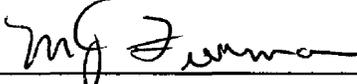


**The Cult of True Womanhood:
Women of the Mid-nineteenth Century
and their Assigned Roles as Reflected in
Contemporary Writing**

By:
Laurie Bonventre

Presented to the American Culture Faculty
at the University of Michigan - Flint
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Liberal Studies
in
American Culture

July 2005

First Reader 

Second Reader 

Precis

Women of the mid-nineteenth century found themselves in a unique position brought on by changing social and economic structures. Technological advances and changes created opportunities for men to work outside of the home, earning enough money to support their families without assistance from their wives. This led to a push for women to stay in the home, as exemplars of four very important qualities: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. These qualities were extolled through magazines and other writings of the time. There were voices speaking up against this new ideal, but it lasted intact until the advent of the Civil War when it began to change because of circumstances beyond the control of average Americans. In some form, however, some of the ideals are still encouraged even now.

Index

3	Precis
4	Introduction: The Lady of the House
7	Chapter 1: True Womanhood in Context
19	Chapter 2: The Cult of True Womanhood
43	Chapter 3: Fighting the Status Quo
53	Conclusion: The End of "True Womanhood"
58	Works Cited

Introduction: The Lady of the House

"Welcome home, dear! Can I get you something to drink or would you like your pipe? How was your day?"

Settling down into his comfortable leather armchair, the weary husband replies, "Thanks, honey. A nice dry martini would be lovely. I am worn out. We had three office meetings this morning and I met with two new clients after lunch. How are the kids?"

"They are great. Junior got two hits at his baseball game this afternoon and little Sarah made a finger painting during our craft time this morning. She says it is a picture of the pony you promised to buy her for her next birthday." Laughing she continues, "I'm not sure that we'll be able to find the one she wants, though. The one in her picture was pink, had a lavender mane and had one horn made out of mother-of-pearl."

After chuckling good-naturedly, Sarah's fond father says, "That

little minx. What's for dinner?"

"I made your favorite! Beef Wellington with glazed carrots and my special mashed potatoes. We have cheesecake for dessert!"

"That sounds lovely. Are the kids in bed?"

"They were just exhausted and went to bed about a half an hour ago. I promised them that I would send you in to kiss them goodnight."

"All right. Well, I am famished. Shall we eat?"

"I'll have it on the table in no time. You just relax over there and I'll get everything ready for you."

After sharing smiles, the couple settles down to a nice dinner and calm evening at home, the husband relaxed in his castle and his wife happy in her roles as caregiver and nurturer. Of course, her hair is perfectly styled and her makeup is flawless. As she brings her husband his after-dinner drink and dressing gown, she is careful to ensure his absolute comfort. Her job is, after all, to ensure that her husband, children and home are well cared for and immaculate.

The picture of the young housewife wearing her pearls and cashmere sweater while cleaning or preparing dinner is an ideal that one might imagine has permeated American society for ages. Though it may seem as though it began in the 1950s, this image of the ideal woman as one who stayed in the home taking care of her husband and family dates back as far as the beginning of new world settlement.

During the 19th century, however, the responsibilities that women had began to change. In this thesis, we will take a closer look at articles from popular women's magazines of the period from 1820 – 1860 which lend support to Welter's claim. The image of the ideal woman reflected in such publications exerted daily, subtle pressures on women to conform to a standard that required them to stay in the home, focused on their homes and families to the exclusion of most other things.

During the period from 1820 until 1860, changing social structures and economics affected family structures and gendered role assignments. Some believe that these changes led to new identities, centered on the home and family for women of the rapidly expanding middle class. This movement has become known as the "cult of true womanhood," a phrase coined by Barbara Welter in an article she wrote for *American Quarterly* in 1966, and has influenced women's lives immeasurably.

Chapter 1: True Womanhood in Context

In the beginning of the 19th century, America was changing at a faster pace than it ever had before. The population was growing quickly and the physical landscape of the country had more than doubled with Thomas Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase of 1803. The advent of the industrial revolution was also creating many new jobs and opportunities for American families. For a country less than fifty years old, these swift changes brought instability and uncertainty. American society had to find balance and a center upon which to base itself. One center was found in the roles women played in the lives of their families. A modified ideal of true womanhood developed as a response to a rapidly growing population, expanding frontiers and industrial developments and the effects they all had on society and the family.

The population exploded during the first half of the 19th century. As the inset table shows, the census of 1820 reported an aggregate population of 10,086,015 (ICPSR 2). By the census of 1850, the aggregated population had more than doubled to 23,054,152 (ICPSR 2). With such rapid growth in population size, established structures like government bodies and industries had to adapt and expand to fit the growing needs of the citizenry. Small businesses began to develop to meet the requirements of the newly prosperous middle class and organizations like social and leisure clubs expanded to include new members.

Table 1	Free Males	Free Females	Total Population
1820	4,060,379	3,917,920	10,086,015
1830	5,481,675	5,311,228	12,785,928
1840	7,417,640	7,119,240	17,018,891
1850	10,166,440	9,687,112	23,054,152

Data from Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, Study 00003: Historical Demographic, Economic, and Social Data: U.S., 1790-1970.

Growing industries brought many new jobs which meant that men no longer had the time or the need to produce many of the things their families consumed. Since families still used the same goods like food and clothing, new businesses which included factories, retail stores and grocers began to develop with the sole purpose of providing these things. Though there had always been a market for them, it had

grown dramatically. With the addition of these jobs, a new middle class began to emerge consisting of lawyers, teachers, factory managers, doctors and others, along with their families, different from the middle class that had been prevalent during pre-industrial times, (Lavendar 1). While the old middle class had been very small and consisted of doctors and lawyers, this new middle class was much larger and included industrial employees, as well. Socially, this affected the neighborhoods they lived in and the people they associated with. Families were able to shift their focus, many for the first time, away from mere day-to-day survival and could spend some time and money on things that were not absolutely essential to life. With the changes in their occupations, many families were no longer completely self-reliant and their lives became more enmeshed with the lives of their neighbors as they began to buy necessities from the same stores and sometimes from each other.

As industrialization improved the standard of living for many families, the growing population began to move, in high numbers, into industrial jobs. Census data from the period shows a marked increase in the number of people working in manufacturing from 1820 through 1850. In 1820, there were 346,845 (ICPSR 2) people working in manufacturing and by 1850, there were 943,305, an increase of 273% (ICPSR 2). People were moving away from the country and their small farms into the city for manufacturing jobs that were certain to improve

their standard of living, health and family status.

The change was not only restricted to population size and economic opportunity. The country was growing very quickly geographically, as well. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 more than doubled the country's size and provided vast new frontiers for the booming population to explore. There was more land for growth of both farming and industry. Purchased from Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of France, for about fifteen million dollars, the land cost only a few cents per acre. The new frontier suggested that opportunity was unlimited.

