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# Martha and the Church

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### Martha and the Church

Martha McMillan was heavily involved in her community. If you follow stereotypes of a woman in the nineteenth century, then in reading that statement means you most likely thought of a woman who goes into town periodically to get provisions or maybe to visit a friend. That is not Martha. Martha lived in a distinctly different time than currently is enjoyed. As we look into her life, it can be seen that modern stereotypes wont work. What this paper will discuss is Martha's involvement in the churches around Cedarville in May through July 1873, how that affected her writing in regard to genre, and a brief history of the churches she would be involved in.

The journal, in any time period, is an important and treasured possession of the person who wrote it. Martha loved her community and the people that were in it. For Martha, loving her community meant more than just going to town hall meetings and having ladies over to knit. Martha had people at her house constantly and she wrote about it. "11 May Sabb. Pleasant. No one with us on last night for once in a longtime." (McMillan,

May 1873) Note that it has been a long time since she hasn't had lots of people to care for. Having people at her house and running a huge farm did not stop Martha from being faithful to what she saw as valuable. Every Sunday Martha writes about her time in church or if she wasn't in church. During the months of May, June, and July 1873, Martha doesn't talk about sermons as much as she does in other journals. However what we see is more of her involvement in the church at large. Martha discusses where people are, like the fact that Mr. Morton, her pastor, took a trip to the west during the month of June. What this gives us is an idea as to the importance of the church in Martha's life. She cared where her pastor was and who was filling his place. Martha also cared about what was happening in the greater presbyterian church. It is mentioned in her journal during 1873, that a synod meeting will be held in Cedarville at some point in 1874. What Martha is writing about is more than just crops and farm life. She discusses the people she cares about and often processes how she can help them come to know Christ more fully. In an evening in June of 1873, the McMillan family reads the Gospel of John. These kind of events are typical of what Martha writes about.

Life writing is a unique genre because of its broad range of writing styles and internal genres. Although as a whole life

writing is a genre, there are many facets of the genre that fit into a complicated mesh of sub-genres. Because of the broad range of topics and styles that the genre can cover, it can be difficult to define what exactly fits into life writing. Suzanne Bunkers attempts to do so when she says, "Each diary was created in a specific historical, socio-economic, ethnic, and geographical context; by virtue of specificity of context, therefore, no one diary can rightfully be called 'typical' of all diaries written by nineteenth-century women." (Bunkers 15-17) As Bunkers mentioned, the context of the piece is vital in our understanding of the text's value and our ability to be able to read the text well. Martha's journals definitely aren't typical, bunkers makes that statement well. Of the potential topics offered that could be talked about Martha addresses all of them. She talks about religion, farm life, and personal life. Margo Culley speaks to the general sub genres that are found in life writing, they are religious, secular, and exploration of self. A religious journal will describe a person's personal walk with Christ or their development in Him. A secular journal deals with the everyday affairs of life such as politics, community events, and education. A journal that explores self is one that is far more personal. In this type, a persons life is more visible. Its how they process their day. How they understand

life. (Culley) Sometimes a life writing will fit this criteria and sometimes there are writers that don't fit into a category but combine two or even all three. Martha covers all of these genres and even moves into some twentieth century tendencies.

Martha McMillan wrote in the 19th and early 20th Century. Through her writing we see many aspects of farm life and spiritual life in the 19th Century. The other thing that you find in her is a deep ability to process life. She represents a unique ability to write in all three genres. Martha's journals speak frequently of the spiritual growth of the community as well as her own spiritual understanding and development. Martha also addresses the duties of the farm, the age of the children, and the many people that came and were a part of the huge farm that James and Martha ran in Cedarville. Martha frequently self reflects in her writing giving us insight into her as a person and her thoughts. All these aspects come together to make a unique mixture of all three categories and breaking many of the bounds that Culley speaks to. The importance of Martha not fitting the mold set out by Culley is that it shows Martha's unique ability to write and tell a whole spectrum of information in one set of documents.

Martha is seen as a balanced person due to the way she writes and it speaks to her ability to live in the intensity of

a farm. "Synod will meet on next year at our church in C- Harlan has been sick all day has had another chill\_ Jamie out with the men at the corn planting this P.M." (McMillan, May 1873) The insight you receive into a 19th Century woman's life is immense in the context of the ability to weave faith, family, and farm. Martha's journals always cover the things she found important in life. For Martha nothing is mundane. She writes about everything. Not conforming to a standard found through other written texts making it clear that she is open to speaking openly in her journal. The ideas of what a 19th Century woman should be are different than what Martha looks like. Martha doesn't fit anywhere. She has a style distinctly her own. This makes her an in-depth person to look into as well as her writing a unique piece of literature to study. For her audience this text would have given insight both into her personal life but also into her farm and spiritual life. The beauty of life writing is that it gives you a clear depiction of what a person thought, did, and cared about. For an audience to read another persons unabridged perspective is to give us insight into how we can be better individuals and people.

