JOURNEYS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DIARY OF SARAH L. WADLEY

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Regina C. Davis

Dr. Katherine Rodier, Committee Chairperson
Dr. Kellie Bean
Dr. Janet Badia

Marshall University

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ABSTRACT

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By Regina C. Davis

As a young woman living in Louisiana during the Civil War, Sarah Lois Wadley documented in her diary the fractured, conflicted perspective that was her experience as a woman living in the war ravaged South. Her writing is evidence of the confusion she felt as a result of the discrepancy between the expectations of Southern patriarchal society and her own needs as a woman. Wadley's diary is a complex text similar to a novel in that it relates events through a construct that reflects her response to her reader's/society's expectations. From a deconstructionist perspective, the power of Wadley's text lies in what she *doesn't* say.

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Introduction

There are two versions of Sarah Wadley's diary: a microfilm version of the typed transcript and the actual volumes stored at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Experiencing this diary in its different forms revealed the two faces of Wadley's story: the historical portrait of the Civil War-era South, and the literary efforts of a talented young woman. Reading the microfilm was like reading a novel; Wadley and the various members of her family and their acquaintances are rich, well developed characters that rival those of any well-known nineteenth century novelist. Through Wadley's pen, the wild Louisiana swamps become mysterious, eerie and beautiful all at the same time. In Wadley's diary, the Civil War becomes more than a moment in American history, something to be learned from a textbook. In Wadley's diary, the events of the Civil War form a complex plot outlining the story of her life that draws in her reader and engages her interest until the last page.

Thumbing through the fragile leaves of Wadley's diary in person is a different experience. The handwriting is faded, the pages are yellowed and stained and the once-handsome leather covers are cracked and dry. A leaf is carefully pressed between the pages of the last volume, and they smell faintly musty. Reading them this way draws attention to the fact that Sarah Wadley was a real woman, not a heroine from a romantic novel. Her fears were real, and her experience is a page in history.

The original plan for this study was to compile a critical interpretation of Wadley's diary using the same methods employed to examine novels and other types of fiction. But thus far, critics have not focused on the stylistic or literary aspects of diary literature. The challenge was to formulate a critical interpretation of Wadley's diary that addressed the stylistic, literary aspects of her story and at the same time acknowledged the historical importance of the journal itself.

The historical aspect of Wadley's diary is interdependent with the literary elements of the work. History is important to Wadley's story because it not only determined what she wrote, but how she wrote and in what form. The course of the Civil War comprised the bulk of Wadley's writing, and her position as a woman living in the patriarchal South dictated that she could only express herself in the pages of a "private" journal and even then she felt it necessary often to blunt her true feelings with symbolism and even silence. At the same time, Wadley's diary is a significant historical document that exemplifies the experience of many Southern women.

To discuss Wadley's diary in these terms it has been important to establish some basic boundaries. Chapter One provides a generalized survey of the study of diary literature, and gleans from this collection of information a rudimentary definition of the diary as a literary form. It also provides an overall view of Wadley's diary, briefly summarizing the contents of each of the five volumes. Chapter Two continues in this vein, narrowing the definition to specify the common themes of Confederate women's diaries and the set of historical circumstances that influenced their creation.

The final half of this study concentrates solely on Wadley's text. The third chapter, entitled "Ambivalence and Truth," examines how Wadley's response to the personal conflicts created by Southern society and the upheaval of the war played out in her journal. It is in these passages and those highlighted in Chapter Four that Wadley's work most strikingly takes on the cast of fiction. Her recollection of these events appears to be

carefully constructed, written by Wadley as an attempt to voice criticism and yet remain within the boundaries of what was expected of her as a Southern woman. In Chapter Three she blatantly rejects motherhood and marriage; yet her text reveals that she constructed an ideal husband in her father and surrogate children in her siblings. Her deliberate omission of any details concerning her mother reinforces the theory that she was using her text not only to relate the "truth" of actual events, but also the "truth" of her own interpretation of reality.

Another notable aspect of Wadley's diary is that her feelings toward slavery are somewhat unclear. On the surface, it would appear that like most Southerners, Sarah Wadley supported the practice. Closer examination reveals that Wadley's apparent support for slavery is only her repetition of what the men in her life had to say regarding the "peculiar institution." The reader is left to wonder what Wadley herself thinks and this omission is another layer of "truth" in the diary – a gap, a silence that in itself conveys a message.

Chapter Four focuses on the journeys in Wadley's story and how the contrast between her dream journey to Nebraska and the family's desperate attempt to flee oncoming Federal troops reveals her turmoil over being a war refugee. The dream journey is portrayed as preordained, divinely inspired. Far different is her relation of the family's actual journey through the bayou, where Wadley infuses her lush surroundings with death imagery. Once again, what is significant is the way Wadley chooses to describe events, using her descriptions as a veil to obscure feelings that she did not feel comfortable stating openly.

This study progresses from a general theory regarding the boundaries of diary literature to a more refined discussion of the characteristics of Confederate women's diaries and the circumstances that gave rise to this type of writing and focuses on an examination of how these theories apply to the diary of Sarah Wadley. As a whole it seeks to establish a relationship between the stylistic aspects of fiction and the "truths" of diary literature. As a unique piece of literature, Sarah Wadley's diary provides an excellent basis for such a critique.

Chapter One:
A new critical focus

As the Civil War drew to a close in 1865, Sarah Wadley wrote in her journal this short summation of its contents: "this book holds within its covers the record of our triumphs, of my hopes, my faith, my love for my country" (5:339). With this simple declaration she categorizes a work that had at that point spanned over five years and captured the emotional tumult of a key event in America's history. The delicate, yellowed leaves of the Wadley manuscript tell the story of an intelligent, compassionate, and strong-willed young woman who not only grappled with the moral implications of the Civil War but also struggled to maintain her own sense of identity in a rapidly changing Southern society.

This study explores Wadley's journal from a critical perspective. All citations refer to the typed manuscript. This study focuses on Wadley's text and how her treatment of her wartime experiences documents the fractured, conflicted perspective that was her experience in the antebellum South and the Civil War. Sarah Wadley's text reflects the confusion she felt as a result of the discrepancy between her society's expectations and her emotional and intellectual fulfillment. Her narrative treatment of her wartime experiences also reveals a pronounced ambivalence toward the Confederate cause and moral issues such as slavery.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Wadley's narrative is that it reads much like a novel, and this characteristic provides the framework for the critical analysis that follows in these pages. The diary of Sarah Wadley is a complex text similar to a novel in that it relates events through a construct that reflects Wadley's response to her reader's/society's expectations. From a deconstructionist perspective, the power of Wadley's text lies in what she *does not* say. Her words themselves are designed to accommodate her readers' expectations with regard to Wadley's position as a woman in the patriarchal culture that dominated the South, but her ambivalence toward her societal "duty" reveals itself through the inconsistencies found in the description of her relationship with her father and the family's various slaves, and also the symbolism and imagery in her journey descriptions.

As an historical document Sarah Wadley's diary is invaluable. It offers the modern scholar an intimate and inherently Southern view of the Civil War and its devastating aftermath. Surviving journals such as this one helped define the modern historian's concept of the period; however, a thorough reading of the Wadley manuscript proves that the diary is much more than a fascinating piece of history. The manuscript reveals the author's evolution from an awkward, insecure teenager into a composed woman who is most of all a survivor. Simultaneously, the diary is a record of the day-to-day episodes of the war and the disintegration of the Old South. Ultimately, the reader turns the page not to discover the outcome of the war, but to learn the fate of Sarah Wadley and how she was affected by the joys and sorrows she met with along the way. Like any good literary work, her diary affects the reader on an intellectual level and on an emotional level.

The unfortunate reality is that critical study of the diary form remains a largely unexplored field. Although many diaries have been widely published for public consumption, they are too often only sought after for their historical value or the insights they provide into the private lives of public figures. Critic Judy Nolte Lensink explains

that this lack of text-oriented inquiry is the result of a lack of critical tools and guidelines to approach such an analysis (Schultz 61). Therefore, the first step toward a textual study of diary literature should be to formulate a solid definition that identifies the form as unique and establishes the boundaries that critical inquiry requires. In Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries, Suzanne Bunkers and Cynthia Huff explain the relevance of studying the diary form from a critical perspective:

> Because their place within the literary canon has been marginal, diaries beg us to define what we mean by aesthetics, to question what the qualities and politics of literary inclusion involve, to analyze what such issues reveal about the place of literature and textual study… and to assess how the formulation of these questions fit into our conceptions of self and the world. (2)

These two critics feel that the complex structures within the texts of diaries, particularly women's diaries, reveal a great deal about larger cultural and psychological concerns. They reject widely held notions that the fragmented nature of the diary form renders it unfit for textual study; instead, Bunkers and Hill argue that these inconsistencies are indicative of the perceived position of women and the facts of women's experience within the societal hierarchy.