As men went into the working world and became better able to earn enough money to support their families, the families no longer needed to make as many of the items they needed in order to survive. As a result, some traditional gender roles were altered or became unnecessary. Women, who had often formed cottage industries and traded services like cloth-making and sewing with their neighbors, were told that they no longer needed to do so.¹

Some women continued to work, however, as women that were not living in middle-class families with comfortable homes and gainfully employed husbands had no other choice but to work outside

¹ There is very little documentation to clearly define all of the roles women were expected to fill. However, there is evidence that they often took part in home industry. For example, when women needed to make fabric, one member of a group would card wool, the next would spin thread and the last would weave the cloth. All of the women received part of the finished product as payment for their labors (Collins 70-80).

of the home. Although “the urban female labor force included self-supporting women-those who had to work to survive, prostitutes, vagabonds, and widows” and had included them from the beginning of colonization, they were not visible as a social group, and were not distinct in their own right. In the larger cities, women in the working world were, for the most part, considered to be beyond the pale of polite middle-class society as they were usually of poor, African-American or immigrant descent (Weiner 14).

In smaller communities, thousands of white rural women were able to work, at least on a temporary basis. But unlike the urban poor, such workers retained a “domestic ideology.” These young women lived in paternalistic structures as either servants in family homes or in the “pseudo-homes” of boarding houses and mill owned dormitories (Robinson 48). Some women lived as domestic assistants to the ladies of the house for the years between their educations and their marriages. These women were often seen as surrogate daughters and used the time spent in employment as a time of training for the lives they would lead after they married and obtained families of their own. Social order could be maintained through this association with a family-like living situation (Weiner 14).

That would change, however, as immigration increased during the middle of the nineteenth century, and working women found more competition for the jobs in their communities and the jobs that were

available began to be seen as only for women of low social rank. Female domestics began to be seen not as surrogate daughters but as servants of inferior rank (Weiner 15). "As domestic service became a major job channel for immigrants, it no longer served as acceptable employment for native-born women between the stages of childhood and marriage....As class distinctions grew more marked in the jobs that were available for women and in the women who worked in those jobs, a working woman became viewed as more of an aberration than a norm, reinforcing the paternalistic ideology that told women to stay in the home.

The idea that men should have sole responsibility for supporting their families financially while their wives should run the family home and perform all of the duties that came with a home became more prevalent (Lavendar 1) and a new "ideal of womanhood" arose with these new attitudes about work and the family. Women became the homemakers and were told in detail how they could do their jobs in the best way possible. "The Cult of Womanhood" could be found in women's magazines, religious writings of the time and in gift publications (Welter 151). Women's magazines like *Godey's Lady's Book* were especially interested in this new ideal and were very efficient in communicating it to their readers.

Women were to be the calming influence over their homes. They were the religious compasses of the home and the source of their

families' comfort and peace. There was no length too great for them to go if it would better serve their husband and children. Any outside interests were to be sublimated in deference to home and family. If a woman became distracted by any activity outside of the home, whether educational, or otherwise, she was damaging her family.

One early edition of *Godey's Lady's Book*, known at the time as *Ladies Magazine and Literary Gazette* illustrates well the jobs assigned to women. One of the magazine's readers wrote in to the magazine to ask for advice on how to best influence her husband in positive ways. Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of the magazine, published one of her own poems to answer this question.

TO THIRZA

The stars o'er heaven are burning bright,
And from her urn, of purest light,
The moon pours down, on vale and height,
Such living beams,
That, Thirza, 'tis a glorious night
For poet's dreams!

But truth, for once, shall guide my muse,
And that sweet silvery theme we'll choose,
Which, like the gently dropping dews
On summer flower,
Comes o'er the heart, till few refuse
Its spell of power.

Luna! thou hast been deemed divine,
And now thy beams divinely shine,
Yet tempt they not *one wish* of mine
Abroad to roam,
Fool must I be, could I repine,
So rich at home.

To mar the tone-
But listen, Thirza, and the art
Shall be your own.

Like gems of heaven's own current coin
See Beauty as the morning shine!
I feel its power, though never mine,
The soul to win,
Denied its boon, should we repine
'Tis scarce a sin:

But still, though *this* the husband gain,
Discretion must his heart retain-
Then make not Hymen's band a chain-
Your sway must be
Like truth's, like virtue's gentle reign,
That makes man free.

You ask your husband's confidence;
Good-breeding then unite with sense,
And let no frivolous pretence
Excuse neglect,
Nor dream affection may dispense
With all respect.

To please his taste your dress prepare,
And costly as his state will bear,
Rich more than gay; but *neatness* there
Must still preside,
It makes each ornament more fair-
'Tis woman's pride.

You charm each guest with welcome free,
And please in polished company-
Graces are there the world may see,
The world applaud;
Still let not your ambition be
To shine abroad.

Your husband-is he kind and true?
To *him* your sweetest smiles are due;
He studies, or he toils for you,
With anxious care:
His rougher path with flowers to strew,
Must be your share.

Still use no holy argument
 To prove each fact;
But let him rather yield assent
 As his own act.

Even should he slight your faith, most dear,
Nor aught that's high and holy fear;
The mild reproof, the tender tear
 May yet prevail;
A sigh will sometimes win the ear,
 When sermons fail.

O, knew our sex their *moral power*,
And would they use that heavenly dower,
How short were crime's triumphant hour
 Or boast of guilt!
The forfeiture of Eden's bower
 Would scarce be felt.

But Luna's beams no more descend,
And my dilated song must end-
Blest if it teach thee how to blend
 That charm of life,
The *mistress gay*, the improving *friend*,
 The faithful *wife*.

Hale made little attempt at subtlety in her poem, adding italics to emphasize the points she believed were the most significant. Women of the middle class were to find their joy and fulfillment in the home where they were all-important to their families. They provided religious guidance and provided for all of their family's physical needs, as well. This had become even more important in a society dealing with massive changes at a rapid pace. Society needed a stable base to rest upon and saw women as the key to maintaining that base. The pressure that it began to place upon women was strong and extended to many areas of life, including economic and social.

However, it is important to note that, though this was encouraged as the ideal for all women, this was only a realistic expectation for free middle and upper class women. Enslaved women and women of the poorer classes were unable to follow the ideals of true womanhood as they were required by their social standing to toil outside of their homes. This was especially true for enslaved women who had no choice in the way that they lived their lives. Unfortunately, these women were not generally considered as being part of polite society and were overlooked as though they did not play a role in society.

Chapter 2: The Cult of True Womanhood

The rapidly changing social and economic situations in America brought altered role assignments for many women but those roles would have been meaningless if they had not been communicated to the women that were affected by them. The first step in communicating the new ideal was to inform women of the traits that it embodied. According to Barbara Welter, an American History scholar from the City University of New York, there were four major parts of this new ideal of womanhood. They consisted of piety or religiosity, purity, submissiveness and domesticity (Welter 152). "Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife-woman" (Welter 153). These characteristics, which were thought necessary for all "good and proper women," laid the groundwork for a growing group of middle class women and their families, giving a much desired stability during otherwise turbulent, quickly changing times (Lavendar

1). These vital qualities were then communicated to women through magazine articles and editorials as well as in the serialized novels found in popular magazines.

Religion, or piety, was considered to be the source of strength for women, the "core of woman's virtue" (Welter 152). Considered to be a gift from God to women, religion was hers by divine right. Men were strongly encouraged to choose a pious woman for if she were that, all other desirable qualities were bound to follow (Welter 152). Women were warned not to let literary interests or intellectual pursuits take them away from God and their relationship with Him (Welter 154).

Sarah Josepha Hale an editor at *Godey's Lady's Book* "spoke darkly of those who, like Margaret Fuller², threw away the 'One True Book' for others, open to error" (Welter 154). She used stories about women who had done so as "proof that 'the greater the intellectual force, the greater and more fatal the errors into which women fall who wander from the Rock of Salvation'" (Welter 154). Religion was "a salve for a potentially restless mind, an occupation within woman's proper sphere - the home" (Lavendar 1).

