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Cecilia Morgan. *Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996. xi + 304 pp. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8020-7671-7; $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8020-0725-4.

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The language of gender is a topic that has received some small amount of attention in Upper Canadian historiography, but only enough so far to whet our appetite. With the publication of Cecilia Morgan's *Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Languages of Politics and Religion in Upper Canada, 1791-1850*, the subject finally receives the sustained attention it deserves. By gender history, Morgan means not simply focusing on the experiences of women and seeing how they were mediated by race and class, but also attempts, in the tradition of Joan Scott, to escape essentialism and "question the very constitution and configuration of the categories of woman and man." Taking Scott's approach even further, Morgan wishes to explore "the ways in which other relationships"–particularly race, class and religion–"might alter the meanings of gender identities and categories" (p. 9).

Gender discourse in Upper Canada was multifaceted and in constant flux, dependent for its meaning on combinations of time and place, speaker and audience. What was consistent, Morgan finds, was the recurrent use of gender as a means by which to explain social relations and back up competing claims to legitimacy. As such, it serves well as a window through which to view the operation of power and, in this case, the cultural formation of a white, colonial middle class (p. 7). Morgan bases her study on the idea of separate spheres, in which politics and religion serve almost as tropes for the masculine and feminine, public and private. But, while Morgan is well aware of recent work criticizing separate spheres as an overly schematic and somewhat reductionist notion, she stresses that the concept was nevertheless still an important way for Upper Canadians to understand and to make sense of their world. Armed with the knowledge that separate spheres were rarely truly separate, Morgan attempts to deconstruct the concept, looking not for what separated male and female worlds, but rather what bound them together. Detailing competing understandings and meanings, and the complex interdependence of ideas, Morgan exposes changing ideas of gender, race and class which were both an integral part of the trans-Atlantic world and uniquely Upper Canadian in their formation (p. 16).

Echoing much previous work, Morgan identifies the War of 1812 as an event of pivotal importance in the creation of a language of patriotism and an Upper Canadian political identity. In defence of Upper Canada, the militia was mobilized, but so too, Morgan shows for the first time, was the language of gender. The conflict saw a disciplined, "manly" force of Upper Canadians defending not only the colony's borders but Christian duty, moral responsibility and, indeed, civilization itself from a horde of invaders cast as distinctly unmanly. Women's contribution to the war effort, although often substantial, was downplayed, and they were cast as helpless and vulnerable victims enduring their plight until rescued by manly Christian soldiers. Morgan perceptively draws parallels between women's status as an inappropriate target in war and the widely held belief in the sanctity of private property. "Like the family," she writes, "private property was deemed off-limits to the military" and, indeed, "in this discourse of patriotism and loyalty, women came very near to being private property themselves" (p. 44). But private property *was* attacked, as were women, and the private found itself thrust into the public discourse of patriotism and duty. Thus, Morgan convincingly shows how the public, masculine world of patriotism was entirely dependent for its existence on the presence of a feminine world of domesticity and vulnerability.

In politics, too, gender found a voice, as both Tories and Reformers resorted to the image of the family to legitimate their claims for colonial leadership. The Family Compact, indeed well named, stressed ideas of stability and hierarchy, with colonial leaders cast as paternalistic heads of society. Paleyite theology loomed large (p. 64) as the Empire was compared to the family, and reform ideas were cast in distinctly feminine terms as chaotic,

laden with emotion and likely to bring about the destruction of a well-ordered society. Reformers, for their part, criticized Tories as dependent on royal favour and patronage, and prone to corruption and venality. Such feminine dependency was considered unseemly, and Tories were accused of having forfeited their masculinity and thus the right to have their opinions treated with respect. Speaking of "the people's" interests, Reformers drew on elements of Commonwealth discourse to stress their freedom from dependence and their fitness to rule colonial affairs (p. 85). While neither side's conception of politics had any place for direct female participation, Morgan adeptly shows how ideas of paternalistic leadership, manly independence, and self-serving sycophancy relied in turn on manipulating images of gender for their power and resonance.

If politics occupied a great space in the colonial mentality, the same must be said of religion, and Morgan concentrates on Upper Canada's vibrant Methodist community to show religion, too, as an area in which ideas about gender, race and class interacted with one another. Methodism, more than any other religion, found itself the target of attacks by the colonial elite. The untrained lay-clergy was a democratic idea that smacked of the republicanism to the south (p. 103), while a faith which held that "every man, woman and child is a doctor of divinity and speaks in public" posed obvious threats to traditional hierarchies of power. Concentrating on the hysterical emotionalism of the camp meeting and the perceived sexual excesses of Methodist women, critics feared that religious enthusiasm threatened the stability of the family and would cause women to neglect their domestic duties (p. 108). Morgan reveals a dialectic between religion and gender; a discourse replete with slippages in which religion and gender were mutually dependent, and mutually reinforcing, categories.