Unlike Bunkers and Huff, many critics choose to focus on the cultural aspects of diary literature, using texts such as the Wadley manuscript to provide evidence of patriarchal oppression, for example. Few endeavor to break down the intricate metaphors and subtle imagery that reveal the author's inner turmoil far better than any literal, day to day log of mundane events. In many respects, criticism that ventures outside the traditional historio-social concerns has been virtually nonexistent. Contemporary scholarship must formulate a critical approach that explores the form from a technical, stylistic point of view. If diary literature is to be considered a true literary genre, it must generate an accompanying body of criticism that performs the same function as critical theory does for novels, poetry and other forms.

The path to formulating a definition of the diary form as a genre begins by exploring past theories of autobiography and the diary and how these theories have evolved and shifted focus in more recent years. Despite the relative lack of critical inquiry, definitions of the form have expanded considerably since the turn of the century. In the past, many critics found it useful to think of the term "autobiography" as an umbrella, a catch-all term that included the critical study of various forms whose purpose was to document the author's life. Indeed, before World War II critics tended to lump together *all* works of nonfiction prose whose purpose was to record the events of a lifetime, whether they were biographies, autobiographies, letters or journals (Jelenek 2). During the fifties critics began to differentiate among the various forms, noting the differences between daily journals, memoirs and biographies. But by the early seventies critical focus had begun to shift more toward a psychological approach.

In Metaphors of Self (1972) James Olney argues that autobiography, including the diary form, represents "each man's metaphor of his self" (3). Olney's theory is based on the assumption that literature is a tool of introspection, and as one of the forefathers of modern autobiographical criticism, his scholarship is a valuable resource. His work provided a basis upon which to build future theories regarding the importance of the ways in which the emotional life of the diarist plays a major role in the creation of the text and are certainly applicable in a study of Confederate women's diaries. Southern women such

as Sarah Wadley often used the journal as a way to map out a path to personal improvement. The eve of a new year was a common time for a woman like Sarah to think about her past actions and vow to act more admirably in the coming year. On New Year's Eve 1863, she vowed : "I will try to do better, I will set to work earnestly and perseveringly to cure the great faults which I know I have and find out those that are now hidden" (3:141).

In studying the Wadley manuscript, the reader also notes that Sarah often used her diary to confide her perceptions of herself within a society where a woman's looks and manners were considered her most valuable assets. In a tone that was usually wry and self-mocking, Sarah always found herself lacking in both attributes as this passage from 1863 illustrates:

> Miss Julia was not inclined to converse, and Miss Helen was carrying on a light conversation with Mr. H so as I could not enjoy silence and could not become interested in allusions to flirtations of which I know nothing, I was in an unpleasant position. How often, when situated thus, have I regretted… that I had not been educated to speak words without meaning and to practice gracefully all those coquettish airs which form such an important part of conversation between ladies and gentlemen. (1:53)

And again, in 1864, she writes of her awareness of her lack of physical beauty:

> I have never had any beauty, I have always known and sadly known that I was <u>ugly</u>… Oh what a terrible picture, it is only to relieve myself that I draw it, it may provoke a smile in some better day to read over these querulous complainings. (4:211)

Wadley is starkly honest here, referring to herself as "ugly." This concern over her lack of physical beauty underscores her awareness that the women of her time were rarely sought out for their lively personalities or educated opinions. It is also a reminder that Wadley was aware that at some point her diary might be read by others and penned many of her observations with this possibility in mind. Throughout her diary Sarah Wadley writes of her perceived shortcomings but also her other attributes, such as intellect and wit, which she feels are more important than beauty and social skill. Despite her lack of beauty and social graces, she often uses the pages of her diary to reassure herself that her worth lies in other areas such as intelligence and sensibility.

From a more psychological standpoint, Wadley's diary presents an excellent example of the diarist using her pen as a tool for looking within herself. An important part of diary composition includes the process by which the diarist arrives at her concept of self, and although the recent critical theories regarding autobiography actively explore this convention, they do not address entirely the textual issues within Wadley's diary. These theories are, however, helpful as a foundation to build upon in the process of forming more definitive boundaries for an analysis that is focused primarily on the literary aspects of the text.

In the early 1990s, scholars such as Steven Kagel began to publish works that attempted to move away from the psychological criticism of diaries and autobiography and toward a more technical, albeit broad, definition of the diary as a literary form. Kagel seeks to define the diary as separate from autobiography and to establish boundaries that would enable critics to explore the textual aspect of the form, as we would a novel or poem. In his recent study entitled <u>American Diary Literature</u>, he surveys a large body of

examples, making basic assumptions about the form. Kagel concludes, "the life of a diary is often born of a tension, a disequilibrium in the life of its author, which needs to be resolved or held in check" (16). Kagel's assertion reaffirms theories regarding the diary as a process of self-evaluation and offers yet another dimension: a diary's structure must correspond to its author's emotional need.

Kagel's work provides another building block for the definition of the diary form as it applies to this analysis of Wadley's writing. Essentially, a diary is an autobiographical work that is episodic in nature. It encompasses a distinct period in the life of its author and serves a specific emotional function during that period. The "action" of the narrative therefore has a clearly defined start and finish. The diarist's narrative techniques, or lack thereof, provide a means by which the scholar can evaluate the work and compare it to other works.

When considering the diary as a literary form, it is also important to address some prevailing criticisms that have impeded the study of diary literature. In her effort to trace the tradition of women's autobiography, Estelle Jelenek dismisses the diary form entirely (xii). The implication of Jelenik's dismissal is that as an episodic work, the diary falls short of achieving the coherence required to convey the themes that she feels are important in the study of women's autobiography. Steven Kagel also acknowledges the barriers to criticism of the diary form, the strongest and most common criticism being lack of unity and creative control.

Wadley's text negates these concerns. The unity of Sarah's diary is derived from the repetitious themes of ambivalence she displays on the subjects of marriage, maternity and slavery–all aspects of Southern life. The Wadley manuscript also arrives at a sense of unity through a second path–the journey theme. The story of Sarah Wadley and her family is peppered with journeys, both literal and figurative. The diary begins with her journey north from Georgia, and ends with the family returning to Georgia from Louisiana at the end of the war. During the war, the family relocated several times, usually because of her father's position with the railroad. These are the literal journeys contained in the manuscript; however, from a stylistic point of view, the figurative journeys are far more notable.

The story itself is a journey. Within the pages of her diary Sarah Wadley must make the journey to adulthood and also triumph over the emotional hardships of the war. The issues that arise from the war strongly influence Sarah's development of her sense of self. In this story, the historical and the personal are intertwined – who she is, as a woman and a Southerner, is inextricably linked to her pride in the South, which is being torn down as a consequence of the war.

Sarah Wadley's diary also refutes the notion that the nature of the diary form diminishes the author's creative control over her subject. Margo Culley argues that "like any text, a diary is a verbal construct that requires selection and arrangement of detail by its writer" (72*)*. Kagel also makes a significant point by stating that "the good diarist, as any good writer, makes the events of his record appear distinctive through his treatment of them" (21). Her eloquent treatment of the harsh reality of the war puts Sarah Wadley on the same footing as any accomplished nineteenth century novelist. Consider the following entry from April 1862:

> Oh! What a time is this… my heart sickens when I think that under this beautiful blue sky, with God's heavensent air breathing warm and fortifying

> around, while the birds sing and the green leaves wave as if to praise their creator, thousands of men are mingling in mortal combat, and groans and shrieks sounding amid the roar of artillery and the trampling of cavalry, the picture is too dreadful; how many mothers and sisters, wives and children sit in suspense and despair this day. (Wadley 2: 66-67)

Had she lacked creative control over her subject matter, Sarah Wadley could have still effectively communicated the amount of bloodshed at the Battle of Bull Run, but the passage would not have been nearly as effective at recording her emotional reaction to the reports from the battlefield. Instead, she used nature imagery to compose a gripping contrast between life and death. Wadley paints a calm pastoral scene in which "birds sing and green leaves wave as if to praise their creator" under a "beautiful blue sky"; this description resonates sharply against the violent images of "men mingling in mortal combat" and "the roar of artillery." Her journal entry is a powerful reminder of the slaughter that occurred on that historic spring day and the scores of women who waited desperately for news of their loved ones. It is also an indication of Wadley's awareness of the subtle strength of imagery as a way to enhance a simple episodic narrative.

The Wadley diary documents the devastating effects of the Civil War on a young girl just entering into the fragile beginnings of adulthood. In 1863 Sarah wrote that the war years had for her been "the most impressible period of life" (3:33). Indeed, within its pages are the eloquent words of joy and sorrow the describe one of the most significant eras in American history.