² Fuller claimed that she had known from childhood that she was not "'born to the common womanly lot,' and she spent her life exploring the territory beyond that 'lot'" (Mitchell 1). Eventually, Fuller became a leader in transcendentalist circles, a Goethe scholar, the first editor of *The Dial*, a literary magazine and literary critic (Mitchell 2). She presented her arguments for the rights of women in a witty style that startled her readers and left them unsure as to how to classify her (Von Mehren 3). She said she loved being a woman but was stifled by the limitations that came along with womanhood (Von Mehren 4). Her independence and steadfast determination to follow her own path kept her enmeshed in scandal and gossip for all of her life. She went on to publish several works arguing for women's rights including *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.

Purity, in women, was highly revered, and as essential to a woman as piety. "Without sexual purity, a woman was no woman, but rather a lower form of being, a 'fallen woman,' unworthy of the love of her sex and unfit for their company" (Lavendar 1). Women were expected to guard their virtue from the assaults of men, who would surely be thankful for having been saved from themselves (Welter 156).

Purity was not only sexual, though. Any social change could be seen as a challenge to a woman's virtue. When new fashions like bloomers and shorter skirts became popular, magazines were quick to write about the immodesty of the new costumes. According to a dialogue printed in *The Ladies Wreath*, trousers were "only one of the many manifestations of that wild spirit of socialism and agrarian radicalism which is at present so rife in our land" (Welter 157). The new styles may give the wearer a sense of greater comfort, but they were a danger to her purity and moral fiber as well as being a threat to the very foundation of the country (Welter 157).

Fanny Fern, a well-known and very popular female writer of the time, addressed the issue of women's clothing in some of her newspaper articles. In one of her articles, published during the mid 1860s, she told about an evening spent walking with her husband. While at home, reading the newspaper, she discovered that a woman had been arrested for wearing men's clothing. What, she wondered, is

so offensive about that? She said, "Think of the old maids (and weep) who have to stay at home evening after evening, when, if they provided themselves with a coat, pants and hat, they might go abroad, instead of sitting there with their noses flattened against the window-pane" (Fern 1750). Because the weather had been especially rainy, Fern knew the dilemma that she faced if she wanted to take a walk. How would she be able to hold her umbrella and her skirts so that she did not ruin them by dragging them through the mud?

Deciding that weather was not going to keep her indoors, Fern found one of her husband's suits and put it on so that she and her husband could go walking. "Oh," she wrote, "the delicious freedom of that walk, after we were well started! No skirts to hold up, or to draggle their wet folds against my ankles" (Fern 1751). If anyone was shocked by her actions, they were welcome to be so. She would not change her ways because of them. Her health, both mental and physical, was worth more than a little social custom. "I've as good a right to preserve the healthy body God gave me, as if I were not a woman," she claimed (Fern 1751).

Even the thought of the loss of purity could reduce a woman to tears since, if a woman was guilty of losing her purity, at least in magazines, she was inexorably led to madness or death (Welter 154). According to the magazines, death was preferable to the loss of innocence. "Purity, considered as a moral imperative, set up a

dilemma which was hard to resolve. Woman must preserve her virtue until marriage and marriage was necessary for her happiness. Yet marriage was, literally, an end to innocence. She was told not to question this dilemma, but simply to accept it" (Welter 158).

Perhaps the most feminine of the four characteristics is submissiveness. Men were also expected to be religious, although it was perceived to be harder for them, and they were told to be pure, though this was also thought to be a hardship for them; still they were never supposed to be submissive (Lavendar 2). Men were to be the movers and shakers, the ones that accomplished things while women were passive bystanders. The order of authority was to be God, then men and after them, women. Women were at the bottom of the list, expected to defer to those who ranked above them. Barbara Welter refers to a young wife quoted in *The Ladies Companion* as saying that "she did not think [a] woman should 'feel and act for herself' because 'when, next to God her husband is not the tribunal to which her heart and intellect appeals - the golden bowl of affection is broken'" (Welter 159). Published in her book, *Recollections of a Housekeeper*, "Caroline Gilman's advice to the bride aimed at establishing this proper order from the beginning of a marriage: 'Oh, young and lovely bride, watch well the first moments when your will conflicts with his to whom God and society have given the control. Reverence his *wishes* even when you do not his *opinions*'" (Welter 160).

The submission of women was ensured in several ways, one of the most obvious being their clothing. A nineteenth century woman was expected to wear a corset, which minimized the size of her waist. In addition, women wore heavy petticoats and other undergarments, resulting in heavy clothing, which did not allow for much physical mobility (Lavendar 2). It seems likely that a woman would be submissive when she was dressed in this manner as she was physically unable to present any sort of challenge to her husband. She was forced to accept her husband's dominance because she was not able to perform many of the physical tasks that he could, leaving her to depend upon him for many things.

As a woman's place was believed to be in the home, domesticity, the fourth and final quality of ideal womanhood, is perhaps the foundation of the other three. "Women were expected to uphold the values of stability, morality, and democracy by making the home a special place, a refuge from the world where her husband could escape from the highly competitive, unstable, immoral world of business and industry" (Lavendar 3). Since men were thought to be at risk of becoming hard and amoral from the evils they dealt with in the world of work, women were assigned the task of making their homes a safe haven in which their husbands could shed the harshness of the outside world and show their softer, more human side.

The role of nurse was one of the most important parts of

women's domestic responsibilities. A woman's own health was thought to be delicate and she was forced to deal with restrictions that her own weakness brought, but she was to be more concerned with the illnesses of her children and husband. With all of the childhood illnesses that were taking children's lives, American women became expert in sickroom nursing. Many of their cookbooks contained recipes which promised to remedy everything from gout to fever (Welter 163). "Nursing the sick, particularly sick males, not only made a woman feel useful and accomplished, but increased her influence" (Welter 164).

Also, women were told that they should devote themselves to morally uplifting occupations that would help them to maintain their piety and purity. *Godey's Lady's Book* stated that "there is more to be learned about pouring tea and coffee than most young ladies are willing to believe" (Lavendar 3). Women were encouraged to do needlework and other crafts as they went about their daily duties of housework and childcare. In such a calm environment, men would naturally be attracted away from the world outside of the home and the evils it held (Welter 163). If women asked for a greater scope in which to use their gifts or talents, magazines of the time were critical, saying that such desires undermined the fabric of civilization and the family (Welter 172-173). Women had Rights but, according to Mrs. E. Little in her article for *Ladies Wreath*, they were limited to:

The right to love whom others scorn,

The right to comfort and to mourn,
The right to shed new joy on earth,
The right to feel the soul's high worth,
Such woman's rights a God will bless
And crown their champions with success. (Welter 173)

As has been previously mentioned, the primary method of communication to women was in their magazines. *Godey's Lady's Book*, *Ladies' Wreath*, *The Amaranth*, *Graham's Magazine*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Putnam's Magazine* and *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* were only some of the journals that found popularity during the period (Lund 153-222). They provided the primary reading materials for much of this aforementioned middle class and were published on a regular basis, some monthly and some less often. They contained short stories and poetry and also commonly contained serialized novellas. The stories would be published over the course of several months with a few chapters contained in each issue of the magazine. Serials were very popular, gaining a large and appreciative audience. Many familiar authors can be found in the pages of serials, including Edgar Allen Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Lydia Maria Child, James Fenimore Cooper, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Herman Melville and Harriet Beecher Stowe (Lund 153-222). There was the potential in these magazines to reach a large audience with messages or ideas. In other words, this was the perfect medium through which to promote the ideals of the Cult of True Womanhood. The ideal of womanhood would have never developed into a cultural phenomenon if it had not been

communicated to the women of the country.

