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Giselle Roberts, ed. *The Correspondence of Sarah Morgan and Francis Warrington Dawson with Selected Editorials Written by Sarah Morgan for the Charleston News and Courier.* Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2004. lv + 274 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8203-2591-0.

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A Marriage of Two Minds

The story began like a romance. Sarah Morgan, facing a choice between poverty and dependency, met Francis Warrington Dawson, a widower with a promising journalism career. The smitten Dawson proposed marriage. Any woman in Morgan's predicament would have gladly accepted; but their story took a surprising turn from what Carolyn Heilbrun called the "narrative of marriage."[1] Morgan refused Dawson's hand. More surprisingly, Dawson did not slink away in rejection. Instead, he offered Morgan something closer to her true desire. He offered her a means of independence; he offered her a job. Throughout the following year, the two developed a friendship that not only subverted the conventions of nineteenth-century friendship, but also allowed Morgan to explore a new definition of elite, white southern women.

Between January and October 1873, Morgan and Dawson conducted an epistolary relationship spanning over 190 letters. Giselle Roberts has selected 80 of the most pertinent of these letters, omitting "excessive repetition" (p. li) but retaining most of the representative letters and framing them with introductions and annotations. In presenting this correspondence, Roberts intends to explore the role of the Civil War in redefining gender, particularly in regard to women and specifically in regard to elite, white women. Morgan's experience in pursuing a career as a writer highlighted the change in status that the women of her class experienced, exposing both losses and opportunities. Single women such as Morgan felt deep ambivalence toward these changes, finding a measure of liberation through economic independence, but also regretting lost privileges and identity. By highlighting the fairly unique relationship between Morgan and Dawson, Roberts suggests that, as elite, white women grappled with their shifting status in the aftermath of the Civil War, interactions between women and men also changed. While Morgan explicitly addressed the economic issues facing women of her race and class in the essays that she wrote for Dawson's paper, their private discussions revealed a subtle renegotiation of personal gender relations. The friendship that developed between the two may be more recognizable in the twenty-first century than it was in the nineteenth.

Morgan and Dawson met at her brother James's plantation in South Carolina in January 1873. This was not the happiest period in the life of either. Dawson had lost his wife of seven years scarcely a month earlier and was embarking upon a potentially risky partnership as owner and editor of the *Charleston News*. Morgan's family had been devastated during the Civil War, an experience that she chronicled in the five volumes of her diary.[2] While her sole surviving brother had sold the family's Louisiana plantation and removed to South Carolina, neither Morgan nor her widowed mother had any property or independent means of support. When James Morgan married, the plans for Sarah and her mother to act as his housekeepers were thwarted, and the two became dependants upon the newlyweds' charity. Additionally, Sarah had accepted guardianship of Howell Morgan, the son of her deceased brother, Thomas. By the time Sarah met Dawson, she found herself responsible for a young boy and an aging mother, yet unable to support herself, much less the other two.

Morgan believed that her predicament was not unique in the postwar South. She criticized southern society for perpetuating a definition of femininity that required dependence and saw female employment as a "desecration" of that femininity (p. 62). This rendered single women useless, as far as Morgan was concerned, a situation made worse by the carnage of the war that had eliminated husbands and potential husbands from the population. Single women, including widows, ended up in competition for the remaining, eligible men in order to survive. When Dawson gave Morgan the oppor-

tunity to write, the political, social, and economic readjustments of post-Civil War South Carolina served as the backdrop against which she could vent her frustrations about her personal crisis and in which she "struggled to reconcile her antebellum socialization in the Southern feminine ideal with the realities of life in postwar South Carolina" (p. xvii). In the process, Morgan attempted to redefine southern femininity to include employment and self-sufficiency. Dawson, as his letters demonstrate, provided her not only with the public forum to expound upon her ideas, but also facilitated Morgan's own private struggle to live according to this new ideal. Since she wrote and published her essays secretly, he became her sole confidant in what, for her, was a very dramatic development in her life.