Sarah Wadley began her diary at the age of fourteen, on the eve of an extended trip North with her uncle. The trip North was a significant event–not many young ladies her age were offered the opportunity to travel so extensively. Sarah's age when she began writing is also a significant aspect of her narrative. At fourteen, Sarah Wadley was caught in those precarious years when one is too old to be a child yet too young to be an adult she was at an age when most Southern young women would begin to consdier marriage, and the upheaval caused by this experience intensified her confusion and distress over the war. Thus, it would appear that the initial "disequilibrium" noted by Kagel would in Wadley's case be her journey North. Away from home for the first time without parental supervision, Sarah chose to begin keeping a record of her experiences because this trip represented her first foray into the "adult" world.

A short summary of Wadley's narrative is easily divided into the five volumes of the typed manuscript. The first of the five volumes in the Wadley diary focuses mainly on the aforementioned journey North and the growing unrest in the South; then, with secession and the outbreak of war the diary changes on several levels. Reports from the battlefront and fervent declarations of Southern nationalism became frequent journal topics.

The next three volumes of the journal comprise the bulk of the "action" in the story and display a marked development of Sarah's narrative voice and style. Sarah and her family were forced to undergo many changes as a result of the war. The household relocated several times, lost contact with friends and relatives, and faced economic and emotional hardship. Sarah wrote about it all in the pages of her journal, and the haunting specter of the Civil War overshadowed every aspect of her life. To Sarah Wadley, the diary was a significant source of comfort. Indeed, as the Union army marched ever closer to her home, the length of her entries not only increased, but the frequency at which she

recorded them doubled. In the year 1863, at the height of the conflict, Sarah wrote one hundred thirty two entries. This figure is twice the number of the previous two years.

The conclusion of the "action" of the Wadley diary is the last entry of volume four, dated May 1865. The Confederates had surrendered, and by summing up the contents of her journal as "the record of our triumphs, of my hopes, my faith, my love for my country," Sarah Wadley acknowledged the end of a significant period in her life. She referred to the journal as a complete record of the physical and emotional tolls brought on her by the Civil War. This acknowledgement not only lends a sense of finality and closure to the work, but also reaffirms the theories of critics such as Steven Kagel, who argue that journals are born out of a specific source of tension in the author's life–in Wadley's case this tension would be the moral conflicts she was forced to confront as a result of the Civil War. Confederate surrender inevitably meant that the conflicts that inspired the journal, too, would come to a close.

As a whole, volume five can be considered an epilogue. It is composed of scattered, intermittent glimpses of life in Dixie after the Union victory. In the first section of this volume the entries are lengthy, albeit separated by periods that span several months at a time. Eventually, the entries begin to trail off significantly. Sarah marked down only one or two dates per year. These entries were often single sentences devoid of personality or details of any kind. From a later, unspecified point in time, she notes births, marriages, deaths, etc. Even the death of her beloved father in 1882 merited only this short entry: "Our Father died suddenly at Saratoga, New York, at six o'clock in the evening" (Wadley 5:395). Entries such as these seem to be only afterthoughts and hurried notes to explain what happened to the family, and the country, after the war. The Wadley family survived intact and eventually began to prosper once more. These last entries tie up loose ends in the story and ultimately reaffirm that life goes on.

For over fifty years Sarah Wadley's manuscript has lain virtually untouched in a university archive–lost, like the stories of so many southern women. Southern women's diaries represent to modern scholarship a new frontier. The academic community must reexamine the diary as a unique literary genre for it offers new and exciting avenues of critical study. Close textual analysis of diaries such as Wadley's can reveal intricate layers of narrative that transcend simple day-by-day accounts of nineteenth-century life. Walt Whitman once commented that "the real war will never get in the books," but perhaps Confederate women's diaries can bring the modern world one step closer to understanding its impact on both history and literature.

Chapter Two:
'In the merciful heart of a woman' –
The creation of
Confederate diary literature

Literary critic Steven Kagel has stated unequivocally that "most of the best civilian diaries of the Civil War were written by Southern women" (32). Undoubtedly, Confederate women were far more prolific on this front than their Northern counterparts, and the body of literature that they produced represents a unique sub-genre of diary literature. The Civil War era South created a social and political environment that fostered the growth of wartime autobiographies written by women–a special set of circumstances that enabled, even necessitated, that Southern women commit their experiences to paper. The results, Confederate women's diaries, reveal commonalities such as criticism of the Confederate leadership, resentment of gender constraints, and ambivalence toward the role of author.

The antebellum South created a population of women who may have been worshipped, protected and pampered, but simultaneously denied any public or political identity. Women's place in Southern society before the war demonstrated, in essence, a paradox between the act of being revered by men and their own submissiveness to the same men. Newspapers and politicians used flattery to reinforce to women that it was their obligation to confine their interests solely to domestic concerns and shy away from politics and academics. The message sent to women of the time was that the roles of wife and mother were honorable and they should feel relieved they were not burdened with thoughts of public life. When the war began in earnest, the South was flooded with nationalist propaganda, much of it geared toward women to elicit strong moral support from the homefront for the Confederate cause.

In her 1992 study entitled Southern Stories: Slaveholders in Peace and War, Drew Gilpin-Faust researched extensively the nature of Southern nationalist propaganda and its focus on Southern women. She cites several examples to support her theory that the major goal of this type of media was to draw the female population into the Confederate frame of mind by emphasizing the importance of their emotional and spiritual support. The ideology of Confederate society forbade women from participating directly in the war effort–a role in politics or military life was not an option–so it sought to appease them by placing emphasis on moral support. According to Faust, the employment of flattery and the attempt to create a somewhat false sense of importance in women were central to the success of Civil War-era propaganda (116).

Initially, at least, the onslaught of propaganda proved successful. The Confederate war effort received an inordinate amount of domestic encouragement. Sarah Wadley proclaimed her anger at what she perceived to be Northern aggression against the South in 1861:

> What benefits have they in view that they will introduce all the horrors of civil war into our country? …rather will every man, woman and child perish upon the soil that gave them birth… rather than call down the curses of our free Forefathers upon the degenerate race who could stoop to ask admittance again into a union of name when there is hatred and treachery in the hearts of those with whom we have been united. (1:127)

Southern women blamed the North for the war, and, as Wadley's quotation illustrates, their response to this interference was indignation and a resolve to fight against it. Confederate diaries are filled with nationalist rhetoric such as this, and as George Rable points out, women "mouthed familiar words: *liberty, honor, Southern rights*, they excoriated the enemies of the white South… they even implicitly defended and tacitly supported a social system that exalted female subordination" (49).

Soon, women throughout the South began to devise ways to offer their own contributions to the war effort and alleviate their sense of helplessness. Their contributions to the war effort came in the form of countless sewing societies and various other charitable organizations that provided clothing and other necessities for Confederate soldiers (Firor-Scott 81). Drew Gilpin-Faust quotes one Alabama woman who explained her work for the Confederate cause this way: "Our needles are now our weapons, and we women have a part to perform as well as the rest" (Mothers of Invention 24). Confederate sewing societies gave women a part to play, and rather than arming themselves with more traditional weapons, they wielded their needles as a way to participate in the war effort. Sarah Wadley also participated in a sewing society formed by her mother, sister and other local women.

But despite this outpouring of encouragement as the war began, female sentiments would begin to change. Indeed, with the outbreak of the Civil War, Southern women found themselves taking on new roles. Fathers, brothers, and husbands departed for the battlefront, leaving the women at home to manage the households. Mothers, sisters and daughters who had little knowledge of running a plantation or managing household finances suddenly found themselves with the responsibilities of managing not only the family's financial transactions, but also the slaves, crops and livestock. These new duties, coupled with the absence of any protective male influence, eventually fostered new attitudes of individualism and independence among Southern women.

By studying diaries from this region and time period, critics have discovered evidence that points to both the paradox inherent in the social status of Southern women and the surprising sense of strength and autonomy they gained from the hardships of war. Elizabeth Sue Nulton points out that "Southern myth said that women were weak, docile, maternal, protected and unpoliticized, the war's reality produced women who were strong, independent, self-sufficient and behind the scenes political forces" (45). Drew Gilpin-Faust also examined the connection between the Civil War experience and the change it produced for women. She concludes that war "brought forth a new conception of themselves as individuals with needs, interests or even rights, not just duties and obligations" (235). The escalation of the war shifted women's focus inward, toward their own needs, rather than a complete devotion to families and other traditional obligations. And with the majority of Southern men devoted physically and mentally to the war effort, women were forced to fend for themselves, to develop methods to cope with their situation in the absence of men.

Along with this discovery of independence and strength came the realization that even if the Confederacy were to prevail in the conflict with the North, the cost in terms of bloodshed and lives lost would be tremendous. As the war dragged on and more reports came in from the battlefield, Southern women began to comprehend that their current situation was far more than a temporary inconvenience–the war could potentially continue for months, even years.