Although serial fiction was very popular, many believed that fiction could be a dangerous influence over women. Fiction, they thought, could lead women down a dangerous path of laziness and moral laxity. In order to balance the effects of novels, the same journals which published them also contained articles and editorials written to help women define their roles. These pieces were written by a variety of writers including famous authors, ministers, public officials and women. In a style that was much less subtle than that of serialized novels, women were told, in no uncertain terms, how they should behave and what they should spend their time doing. If, for any reason, women missed the messages being sent in serials, articles and editorials provided an alternate source of information.

The premier women's magazine of the time was *Godey's Lady's Book*, a serial published from 1830 until 1898. Louis Godey began to publish the magazine in 1830 on a monthly basis after realizing that an annual gift book could make a good profit if it was published more than once per year (Greenberg 1). American magazines were not a new concept but were mostly patterned after their European predecessors and Godey's magazine was no exception. The magazine contained hand-drawn fashion plates along with fiction, non-fiction, poetry and advice articles. The magazine also contained everything from house plans to patterns for slippers.

Godey's Lady's Book enjoyed popularity unknown by its contemporaries. "By 1836 Godey could claim, and probably with fair accuracy, that his magazine 'has a much larger circulation than any other magazine in the country'" (Greenberg 2). In 1831, more than 63,000 people subscribed to the magazine, a number estimated to be more than double that of its closest competitors (Greenberg 2). At the eve of the Civil War, circulation rose as high as 150,000 subscribers, most of whom were women. The magazine was being purchased by 1 1/2 percent of all of the free women living in America at that time, a significant number. It can be assumed that many copies of the magazine were read by several women, probably members of the elite, as they were often the women with the most available time to read and were most likely to have had an education and, therefore, the ability to read. There is no doubt that this magazine had great influence over American women.

The magazine became so well known and so popular that Nathaniel Hawthorne, perhaps sarcastically, had his characters, Phoebe Pyncheon and Holgrave, mention it during a conversation in *The House of the Seven Gables*. Holgrave declares that "'Among the multitude of my marvellous gifts, I have that of writing stories; and my name has figured, I can assure you, on the covers of Graham and Godey'" (Greenberg 1). The popularity of Louis Godey's self-titled magazine made it certain that Hawthorne's readers would recognize

his name, knowing that any author published there must be an accomplished one, indeed.

Sarah Josepha Hale had also been producing a journal, *Ladies Magazine*. In an effort to cut down on some of his competition, Godey acquired the *Ladies Magazine* from Hale and incorporated some of its elements into his magazine. Hale began to work with *Godey's Lady's Book* as its editor. Godey did not relinquish total control of the magazine but Hale's influence began to be felt immediately. She was adamant that the material she published be original and of good quality. In addition to originality, Hale was interested in employing women as both writers and artists. Although men were employed regularly by the magazine, during 1840, contributors to *Godey's Lady's Book* were all women. Hale also made a point of using American writers in an attempt to give the magazine an American feel and American topical interests (Greenberg 2). The high circulation numbers and longevity of the magazine suggest that her efforts were successful.

The serial fiction contained in *Godey's Lady's Book*, along with the other non-fictional elements, was instrumental in portraying the ideals of true womanhood to women of America. The stories often contained female characters in significant roles, usually focusing on one woman with several less important female characters around her. The heroine was accompanied by a female friend, who fell just short of

the ideal set by her friend and by a woman who was working against the standard the heroine was working to set. A heroine was a model that the audience was expected to follow and was placed in contrast with the other women of the story. The other two types of women worked as foils that served to emphasize the ideal qualities possessed by the heroine. These portrayals worked in a subtle yet effective way, sending messages to women that would affect the way they lived and ran their homes. All four of the qualities that make up the ideals of true womanhood are laid out for readers in these stories. The qualities are reinforced with messages about the benefits that come with compliance and the problems that come when women do not follow the rules laid out for them by society.

Four serial novels, *Louisa Worthington*, *The Cleybornes*, *Allondale Priory* and *Katharine Walton* published by *Godey's Lady's Book*, between 1830 and 1850, along with several articles and editorials illustrate larger trends that were influencing the literature of the time and, more importantly, demonstrate the way the ideals of the Cult of True Womanhood were promoted. The articles and editorial pieces will also show how the ideals of true womanhood were communicated through media in forms other than fictional. Whatever the form, the ideals were communicated thoroughly to the women that were expected to assume them.

The Cleybornes was printed in four segments lasting from

September 1849 through December 1849. The heroine of the piece is Amanda Cleyborne, a new and very young bride. Olivine Wavel, a young woman who is visiting the small town that is home to Amanda, befriends her. Olivine is a city socialite, moneyed and wise in the ways of the world. Mrs. Somerden fills the third female character type. Amanda meets her when she visits the city for an extended visit. While not a villain, per se, Mrs. Somerden, a jaded woman interested only in gossiping about her "friends" and spending money recklessly, personifies many of the negative traits that women feared.

Miss Leslie, the author of the serial, wrote the story of a newly married woman and the experiences she has during the first few months of her marriage to Mr. Cleyborne. The tale begins with an accounting of the wedding of Amanda Stansby and Lester Cleyborne. They live in a small country village and Lester Cleyborne is accounted to be a man of comfortable, though not excessive, means. After they have been married for a short time, the couple must travel to the city so that Mr. Cleyborne can attend to business.

While the couple is in town, they socialize a bit and make several new acquaintances. Amanda especially befriends two women, Olivine Wavel and Mrs. Somerden. By placing them in the roles of heroine, friend and "bad girl," the story comments on their piety or the lack thereof. Amanda, the heroine, is described as having been "educated at the Moravian seminary of Bethlehem" (Leslie 188). She has gotten

her education in a Christian school, the author's not-so-subtle way of telling her readers that Amanda is a religious woman. As befit a pious woman, the house that she lives in with her new husband is not "showy or useless, but all was chaste, sensible and becoming" (Leslie 189). Also, the night before she is wed, Amanda makes sure to spend some time in prayer and contemplation. She wants to ensure God's blessing upon her union.

Perhaps the most obvious statement of Amanda's piety occurs when she and her husband attend a party at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Somerden. After the company has eaten dinner, a small orchestra begins to play and the guests begin to dance. Amanda, in spite of having several invitations to join the dancers, remains on the fringes of the group. Her husband is pleased that she has not been dancing and tells her as much. Later, when the musicians play a waltz, Mr. Cleyborne says that no true lady would ever waltz. It was much too risqué for a woman of piety. Unfortunately, Cleyborne says, women who choose to abstain from the scandalous waltz were considered prudes. In response, Amanda says "If this is prudery, I will always be prudish" (Leslie 266). She is more concerned with maintaining her pious appearance than with being considered fashionable or being labeled a prude. Amanda is a "true woman."

