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Simon Morgan. *A Victorian Woman's Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century.* London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007. x + 270 pp. $74.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84511-210-3.

Reviewed by Anne Rodrick (Department of History, Wofford College)
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Not-So-Separate Spheres?

Simon Morgan's work focuses attention on the role of women in the development of the public sphere in nineteenth-century Leeds. He argues that the contributions of women to the formation of middle-class ideals of gender and identity have been largely ignored, especially those contributions that were channeled through what he calls "counter-publics"–those spaces in which women could operate more freely and could both influence and counterbalance the work of men in the more traditional public spheres. His work explores an important, indeed crucial, question in both the history of urban development and the changes in gender roles and expectations in the nineteenth century: how did women "develop identities based around notions of civic virtue and public service" (p. 5) in the face of domestic ideology that emphasized private influence rather than public participation?

Morgan uses Leeds to examine the intersection of civic identity and gender during the period from about 1830 through the 1860s, a period during which he argues civic identities were "heavily contested and … reinvented" (p. 6). By 1870, "Victorian civic pride [had reached] its zenith," and the contributions by women to civic identity were largely fixed. Before that moment, and especially in the years following 1800, a variety of factors intersected to help develop a public sphere: rapid urban growth leading to difficult if not intractable problems of health, hygiene, and infrastructure; an influx of new citizens who brought with them new ideas; and an important minority of non-conformists, who were eager to enter local politics and who formed one of Morgan's crucial "counter-publics." In these early years, Leeds saw the formation of a variety of cultural clubs and institutions, ranging from the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society and the Mechanics' Institute to a number of societies devoted to or serving a rapidly growing physician population. These clubs and institutions were almost wholly male, but Morgan argues that the men who attended, organized, and presided over these bodies were inseparably linked to the world of women through their wives, daughters, and other female relations. Thus, Morgan says, the dichotomy between public and private was always incomplete, and the world of men and the world of women overlapped and intersected in crucial and heretofore understudied ways.

Morgan examines the rhetoric of women's education to look more closely at the debate over public and private spheres and the roles of women in each. He presents a fairly straightforward debate that persuaded many parents and others that educated girls would become more effective mothers of children, especially boys, who would be part of the country's continued growth; these girls would also assume crucial roles in educating the poor in Leeds' ongoing "civilizing mission." According to Morgan, most voices in the debate–which he places in the decades of the 1820s through the 1850s–were focused on how women's "natural" domestic capabilities could be harnessed through education to help others. Although Morgan mentions certain institutions of education for girls and young women, such as the Leeds Ladies Educational Institute (founded 1854), he provides no strong sense of curricula, numbers of pupils, fees, or graduates. Nor does he address the ongoing and very difficult debate over the "selfishness" of women who wanted to learn for the love of learning, rather than for any vocational training for wifehood or motherhood.

Morgan moves from the topic of girls' and women's education to the broad expanse of "women's engagement with high culture," arguing that "women were important consumers of culture and education in the form of lectures, … and were in the habit of visiting museums and galleries, both national and local" (p. 61). He uses the diaries of Elizabeth Gott (d. 1857) to show that "elite" women occasionally attended lectures and museum displays as "means of self-instruction or entertainment" (p. 62). Here we see some of the underlying problems of

Morgan's work. Gott is referred to as both "elite" and "middle-class," as both typical and atypical of women in her own social world, and as attending these sites of culture for reasons that, as previous historians have shown, are neither easy to determine nor interchangeable in the ways that Morgan presumes. Further, Morgan attempts to use Gott and a very small number of other women to demonstrate that women above the working classes were avid consumers of many types of cultures, but his evidence is too thin to support such bold claims, as he himself admits: "Although they reveal much about the cultural openings available to strong-minded, independent or gifted women, the activities of Gott, Heaton, Hey and Lupton do not necessarily imply a broader cultural citizenship" (p. 65).

And here we have a problem that will recur throughout the rest of Morgan's work. He wishes to show that women were deeply and actively involved in such "public" activities as attending museums and lectures, participating in cultural institutions, "civilizing" the poor, contributing to the intellectual growth of the city, and establishing a presence in the Leeds political landscape. However, over and over we read such admissions as, "quantitatively and qualitatively, women were definitely second-class citizens in early nineteenth-century cultural societies" (p. 69);"women were excluded from the management of institutions that were in the vanguard of the intellectual and environmental improvement of the town" (p. 72); "women's access to the apparatus of the public sphere … was severely limited" (p. 106); and finally, "although it could be argued that opportunities did exist for women to participate in the sphere of formal politics on a local level, they were probably becoming fewer and more marginalized as the period progressed" (p. 136).

Morgan's work is important in raising the questions that surround the issues of gender and the public sphere, issues he raises most specifically as a corrective to the 1990 work on Leeds by R. J. Morris (*Class, Sect, and Party*), which had referred only peripherally to women. His work is especially helpful in his discussions of the ways in which "feminine" behaviors, such as tea parties and fund-raising bazaars, became crucial to the ongoing support of public sites of culture, augmenting or even replacing all-male public dinners and male-dominated economic committees. He argues that these middle-class women, even when constrained by gender expectations and confined to audience membership or limited involvement in charities for the local poor, helped lay the foundation for more active citizenship in the generations to come. However, there remain several specific problems in his work, most fundamentally the lack of evidence broad enough to support his initial claims. Other problems lie in approach and definition; for example, Morgan does not address the many difficulties that impeded and redirected the development of a strong urban identity in this period. Nor does he, at a basic level, clearly define or carefully use such terms as "elite" and "middle class"– are these interchangeable, as he seems to suggest? What are the complexities in the notion of female "influence" in the nineteenth century? And finally, how do these complexities further complicate the problems in defining both "citizenship" and "culture" as they evolve throughout the long nineteenth century, well beyond the decades under study in Morgan's narrative?

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