Regardless of their particular views on state's rights or slavery, Southern women had strong feelings toward the moral implications of the war. They began to resent the conflict that had torn apart their families, drove many of them into poverty and left many more widows. Letters from home became filled with pleas for male loved ones to abandon the battlefield and return home, and women began to question their allegiance to a cause that had begun to cost them dearly. Drew Gilpin-Faust agrees, stating that an awareness of the inhumanity of war coupled with Southern society's indifference to the position of women generated the lack of morale that eventually tore the Confederacy apart from the inside out. In Mothers of Invention she explains:

> [R]etreat from the public realm was fueled in part by their recognition that in the Confederacy the public interest did not encompass their own, for it threatened to kill their loved ones, [and] deprive them of life's basic necessities[.] A nation that had acknowledged no legitimate female political voice had in crisis failed to consider women's needs. (242)

Clearly Faust feels that the political and social environment of the Confederacy largely ignored the concerns of women; thus it could not guarantee their support. According to Faust, the decline of morale from the homefront was inevitable.

Like the diaries of so many of her Confederate sisters, Sarah Wadley's journal shows an accelerating sense of horror and dread at the bloody reports coming in from the war front as early as late 1861. Despite various reports of Confederate victories, haunting images of the battlefield would find a place in Sarah's thoughts with increasing frequency. Although Sarah remained confident in her beloved Dixie and certain of Confederate success, her concept of the struggle for Southern independence was becoming greatly altered. Increasing familiarity with the atrocities of war prompted Sarah to make these remarks in late 1862: "[W]e hear that Yankees are dying by hundreds in New Orleans, this last is an awful thing to rejoice over, and yet such the fate of a bloody war and such are the feelings which it engenders, even in the merciful heart of a woman" (2:86). In June of 1863 she wrote again of her horrified reaction to reports of the rising death toll:

> [T]he Yankee dead lie in heaps about our entrenchments; it is horrible to relate, sickening to think, but so curious a fact that I must note it down, all the vultures have left this country, a carcass may lie for days untouched, these creatures have gone eastward in search of nobler game. How terrible is war! (3:8)

It had begun to dawn on Sarah Wadley, and many other women also, that victory could only mean death, and as much as Southerners might despise the term "Yankee," most women could not accept the thought of so much senseless bloodshed.

After the first rush of patriotic sentiment had dissipated, the Civil War became an increasing source of emotional distress. Women were continuously either mourning loved ones who had been killed or worrying over those who were absent. Many times Sarah and the rest of her family went months at a time with no word at all from her father, Colonel Wadley, whose position in Jefferson Davis's administration required him to spend a great deal of time in Richmond, Atlanta, New Orleans and other Confederate capitals.

Sarah experienced constant anguish and anxiety over the absences of her father and brother Willie, who had been conscripted as a quartermaster for the Confederate army. Willie's unavoidable conscription had been a devastating blow for Sarah, and although

she wished for him to be brave and fight for his country, her concern for his safety outweighed her patriotism. She wrote in her diary of her desperate hope that he would be spared from serving directly on the battlefront. Sarah not only reflected on the absences of her father and eldest brother, but she also thought about the cost of the war in terms of friends and family, and relationships that were lost or irreparably damaged as a result of the long, bitter years of war. She was constantly reminded of her losses and wrote sadly in her journal "my heart is like a deserted house in which the ghosts of the departed are walking always to and fro" (4:266).

The Wadley family did, however, manage to remain intact, but the continuous upheaval and despair eventually took its toll. By late 1863 Sarah Wadley, like countless other Confederate women, had decided that independence was not worth the price of further conflict. In September she sadly commented that "public and private grief both press upon us now; we must take up our cross, we must learn resignation" (3:59). Sarah's use of this inherently Christian metaphor echoes the religious tone of many of her entries. If Confederate women used their religion to give them confidence in the South's cause, logically it also provided them with a framework for dealing with the ensuing losses. Drew Gilpin-Faust emphasizes the numbing effect of bereavement and disappointment, explaining that "Christian doctrines of resignation seemed to support this process of numbing and denial… Women invoked religious doctrines and texts almost as incantations in their effort to transcend suffering and grief" (191).

Sarah Wadley was not alone in the way she related the wide range of emotion she experienced during the war. The patriarchal nature of Southern society prohibited women from voicing their opinions of the war in a public forum–they were not given the opportunity to write editorials or speak to lawmakers; thus, their diaries became the repositories of emotions that ranged from anger, fear and anxiety to outright opposition to the war. Excluded from public matters by their society at large, Confederate women began to express themselves in the only way they could–in the pages of a "private" journal.

In her essay entitled "Ambivalence, Anger and Silence: The Civil War Diary of Lucy Buck" Elizabeth Baer agrees. She implies that the Civil War so completely upset women's concept of patriarchal protection and God's benevolence they began to question the very fabric of a Confederate society built upon these concepts. She refers to the war as a "radical disjuncture" and comes to the conclusion that because "society did not brook such questions [about society] in public context, Southern women often turned to their private journals to express their ambivalence and anger, both overtly and by virtue of silence" (218).

Modern historians have documented how the Confederacy's loss to the North in the Civil War was cased by internal strife and the withdrawal of the public's support. Certainly, Sarah Wadley's diary demonstrates the "how" and "why" of that conclusion. Early sentiments of Southern patriotism were based on false notions of divine rights and loyalty to an outmoded way of life. The patriarchal antebellum South could not hold up under the pressures of war.

If the atmosphere of the antebellum and Civil War South created a bond between women who unleashed a storm of emotion in their diaries, it also produced in those diaries a body of literature united by several common themes. Sharp criticism of the lack of organization and leadership in the Confederate government, resentment of the

marginal status granted women, and ambivalence toward the act of revealing themselves through writing identify the diaries of Southern women as distinctly different from those of their Northern counterparts.

Because many Southern women viewed their private journals as the only outlet for their opinions on the war it is only logical that the most frequent and obvious opinion expressed in these journals is a distinct criticism of the lack of leadership within the Confederacy and the war in general. Often women would overhear their husbands or fathers discussing the shortcomings of various Confederate officers and government officials and criticizing the often chaotic and uncivilized atmosphere the war brought to areas across the South. Publicly the women might remain silent, and reserve their criticism for the pages of their journals.

Because of her father's high-ranking position within the government-controlled railroad, Sarah Wadley was most likely privy to many discussions concerning the state of the Confederacy. In addition, many officers visited the Wadley home, bringing news from the battlefront and the Confederate capitol in Richmond. Whether or not Sarah actively participated in these discussions by voicing her personal views cannot be known; however, it is most unlikely that the viewpoint of a young woman would have been solicited. But in the pages of her journal Sarah was forthcoming with her views.

She reserved her most scathing criticism for military personnel and their lack of leadership skills. In June 1862 she mentions the plentiful rumors of weakness within the ranks of the Confederacy: "We hear constantly of some weak rash act, of some cowardice, some treason in our Confederacy." In an entry a little over a month later she expresses doubt yet again: "It is not only the present it is the future I think of, I am seldom aught but hopeful and trustful but yet I often feel an anxious dread for my country. I fear evil to her, not from foreign enemies but internal faults" (2:79).

By December of 1863 Sarah Wadley was even more fearful that the Confederacy was beginning to weaken. She wrote:

> [O]ur foes within, our inefficient and false officers, and the lukewarmness of the people are what we have to contend with, these are foes far more powerful than the Yankees, and when I think of the corruption in our midst and see no genius powerful enough to crush it, I fear that we shall gain our liberty only after years of war and perhaps anarchy. (3:135)

She eventually realized that the disunity within the Confederate bureaucracy was a serious threat to the Southern cause. The "lukewarmness" of the Southern people was a crippling handicap for the South from the start, and as these quotes illustrate, Wadley's uncertainty only increased with the growing realization that in the end it would not be the North that defeated the South, but the Southerners themselves. She had begun to think of weak links within the Confederacy as a greater threat–"foes far more powerful than the Yankees." She also acknowledged that the leadership was partly to blame, saying that there was "no genius powerful enough" to quell the unrest within the Confederacy.

Other, more widely known diaries exhibit this same type of criticism. One example in particular is the most recent edition of the diary of Mary Boykin Chesnut. Edited by C. Vann Woodward and Elisabeth Muhlenfeld, this edition provides the most comprehensive text to date and includes Chesnut's sharp and often scandalous criticisms of the major players in the war. Chesnut's position as the wife of a prominent South Carolina senator allowed her to socialize with politicians and military personnel,

including President Jefferson Davis. Her diary entries are choppy confidences laden with gossip but no less potent in their criticism of the Confederate state of mind. In the opening pages of her diary she confided that "[o]ne of the first things which depressed me was the kind of men put in office at this crisis" (6). Thereafter, her jabs at Confederate officials became increasingly specific and personal. Perhaps because of her prominent social position in the capitol of Richmond, the journal of Mary Chesnut displays a more severe brand of criticism than Sarah Wadley, who was removed from the action in rural Louisiana. Nevertheless, the excerpts from both texts are representative of the common sentiments expressed in many Confederate women's diaries.

