Victorian America and the Civil War, by Anne C. Rose. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. xiv, 304 pp. Illustrations, notes, appendixes, bibliography, index. $29.95 cloth.

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Exciting books and articles have continued to appear in recent years that take the study of the Civil War in new directions. Anne C. Rose's *Victorian America and the Civil War* does just that. In much the same way as Steven Watts's *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790–1820* (1987) reconceptualized the War of 1812 as an event consciously exploited (by elite Americans, at least) to ease the culture's transition from the republican vision of the revolutionary era to the emerging liberal ethos of the early nineteenth century, Rose's very interesting book examines the Civil War as a context in which Victorian Americans sought to resolve various anxieties produced by a culture increasingly detached from the secure religious moorings of the past, increasingly characterized by individualism and its implications for the breakdown of community and family.

Rose actively engages an impressive amount of secondary research on politics, culture, and society during the Victorian era in America. In addition, she studied the lives of seventy-five middle-class men and women born between 1815 and 1837—all of whom were young and impressionable during the peak years of the Second Great Awakening and the "take-off phase" of the urban industrial revolution, and were adults during the Civil War (3). Although most (39) of Rose's subjects spent their lives in the region traditionally perceived by historians as most "Victorian" in character—the New England and Mid-Atlantic states—a few (15) lived in the South, and a slightly larger number in the Midwest (only Josiah Grinnell was an Iowan) and the Far West (21). And although most (61) of Rose's subjects were men, the experiences of fourteen women are also represented in the book. Thus Rose's work serves to broaden our geographical understanding of American Victorianism, helping to undermine some of our enduring faith in antebellum regional distinctiveness. Moreover, although not consistently "gendered" in its methodology—she wisely notes that the book should not be read as a study of gender differences (15)—Rose's work nevertheless avoids the pitfall of allowing men's experience to speak for all Americans.

The introduction—perhaps the most thorough I have ever read—defines the study's terms and explains the author's agenda. Then Rose begins a fascinating exploration of the "quiet erosion of inherited

patterns of [religious] feeling, belief, and practice" (17) from which mid-nineteenth-century middle-class Americans suffered, and their consequent struggle to find meaning, purpose, and a psychologically and spiritually satisfying intensity of experience in other aspects of their lives. In chapters on work, leisure, family, and politics, Rose then unfolds the fabric of her tale, revealing how the Victorians strove — almost desperately, it seems at times — to find in each of these areas of life that which might fill the vacuum left by the decline of tradition-al religious forms and experiences.

At the end of each chapter, and once again at the end of the book, Rose lifts up the Civil War as the event that provided, at least to this "Victorian generation," the answer: the war became a religious cause of profound intensity; it offered those engaged in its prosecution a form of labor of apparently cosmic value; it was the ultimate "enter-tainment," one characterized by life and death stakes; it was simulta-neously an intra-family crisis of epic proportions and an opportunity for individuals to revive — on the battlefield, and in various collective efforts for the "cause" — the lost familial intimacy of the communal world of the past; and it became the vehicle by which Victorians embraced and found meaning in the emerging world of professional, highly bureaucratized politics. The Civil War, in Rose's interpretation, was the bridge that led this first Victorian generation in America over the troubled waters of the changing society and culture of which they were the vanguard. It was an event whose time had come, not just because of the twin crises of slavery and sectionalism but also because of the Victorians' need to identify their purpose and place in American history. Although the Victorians' anxieties did not bring forth the war as such, they did find in it a degree of immediate resolution.

Clearly not written with a broad popular audience in mind, *Victorian America and the Civil War* nevertheless merits a wide scholarly reading. If not all of the key chapters' arguments are developed with equal lucidity and strength, those that most sharply hit the mark (those on religion, work, and leisure) allow for forbearance in the other two (on family and politics). If the voices of northeasterners tend to drown out those of Victorians in other regions, and men those of women, there is no substantial evidence of cacophony, inexplicable contradiction, or ventriloquism. Rose may perhaps be faulted slightly (along with many of the rest of us) for aiming to make her story *too* neat, raising vague suspicions here and there about the imposition of a historical agenda on data that may or may not fully support it. But these are little more than half-hearted complaints on the part of a reviewer otherwise glad that Rose took up the task in the first place, and pursued it to such an enlightening conclusion.