Piety was an issue that non-fiction writers also addressed. "If piety is lovely, it is eminently so in the female; if it is kind, the woman

who is a sincere christian is a striking exemplification of it; if it is a deep and abiding feeling, look at her who was 'last at the cross, and earliest at the grave,' and you see it in all its strength" ("Female Piety" 26). Women were supposed to have an especially strong religious side and it was supposed to be natural for them. In his article, "Importance of Religion to Woman," Reverend Luther Lee went into detail when describing a woman's relationship with her God.

Religion was important to a woman because of the ways in which her faith helped her guard against the "evils that threaten on every hand" (Lee 109) and because it helped to "make a favorable impression on the minds of the circle in which she is called to move" (Lee 109). Piety was also the saving grace of a married woman. When trouble came into the married woman's home her piety and relationship with God allowed her to fulfill her role as "she whom God designed as a help, meet [sic] for man, baring her fair bosom to the storm, to shelter the partner of her joys and sorrows from its desolating fury, pouring into his dark and stricken heart, hopes and comforts with which she dares not to sooth her own sorrow-smitten spirit" (Lee 128).

Published in two parts in the January and February 1850 issues of *Godey's Lady's Book*, *Allondale Priory* is a shorter work which still contains the same messages and character types found in longer pieces. The lead character of the work is a male in search of the

simpler life of the country. While he is changing his life he encounters women that fall into the three categories of female characters so often found in works of this type. Though she has a much smaller role than some of the women portrayed as the heroine figure, Elinor Egremont is the woman set up as the ideal. She has one sister, also presented as the ideal, though already in possession of a fiancé and therefore not an impediment to the plotline planned for Elinor.

The story follows a young man, Mr. Eden, who discovers that the steward he has trusted to run his property has been stealing from him and bankrupting his properties. Eden travels to the country in order to get the situation under control and to take a much-needed break from the hustle and bustle of the city. While he is in the country, Eden realizes that he is much happier there than he had been while living in the city, enjoying its dubious pleasures. In the end, he decides to reside in the country at his estate instead of living in the city. He has found a worthy woman to share his life with and the quality of his life has improved dramatically.

Elinor Egremont, the heroine of the piece, is not mentioned until the fourth page of the story. She is one of two daughters belonging to the local vicar. Her mother is only mentioned once in the story as a pious woman who has passed away. Mr. Egremont attributes the excellence of his daughters to his wife's teaching and influence during the girls' childhood years. Though the sisters are often mentioned

together, the focus is on Elinor as she is the eligible young lady in search of a husband.

Purity, the second of the four traits of the ideal woman is a foundational element of Eleanor's character. She is the model daughter of the local minister and has a reputation that is above reproach. When Mr. Eden is asked by his aunt to describe Elinor he says that her "dress is marked by that simplicity and neatness which must always be elegant" (Otis 98). She is not given to displaying her body in a vulgar fashion, sure to maintain her purity of body and spirit. She is not one to tempt the men around her with her physical charms. To further the testament to her purity, Elinor's name has never been mentioned in connection with any men or any scandalous behavior. She has kept herself above such things. Even when a man who possesses wealth and a title pursues her, she does not marry him. She cannot marry where she does not love and no monetary gain can induce her to do otherwise. This purity of heart further attracts Mr. Eden and he asks for her hand in marriage (Otis 102).

In journals, purity was emphasized as so valuable to women that they could never hope to regain their reputations if there were any hint of impropriety or indiscretion. A woman's reputation was one of her most important possessions. But if she lost her unblemished reputation and her purity came into question, "her penitential tears" could never "atone for her sullied reputation" ("Woman 176). She

could never have hoped to remain accepted in society or to ever make a “good” marriage if there was any reason to suspect that she may not have remained entirely pure, both in mind and body.

The longest of the four serials, *Katharine Walton: or, The Rebel's Daughter* went into publication in *Godey's Lady's Book* in February 1850 and continued until December of the same year. The title character, Katharine Walton, is the ideal woman, admired by every man she meets. As the story is set during the Revolutionary War, Katharine is the daughter of a man who has been arrested by British soldiers and sentenced to hang. In spite of all that she faces, she never compromises her character or her dedication to the qualities that make her ideal.

Two other women that are introduced into the story after a few chapters are not clearly defined at their introduction. The reader is left to wonder which of the two women will fulfill the role of friend and which will be the woman that steps beyond the acceptable boundaries. Eventually it becomes obvious that Ella Monckton, the sister of a British official, is the one that will befriend Katherine. She may be slightly flawed but she is also trying to change. Moll Harvey, the other woman, is clearly identified as the woman that should not be admired. She is willing to be different and does not conform to the rules of society. That makes her dangerous.

As the heroine of this piece, Katharine Walton is the embodiment

of the submissive woman. As the character around which the entire plot of the story revolves, she is important in conveying information to the reading public. The story is based during the Revolutionary War and Katharine's father is tried and convicted by the British of treason against the government. He is sentenced to hang but is rescued by a group of American troops to escape into the woods for a while. Major Walton's rescuer is none other than Katharine's fiancé (and cousin).

Colonel Balfour, of the British troops, takes possession of the Walton estate and uses it as his headquarters while he conducts the search for the escaped prisoner. During the time he spends at the Walton estate, Balfour becomes attracted to Katharine Walton and decides that he will woo and win her for his wife. When her father is recaptured, Balfour threatens to have him hung if she will not agree to marry him. If she does succumb to his courtship, he will act in her father's defense and will be able to save his life.

Katharine is in a difficult situation from the beginning of her story. It seems that if she were ever going to forsake her submissive nature, it would be when all of the foundations of her normal life have been disrupted. Yet, even when all seems to be against her, Katharine still strives for a submissive ideal. After the British take over her home, Kate is sent into the city so that she is not in close proximity to the action and, potentially, not in a position to aid her escaped father. Katharine faces a dilemma in this situation. She is dealing with her

family's sworn enemy, yet she is still obliged to allow the patriarchal hierarchy to hold sway over her life. Although she is not any relation to Balfour, she knows that as a woman in his care, temporary though it may be, she is to obey his orders. If she failed to submit to his will, she would be violating one of the key tenets of true womanhood. This is something she is simply unable to do.

Later, when her father is in prison, he forces her to swear on a Bible that she will not accept a proposal from anyone except her cousin. She takes the "sacred volume" into her hands and vows to do as her father requests. He is so sure of her submissive nature that he knows she will not break any vow that she has made to him. Katharine would never dream of going against a direct order from her father, the ultimate authority over her, second only to God (Simms 333).

According to the thought of the time, women were created by God as inferior to their husbands, and journals, like serial literature, told them to be satisfied with their situations. Submissiveness, a trait given by God to establish the natural order, was to be accepted without question so that husbands never had any reason to remind them of their place (A Lady 288). Even if the husband did not want to take his position as the head of the household, a wife was not supposed to allow that to happen. "If he be an honourable man, he will never exert his authority, but rather seem to yield submission.

But, mind this, never accept such submission-never exert authority over him, but remembering the wayward nature of man, still act and demean yourself according to the duty of a wife" (A Lady 288).

Women were charged with enforcing their own submission, just in case their husbands were not equipped to do so or were unwilling to enforce it for their wives.

The last of the four serials was published in *Godey's Lady's Book* in the January issue of 1830. Written by an author identified only as "J," the piece follows the adventure of two young women, Louisa and Ellen, as they leave their country homes to visit family and friends in a nearby town (never mentioned by name). Just as the others do, this tale serves to communicate the four traits of ideal womanhood, emphasizing domesticity most of all, warning of the dangers a woman faces when she does not remain interested in domestic life.

