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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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Rebuilding Southern Womanhood

Sarah Morgan's extensive Civil War diary has long been a staple of historians' examinations of the war's impact on women and the southern home front.[1] Giselle Roberts's carefully annotated edition of Morgan's letters to and from Francis Warrington Dawson, as well as Morgan's newspaper editorials, add a new dimension to our understanding of Morgan and the world she negotiated. Far from the stereotypical southern belle who depended on the men of her world to care for her, Sarah Morgan instead carved out for herself a career and an independent life. Her correspondence with Charlestonian newspaperman Dawson, combined with her sharp editorials on the social issues of the Reconstruction South (especially those that affected women), offer a rare "window into relationships, family, class, and gender in the postwar South" (p. xv). Furthermore, the editorials give "an intimate portrait of her personal journey as she searched for new ways of living in the postwar world" (p. xv).

In this volume, Roberts presents eighty of the almost two hundred letters exchanged between Sarah and Frank in 1873. Unfortunately, Sarah destroyed her letters from the first half of the year–her earliest surviving letter to him is dated July 25, 1873–so scholars must deduce the content of those letters from Frank's responses to them. Sarah's essays, also written in 1873, offer a revealing look at her views on the world around her. The cloak of anonymity gave her the confidence to express controversial views on southern womanhood, postwar politics, race relations, family relationships, and international issues.

Born in New Orleans and raised in Baton Rouge in an elite family, Sarah was educated not only in academic subjects but in the intricacies of the southern patriarchy. Both would shape her life and her views on the world. As it did for most southerners, the Civil War destroyed the world that Sarah had been trained to inhabit, as well as many of the people she loved. In the war's first year, she lost one brother to a duel as two others left home to enlist in the Confederate Army. Her father died later that year. After Union troops attacked Baton Rouge in 1862, Sarah, her mother, and her sister began their wartime existence as refugees. In 1863, her two older brothers were killed in battle. The end of the Confederacy not only left Sarah without her home and three of her brothers, but it also redefined her place among the Louisiana elite. With her father gone, Sarah had little choice but to move in with another male family member. After spending time as a dependent in her half-brother's household, Sarah moved with her mother to South Carolina to live with her younger brother, James Morgan, in May 1872. The two women initially took charge of the household, but when James married in early 1873, Sarah and her mother became unwanted dependents.

Sarah did not enjoy this new status, but she found a way to negotiate it. In January 1873, James's friend Francis Dawson came from Charleston for a visit. He left smitten with Sarah, who refused to return his affection. He began sending her love letters as soon as he returned to Charleston. Roberts notes that Sarah's refusal to consider Frank as a suitor resulted from the harsh realities of postwar life. "Sarah, like many women, had suffered the consequences of embodying the southern feminine ideal. Submission had rendered her dependent on a string of men who could not or would not fulfill their responsibilities to provide and protect" (p. xxxi).

Sarah's refusal to exchange love letters with Frank did not discourage him. He continued to visit her at James's home. Impressed with her intellect and the political conversations the two shared, Frank asked Sarah to write an editorial for his paper, *The Charleston News and Courier*. She ultimately agreed, but only on the condition of strict anonymity. Sarah's first piece, "The New Andromeda," was published on March 5, 1873, and was followed by more than seventy others that year. Sarah's

contract for three pieces a week provided her an income that would eventually allow her some independence. With her writing career, Sarah attempted to reaffirm both her place in elite society as well as her vision of the domestic ideal. She hoped that her secret career outside of the accepted boundaries of southern womanhood would ultimately allow her and her mother to set up their own household.

Much of the ten-month correspondence between Sarah and Frank included his comments on her writing. He proved an encouraging mentor, pushing Sarah to explore all types of topics, not just stereotypically feminine ones. She consequently began to write about politics as well as social issues. Her pieces reflect her continued southern nationalism and her elite upbringing. She often focused on southern women's position in the postwar world: "Sarah spoke candidly of the plight of Confederate belles, who had sacrificed their traditional rite of passage during the Civil War only to find that southern defeat brought with it far more devastating consequences" (p. xxxvii). Single women had few options, and those without money or their own households were viewed by society as failures or burdens. For her part, however, Sarah believed that women could honorably choose to remain single. She encouraged single women to recognize their power and further urged them to find work outside the home as part of their contribution to southern domesticity.

Sarah's written support of women's employment outside of the home and female agency, however, did not indicate a belief in women's rights. In fact, she frequently derided woman suffragists and stressed her dedication to women's traditional place in society. According to Roberts, "Sarah sought only to reposition the adult single woman within her household and community, to grant her alternative ways to enhance her position, and to give her the tools to move from the margins of postwar life to the center" (p. xli). These single women would be able to help support their families in different ways than they had in the antebellum South. They would adapt their earlier roles as their families' moral supporters to fulfill postwar necessities. Roberts notes that although Sarah celebrated and encouraged this new southern womanhood, she never fully accepted it or her new role in the world. Sarah and Frank's correspondence, which lasted from January until October 1873, demonstrates her struggles with her new career, her role in postwar society, and her place in Frank's life. Although Frank continued to send love letters and marriage proposals to Sarah, she repeatedly rebuked his advances and pushed him to consider her as a "sister." In their letters, they candidly discussed finances, politics, social issues, and their personal relationship. Their professional and platonic relationship pushed the boundaries of accepted nineteenth-century liaisons; unrelated men and women were not encouraged to have social relationships outside of courtship. Questions circulated about the propriety of their friendship, visits, and constant letter writing. In October, Sarah moved herself and her mother to Charleston. Once in Charleston, Sarah continued writing for the paper, and she allowed Frank to court her. The two married in January 1874 and had three children, two of whom survived infancy, over the next seven years. They shared "an equal partnership, framed by love and mutual respect" (p. 249). Although Sarah gave up her editorials, she continued to publish book reviews in the *News and Courier*.

Through her correspondence with Frank and her editorial writing, Sarah Morgan Dawson rebuilt her identity in the postwar South. She found for herself a place in society that allowed her to support herself without openly challenging southern gender conventions. As Roberts notes, "writing also forced Sarah to grapple with her understanding of the single, white woman's place in the postwar community, in which the antebellum ideals of marriage, submission, and gentility were often pitted against women's employment and independence" (p. xvii).

Roberts's volume of Sarah Morgan's letters and editorials, combined with Morgan's previously published diary, allows scholars a rare comparison between one woman's private and public persona. Through both guises, Sarah explored and navigated the changing landscape of the postwar South. Her writings offered contemporaries, as they do historians, a changing narrative of elite southern women's place in a world of upheaval. Scholars and students of the American South and women's history will benefit from this glimpse into the personal and professional life of a fascinating and unconventional lady.

Note

[1]. Charles East, ed., *The Civil War Diary of Sarah Morgan* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991); James I. Robertson, Jr., ed., *A Confederate Girl's Diary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960).

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