Martha McMillan dedicated herself to her community. As she records the goings on of the village in her journal, it can be seen that she not only cares about the social and political

aspect of life but also the spiritual. Life writing must be understood in the context of the time it was written as well as the environment. Martha forms a unique piece of life writing that can only really be understood in the context of the family she was a part of and the village she lived in. One of the things that influenced Martha heavily was the church she attended.

Over the course of Martha's life, the church changed and grew in Cedarville. For Martha faith is first priority. Martha loved the Presbyterian Church particularly in regard to her Scottish heritage as a Covenanter. It is clear by Martha's family and up-bringing that she was encouraged towards a more conservative political and religious view. Who you marry tells a lot about you. In a list of ministers of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Cedarville, McMillans are mentioned as leaders both historically and as ministers sent from the church in Cedarville. (Church, pg. 1) James and Martha served the church for many years, though James wasn't quite as dedicated as his ancestors. Both James and Martha attended the reformed Presbyterian Church. Gavin McMillan and Hugh McMillan were predecessors to James Morton who pastored Martha for over forty years. Martha married into a family with a good amount of religious heritage. What we know of Martha before she was

married is that she went to seminary and that her brother David Murdock was a minister in the Presbyterian Church. Seminary for Martha is less spiritual and more of a high school strictly for girls. Martha loved her community and she loved her church. She also challenged her children to be a part of ministry. Murray Murdoch says, "Homer McMillan, a pastor and secretary to the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A." (Murdoch, pg. 24) Martha's son Jason also became a minister. It can be seen that Martha's dedication to the church not only was for herself but it made itself evident in her legacy to her children. Martha lived as a member of her church community but more importantly as a Covenanter.

Martha was a Presbyterian but particularly a Covenanter. There are two main types of Presbyterians, united and reformed. Covenanter is a label placed upon the Reformed Presbyterians. Generally speaking, a Covenanter is more conservative than a Presbyterian who goes to a United Presbyterian Church. There is a lot of history behind the name McMillan and the Reformed Presbyterian church. In 1743 Reverend John McMillan and Reverend Thomas Nairn re-established the Reformed Presbytery of Scotland. (Synod, pg. 25) The reason it needed to be re-established was because it had been destroyed by church structure not found in the reformed church and by Catholic

belief in England. America eventually received this group with open arms. Presbyteries were established in Philadelphia, Pittsburg, Ohio, and in the West. (Synod, pg. 27) Martha would become familiar with these as family members became heavily involved in the different areas that the church asked them to be a part of. Often in Martha's journals we will hear about a visiting preacher from a different presbytery. On June sixteenth she writes, "The funeral exercises were conducted by Rev [Boyd]. Mr Morton being absent on a visit to the west." (McMillan, June 1873) When this happens Martha often speaks more about what she thought of the sermon in her journal. Because of when Martha began her journal, there was religious and political turmoil. The Presbyterian church at large was trying to figure out what they were to think about political issues due to the Civil war. Martha often writes about the different changes that are occurring in the church. Martha directs the reader towards times in history where the church was struggling to figure out doctrine. On May twenty-ninth "Bro Robert returned on last night from attending the meeting of Synod at Pittsberg. Synod will meet on next year at our church in C-..." (McMillan, May 1873) Synods would be held in Cedarville that would be attended by Martha's pastoral family member. (Chesnut, pg. 47-54) Martha

loved knowing and reminding herself that she was part of the greater body of Christ.

Martha wasn't just a Sunday school teacher or a relative of pastors. Martha engaged in the church. The church was part of who Martha was. Martha wrote a lot about general happenings on the farm. When Martha processes her day she deals with family, community, and church. What is seen in Martha is that there is no secular religious divide and that provides something for modern culture to learn from. If christian culture acted more like Martha did in regard to church, the world would be a better place. Understanding Martha helps a reader to understand what it is to live in the world but not of it. Martha impacted the people around her and that changed her town. Carol Lee describes Martha's journals by saying, "Tucked away inside Cedarville's library archives is a treasure...Martha McMillan had no special qualification to write this journal...But no question, she was a witness to the changes in American life at the turn of the century". (Lee, pg 1) Martha helps the reader to understand what being a church member looks like and it is interesting to absorb her perspective on the whole subject. Reading Martha McMillan will give you insight into a true nineteenth century woman and to the body of Christ that she loved being a part of.

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