The story centers on Louisa and her friend Ellen Stanley as they spend time visiting friends and socializing in the city. Louisa is interested in beautiful clothes and socially prominent connections while Ellen is interested in the beauty of simplicity and the home. Ellen is concerned with getting to know about the true interests of people and not in focusing her attention on what they happen to be wearing. After they attend a party, Louisa is disappointed to discover that many of the people there are also interested in simple things of home and family, not in the social whirl that she had been expecting ("Louisa

Worthington" 21). By the end of the story, Louisa is vastly disappointed to discover that she has not been the social hit that she had hoped to be. Instead, her friend, Ellen, is popular and valued. Her love of home and family has won over the highest members of society and made her the admired lady that Louisa had wanted to become. Domesticity is the trait that has determined the girls' popularity or the lack thereof ("Louisa Worthington" 22).

As the only place in which a woman had some authority, and even there in a limited capacity, the home was where a woman was supposed to be at her best and most effective. She was to be the loving wife, thrifty money manager and nurturing mother, happy in her position and daily life. A woman was expected to support her husband in all of his ventures, successful or not. When her husband was experiencing difficult times, she was to stay at his side as his comforter. In relating a conversation with a friend, Washington Irving quoted his friend as saying, "I can wish you no better lot...than to have a wife and children. If you are prosperous, there they are to share your prosperity; if otherwise, there they are to comfort you" (Irving 107).

As frugal housekeepers, women were expected to ensure that their households ran as smoothly and inexpensively as possible. There was to be no waste in their tightly run homes. Every woman was to see it as her duty to ensure that there was "no waste of time or

material in the household” and it was very important that any outward expenditure be “curtailed as much as possible.” If the woman of the house had servants, she was to be ever vigilant to ensure that they performed their duties in the most efficient way possible as “no servants are ‘so confidential’ that they are never neglectful” (“Wives, A Help...” 92). A man was sure to appreciate the wonderful woman that he had married and all of her talents as long as she made it her priority to save money and time in every way possible.

As mothers, women were to dedicate their lives to the care of their children. “The early years of childhood, those most precious years of life and opening reason, are confined to woman’s superintendence. She, therefore, may be presumed to lay the foundation of all the virtue and all the wisdom that enrich the world” (“Woman” 26). This was a lot of responsibility for women to have in their lives. As it was so important, this was not a duty that was to be taken lightly. An article, “Femelle Autorite,” that emphasized the importance of a woman’s role in her home as authority, issued a call to women that was meant to encourage them in their efforts for their families. “Mothers! the intense anxiety for the future welfare of your children, made known by sleepless nights, unwearied exertion and constant counsel, be assured, is not in vain-but will, in days and times to come, be to them more valuable than jewels, and more precious than rubies” (“Femelle Autorite” 265). Although the work was difficult

and women often had to deal with rebellious children and frequently-absent husbands, their mission was one of priceless importance. Even if their actions met with resistance from the very families these women were working so tirelessly for, there would be a reward for the devoted mother in time.

So, each writer sent out messages, both traditional and less so, to her audience. Piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity were subtly communicated as ideals to the reader, almost without her knowledge. Serial literature, editorials and magazine articles gave advice on marriage and life as a woman, mother or daughter, married woman or single woman. It seems that there was almost no way for women to avoid seeing the messages that permeated literature of the time.

Chapter 3: Fighting the Status Quo

But not everyone writing at this time was espousing the ideals of true womanhood. Activist networks were forming under women like Susan B. Anthony, fighting for women's right to the vote, Amelia Bloomer, the editor of the reform newspaper, *The Lily*, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, suffragist and staunch supporter of the temperance movement (Hoffert 16-17). Several social reform organizations were formed, including the National Dress Reform Association, devoted to the discussion of women's clothing and to changing the norms set for women and the way that they dressed (Hoffert 30), the National Women's Party which dedicated itself to establishing equality between the sexes (Hoffert 120), and the National Women's Suffrage Association, an organization devoted to obtaining the right to vote for women (Hoffert 14).

In addition to the social movements that were blossoming during

the period, many writers were fighting against the standard set forth in popular women's magazines. These included Margaret Fuller, author of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Frances Wright, a fervent activist concerned with assistance for the poor and emancipation, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and John Stuart Mill, a liberal English writer known for his prolific writing and publication (Rossi 183) and, in the realm of fiction, Nathaniel Hawthorne, most famous for his novel, *The Scarlet Letter*. Though there were some significant differences in their styles of writing as well as in their topics, most of these authors believed that, through reason and careful study, there was no one that "could fail to be convinced" of the problems inherent in the condition of women. Once convinced of this, "what 'reasonable' man could fail to encourage women to cultivate a wider range of options and skills?" (Rossi 3). The ideal woman was, to these writers, not the woman that magazine articles and serialized novels were espousing and, instead of following the trends, they portrayed a different standard, one that valued the contribution a woman could bring to society as a whole.

In 1843, Margaret Fuller wrote, "The Great Lawsuit: Man Versus Men. Woman Versus Women," which was only the beginning of her work concerning the rights of women (Norton 1618-1620). In 1845, Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* expanded "The Great Lawsuit" (Norton 1618). In this essay, Fuller argues that men could never truly take measures in the true interests of women because only

women are equipped to make the right decisions and to know what measures are necessary (Fuller 1628). She goes on to say "A profound thinker has said 'no married woman can represent the female world, for she belongs to her husband. The idea of woman must be represented by a virgin'" (Fuller 1654). That, Fuller said, is the very heart of the problem with marriage and of the "present relation between the sexes, that the woman does belong to the man, instead of forming a whole with him" (Fuller 1654). She saw submissiveness, one of the four traits of true womanhood, as being detrimental to both the husband and the wife. According to Fuller, if women and men were seen as equals in their relationships, the relationships would be healthier and neither partner would need to be superior to the other. Both partners in the marriage would be happier if their relationship was structured in this way.

While Fuller did believe that a woman was well-suited to keeping a home for her family, she did not believe that domesticity and devotion to home and hearth was always a good thing. In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, she spoke of the risks that women faced when their lives were completely wrapped up in the home. She wrote about several situations that illustrated the problems that a woman could face. She referred to a woman that had been forced to live in straitened circumstances because of her husband's bad habits and irresponsibility. Eventually, the woman found herself desperate,

unable to feed her children and when the unworthy husband left his wife, taking the children, "the fact that she alone had borne the pangs of their birth, and nourished their infancy" gave her no rights over them (Fuller Ossoli 32). This wife had remained in the home, caring for her family, nursing them in times of illness, and supporting her husband without thought for herself and had ended up alone and without support.

Another activist who lived her life outside of the accepted norms of society, Frances Wright, an Englishwoman who moved to the United States in 1825, became an influential speaker on behalf of women's rights and abolition. In breaking the unspoken ban on public speaking by women, Frances became a target for criticism and "was branded 'The Great Red Harlot' " because of her decision to live as a single woman and her outspoken ways (Collins 100). She believed strongly that women should be allowed and, in fact, encouraged to get outside of the home and pursue some of the same activities that men did: "Now, though it is by no means requisite that the American woman should emulate the men in the pursuit of the whale, the felling of the forest, or the shooting of the wild turkeys, they might, with advantage, be taught in early youth to excel in the race, to hit a mark, to swim, and in short to use every exercise which could impart vigor to their frames and independence to their minds" (Wright 107). Women should not be stuck in their homes with no outlets for their energies.

