
Censoring Grace King: Northern Discomfort with Southern Womanhood

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Abstract

In her 2007 publication, "Grace King: Southern Self-Representations and Northern Publishers," Mary Ann Wilson states, "As a product of her particular postbellum cultural moment, King was both self-deprecating and fiercely proud, dependent on men and male publishers yet scornful of their power in her life. The male-dominated publishing world that controlled her fate was not only male- it was Yankee" (389). For King, these Northern editors represented a type of Other in comparison to her feminine associated southern identity, and she often found herself caught between these two polars: the masculine North in control of her publishing opportunities and her feminine French and Southern influences and writing style. Her numerous mentor-writers included Marie Blanc and George Sand; her editors, however, were Northern, American men, deeply attached to their English ancestry, and King's attempts to navigate the space between her mentors and editors was clearly a struggle for her. Through traveling Europe and creating a life outside of New Orleans, King began navigating the space between Amateur Writer and Independent Woman Intellectual. She cultivated a sense of confidence that enabled her to approach her writing as a career and connected with the intellectualism found in the Paris salons, all of which she captured in her journals and 1932 memoir *Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters*. King's discovery of identity and self-confidence often resulted in discomfort for her male editors, who attempted to reign in and censor her writing. The timid, Southern lady demeanor faded and was replaced by a confident writer and intellectual who demanded respect and equal treatment. I argue that King's struggles between these her mentors and her editors is evident in her journals and memoirs, and in her attempts to navigate these gendered spaces, we witness King's discovery of herself as a writer.

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