The second most common thread in the war diaries of Southern women was an expressed desire to break free of the restraints imposed on them by their gender. The circumstances of the war made it impossible for women in the South to ignore the fact that they had no political identity, and thus no role in the conflict. Drew Gilpin-Faust comes to a similar conclusion; after surveying many examples of Confederate women's diaries–including the Wadley manuscript–she states that these women directly blamed their gender for their feelings of diminished usefulness during the war. In Southern Stories she writes that "without directly challenging women's prescribed roles, [Southern women] nevertheless longed for a magical personal deliverance from gender constraints by imagining themselves men" (119).

Escape from the constraints of gender was a common sentiment in the pages of women's diaries, a notion too shocking to mention except in the strict confidence of a "private" journal. Early in the war Sarah Wadley enumerates the wartime duties of Southern women and allows herself a glimpse of something different:

> [W]hatever comes it is women's lot to wait and pray; if I were a man – but I am not; my spirit of ten makes me chafe at the regulations which it is right a woman should submit to, and I will not encourage it by giving way to vain wishes and vauntings "if I were a man." (1:130)

While it is clear that Sarah regrets her lack of opportunity as a woman, it is also clear that any attempt to challenge the restraints of her society would most likely prove unsuccessful. In fact, it appears that Sarah felt this notion was so farfetched she would not even allow herself to discuss it in the pages of her journal.

Mary Boykin Chesnut expressed notions similar to those of Sarah Wadley. On several occasions Chesnut expressed the opinion that had she been a man her wartime experiences would have been vastly different from the endless parade of Richmond social functions and lonely stretches at the plantation to which she was accustomed. In May 1861 she announced that "a fight imminent at Harper's Ferry and at Norfolk. Beauregard is at Norfolk and if I was a man I should be there too!" (73). Days later she writes, "if I was a man I would not doze and drink and drivel here until the fight is over in Virginia" (74). Months later, in October 1861, she was even more anxious to shed her passive role: "If I had been a man in this great revolution–I should have been either been killed at once or made a name and done some good for my country" (180). In her own way Mary Chesnut, like Sarah Wadley, realized the unacceptable and futile nature of wishing to be a man; however, instead of forbidding herself to continue down this path she severely edited her manuscript in later years, choosing to either eliminate the more socially unacceptable passages or attribute them to a character she called "Isabella."

The final, and perhaps most significant, similarity evident among Confederate women's diary literature in the diarists' attitude toward authorship. What emerges from many of these narratives–and that of Sarah Wadley in particular–is a reluctance to engage in the intimate revelations inherent in diary writing and at the same time a realization that this act provided emotional release. In the opening volume of her diary Sarah resolved only to record "important matters such as departures and arrivals" and she clearly was subscribing to the notion that a diary was only useful as a means of keeping family records for posterity (1:35). As a woman, keeping family records was part of her duty.

But the Civil War altered this expectation. The boundaries that dictated what was proper for women to discuss began to expand, and as the war progressed the curtain lifted on women's inner lives. Unaccustomed to the freedom of the pen, Sarah and her Confederate sisters often chided themselves for being so revealing and yet they could not stop.

Until April 1861, the entries in Sarah Wadley's journal consisted mainly of glimpses of her daily life and surroundings and reports of the war. She does not confide any "private" thoughts to its pages, she does not discuss her views or opinions–the tone of the diary is somewhat restrained and polite. But on April 26, 1861 the tone of the diary changes:

> This is one of my dark days, one in which I feel the burden of humanity pressing too heavily to be borne; the future looks threatening, the present is clouded with doubt, and uncertainty; our country is in turmoil and danger, and our family seems like a ship floating upon a troubled sea, with no particular destination, no particular interest in any thing, only to keep afloat. (Wadley 1:130)

This is an entry filled with hopelessness and despair; clearly the tone and purpose of the diary has changed. Wadley is consumed with worry about her loved ones, saying "our family seems like a ship floating upon a troubled sea," and she seems to be acknowledging for the first time a lapse in her confidence that everything would turn out alright, frankly admitting "This is one of my dark days." The narrative voice in this entry is vastly different from that of previous entries which described such things as snowy mornings and the minute details of her bedroom décor.

Interestingly enough, in her next entry almost two weeks later she chides herself for the previous show of emotions:

> It is quite a long time since I have written here, not because I have been very busy, not because I have been sick as my last entry makes it appear probable, only I have not felt like it, and I might as well not write anything as such entries as my last few, thoughts and reflections indeed, they seem very sensible when I am writing them, but when I look over them afterwards I do not know whether to laugh or blush, but I must be careful not to go on with a page full of them now. (1:130)

In this latest entry Sarah Wadley appears to be almost embarrassed at her forthrightness two weeks before. The phrase, "I do not know whether to laugh or blush," implies that she felt she should either dismiss her feeling as frivolous or be ashamed of her openness. Conditioned by society to believe it improper for a woman to speak of such hopelessness and despair, Sarah was clearly uneasy about revealing so much about herself even in the

pages of her private journal. In addition, the frank discussion of her state of mind violates her earlier vow to record only the facts–arrivals, departures and war news.

The conclusion to be drawn here is that any discussion in her diary that concerned her emotional turmoil was problematic for Sarah on two levels: first, writing of her emotions so openly conflicted with what she believed to be proper material for her journal; and second, she was perhaps quite taken aback at herself and the intensity of her (now revealed) emotions. As an author she was very ambivalent about the act of writing, of putting the focus on herself. Later however, she confesses that despite her reluctance to place herself in the spotlight, the act of writing in her journal was a source of emotional comfort, a salve for the hardships of war. In the last page of this volume she concludes, "dear journal, this is my last entry in this book and for the first time I feel how dear it has become to me" (1:141). Looking over what she had written, perhaps Sarah realized how the function of her diary had changed; perhaps in reading over her words, she became aware for the first time of the comfort she had gained from writing them and this spurred her to continue.

Confederate women's Civil War diaries represent the influence of antebellum Southern society and how that social structure changed during the war. Women wrote about life on the plantation in the absence of men, Yankee occupation, and their often desperate financial circumstances. But ultimately the war accounts were only the beginning–they opened the door for narratives that encompassed far more than historical record. Faust has referred to the war as an "enabler," for it provided Southern women with a socially acceptable way of telling their stories. Catherine Clinton agrees, stating that "women kept journals as a means of coming to terms with their female identities within a particular society. The journals testify to the variety of personalities but invariably betray a sense of self as the product of specific personal and social relations" (252). Indeed, by giving their war accounts, women were forced to confront the fact that they had no public voice and their narratives consistently display their struggle to resolve and overcome that issue.

Chapter Three:
Ambivalence and truth

An examination of the factors that contributed to the creation of Confederate women's literature reveals that women were not always content with their status or the war effort. Chapter Two outlined the circumstances that necessitated and drove women to record their thoughts within the pages of their "private" journals and reveal the commonalities in the results. But this was only an introduction to the complexities of Sarah Wadley's journal; a close analysis exposes many gaps and interruptions in her text. Once again, often what Wadley *does not* say indicates that her ambivalence and her silences are often closer to the truth of her experience. This type of "reading between the lines" is more explicitly defined by Leigh Gilmore in her study Autobiographics. "Autobiographics," she explains, "as a description of self-representation and as a reading practice, is concerned with interruptions and eruptions, with resistance and contradiction as strategies of self-representation" (42).

This critical philosophy is a useful approach to Wadley's diary. One of the most striking and perplexing features of her manuscript is the many contradictions and the reader's sense that much of she writes has been carefully constructed–often her narrative takes on a fictional cast. Gilmore contends that identifying autobiography with fiction is not a negative characterization because factual "truth" is a premise that does not necessarily apply to the "authentic" experience of personal narratives (25). Through the lens of deconstruction, Wadley's ambivalence with regard to matrimony, maternity and slavery is revealed through the inconsistencies and gaps in her text.

Unable to mold herself into what was the prevailing notion of the ideal woman–the stereotypical Southern belle–Sarah Wadley resolved to reject the common goal of motherhood and children. In October of 1860 she noted in her diary a discussion she had with her parents where her father outlined his definition of a good marital match for Sarah. She vows spinsterhood in response, citing among her reasons her feeble health. She writes:

> Neither my father nor mother have a cause to fear lest I should make an unwise choice, for I intend to pass a single life… this is not a romantic maiden's vow, but it tis [sic] a conclusion to which I have come after sober thought. I think it would be wrong for me to marry, my health, or more properly my constitution is too feeble to sustain the burden which a wife and mother must bear. (1:71)

It is significant here that Wadley describes marriage and motherhood as a "burden." At this stage in the narrative she displays a negative attitude toward marriage, and rejects any characterization of her as a "romantic maiden." As a way to escape expectations she could not meet, Wadley says "my constitution is too feeble," buying into a lesser role commonly placed on Southern women as a way to keep them out of public life.