Remembered mostly for her role in the fight for women's suffrage, Elizabeth Cady Stanton believed that, beyond the vote, women deserved to have equality with men on every level. She thought that the responsibilities they had in the home were excellent preparation for responsibilities outside of the home. Referring to an incident in her life when she had nursed her sick child, she said that though "uncertain at every step of my own knowledge, I learned another lesson in self-reliance. I trusted neither men nor books absolutely after this, either in regard to the heavens above or the earth beneath, but continued to use my 'mother's instinct'" (Stanton 400). She believed that, if women were capable and intelligent enough to care for their families in emergencies, they were capable and intelligent enough to handle emergencies in places other than the home.

Representing men in the argument against the standard of true womanhood, John Stuart Mill wrote in "The Subjection of Women" that the social status of women as inferior, or submissive, to men had no relation to their biological makeup or natural abilities. It meant nothing, he said, to state that "the *nature* of the two sexes adapts them to their present functions and position, and renders them appropriate to them" (Mill 203). The present condition of women had less to do with their abilities than it had to do with the balance of power and the need for those in power to remain so.

According to Mill, the general opinion of society was that women were predisposed to domesticity, life in the home as wife and mother. He believed that this was exactly the opposite of women's true nature. Women, instead of being predisposed to a life of domesticity, stayed in the home and had families because it was "necessary for society that women marry and produce children. They will not do so unless they are compelled" (Mill 206). Women were forced into domesticity because of societal needs and not by any predetermined need or talent of their own. Mill believed that women were victims of an unspoken plot that kept men in power and women in the home, where they could serve society by reproducing and adding to the population.

The arguments against this standard were not only found in non-fictional writing. Nathaniel Hawthorne's fiction takes aim at the standard set by the cult of true womanhood and in a more subtle manner than the essays of Mill, Stanton, Wright and Fuller. Just as magazines used fiction to communicate with their readers, Hawthorne used fiction to tell his readers how he felt about the way women were expected to behave. In 1850, Hawthorne published *The Scarlet Letter*, perhaps his most famous work. By placing a "fallen woman" in the lead role, Hawthorne set up a story that would challenge messages found in popular serials published at the same time.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne also made use of the conventional character types in new ways. His tale, placed in the

seventeenth century, during the early days of Puritan society, is about a woman, Hester Prynne, who dares to challenge societal norms.

Though she is nothing like her counterparts from magazine serials, Hester is placed in the position of heroine. Hawthorne was setting his character against the standard woman and her ideal qualities. She faces circumstances in her life that most heroines do not and although her choices bring devastating consequences, these only serve to enhance the nobility of her character.

Moving away from the standard format, Hawthorne chose not to place a secondary "friend" character in his book. It is the absence of this character that is perhaps most telling of Hawthorne's intentions toward Hester Prynne. Without a friend to support her in her time of need, Hester is completely isolated from other women. She is alone and has no one to rely upon except herself for solutions to her problems.

Hawthorne also put a slight twist into his third type of female character, the unlikable woman. Instead of portraying her with one woman, Hawthorne uses an entire group of women. The judgmental Puritan women are all characterized collectively. Though they seem to fit the preconceived ideal of true womanhood, Hawthorne does not admire them, turning the convention of ideals on its head. The heroine is played by the woman who would have traditionally been the rebellious character, stepping outside of the rules of propriety, and the

pious Puritan women are self-righteous and unsympathetic.

Hester Prynne is a young woman who is cast out of society when she becomes pregnant with a baby that was not fathered by her husband. When she refuses to identify the baby's father, she is put in jail, and it is there that she gives birth to her daughter, Pearl. During the course of the story, Hester finds a way to support herself and her child with her embroidery skills. She is successful in her own way and rises above the limits that her town has placed upon her. Hester becomes a model of survival and independence, completely challenging the belief that women are incapable of taking care of themselves and must, by their nature, depend on the care of men (Hawthorne 1333 - 1474).

Hester was the ideal of Hawthorne's novel but was not ideal by the standard of the day; she is not pious, pure or submissive. Yet, she is a woman held up for admiration and as an example for imitation. Though not a good mother in the conventional sense, she has domestic abilities and those are demonstrated in the way she takes care of her child and in the way she keeps her home. However, although Hester keeps a nice house and cares for her child with concern and tenderness, the fact that she is lacking the other three traits of true womanhood are enough to make her unacceptable to society.

As a heroine set in his own time, it seems unlikely that

Hawthorne's contemporaries could have accepted Hester as someone they could support. Hawthorne was able to form Hester in the way that he did because he placed her in a time and context that was removed from his own. This allowed a comfortable distance for his readers, just far enough away from the action, to allow them to remove themselves from the story. Hawthorne was only willing to go so far in his writing, though, as he could not risk alienating the very readers who purchased his writing, allowing him to continue. As it was, *The Scarlet Letter* was not reviewed in *Godey's Ladies Book*, a magazine which had published some of Hawthorne's other work. He is certain to make it clear that Hester is not rewarded for her rebellious actions and is, instead, under the judgment of God. Although the book was called "licentious or morbid," it sold well and caused a sensation in both the United States and Great Britain and "Hawthorne was proclaimed as the finest American romancer" (Norton 1249). It has maintained its appeal and popularity since its first publication.

Even though it may have seemed that all of society was pushing for a new type of woman to take shape, not everyone was in favor of it happening. Fuller, Wright, Stanton, Mill and Hawthorne were only a few of the people that were actively fighting against this new ideal. Using the same mode to communicate their messages as the people they were fighting, these writers spread their messages through their writing. They published their pieces in magazines, journals and books

that were readily available to the reading public. Though they were not as popular as the magazines that were filled with tributes to true womanhood, they brought attention to the issues these writers were fighting to address. In the end, they received the attention that they needed in order to make their voices heard. Women received the vote with the 19th Amendment to the Constitution in 1920 and received validation in their roles as working women with valuable contributions to make to the public and political worlds.

Conclusion: The End of “True Womanhood”

After beginning around 1820, the Cult of True Womanhood was firmly ensconced in American culture by the middle of the century. Women of the middle class had been repeatedly told that they belonged in the home, taking care of their families. At least subconsciously, they knew that society wanted them to be pure, pious, submissive and domestic. It must have seemed as though American people had found a new way to operate in the changing world, a way that would give them much needed stability. But that was not always to be the case. Rising tensions between states in the North and states in the South over issues of slavery and states rights began to shake the foundations of American society. By 1860, it seemed clear that war was inevitable and the America that had developed was going to undergo drastic changes. The roles of women, so carefully developed through the early part of the century were rapidly changed as war

forced men to fight. Women had to deal with the absences of their husbands and fathers in addition to filling the roles that men had filled and then been forced to abandon.

When the first shots were fired upon Fort Sumter, America found itself in an unprecedented position, at war with itself. Husbands and sons rushed off to enlist in the military, leaving their wives, mothers and children home to care for themselves. Women were urged to “hurl the destructive novel in the fire and turn our poodles out of doors, and convert our pianos into spinning wheels” (Collins 189). In the South, women began to make razor kits, formed relief committees to sew clothing for the troops and held benefits to raise money to aid the war effort (Collins 189). In the North, women responded to the war in some of the same ways, forming the United States Sanitary Commission which provided much-needed food and medical services for soldiers in the army (Collins 192). An estimated 400 women even signed themselves up to fight in the war, disguising themselves as men.

