anxious about

[93] Ibid., 67.

[94] Ibid., 68.

their honorable status when it came to accusations of lying, Sarah reflected the same nervousness about compromising her own honor and name. The most significant conflict that Sarah faced regarding her honor came when she was told by Union officials that she must take a loyalty oath to the United States before she could join her brother in occupied New Orleans. The oath-taking began with a sort of roll call, and slips of paper stating that each person had taken the oath were written by officials. While Sarah thought that these pieces of paper ended the process, she soon realized there was more involved:

> …after another pause he uncovered his head and told us to hold up our right hands. Half crying I covered my face with mine and prayed breathlessly for the boys [her brothers] and the Confederacy, so that I heard not a word he was saying until the question, 'So help you God?' struck my ear. I shuddered and prayed harder. There came an awful pause in which not a lip was moved. Each felt as though in a nightmare until throwing down his blank book, the officer pronounced it 'All right!' Strange to say, I experienced no change. I prayed as hard as ever for the boys and our country, and felt no nasty or disagreeable feeling which would have announced the process of turning Yankee.[95]

Sarah did not immediately "feel" a change as she found herself renouncing the Confederacy (at least on paper), but her actions weighed on her conscience later as she agonized over her honesty. Though she took the oath in April, in June she returned to the subject in her diary, writing, "how about that oath of allegiance? is what I frequently ask myself, and always an uneasy qualm of conscience troubles me." She debated whether she was "guilty of Perjury," and decided that according to the law she was, though in her heart she was not. She finishes the entry over the next several paragraphs by justifying to herself the circumstances and her decision, blaming Yankee force, an inability to choose her fate, and the ceremony's lack of any real meaning to come to the conclusion that "the crime would be in keeping such an oath, with my heart on the other side, where as the

[95] Ibid., 485-486.

merit would lay in breaking it." She decided that her word to these Yankees was not her genuine wishes or feelings, so she resolved to "break their sham oath without hesitation, on the first opportunity."[96] Her ability to justify her dishonesty over the oath of allegiance seems to be in stark contrast to her earlier claims that her brother's death in the duel defended the family from ever being accused of including a liar, for Sarah is able to defiantly dismiss the power of the oath despite her inner turmoil over her misrepresentation so many months later. Though fully aware that lying threatened her honor, she convinced herself that lying to herself about her true allegiance was a worse offense.

Historians writing about Southern women in the war often cite Sarah Morgan's passionate longings to be a man or to dress as one to be able to defend her home. Her phrases were repeated throughout her diary as she often wrote boldly some variation of "If I was a man! O if I was only a man!"[97] In one entry from July 20, 1862, she wrote, "If I was a man—! O wouldn't I be in Richmond with the boys!" and then she continued asking:

> Why was I not a man? what is the use of all of these worthless women, in war times? If they attack, I shall don the breeches, and join the assailants, and fight, though I think they would be hopeless fools to attempt to capture a town they could not hold for ten minutes under the gun boats. How do breeches and coats feel, I wonder? I am actually afraid of them. I kept a suit of Jimmy's [her brother] in the armoir [*sic*] for six weeks waiting for the Yankees to come, thinking fright would give me courage to try it, (what a seeming paradox!) but I never succeeded…I advanced so far as to lay it on the bed…I was ashamed to let even my canary see me…I have heard so many girls boast of having worn men's clothes; I wonder where they get the courage.[98]

[96] Ibid., 507-509.

[97] Ibid., 491.

[98] Ibid., 166-167.

Though she claimed to have no fear of battle itself, she told herself that the requirement of wearing breeches was the obstacle that kept her from aiding the men in protecting the South.