Thus, unable to reconcile her own needs with the expectations of her family and her society, Wadley decided to reject both, although she admits that "to Father's opinion I almost always lean" (1:71). Her reference to motherhood as a "burden" is indicative of the fact that she held no romantic illusions about what marriage would mean to her. It is also indicative of the lessons she had learned from Southern antebellum society, which Drew Gilpin-Faust explains as the fact that women "defined themselves in relationship to

men–first as daughters and sisters, then as wives and mothers" (Mothers of Invention 139).

Having been denied entry into the marriage "market" and unable to compromise her own expectation toward marriage, Wadley discovered another method of fulfilling her desire for maternity and companionship: she devoted herself to her father and the education and upbringing of her younger siblings. She remarks in her diary on several occasions how important it was to her that her family remained safe and united during the turbulence and unrest of the war. In March of 1863 she concludes an entry by declaring "I ask no other happiness that such a home as this, surrounded by my loved ones, and feeling the pure joy of a heart and conscience at peace with God and the world" (3:118).

An examination of the significance of Sarah Wadley's devotion to her father and siblings begins with an analysis of her relationship with her father, Colonel William Wadley. As an assistant adjutant general in Jefferson Davis's administration, Colonel Wadley was very close to the inner workings of the Confederacy and also to the corruption that eventually led to its defeat. Sarah clearly idolized her father and felt an intense affection for him. He is arguably one of the more complex characters of her "drama," for he is both a symbol of the crumbling antebellum South and to some extent the enabler which inspired his daughter's quest for self-knowledge and independence. Curiously, he was the person who prompted her to write by giving her his unused account books to use as journals. He further fostered her independent spirit by giving her access to travel and education. He also spoke openly of his concerns and criticisms of the Confederate government in her presence, which helped her form her own opinions of the war.

Originally from New Hampshire, William Morril Wadley moved south as a young man and began to make his fortune first as a blacksmith and later in the railroad industry. A self-made man, he was enormously successful in this area of business, acting as president of various railroad companies both before and after the war. Thus, although Colonel Wadley was not the conventional landed Southern aristocrat, he owned many slaves and clearly participated in the effort to defend the Southern way of life. His daughter Sarah viewed him as the classic and stereotypical southern gentleman and subsequently compared him to virtually every man she met. Referring to a family friend, she wrote:

> I think that it must be because Father is so tall and large that I dislike little men, in my opinion it is a real misfortune for a man to be so little, and yet, much as I dislike his stature I can but dislike Mr. Green… (Wadley 3:107)

Later she refers to another acquaintance in much the same manner:

> I do not like Dr. Cummings much, nor do I think him handsome, perhaps I expect too much from him, but there is an expression of effeminacy and indolence about his mouth that I cannot like. (Wadley 3:114)

Her dislike for the "feminine" qualities of Dr. Cummings is a glaring contrast to the strong, patriotic portrait she paints of her father in the following quotation:

> No man is willing to do more for his country, to sacrifice more for it than my father, but no man is more firm in resisting tyranny or maintaining these rights which make our country dear. (3:20)

She also claims that her father has an "iron constitution" and is dismayed by what she sees as the physical toll taken on him by the hardships of war and the pressures of his

government position. In 1863 she wrote of her dismay and longed for her father to be again the vibrant man he was before. She writes:

> My dear Father, his cares wear upon him, his expression is changed to one of constant care and anxiety and his voice has taken a tone of sadness that makes the tears start to my eyes when I heat it, his talents are the same, he still accomplishes very much, but how it would gladden me to see again the clear, bright glance of his eye, I have never seen a man's eye with such beautiful expression when he is well and happy, it is so clear that one feels that no falsity, not the shadow of it is there, and it is strong and boyish and in perfect innocence and its kind of gaiety and yet one feels that they can perfectly trust their life even, to him. (Wadley 3:118)

This quote not only serves to reinforce to the reader the intense feelings Wadley had for her father; it also outlines the qualities she found attractive in men–honesty, integrity and "boyish innocence." She also effusively praises her father's physical attributes, saying "I have never seen a man's eye with such beautiful expression." Clearly Colonel Wadley represented for Sarah the ideal mate. And despite the fact that she claimed to have no interests or aspirations to marriage and motherhood Sarah Wadley consistently depicted scenes in her journal that not only portrayed her father as the ideal husband, but an ideal family unit that included Sarah, her father and younger siblings. Curiously, her mother does not appear in any of these scenes. Consider the following from 1861:

> Yesterday Father took us all down to the mill on the carriage, one of the springs of which was broken, and which Father spent hours in mending… I spent the day in watching Father, looking after the children and sitting in the mill observing their actions. (Wadley 1:133)

On the surface this would appear to be a quiet domestic scene penned by a young girl who clearly adores her father. But the traditional roles seem oddly skewed, with Sarah "looking after the children" while her father performs a common household task. Sarah's mother is conspicuously absent. In fact, her mother figures very little into Sarah's narrative. The reader gets absolutely no sense of her as a character at all–there are no descriptions of her looks, her personality or her relationship with her daughter.

So in the absence of a mother figure in her text, Sarah Wadley inserted herself into this role, describing often and in detail the parent relationship with her younger siblings. In 1863 she described the joy she gleaned from instructing her younger brother George:

> George too is advancing, he knows all his letters and a few little words. I do not let him study in those dull a-b, abs, and b-a, bas, but have put him to read in a little book of monosyllables; my darling never refuses to come say his lesson and although sometimes a little playful and unwilling to confine his attention to the book, he is never in a passion with me and a few words of commendation or reproof will quiet him immediately… (3:7)

In addition to providing her with purpose and happiness, Wadley's voluntary duties as teacher also caused her a significant amount of distress. In 1864 she penned a lengthy entry in which she describes the children's collective refusal to learn. Her sister Eva "flew into a violent passion and used very abusive language to [her]" and George was "violent and disobedient." This behavior caused Sarah to flee the schoolroom in tears. Her pain was increased when "Father said [she] had better stop teaching the children, this

hurt [her] worse than ever, it seemed a confirmation that [she] was doing them no good" (Wadley 4:288).

Colonel Wadley's reaction to the events in the schoolroom is especially significant because she viewed his decision as a devastating type of rejection, denying her the surrogate mother role she had attempted to claim for herself. Through her text, Sarah Wadley had carefully constructed her own ideal of marriage and maternity that included her father and younger siblings. In the diary they became symbolic of the conventional family that she has rejected as a "burden." The diary entries represent an attempt to step away from the traditional role of wife and mother, thereby avoiding the connotations and constraints that accompanied it, and yet still have the power to acknowledge the maternal instinct and the need for companionship.

Wadley's attitudes toward her family's slaves and the "peculiar institution" in general also reveal a considerable amount of disparity. Her writing reveals a determined effort o voice her support for slavery, but subtle clues in the text are evidence that her feelings toward this Southern convention, like her attitudes toward marriage and motherhood, are ambivalent. As the animosity grew between the North and the South, it is no surprise that the slavery issue would appear with increasing frequency in the pages of Wadley's diary. She reveals her ambivalence toward this controversy in three ways: She frames her justification for slavery in the words of others, she quotes the slaves directly as a way of promoting the commonly held notion that slaves accepted their situation with an almost childlike acquiescence, and she relates violent episodes that seem to reinforce the opposing stereotype that slaves were uncivilized brutes and a danger to whites. Her treatment of the slavery issue is yet another construct in the text, a method of relating events while distancing herself from any sentiments that would not fit in with her readers' expectations.

In December 1860 her father showed the family a newspaper containing the text of a sermon given in New Orleans the month before. Sarah related the pastor's views on slavery, saying "he deems it the duty of everyone who can influence the public mind to speak boldly for the right; he then goes on to show by incontrovertible arguments that slavery is providential and right." She goes on to say that this man felt slaves were incapable of taking care of themselves and it was the duty of the master to provide protection. She is careful to point out that "Father… is convinced that we must secede, it is impossible for the North and the South to coalesce." She also notes that these are the pastor's views, not her own: "his forcible and eloquent words are these" and "these are only Dr. Palmer's views that I have quoted" (Wadley 1:84-5). Wadley uses several sentences to list the minister's qualifications and detail his opinions, but she is markedly silent on the subject of her own.

This is a perfect example of the "gaps" mentioned in Gilmore's Autobiographics. In her text, Wadley creates a gap by distancing herself from the opinions of her father and the minister. Her silence becomes a sort of criticism in itself. She never indicates her own feelings, in her own words, thus the reader can only assume her own opinions did not mesh with the more socially acceptable views of the men in her life. By constructing her text to allow the words of others to speak for her, Wadley is able to avoid any confrontation of an issue she is conflicted about.

