

10-7-2014

Book Review: Southern Women Novelists and the Civil War: Trauma and Collective Memory in the American Literacy Tradition since 1861

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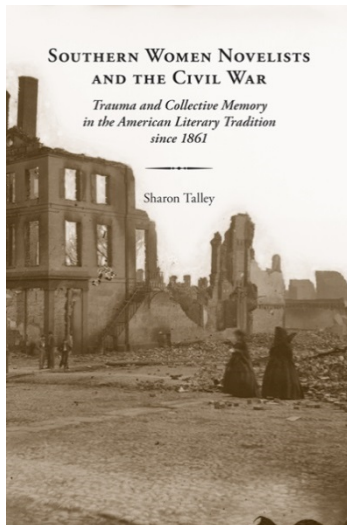
Jordan, Carol Walker (2014) "Book Review: Southern Women Novelists and the Civil War: Trauma and Collective Memory in the American Literacy Tradition since 1861," *The Southeastern Librarian*: Vol. 62: Iss. 3, Article 7.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Southern Women Novelists and the Civil War: Trauma and Collective Memory in the American Literary Tradition since 1861. Sharon Talley. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2014. ISBN 1-62190-013-4. \$74.



On lifting the cover of this book, I wondered naively “what is there to talk about in Civil War history that I haven’t already seen, heard and suffered through” as has any woman born and lived two-thirds of her life in the southern United States.

Yet, inside the front cover, Ms. Talley tells me that southern women played a critical role in shaping the South’s evolving collective memory by penning journals, diaries, historical accounts, memoirs, and literary interpretations of the war. At this point, she caught my attention. I thought women managed the plantation houses, supervised the farming, the slaves, and the crop rotations during the Civil War but I was woefully lacking in the depth of women’s contributions through their writings.

Talley brings us through a presentation of oral and written histories and analyses of the voices of fifteen women novelists spanning the “Civil War Period, Reconstruction, Turn of the Century, The Modern Period and Novels Since World Two...”(inside fly leaf). Fascinating reading, eye opening discussions and commentaries drew me into this historical collection of women’s voices and experiences as seen through the eyes of many women. While Ms. Talley obviously included the famous “Gone With The Wind” writings of Margaret Mitchell, she raised other novelists and their writings as well.

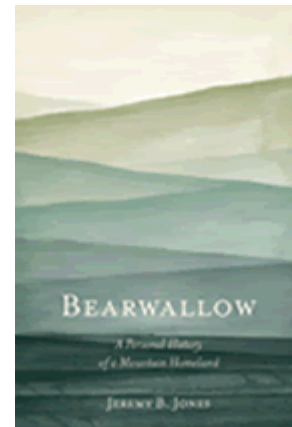
A note of interest, according to Talley, women novelists came to be called “scribbling women ...even referred to as “...damned scribbling women..” and yet in 1850, James Harr (p. 339) declared novels by Hawthorne, Melville,

Thoreau, and Whitman did not equal the sales of one of the more popular domestic novels by women”.....

There is an extensive End Notes and Index which I highly recommend to any student or faculty member who hopes to learn more about southern women writers during the Civil War years and beyond (1861- present). (p. 337-432)

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Bearwallow: A Personal History of a Mountain Homeland. Jeremy B. Jones. Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, Publisher, 2014. ISBN 978-0-89587-624-9. 288 p. \$24.95.



A native of southern Appalachia, Jeremy B. Jones spent the early years of his life in the shadow of Bearwallow in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. Pulled away by education and a teaching position in Honduras, he continued to be drawn back to the mountains and has now settled into a position as a professor in the department of English at Western Carolina University. In his debut memoir, *Bearwallow: A Personal History of a Mountain Homeland*, Jones explores how his mountain upbringing imprinted on his adult life, and through that journey, he grapples with the age-old questions of who we are and how our geographical and cultural background affects who we become.

The stories of Jones’ personal odyssey take place within the backdrop of the mountains and it is this unique topography that reflects the themes of the book: the pull of home versus the need to leave, the outsider assimilating in a native culture, reality versus regional stereotypes, and land conservation in the face of impending development. The inherent tension of these themes is found in Jones’ exploration of the mountains, which give context to his life as he seeks to understand his geographical and genealogical past. Biking through the challenging local terrain, he takes the time to listen to a local historian’s tales of Civil War