However, she also belittled the bravery of Confederate soldiers by asserting that it was instead the Confederate women who were the examples of courageous and honorable conduct—if only they could serve in the ranks to prove it! Again, she repeated her belief that if she "was only a man," she "could don the breeches, and slay [the Yankees] with a will!" But this time, she added her speculation that "if some few Southern women were in the ranks, they could set the men an example they would not blush to follow. Pshaw! there are *no* women here! We are *all* men!"[99] Though this statement reveals that she equateed bravery in battle with manhood, it also reflects Sarah's belief that the women of the South also possessed this masculine bravery. For Sarah, courage and honor is not a quality possessed solely by men; in fact, she wrote that women could teach the men a few lessons in bravery. While this belief may reveal her naivety about the horrors of war and her tendency to associate bravery with masculinity, she clearly does not believe that a woman would lack courage or honor when faced with battle.

While her occasional fiery moods may have made her write such bold claims, she is never willing to bring herself to blur the gender roles enough to dress as a man throughout the course of the war. While Sarah never acted on her wish to "don the breeches," other women from the South did—allowing them to fully enter the masculine sphere of honor by 'becoming' men in disguise. According to DeAnne Blanton and

[99] Ibid., 65.

Lauren M. Cook in their study of female soldiers in the Civil War, women " bore arms and charged into battle" as well as "lived in germ-ridden camps, languished in appalling prisons, and died miserably, *but honorably*, for their country and their cause just as men did" [emphasis added].[100] Though statistics from 1888 claim about four hundred women served for the Union alone, Blanton and Cook's research found evidence of about two hundred and fifty women fighting for the North and South combined, though they are sure that there were many more.[101] These women who disguised themselves and took up arms for either army were not acting on the notion of feminine honor—where acting as a lady deemed a woman honorable. Rather, their actions went completely against what was expected for young ladies. Instead, these women embodied the ideals of masculine honor by possessing the bravery to honorably fight and die on the battlefield, and they were able to secretly blur the gender boundaries historians assign to the two separate codes of honor by becoming soldiers.

Though she did not actually take up arms (aside from smaller weapons for self-protection occasionally), Sarah Morgan did blur the code of honor's gender boundaries by handling situations that should have excluded females under the code. Though most historians do not credit women with defending their own reputations, Sarah faced those attempting to criticize her and protected her name as any man of honor would. This need to assume the role of her own protector seems essential for Sarah during such a time as the Civil War, since all of the men of the Morgan household were off at war and thus

[100] DeAnne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 1.

[101] DeAnne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War*, 6-7.

unable to serve as their noble defenders. Sarah defended her own name when rumors circulated around the town about her kindness towards Yankee officers, but a more telling example of Sarah's incursion into the masculine code of honor was when she defended her brother's reputation from attack. While living in New Orleans with her half-brother, a loyal Unionist, a young woman was heard telling people that "Confederate gentlemen" could not be expected to visit the house of Judge Morgan because of his allegiance. When Sarah heard of this attack on her brother's respectability, she wrote angrily that she did not care what was said about herself, only that "one word of contempt for Brother I *never* forgive!" In retaliation, Sarah told the bearer of this information that the young woman's "visit will never be returned…and that [she will decline] knowing anyone who dares cast the slightest reflection on the name of one who has been both father and brother to [her]." Sarah did indeed follow through with her efforts to punish the woman for tarnishing her brother's name in society; when Sarah was at a social gathering in which this girl was announced, Sarah and her sister immediately left the party without speaking to the woman. As any man of honor would respond had his sister been insulted, Sarah wrote that "no one shall utter his name before me with anything save respect and regard."[102] While she may not have challenged the woman to a duel, Sarah Morgan was just as protective of her family name as her brothers were, and she defended their reputations in the best way that she knew how without violating her honor as a respectable woman. Though her instincts when insulted were to react to the affront, Sarah seemed limited by the feminized version of the code of honor that Roberts has

[102] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 562-563.

described that enforced proper lady-like behavior. For Sarah, the safest way for her to retaliate against the threat to her family's honor, while still maintaining her own personal honor, was to shun the woman.