Days later, she writes of another sermon preached by a local minister, and while the words meant to support the South's cause appeal to the Christian in her she does not

comment on her own feelings toward secession and slavery. These glaring silences leave the reader to draw the conclusion that Wadley's own opinions on the slavery issue were either incomplete or incompatible with those her family–her permissive, yet opinionated father in particular–or her social peers found acceptable. Although she later openly criticizes the ineptitude of the government, she does not comment directly on the moral implications of slavery. Drew Gilpin-Faust has posed an explanation for this lack of spoken opinion. In Mothers of Invention she states that "Confederate women could afford little contemplation of slavery's merits 'in the abstract'… Slavery's meaning did not rest in the detached and intellectual realms of politics or moral philosophy" (73). Gilpin-Faust's statement is an accurate one; southern women tended not to participate in either politics or academics and had only their own experiences within the patriarchal society as the basis for forming their opinions. As a woman, Sarah Wadley felt she could not criticize or disagree with a tradition that was an integral part of Southern culture. Her silence is both an indictment of a society that would not have listened and the rejection of a notion toward which she felt conflicted.

As the war raged closer to her Louisiana home and Yankee soldiers traveled the countryside, pillaging plantations and freeing slaves, Sarah Wadley's text reveals an increasing desire to justify her family's slave ownership. With reports of runaway and freed slaves circulating frequently, Wadley appears to have used her diary to reassure herself that their slaves did not want to leave and in fact actively sought shelter within the Wadley household. George Rable comments that like Sarah, many Southern women "found comfort in the convenient fiction that their people were perfectly contented and would never consider rising in revolt, such assertions showed more hopefulness than confidence" (37).

Sarah Wadley used many narrative devices–such as quoted dialogue, for example–to emphasize this "confidence" in her text. She noted in 1863 that her father offered all of their slaves the choice of freedom with the Union or to remain with the Wadleys. Virtually all chose to stay. She writes that she overheard a slave promising allegiance to her father and quotes him directly: "No Mars William," Abe says, "I come from Georgia and you did too and I calculate to die by you" (3:49). A year later she makes a similar observation, noting the way a family slave had refused an offer of amnesty with the Union troop: "Sandy told him no, that he had had no hand in bringing on the war, and was not going to have anything to do with it!" (Wadley 3:81). The emphasis here is Wadley's, and it underscores not only her desire to reassure herself that the slaves were content with the status quo but also that the cause of the war was not the South's "peculiar institution," but the North's attempts to infringe on states' rights.

Another significant aspect of these quotes is that they actually are quotes–words directly from the slaves' mouths. Once again, Wadley takes herself out of the text. She uses the words of others–in this case the slaves themselves–to fulfill the reader's expectations, which is that as a Southern woman she support the institution of slavery. In this manner, she avoids outlining her own views. Her silence speaks volumes, and theoretically she has employed this device and others to answer Gilmore's questions regarding autobiographical production: "What are the culture's views of truth…of appropriate autobiographical representation? How can [the writer] position herself within these discourses in order to be read as she wishes?" (46). The answer, at least in this case, is through the words of others–first the preacher, and then the slaves. By inserting these

outside views Wadley satisfies the expectation that she voice her support for slavery, but at the same time does not put herself in a position that would have been at odds with her peers.

Direct quotes from the slaves also attempt to negate the abolitionist idea that slaves were unhappy and longed for freedom. They perpetuate the stereotype that portrayed blacks as simple and childlike. George Rable terms this sort of characterization as "unthinking racism" (37). This is exactly the way Wadley described a slave named Mack in the following passage: "He is a good simple fellow, comes from the Georgia low country and talks that strange dialect, he is just like a child, actually plays with dolls, always has a grin on his face when we look or smile at him" (3:76). Her characterization of another slave sounds similar: "He is tall and stoop shouldered, and one of his legs crooks outward at the knee, which gives him a loose shuffling gait, and which has gained him the name of 'Crooked Steve,' he always has a good natured grin on his wide mouth" (3:105). Certainly these portraits fit well with the traditional stereotypes found in Southern propaganda: smiling blacks in the field picking cotton, a cherubic mammy with the "masr's" children perched on her knee, etc. But in Wadley's narrative these characterizations serve a more personal purpose–they are the method by which Sarah Wadley justified her participation in a practice that had come under attack.

Stereotyping came in a darker, more violent form also. In September 1863, as the Wadley family attempted to flee the Yankee occupation of Louisiana, one of their slaves was apparently murdered. Wadley's explanation of Fox's disappearance and apparent murder is somewhat confusing, but her characterizations point to the slaves as a drunken, unruly and "dangerous element" that threatens the safety of the women and children. What her text does *not* address is the violence perpetrated by her brother during this incident. The young Negro man, whom Wadley calls Jim Burke, had appeared at the family's camp calling out for a traveling companion she calls "Mr. Duvall." Wadley's eldest brother Willie approached the man, asking what he wanted. When the slave maintained that he wanted to speak to Mr. Duvall only, "Willie then picked up a stick (not knowing [the slave] was intoxicated) and knocked him several times" (Wadley 3:63). Several other slaves maintained that after Wadley's brother beat him, the slave murdered Fox.

Wadley's textual interpretation of this incident amounted to the conclusion that "the act showed us with what an unstable and dangerous an element we had to deal and our minds were full of anxious foreboding" (Wadley 3:63). She does not mention her brother's abuse of the slave Jim Burke, but instead uses the incident to verify the dangers posed by the band of unruly, drunken slaves. Her characterizations hold up the other side slave stereotype: that slaves were menacing savages incapable of living amongst civilized people without physical restraints and reprimands. In many ways, unfounded fear motivated white Southerners' abuse of their slaves, and Sarah's retelling of this event in her diary buys into this stereotype and fear. As Gilmore suggests in Autobiographics, Wadley's diary accommodated her reader's expectations: she displayed the slaves as amiable children happy with their situation, and also as uncivilized and dangerous to the safety of white women and children. What the text does not address is Wadley's response to the violence all around her committed by whites.

The diary of Sarah Wadley is filled with intentional constructions and subtle narrative devices. Taken at face value, the reader finds a narrator deeply entrenched in Southern

tradition. Closer analysis reveals that the diary is somewhat of a façade. Wadley employs it as a method of affirming that she was living up to the standards of her society. Early in the narrative she claimed to reject the role of wife and mother; her text is evidence that she only sought to reject tradition, fulfilling her needs by her intense devotion to her father (the ideal husband) and her siblings (surrogate children). On the issue of slavery she can only offer up the words of others, and in her diary she attempts to strengthen her own beliefs with stereotypical descriptions of the blacks in her family's home. A psychological study would point to the paradox between Sarah's words and actions as evidence that her concept of self was at odds with the social construct of woman. Indeed, the previous chapter points this out as a significant facet of women's diaries in general. In terms of Wadley's narrative ability it proves that her words often disguise the truth inherent in her deeds.

Chapter Four:
Journeys

As the title suggests, the prevailing motif of this chapter is the journey. The previous chapters explored the history of criticism associated with diary literature, the unique set of circumstances that created Confederate women's diaries, and the conflicts revealed in Sarah Wadley's description of her relationship with her father, her siblings and their slaves. This chapter will provide further analysis of Wadley's text, particularly the way her narrative treatment of her journeys provides yet another example of her war-time inner conflict. The theory that Wadley's historical "truth" is a construct in the way she portrayed her interpersonal relationships is continued in the narrative contrast between her dream journey of Nebraska and her literal journey as a war refugee.

There are many examples of literal journeys and transportation in Wadley's story; her father's occupation as assistant adjutant general in the Davis administration and the necessary moves her family makes as a consequence of the war are but two instances. And on a larger scale, this Civil War story narrates the symbolic journey that its author makes to adulthood and the journey toward freedom and emancipation for slaves in the South. But the journey theme also lends credence to the assertion that Sarah Wadley's conflict asserted itself through the silences and gaps in her diary. As with virtually all facets of her wartime life, Wadley also expressed a great deal of distress over the possibility that her family would become refugees. Her diary shows that her opinions ranged from dread at the thought of leaving her home to disappointment and restlessness upon her return. The methods she used to express these feelings involved complex descriptive passages and a distinct reliance on imagery and symbolism.

Two particular episodes in the diary effectively illustrate this point. The first focuses on a dream of a journey west Wadley had in the summer of 1863. The second revolves around a group of entries written in late September/early October of the same year that document the family's aborted attempt to cross the Mississippi River and escape the threat of Federal forces. An analysis of these two sections provides an interesting contrast in that the dream journey reveals a sense of confidence on Wadley's part that the move was a positive one. However, her description of the actual journey and her attitude in the days before their departure and after the family's return displays a notable amount of uncertainty and dissatisfaction. Once again, the text reveals two "truths": actual events and the constructed "truth" Wadley reveals through her narrative choices.