In reproducing this exchange, Roberts faced several challenges. First, the correspondence veered dangerously toward becoming one-sided. Morgan, in an attempt to forget this dark period of her life, had destroyed all of her letters from the first seven months of 1873, an act that she herself later regretted. Roberts argues that "Frank centered much of his writing on Sarah and made a point of responding to the issues she had raised in her letters," and therefore "through Frank's words, Sarah emerges as an elite woman grappling the postwar meaning of her life"(p. lii). Yet, cynical readers might doubt the effectiveness of such an assumption in deducing Sarah's words. His responses may have indicated the factual contents of her letters. They did not necessarily indicate the tone. These cynical readers, in fact, may wonder if Morgan exploited Dawson's infatuation or toyed with his affection in order to procure the position of correspondent, publication of her essays, better assignments, or simply flattery. These cynical readers may also wonder how much of Dawson's affection blinded him to her flaws, or if his constant reassurances to her were in response to a genuine need for support or to a non-threatening pose on her part.

Fortunately, Roberts responds to the need for some direct word from Morgan during the early part of this relationship by including several of Morgan's essays published during these months and later. While the public voice of these essays is somewhat different from the private voice that becomes apparent when her letters appear later in Roberts's volume, the inclusion of these essays is both useful and necessary. Not only do they give Morgan a presence that might otherwise be essentially absent, but they also provide context as a subject of discussion within the correspondence and as evidence of their professional interaction beyond the correspondence. For example, Dawson advised Morgan to "Keep to a stern simplicity," in her writing style (p. 30). She seems to have taken that advice as the literary flourishes of her first essay, "The New Andromeda," published in January, give way to the terse, focused indictments of "Work for Women," published four months later.

While most of these essays focus on the plight of elite southern women, later essays that Roberts also intersperses throughout the volume, explore various political topics such as racial relations and the lives of the wealthy. As Roberts points out, Morgan attempted to redefine the role of women within southern society, but she did not intend to change southern society. Much like essayist Louisa S. McCord had done in the 1840s and 1850s, Morgan described and defended southern paternalism and hierarchy. In doing so, she not only violated her own belief that women should steer clear of political subjects, but demonstrated how she was complicit in a society that she also critiqued. Unlike McCord, however, Morgan believed that the emancipation of women from a dependant role could be separated from white racial domination.

If the essays reveal a consistently confident voice, the letters trace the arc of her gaining that confidence. Roberts has selected and presented the letters in such a way as to allow the narrative of the couple to unfold much as in a monograph, but with more of the immediacy of a novel. The friendship that emerges in these letters reveals itself to be one of mutual support. While Dawson continued to offer Morgan marriage, he also assisted her in her quest for independence. She, in turn, provided him solace and friendship during the lonely period following his wife's death; and he likened her to Dante's Virgil, writing, "you have led me through the first circle of the 'Inferno"' (p. 16). Not only did they discuss editorial matters of her writing, but they also advised one another on financial matters, both personal and professional. Moreover, through their letters they expressed genuine fondness for one another, ever quick to apologize for slights and constant in their declarations of affection even after she seemed to have closed off all hope of matrimony from him. That their friendship was unconventional was evidenced in James Morgan's admonition against their liaison without an engagement. His request that Dawson and Sarah cease visitation and correspondence delineated the limits placed upon friendship between men and women when neither was betrothed nor related. While historians have explored female friendship, male bonding, and marriage, Roberts's collection suggests another dimension to the history of gender relations.

Morgan and Dawson did eventually marry and produce two children, and Morgan ceased to write. They did

not subvert the "marriage narrative," but Morgan would not have considered herself subversive in any way. Instead, they deviated from traditional courtship patterns as he supported her desire for independence. In the process, she attempted to incorporate work into the ideal of the southern lady, he less publicly altered the notion of southern manhood by facilitating her employment, and they both suggested a pattern for platonic friendship between men and women. Because of this, the volume that Roberts has edited is an excellent contribution to the study of gender in the post-Civil War South. Notes

[1]. Carolyn G. Heilbrun. *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), p. 27.

[2]. Her diary was edited by Charles East in 1991. Charles East, ed. *Sara Morgan: The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1991).

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