Additionally, Sarah inserted herself into the male code of honor by acting almost like a second on behalf of her brother, Gibbes, when a practical joke threatened to lead to a duel between him and Will Carter. While seconds in the dueling party were essential in arranging the specifics of the duel or maintaining order, [103] seconds were also responsible for acting as representatives for the duelist they were assisting, trying to "negotiate a solution" to avoid confrontation without costing the duelist his reputation within those negotiations.[104] Incredibly, Sarah found herself acting in this representative manner while being an invalid recovering from a carriage accident. Her sister, Miriam, had played a game of poker with Will Carter, and Miriam put herself up as the stakes. When Will Carter, who had wished to marry Miriam for a long time, won the game, he expected Miriam to honor her 'agreement.' Expecting to claim his prize, he showed up at their home one evening with a marriage license and a preacher ready to marry his long-time crush. However, the preacher arrived first so Miriam was able to tell him that the whole situation was only a joke that had gotten out of hand. When Carter arrived, he was informed that the evening would not proceed as he had hoped and he eventually left. The diary entry immediately following that night's, however, described Sarah's intervention

[103] Ryan L Dearinger, "Violence, Masculinity, Image, and Reality on the Antebellum Frontier." *Indiana Magazine of History* 100 (2004), 36.

[104] Warren F.Schwartz, and Keith Baxter and David Ryan. "The Duel: Can These Gentlemen Be Acting Efficiently?" *The Journal of Legal Studies* 13 (1984), 337-341.

into the whole affair when Will Carter came to Sarah's sick bed. She immediately recognized the gravity of the situation and her role that she then had to play:

> The very devil shot in his eye as he exclaimed fiercely, 'If anyone dares demand it, I'll die before giving it up! If God Almighty came, I'd say no! I'll die with it first!'
> O merciful Father! I thought; what misery is to come of this jest! he must relinquish it. Gibbes will force him into it, or die in the attempt; George [another brother] would come from Virginia and cut his heart out for the mere threat; even Jimmy would cross the seas and run the blockade to avenge Miriam! And I alone in here to deal with such a spirit!

With great caution, Sarah did "deal" with Carter by making him realize that if he loved her sister, he would not "affect her reputation" and "her honor" in this way. She also convinced him that his actions were dishonorable and that he should not "grieve" the woman that he professed to love by carrying out his threats. After her efforts at diplomacy, she wrote that "I and I only had saved Miriam from injury, and three brothers from bloodshed, by using his insane love as a lever." More importantly, she added that "it does not look as hard here as it was in reality but it was [one] of the hardest struggles I ever had."[105] On the contrary, this seemed like a remarkable incident between a bed-bound Sarah, her siblings, and Mr. Carter. Though Sarah was not a part of the practical joke, she crossed the gender boundaries and managed to save her brother Gibbes, already recovering from a wound he received at Antietam, from having to face Carter in a duel to protect his sister's honor. Sarah became the hero of the event, acting as a second though unable to walk.

Clearly, Sarah's diary complicates the argument that women do not have honor, and she also blurred the distinction between male and female versions of the code of

[105] Morgan, *Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman*, 355-362.

honor. While she did repeat the idea that women were honorable when they fulfilled their societal expectations, she also crossed into masculine territory when she defended her family's reputation, desired the ability to fight, and acted almost like a second in an incident about to develop into a dangerous duel. Sarah even expressed her belief that she had her own honor, which could be jeopardized by town rumors or her dishonesty in taking the oath of allegiance to the Union. Sarah Morgan was not excluded from masculine ideas about courage, honor, and familial defense, and completely rejecting her place in this web of ideologies would ignore these powerful moments that she wrote about when she overcame the limitations her gender placed on her.