Some women began to see the war as an opportunity for them to assert their independence and to seize the chance to liberate themselves. Some of them began to let their hair down and took off their hoopskirts. By 1863, Amanda Worthington of Mississippi constructed a “bloomer costume” which allowed her to fish and help provide for her family (Collins 195). As the need grew, women began

to enter the work world, taking jobs as clerical workers, seamstresses and ammunitions packers. Francis Spinner, Abraham Lincoln's treasurer, actually preferred female clerical employees because "he liked their efficiency and, not incidentally, the fact that they were much cheaper than men" (Collins 196). Eventually there were 447 women working in the treasury department, making \$720.00 per year, a salary that was generous for women of the time but that was not sufficient to meet expenses in this highly inflationary economy (Collins 196).

By the end of the Civil War, in 1865, American society had undergone massive changes. Many of the country's young men had died in action, leaving thousands of widows and orphans to fend for themselves. Middle class women had become accustomed to working outside of their homes and had discovered that they were good at it and even enjoyed their experiences. Women had discovered ways of life that they never would have dreamed of living before war had disrupted their lives and homes. When troops began to return to their homes, they found them very different from the homes they had left.

With these tastes of independence, many women were not willing to immediately revert to the lives they had lived before the war. They had discovered that their talents were not only confined to the home and family and were not ready to restrict themselves again. Though they did return in many ways to the lives they had led before

war had reshaped their world, many of these women saw their identities as being not only restricted to the care of home and family. Some women began to choose to remain single and to live away from their families, supporting themselves. Though there are very few reliable accounts of the makeup of this group of working women, by the turn of the century, some married women had found their niche in the working world (Weiner 19). Thus, the ideals of true womanhood had been forever changed by a war that brought new responsibilities, challenges and opportunities. This is not to say, however, that all women were comfortable with the idea of completely leaving the home for outside work. Most of them still spent their time as homemakers, caring for their husbands and families and many of their magazines, including *Godey's Ladies Book*, still espoused the same ideals of the Cult of True Womanhood.

So, while they have been diminished, the ideals of true womanhood have never been completely abandoned. Even during the times that women have been forced by circumstance to step outside of their roles, some form of ideal womanhood has still persisted in society. The need to find some sort of stability in their lives never went away but the way in which they found it underwent changes over time. The model wives of the fifties' sitcoms were examples of the way that an ideal carried through even though it had changed a little. Even today, some of the ideals can be found in women's magazines

and novels. It seems as though there will always be at least a small attempt to find gendered roles for women. The ideals of true womanhood may not look the same way that they did when they were introduced, but they are still alive and well in some form.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

- A Lady. "Advice to a Bride." *The Lady's Book* 4 June 1832: 286-288.
- "Female Piety." *The Lady's Book* 12 Jan. 1839: 26.
- "Femelle Autorite." *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* 49 Nov. 1847: 264 - 266.
- Fern, Fanny. "A Law More Nice Than Just." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Nina Baym. Vol. 6. New York: W. W. Norton and Company. 2003. 1750 - 1751.
- Fuller, Margaret. "The Great Lawsuit: Man Versus Men. Woman Versus Women." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Nina Baym. Vol. 6. New York: W. W. Norton and Company. 2003. 1620 - 1654.
- Fuller Ossoli, Margaret. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century, and Kindred Papers Relating to the Sphere, Condition, and Duties of Woman*. New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers. 1968.
- Hale, Sarah Josepha. Editorial. *Ladies Magazine and Literary Gazette* 3 Dec. 1831: 534 - 540.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. 1850. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Nina Baym. Vol. 6. New York: W. W. Norton and Company. 2003. 1333 - 1474.
- Irving, Washington. "The Wife." *The Lady's Book* 11 July - Dec. 1835: 107.
- Lee, Luther. "The Importance of Religion to Woman." *The Ladies Pearl* 111 May - June 1843: 108 - 109, 127 - 128.
- Leslie, Miss. "The Cleybornes." *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* 40 (1849) 187 -191, 265 - 271, 305 - 310, 434 - 440.
- "Louisa Worthington." *The Lady's Book* 3 Jan. 1830: 13-22.
- Mill, John Stuart. "The Subjection of Women." *The Feminist Papers: From Adams to de Beauvoir*. By Alice S. Rossi, Ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1973. 196 - 238.

Otis, J. F. "Allondale Priory." *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* 40 (1849) 37 - 43, 97 - 102.

Smith, W. Gilmore. "Katharine Walton: or the Rebel's Daughter. A Tale of the Revolution." *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* 40 (1850) 107 - 118, 161 - 169, 243 - 251, 320 - 326, 397 - 411; 41 (1851) 13 - 27, 89 - 100, 162 - 179, 205 - 219, 287 - 298, 332 - 352.

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. "Motherhood." *The Feminist Papers: From Adams to de Beauvoir*. By Alice S. Rossi, Ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1973. 396 - 401.

"Wives, a Help, or a Hindrance, to Success in Life." *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine* 52 Jan. 1856: 92.

"Woman." *The Ladies Pearl* 1 Jan. 1841: 175 - 176.

"Woman." *The Lady's Book* 12 Jan. 1836: 26.

Wright, Frances. "Education." *The Feminist Papers: From Adams to de Beauvoir*. By Alice S. Rossi, Ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1973. 100 - 107.

Secondary Sources

Baym, Nina. Nathaniel Hawthorne. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Nina Baym. Vol. 6. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. 2003. 1247 - 1250.

Collins, Gail. *America's Women: 400 Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates, and Heroines*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. 2003.

Greenberg, Hope A. "About Godey's Lady's Book: Publication History." *University of Vermont Online* Aug. 1998.
<http://cit.uvm.edu:6336/dynaweb/godey/aboutglb/@Generic_BookView;cs=default;ts=default>.

Hoffert, Sylvia D. *When Hens Crow: The Woman's Rights Movement in Antebellum America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1995

Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. *Study*

00003: *Historical Demographic, Economic, and Social Data: U.S., 1790 -1970.* <<http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/cgi-llocal/censusbin/census/cen.pl>>.

Lavendar, Catherine. "The Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood." 1 Dec. 2004: <<http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history.lavendar/>>.

Lund, Michael. *America's Continuing Story: An Introduction to Serial Fiction, 1850 - 1900.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993.

Mitchell, Thomas R. *Hawthorne's Fuller Mystery.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998.

Robinson, Harriet. *Loom & Spindle or Life Among the Early Mill Girls.* Kailua: Press Pacifica, 1976.

Rossi, Alice S. Prestige From the Other Sex: *John Stuart Mill (1806 - 1873).* *The Feminist Papers: From Adams to de Beauvoir.* By Alice S. Rossi, Ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1973. 183 - 196.

Rossi, Alice S. Introduction: Analysis versus Action. *The Feminist Papers: From Adams to de Beauvoir.* By Alice S. Rossi, Ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1973. 3 - 6.

Von Mehren, Joan. *Minerva and the Muse: A Life of Margaret Fuller.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994.

Weiner, Lynn. *From Working Girl to Working Mother: The Female Labor Force in the United States, 1820-1980.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985.

Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820 - 1860." *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151 - 174.