As William Westfall and others have shown, Methodism eventually began to publicly stress organized *male* leadership–and to downplay female participation–in an ultimately successful quest for wider popular acceptance and social respectability. But, within the Methodist community itself, Morgan sees a continuing struggle over the place of the family and meanings of gender. Far from being individualistic, as charged, Methodism placed great emphasis on the family unit, both as a means of conversion and as an institution of community support. Indeed, the home itself often served as a place for revival meetings, thus effectively combining the public and private (p. 112). The ability to separate these two spheres, often sought after in the political world, was not so integral a part of Methodism, which allowed, and even encouraged, a mix of emotional display and community responsibility. Morgan thus identifies a discourse of masculinity at odds with the separation of individual and community and "lack of connectedness" demanded in early nineteenth-century America. Upper Canadian Methodism stressed an idea of masculine responsibility in the home, encouraging men as leaders of family and community and illustrating, par excellence, the integration of sacred and secular which epitomized the pre-industrial merging of household and economy (p. 123). But, while the family was often the positive site for this dualism, Methodism also provided disruptions for the family. [Male] authority without the backing of religious conviction was scorned, and women were seen as important actors capable of making independent spiritual decisions. If gender roles within the Methodist household seem, at first glance, less rigid than elsewhere, Morgan reminds us that this female autonomy was often restricted to married women, acting as wives and mothers. The well-known work of early female missionaries among the colony's Ojibwa population, while serving an important role in the demarcation of a white, colonial space, was, by the 1840s, increasingly replaced by an ideology which stressed women's domestic duties, as well as the importance of home life in providing a moral sanctuary for husbands and a positive model for youth. The relation between Upper Canadian gender roles and Methodism, and the ways in which this changed over time, is an extremely complex topic, but it is one that Morgan explores fully in what is certainly the best chapter of the book.

Morgan contrasts the language of Methodism with the colony's political and patriotic rhetoric, and she notes that the former seemed far more willing to incorporate images of femininity. For Methodists, masculinity stemmed from a relationship with God and family, while Tory manhood was dependent upon a relationship with the monarch and the state. Recognizing the difficulty of separating ideas of the state and the family in Tory ideology, Morgan nevertheless notes that Methodism differed in offering a conception of the family and community in which female characters were more than the shadowy background images appearing elsewhere. It is from this idea that Morgan identifies the post-rebellion emergence of the middle-class concept of the "public man." Articulated in the conduct literature of the period, the importance of religion in maintaining a happy and well balanced home was stressed and women were encouraged to construct "empires" in the home through the practice of "moral housekeeping." Acting as "mothers for the next generation," women had a serious social responsibility to fulfill in preparing their children–and especially male

children–to enter the world armed with manly attributes of independence, moral uprightness, and self-control (pp. 152-55). Although men were not absent from the home–being encouraged to govern wisely for the benefit of all and to carry the virtue of the home with them into the workplace–much of 1840s social stability seems to have rested on the idea of good mothers tending a proper domestic space.

The public man of the 1840s was thus a curious amalgamation of the competing masculine imagery of earlier years. Independent, virtuous, and operating in politics or business for the good of society, he resembled a mix of the Reform and Methodist ideologies of the 1820s, while influenced by a domestic base that had more in common with earlier Tory ideas. Women's place too had changed, for while men were seen both at home and in public, the language of gender became less prevalent in politics, and women became increasingly less visible in public space, even as shadowy rhetorical images (p. 197). As politics for the first time became a truly masculine sphere, reflecting the growing domesticity of the female identity, charity work allowed respectable women the opportunity to create a new public domain for themselves in which the concept of moral housekeeping was applied to society at large. One thus sees by the 1840s the confluence of ideas of class, gender and, to a lesser extent, race, in the ultimate creation of a white, colonial, middle-class identity–one based upon the idea, equally applicable to both genders, that hard work was its own reward, and one's moral conduct rather than material wealth was a measure of success and usefulness to society (p. 162). But if this bourgeois identity, with its emphasis on voluntarism, self-control and freedom from excessive emotional attachments, was a rejection of earlier "inappropriate" values, it was also, with its abhorrence of dependency, a rejection of wage-earners and thus the beginning of a view of society that saw the working class as unmanly, separate, and, in later decades, the source of much anxiety (p. 196).

The 1840s saw the creation of an ideology of separate spheres, but ideas about class and gender were by no means solidified with this development, and relations continued to shift in response to new imperatives. If women were absent from politics, new ideas about appropriate gender roles allowed them continued access to public events. The work of moral reform enabled them to achieve a wide degree of public visibility and recognition, and middle-class ideas of what constituted a "lady" allowed women to independently voice opinions on public and social matters, not unlike the situation in early Methodism. Demanding a larger public role, Morgan finds middle-class women turning to charity and moral reform work in much the same way as did many women in the United States [1], who similarly seized upon the idea of virtue as a means by which to ensure their continuing legitimacy in a new world of bourgeois individualism. Upper Canadian women and men of the 1840s both worked. Each did so in their own spheres, defined by gender, but in which issues of class and race continued to provide connections and continuities. The idea of a public man, or a virtuous woman, was dependent for its power on those who did not fit these molds, and the recognition (and creation) of social deviance in its many forms was thus central in the development and maintenance of an exclusive, new bourgeois identity ascendant in Victorian Ontario.