Conclusion

Recognizing the prominent roles that women played in the southern code of honor not only acknowledges the active participation of women like Sarah Morgan in cult of honor, but also reflects the complexities of the system. Rather than exclude themselves from the code of honor altogether, women embodied their own version of honor, crossed into the male sphere regarding its practice, and enforced men to uphold the code or face condemnation from these women. To put it simply, women were involved in this idea and value system—they were not simply put on pedestals to be defended by men or passive observers of the events around them. Additionally, women suffered under this dangerous system of honor. As Sarah's writings revealed, she was devastated to lose her brother in a duel but was comforted that he died honorably, challenging the accusation that a Morgan was a liar. Two of her three brothers would later be killed in the same war in which Sarah pleaded with them to fight. By refusing to "blackguard" the officers of the North simply because they were not from the South, she incurred the wrath of Yankees and Rebels alike as neither side could fully trust the Morgan daughters. The casualties in this case included the loss of their home which was sacked because of the Morgan women's confused loyalties and the rumors that plagued Sarah's family during the war years because they held sympathies for both armies. Needless to say, though they may not have been killed in duels or on the battlefield (in most cases), women were also victims of this code as they were haunted by the very ideals about honor that they embraced and preached.

Perhaps because of the damage that the code of honor created in the lives of both men and women in the South, historians can more fully examine the flaws of this ideology. Honor's most loyal practitioners lost the most to the code, as Sarah's diary and biography reveal. Yet, despite her losses, Sarah never seemed to blame her misfortunes on the code itself. She instead saw the people around her as flawed, rather than the system that labeled them 'cowardly' or 'dishonorable.' In Sarah's view, though it may have meant death, a man was to face the battle and protect his home and name. It hardly seems surprising that such devastation and loss would plague the life of someone adhering to such a dangerous if not impossible expectation, and yet the deaths of each of her brothers were a complete shock to Sarah. She did not realize that her brother was going to fight in a duel, and she expected her brothers to come home from the war at any time. She was blindsided by the loss of them and her entries reflect her indescribable grief and fear of a future without "the boys." Clearly, the southern code of honor was not solely the noble ideal it has come to be considered. Rather it frequently became a dangerous and costly reality to those who valued it most. Because of these problems, it is crucial to recognize women's place within this system so that their sacrifices to the code of honor can be understood alongside the problems that the system presented for men. As Sarah made clear through her diary, there was no perfect, bloodless order under this value system, and honor proved to be an abstract concept that demanded costly sacrifice in the lives of both men and women alike.

A Note on the Diary and Charles East's Edition

The original 1913 first edition of Sarah Morgan's diary was published by her son, Francis Warrington Dawson II. Because he wanted to uphold the integrity of the diary but still felt the need to protect his family's more private moments, he "merely [omitted] here and there passages which deal with matters too personal to merit the interest of the public."[106] According to Charles East, who saw the entire diary on microfilm, there were serious issues with Sarah's son's transcription. Beyond mistakes in wording that altered the sentences' meanings, there were passages where "words or phrases [were] missing; sometimes sentences; frequently whole entries, or parts of them, involving several pages of the diary." Some entries in Dawson's edition were composites of two different entries, and in many cases omissions were not marked for the reader. According to East, "when [he] completed [his] transcription" of the diary, he "discovered that the published diary [by Dawson] amounted to approximately half, a little less than half, of the original."[107]

However, because of these omissions, the edition of the diary referenced throughout this analysis is not the original edition with an introduction by Dawson or the subsequent reprints of that edition titled, *A Confederate Girl's Diary*. Instead, Charles East's 1991 edition is used because of his attempts to provide an uncut and accurate representation of Sarah's words from the original diary copied onto microfilm, an

[106] Sarah E. Gardner, quoting Francis Warrington Dawson, *Blood &Irony,* 179.

[107] Charles East, preface to *Sarah Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman* by Sarah Morgan (New York: Touchstone, 1991),x.

undertaking that was not done with earlier editions.[108] Not only is East's "definitive edition" of her diary a comprehensive transcription of her diary (including the "personal" elements previously excluded), but his elaborate research into the various people, places, and events of the diary are extremely helpful in putting Sarah's experience into context with the larger story of the Civil War. His notes were also helpful in pointing out some of Sarah's errors that come from constant wartime misinformation and exaggeration. Using East's version of Sarah's diary was the most effective source for accessing her actual words and thoughts (and their accuracy in terms of chronicling factual information) during the war.

[108] Charles East, preface, ix-xii.

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