

depends on abstract and universal categories of analysis formulated by the social sciences, this challenge must be welcomed.

The author is, however, less convincing in his strictures against the approaches he rejects than he is in his use of those he has chosen. Evidence in the book itself raises questions about the wisdom of dismissing several of the more abstract analytical concepts. Specifically, although the author repeatedly notes the existence in Godmanchester both of considerable occupational specialization and of wide disparities in wealth, he nevertheless rules out the "liberal" theory of "division of labour" and the "marxist doctrine of exploitation of surplus labour" (p. 180) as being irrelevant to the explanation of the town's development. Or, in a similar vein, he suggests that labourers were both numerous and important to the town's economy; but, despite the absence of meaningful records concerning them—surely itself a fact of great significance—he rejects "such hidebound heritages of nineteenth-century thought as theories of exploitation" (p. 189). It would appear that the very success of his method in revealing the social roles of the town's propertied families has led Raftis to treat the method, and the groups about whom it tells so much, as normative for the town as a whole. This attitude would appear to explain as well some of the questions which are asked—"Were the people of Godmanchester content with their local government?" (p. 7); and some of the conclusions which are formulated—Godmanchester's welfare costs were absorbed by "the immediate circle of those involved" (p. 232), the family. In these sentences the poor and the unpropertied have disappeared from view.

To conclude, this study contains much that is of interest to any student of medieval society. But its importance transcends these things, to be found in how it addresses the fundamental problem of measuring historical causes and influences. Impressive where it succeeds, the book remains instructive even where it fails.

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DEBORAH GORHAM—*The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*. London: Croom Helm, 1982. Pp. 223.

When historians began to investigate the position of middle-class women the picture that emerged was one of the "perfect lady", confined to the private sphere of home and family, submissive and essentially idle. Such an analysis was soon perceived to pose problems. First, the gap between prescription and behaviour: perfect ladyhood may have been an ideal, but how far was it accepted by middle-class women? Second, even if the ideal was widely accepted, how many middle-class families had the financial resources to hire the large number of servants to translate it into reality? Patricia Branca's wholly revisionist thesis has gone so far as to suggest that the behaviour of Victorian women of the "lower" middle class in no way reflected idealized perfect ladyhood. Branca has portrayed these women as busy housewives, asserting control over their lives (and in particular over their health), albeit within the confines of the private sphere.

Yet in distinguishing sex from gender, feminist analysis has insisted at every turn that biological female and male human beings become women and

men via the socialization process, thereby developing socially recognizable genders, feminine and masculine. Moreover, research has shown that the personality and behavioural characteristics deemed "masculine" and "feminine" vary between specific cultural and historical situations. Historical research into femininity is therefore welcome.

Gorham's book examines images of femininity during the Victorian period, using fiction, poetry and art, and the prescriptions for female behaviour contained in the manual literature of the period. In the final section of the book, she looks at the autobiographies of some fourteen Victorian women, born at different points in the century and representing different social ranks within the middle class, in order to see how far their behaviour matched the images and prescriptions and to assess the degree of change during the period as a whole.

She concludes that the feminine ideal acted as a constraint for all the women during their early years. Some, like Florence Nightingale, rebelled against it, others, like Molly Hughes (much later in the century), accepted that a woman should become "deeply pleasing to a husband, and widely pleasing to other men" (p. 175), rejected the competitive regime of her new-style girls' school, the North London Collegiate, and willingly gave up her career to assume a supportive and subordinate role within marriage. While the responses thus varied dramatically, the important point is that all the women examined by Gorham were conscious of what was considered the proper behaviour for women. The feminine ideal set up boundaries within which they had to make decisions regarding their lives. Gorham's findings are thus a valuable corrective to the recent portrayal of middle-class women as either helpless victims or totally free agents.

The book also provides us with some important insights into the content of the Victorian ideal of femininity. Recent work, including Gorham's own important article on childhood, sexuality and the social purity movement, published in *Victorian Studies* in 1978, has helped us to understand how and why the burden of purity was carried primarily by young women. Here Gorham shows the extent to which Victorian ideas of femininity were also focused on the daughter. Interestingly, the manual literature shows that advice on the management of young girls was very similar to that respecting their brothers. Only with puberty did the prescription for girls become radically different, reflecting the beliefs of scientists and doctors as to the nature of sexual difference and the need for girls to conserve their energies for reproduction.

What is very difficult to establish is the amount of change that took place in the feminine ideal and its influence by the end of the century. Gorham argues that by the 1890s girls were increasingly allowed "to develop their intellectual capacities without restraint" (p. 106) and that "marriage was no longer seen as the only possibility for a middle class girl" (p. 116). But this pattern was by no means uniform prior to World War I. Mary Stocks, for example, a prosperous doctor's daughter, commented that few girls of her acquaintance (during the 1900s) went to school for more than a year or two or indulged in anything other than charitable works prior to marriage.

We can probably only understand the timing of, and reasons for, changes in the feminine ideal by investigating more closely the ways in which Victorian femininity was structured. The promotion of marriage and domesticity was intimately related to forms of wealth-holding and patterns of domestic organi-

zation. Indeed, there may be an interesting case to be made for the idea that women's sphere widened and women's legal rights increased during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries only as marriage became less important (because of the decline in importance of landed wealth) and as domestic service declined.

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JANE LEWIS—*The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England, 1900-1939*. London: Croom Helm; Montreal; McGill Queen's University Press, 1980. Pp. 235.

The growth of feminism during the 1970s has to a great degree provided support for childbearing women who also work outside the home. Combining child rearing with remunerative outside employment has always been a tricky juggling act—no less so for the working- or middle-class woman who did not "need" to work. However, no longer is the condemnation of female career interests so universal, nor the woman with other than maternal goals ridden with guilt. Recently there has been a backlash from women who feel that this "equality business" has been pushed too far, that full-time mothering and housekeeping have been so undermined and trivialized that they cannot choose traditional roles for themselves even when they want to.

They have little need to feel so embattled. The foundations for the romanticization of motherhood have been too solidly laid to be easily dislodged. The maternal ideal has operated as a powerful ideological basis in the lives of both men and women, with challenges to it defined as "unnatural". As feminist writers have skilfully documented, the entrance of male experts into the childbearing and childrearing domains has resulted in the enfeebling of women's self-confidence and the inability to trust one's own feelings and talents. Motherhood, an exclusively female responsibility, has been defined and guided by gynaecologists, paediatricians, psychiatrists, psychologists and government officials, almost all male and almost all with narrowly traditional conceptions of women as people. It is fairly clear, then, when we speak of a "politics of motherhood", that we are referring to a dependent position created by the assumptions and values of policy makers, treasurers and scientists who have manipulated the role of mother to conform with their perceptions of women. Jane Lewis' *The Politics of Motherhood* offers us a good illustration of how policy makers defined and controlled the welfare of mother and child in England from 1900 to 1939. She presents a detailed analysis of how policies during this period reflected traditional ideology and how mothering was shaped by the kinds of resources and services deemed important and made available. In the years following the Boer War there was strong concern for the high rates of infant mortality in Britain. These infant deaths were seen as the result of mothers' neglect of their babies. It was the mothers' carelessness and dirty houses that caused diarrhoea, one of the most serious sources of baby mortality. Poverty was seen as caused by intemperance, with drunken mothers smothering their children. Mothers were even accused of allowing their children to die to collect insurance money. Working women were blamed for not being at home, housewives were blamed for being at home and running it poorly.

Education was viewed as the cure-all. From 1905 to 1939, there was a massive campaign to wipe out infant mortality. This involved setting up infant welfare