Public Men and Virtuous Women is a solid book. Coming as it did from the author's dissertation, the reader is everywhere presented with evidence of solid research and reflective thinking on what is surely a difficult subject, in an area with fewer sources than might be desired. With much of her study dependent upon the Upper Canadian press, Morgan is presented with unique problems, as well as opportunities. In a province with a highly dispersed population, Morgan identifies the readers of the colony's newspapers as "the first class to achieve solidarity on an essentially imagined basis" (pp. 19-20). The cultural formation of this virtual class, an idea based upon earlier work by both Benedict Anderson and Jurgen Habermas, seems particularly appropriate for Upper Canada, and it is a theme that reappears throughout the book. To what extent this middle-class community was imagined, however, is an issue that deserves perhaps more attention. Much of the writing featured in the colony's newspapers–particularly conduct literature–was imported directly from England, where that country's middle class struggled to distinguish themselves from a corrupt and profligate aristocracy. No such aristocracy existed in Upper Canada, and even those who might be considered the colony's *most* elite struggled themselves, as Katherine McKenna has recently shown, to identify themselves in terms of virtue, morality and propriety [2]. An imaginary foil is likely only *so* useful, and one wishes that Morgan had devoted more space to exploring how (material) differences between colony and mother-country played themselves out on the ground in Upper Canada.

Morgan asserts that the move toward a bourgeois community built on issues of self-control, hard work and virtue was one carried out on a largely individual basis, characterized by voluntarism and personal choice. The role of the state, however, is curiously absent, and

it was likely more deeply implicated than Morgan seems prepared to admit in the creation and maintenance of conditions for middle-class self-realization and the coercion of those who deviated from this image. Gidney and Millar–in a work inexplicably ignored by Morgan–show the state playing an important role in the idea of the public man, aiding him to rise to a natural level based on training and competence.[3] In addition, the sudden explosion of "status" offenses such as prostitution and vagrancy in the 1840s would seem to reveal the often heavy hand of the state in the production and protection of middle-class moral values, and its involvement in the policing–if not outright creation–of appropriate gender roles. Similarly, Morgan ascribes the gradual abandonment of duelling in the colony as a middle-class rejection of upper-class excess, but surely in a period of accelerated state formation, as was the 1840s, duelling simply lost its legitimacy as the state, middle-class to be sure, attempted to enforce a monopoly on violence as dispute mechanisms became increasingly bloodless and bureaucratized.

Upper Canada never seems to have experienced the idea of republican motherhood so prevalent in antebellum America, and only in later years, Morgan shows, did there develop an idea of the middle-class mother as having primary responsibility for the socialization of the colony's youth. Morgan successfully describes new understandings of adolescence, and she goes through great pains to show how youth was perceived as a perilous and tenuous period. Yet while mother and father were both (seemingly) expected to take a hand in the home, their respective duties remain somewhat unclear. Mothers' social responsibility, and the extent of their role in this, is also somewhat vague, with the discussion of the importance of regulatory peer groups adding some unresolved tension to the picture. The existence of temperance organizations, social societies and other peer groups exclusively geared toward young men causes one to question the extent that mothers (indeed, parents) were *solely* responsible for the expected socialization of youth, or perhaps to suspect that they might not have been entirely up to the task. Themes of public and private, so ubiquitous elsewhere, seem to have been in operation here as well, and might have served to elucidate whatever boundaries–or overlap–existed between societal and more individualized responsibility for the proper upbringing of children in Upper Canada. My own reading of Upper Canadian execution speeches frequently blames inadequate mothers for the ultimate fate of condemned criminals, and one wishes Morgan would have further expanded on the birth of new middle-class conceptions of responsible motherhood, which were to have such great repercussions in the conception of women's role in society–effects still being felt in the present.

But, these criticisms are mere quibbles with the book that Morgan didn't write, rather than the one she in fact did. Morgan has successfully, indeed admirably, described the process of a class in creation. The way in which gender and race intersected with class, and the way that it was used by different groups to back up claims for power and legitimacy, is demonstrated in a manner that reveals Upper Canada as a locale of shifting relationships and complex identities perhaps hitherto suspected but never before revealed in such depth. Our understanding of class formation and the uses of gender is improved by Morgan's efforts. Historians of Upper Canada, and indeed, all historians, would do well to pay attention to Morgan's work.

Notes:

[1]. See especially Nancy Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); and Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

[2]. Katherine McKenna, *A Life of Propriety: Anne Murray Powell and Her Family, 1755-1850*, (Montreal/Kingston: McGill/Queen's University Press, 1994).

[3]. Robert Gidney and Wyn Millar, *Professional Gentlemen: The Professions in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

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