In August 1863, Sarah experienced what she referred to as a "vision, I can call it nothing else, at least it was a dream" (3:32). In the entry that follows she recounts a dream–brought on, no doubt, by recent talk within the family of relocation – in which the night stars spell out the word "Nebraska."

In the opening lines of this entry, dated August 6, Sarah characterizes her dream as "beautiful and vivid as reality" (3:32). Indeed, the way in which she describes this event presents this episode as real. She begins by explaining, "I feel very nervous this evening, as if something were about to happen, or perhaps it is what <u>has</u> happened that is influencing me." She continues her story, writing "It was about eight o'clock in the evening and we were upstairs in the hall…" These phrases create a certain amount of expectation in the reader, for although Wadley has stated that the root of her restlessness is a dream, she begins her narrative by representing the dream as fact. By blurring the

lines between her description of actual events and her description of the dream, she reinforces its realism and importance to her as an article of truth.

She continues with her realistic description: "stars…took before my astonished eyes the shape of the word 'Nebraska' standing out clear and distinct… the letters perfectly formed as if in print." (3:32). It is interesting to note here that she describes her dream destination in terms of the written word ("perfectly formed as in print"). The significance of this choice lies in the fact that although she has consistently recorded in her diary the various options her father was considering for the family's future home, Sarah never explicitly expressed her own thoughts on where the family should relocate. Rather, she encapsulates her hopes into a "vision" or a "dream" and writes the destination in the heavens. And whether or not Wadley actually experienced this vivid dream is not the issue (although she most likely did). By writing in her diary only of her father's plans for the family, she created a gap, a silence regarding her own expression. Her description of the dream, whether real or imagined, was a carefully constructed narrative. Wadley spent a great amount of space writing about the dream, which in itself was unusual because it is the only mention of any dream in the five volumes. She referred to it later and attached great significance to its meaning. At the time, westward expansion was a popular means of escaping the perils of war, and land options made a move to destinations such as Nebraska or Kansas an attractive idea. With her focus on the dream journey, Wadley found a method to voice her own "truth" while simultaneously avoiding any appearance of disagreement with her father.

The confidence that Wadley gained from her dream would prove to be short lived, and her vacillation between anticipation and dread over the impending, real journey is a contrast to the grand, sweeping symbolism of the journey west in her dream. Roughly two weeks after the dream her buoyant expectations are still in place, as she resolves that she has no fear of Yankee occupation, and her trust in God's support of the South is absolute (Wadley 3:43). She also comments that she experienced a feeling of peace despite the turmoil that surrounded her: "How strange that I can write upon such trifling subjects when maybe the Yankees are so near, but I feel perfectly calm, just as I always do when I think there is something great to happen or happening to me" (Wadley 3:43).

The expectation that the move would prove to be "something great" is a contrast to her attitude by the end of the same month, when she opens her August 31 entry by stating simply: "I believe it is decided at last, in two short weeks, God willing, we are to start…That we are to go to Georgia takes not from the sting of this bitter parting for me" (Wadley 3:50). In the next entry she writes ominously "I am filled with forebodings" and describes the Yankee occupation of several nearby estates. But in the next entry she changes course again, saying "This trouble and uncertainty wears much upon my deaf Father; I wish we were away" (Wadley 3:55).

In the entries leading up to the family's departure, Sarah is very forthright about her feelings toward the move, although as the quotes above illustrate, her feelings about the journey ran the spectrum from dread to an anxious desire to be underway. The household and the entire community were in a state of near panic–Federal forces were moving closer, rumors were running rampant and there seemed no relief from the growing tension in the Wadley family. And as the family made their way through the steamy Bayou Tensas, Wadley constructed even more complex ways to communicate her ambivalence. Despite the longing to be on her way, Sarah Wadley's description of the family's journey

is anything but hopeful. She relays her feelings about the actual journey most effectively through the death imagery she uses to describe their passage through the swamp to the Mississippi River, which the family viewed as a gateway to Georgia and therefore a means of escape from the Federals. She describes the swamp as a wild place as she relates the mixture of fascination and revulsion she experiences during her journey.

For example, on September 30 the party came upon a small lake in the forest. Sarah explored the area and described the scene in her diary, saying: "A stillness as of death reigned over the green water, covered… with the leaves of the water lily, the cypress trees hanging over the water were draped with grey moss, silent and still, waved by no breath of the passing breeze" (Wadley 3:80). Her description of the scene is a sultry vignette, with seemingly contrasting images of death and nature. The green of the water and the image of the flowering water lily imply thriving life, but the trees are draped with "grey moss," calling to mind an image of cobwebs, and a deathlike stillness "reigned." Note here that the scene was not a calm, serene portrait of nature, but one rules (or "reigned") over by a quiet associated with death. She also notes that there was "no breath of passing breeze," implying that breath and movement–necessary for life–were absent from the scene.

Wadley was apparently fascinated with the juxtaposition between death and nature and descriptions such as this, which combines both, appear frequently in the diary. Throughout Wadley's diary, death–and possibly war–was an image that darkened the beauty of nature. The sense that the swamp, the scene of the actual journey, is ruled ("reigned") by death is a direct contrast to the world of the dream journey, where Sarah's dreams and expectations were inscribed in the form of brilliant stars.

Three weeks after her journey began, Wadley returned home. The first entry she penned after her return signals her odd contradictory disappointment, once again perpetuating the theme of ambivalence:

> Our three weeks journey is safely ended, I sit by the fire in my old room and date my journal "Oakland" once more, around me everything is familiar, but these things awaken no joy in my heart, this coming home is sadder than any departure has ever been to me, I feel my heart cold… I am so sad, so coldly sad. (3:107)

Her repetition of the word "cold" to describe her emotions can be equated with a sense of numbness. After the failure of the actual journey, the ebullient, hopeful young woman of the dream journey had been replaced with one who can only describe her numbness and sadness as "cold." Through the course of both Wadley's dream journey and her actual one, the reader sees a wide range of emotions and her contrast between dreams and reality reveals once again the stark difference between not only her expectations of herself and her actual experience but the ambivalence this disparity produced.

Through the symbolism of the dream journey Wadley was able to express her wishes without challenging the decision of her father to move east across the Mississippi. Through the death imagery that framed her family's aborted journey through the swamp, she was able to convey her fear and ambivalence at being uprooted from her home. Sarah Wadley's depiction of both journeys is carefully written, they are constructs that reveal more than the simple "truth" of actual events.

Epilogue

This study attempts to define the concept of autobiography and the creation of Confederate women's diaries as a way to gain a better understanding of the complexities in Sarah Wadley's text. The most significant features of this narrative are the gaps and silences, and the way Wadley navigates around these to convey her thoughts and feelings without expressing them directly. The key to understanding here is that Wadley's diary does not merely narrate her autobiographical "truth" as it relates to actual events, but her diary is a constructed narrative that conveys its message more through implication and subtle narrative devices. Leigh Gilmore argues this point succinctly in Autobiographics:

> [T]he discourses of truth and identity are varied and complex and when an autobiographer wishes, for example, to represent herself in opposition to a certain standard of "truth," I would argue that she knows what she's doing *rhetorically* and is not merely telling what happened. (25)

In Wadley's case the "certain standard of truth" to which Gilmore alludes is the expectations forced upon her by the unique nature of Civil War-era Southern society. The patriarchal face of the Confederate South denied women a voice, to the point that Wadley felt uncomfortable expressing herself directly even in the pages of her private journal. Her method of circumventing this hurdle included the complex portrayal of her relationships with her family and their slaves, and the imagery and symbolism she used to frame her wartime journey.

In his study Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism George Rable comments:

> To view Southern women as either seething with discontent or mindlessly mouthing the truisms of their society is to ignore their painful and often deeply ambivalent roles as social actors – actors who might occasionally criticize but who could also bolster their society's basic and often unspoken assumptions. (271)

While Rable's summation can certainly be taken in a sociological context, it also eloquently sums up the complex nature of Confederate women's experiences. Her diary is proof that Sarah Wadley did not fit the modern preconceptions regarding antebellum Southern women; a study of her text not only illuminates its relevance as an historical document but also the ambivalence that documented her wartime experience.

The Wadley diary is an exemplary piece of work. It offers the reader a well written narrative that is comparable to any other respected nineteenth century work, and yet it is more than a good story. Its many layers reveal the author as a complex and conflicted young woman who often had only the pages of her journal for comfort. But the Wadley diary is not unique. Southern women's diaries contain not only historical "truths," but personal "truths" about women who had no other voice. These diaries represent an enormous opportunity because this aspect of diary literature is largely unexplored. The value of these diaries as historical documents is widely acknowledged, but their literary worth poses a new and interesting possibility for study.

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