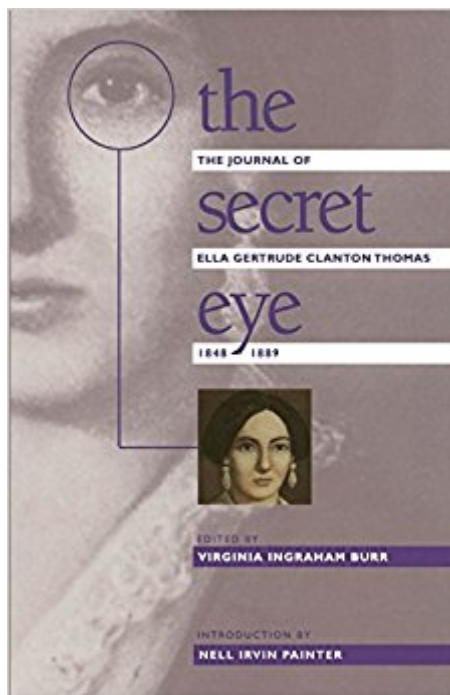


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The Secret Eye: The Journal Of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889 (Gender And American Culture)



Synopsis

The journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, spanning the years from 1848 to 1889, is rare for its treatment of both the Civil War and postbellum years and for its candor and detail in treating these eras. Thomas, who was born to wealth and privilege and reared in the tradition of the southern belle, tells of the hard days of war and the poverty brought on by emancipation and Reconstruction. Her entries illuminate experiences shared with thousands of other southern women.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Few diaries by Southern women are as rich as Thomas's account, which marks the transition of a plantation mistress to a school teacher and political activist, thereby charting the change from the Old South to the New. This abridged version, with a superb introductory essay on Southern women as diarists by Nell Painter, offers the most sustained female commentary on many subjects--marriage, religion, slavery, war, women's emotional and physical burdens, and more. Especially revealing are Thomas's observations during the fall and adjustment of the planter class and her preoccupation with slavery's effects on male-female relations and identities. Though she lived most of her life in Augusta, Georgia, Thomas's is an almost universal voice of Southern white women chafing against slavery, male-dominated institutions, and the spiritual and material poverty of the postwar South. This is a real Scarlett O'Hara, with grit. Highly recommended.- Randall M. Miller, St. Joseph's Univ., PhiladelphiaCopyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text

refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

An involving and intriguing addition to the personal histories of the period."Kirkus Reviews"An unusually rich insight into a crucial period of social change."Maryland Historical Magazine""Few diaries by Southern women are as rich as Thomas's account. This is a real Scarlett O'Hara, with grit."Library Journal""A rare, continuous picture.Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, author of "Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South""Few diaries by Southern women are as rich as Thomas's account. This is a real Scarlett O'Hara, with grit."Library Journal"A rare, continuous picture.Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, author of "Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South"Fascinating."Publishers Weekly"

My mother was born and raised in Augusta Ga.That's what drew my initial interest to this book.Plus, the fact that Nell Painter(a gifted historian and writer) added her intellect to the introduction/overview,sealed the deal.The book was a real eye/mind opener in helping me to understand the mindset of the slave owning planter(read 1% elite) population of this country.Religion and class seemed to authorize and justify her(Mrs.E Thomas) deep seated racist convictions.Did her god create negroes to serve rich whites? They seemed to think so,absolutely and without contradiction.She felt betrayed(imagine that),at the end of the civil war,when her 'servants',many of whom had been trained as craftsmen,on her plantations,left to seek skilled wages.Worth noting also was her fear/resentment of the beautiful mulattoes,whom she felt had a sexual advantage,over proper white women and ,who(now that the war had ended in defeat) could now be educated....('how many white gentlemen would be left for her daughters to marry')The socio/economic conditions of the deep south were very slow in changing because of governmental betrayals(after'Reconstruction') to the ex-slaves and some of the choices the ex-slaves and the ex-slave-owners made.....;the blacks called on jesus ,and the whites called on smith and wesson;.(Malcolm X)FUTURE GENERATIONS OF HOMO SAPIENS WILL READ THIS BOOK AND EXPERIENCE A GLIMPSE OF THE RACIAL HYSTERIA AND THE CONTRADICTIONS THAT SHAPED OUR EARLY AMERICAN CULTURE

Being a Thomas, I found this book especially interesting!

Being from Augusta GA is what attracted me to this book. My mother in law is a great history buff and an avid diary writer herself. It was the perfect gift for her!

I read many Civil War histories. With this one, it was unrelentingly boring. I quit about 100 pages into it and took it to my CWRT for someone else to love and cherish.

Each woman evolves in her own life and era, based on her own experiences. And subject to her marital choice. That this process is so close to home when written by a southern woman over 100 years ago is almost eerie, but compellingly so. It is also very comforting. I read to be entertained certainly, but also to find "kindred spirits". I found one in this honest and brave lady. You can obtain details from the other reviews about the setting and context of the diary. Someone said "we read to know we are not alone". So when I am less lonely after I read a book, then that is a fine fine book to me. Ella becomes a friend to me, someone who is sharing her life over coffee cups. I follow her through a phase of romantic girlishness knowing that she will go through what we all do when the romance wears off and we see what we have married in truth. This is not always a bad thing, but it is always a different thing. It must be since earth is not heaven by any stretch of the imagination!! But then the framework of Ella's life and society changes drastically, and we wonder how our dear friend will deal with this...given the times and options for women and the ever present public opinion worries, Ella faces the truth with admirable courage and plans. OH Bravo Ella. what woman will not shudder as Ella's handsome husband become alcoholic and then mentally unstable? How would we deal with "servants" who betray us when we are being fair and honest now? If we really want to know the real issues behind American History we are better off reading the journals and diaries of women such as Ella. There are no apologies for feelings that might hurt someone else's feelings. How refreshing.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book! How often does one get to read someone else's diary? (Set during the Civil War, no less.) The author was a well educated, intelligent woman for her time and she is an excellent writer. So many aspects of this diary are completely fascinating. Her pampered southern lifestyle, her views on slavery (she calls herself a liberal re: slavery and yet, she is such a racist.), her feelings on male superiority and her longing to do more with her talents. The entries during the war and after are the most interesting... but DON'T read the introductory notes written by the editor...unless you want to spoil the ending! I wanted the diary to unfold one day at a time without knowing what was coming just as it did for Gertrude. After reading the diary I went back and read the editorial notes which add insight into the author's life. This is a story of a very strong woman enduring unbelievable hardships. If you enjoy history at all you will love reading this diary!

I totally disagree w/ the review above because apparently the reader did not understand that this diary is not a novel. It is true however that the diary does not reveal too much of Ella herself. This is not surprising to me since she states that she is not going to open up to her diary and tell her innermost feelings. Unfortunately! However, after she gets married, has children and is much more matured she does reveal a great deal about her life, feelings etc. One can only thank that someone took the trouble to record personal information during the antebellum time and afterwards for the readers of the 21st century to read. Thank you.

A Secret Eye was a huge disappointment. The characters were not as developed and colorful as one might expect. The diary/journal form became ho-hum after the first few entries. The dragging subjects and subject matter made the 470 pages difficult to wade through. Augusta has always been my home and I did enjoy some of the local history. I am certain a more interesting story could have been told about my hometown.

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