Labour/Le Travailleur

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Volume 30, 1992

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/llt30re02

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Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (imprimé)
1911-4842 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Dubinsky, K. (1992). Love Among the Historians. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, *30*, 223–231.

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Francoise Barret-Ducrocq, *Love in the Time of Victoria* (London: Verso 1991).
Steven Seidman, *Romantic Longings — Love in America, 1830-1980* (New York: Routledge 1991).

IN THE NOT-TOO-DISTANT FUTURE, I would wager that scholars interested in the history of sexuality will cease complaining about the paucity of works in their field, and will instead find it as difficult to keep up with the literature as do those who 'follow' women's, labour, or other branches of international social history. As with any new but growing discipline, students of the history of sexuality still have the relative luxury of reading rather widely across time and national boundaries to keep up with recent developments. (Especially those of us in Canada. As Angus McLaren has delicately put it, in a recent article in the new *Journal of the History of Sexuality* about two British Columbia sex reformers, "Canada is not usually associated with the history of sexual radicalism."[1] Sexual *anything*, one is tempted to add. In the absence of much work on these topics here, Canadian sex historians still read Canadian social history rather like adolescents read their parents novels, or encyclopedias: carefully for the 'sex parts.')

Both of these books illustrate, however, that it is indeed a good idea to keep reading across national boundaries, for they are each welcome additions to the history of sexuality, gender and, to a lesser extent, class formation. *Romantic Longings* provides a two-century sweeping look at the changes in the romantic and sexual mores of Americans. While Seidman confines his self-described "cultural analysis of love" to the most literate and written-about, the white, middle class, his book is exceptional in its treatment of a wider-than-usual spectrum of sexual practices. This is one of the first books on this topic I can think of that does not actually mean 'heterosexual' when it says 'sexual.' It is not specifically a work of gay history, rather, it integrates same and opposite sex intimacy so nicely and

[1]Angus McLaren, "Sex Radicalism in the Canadian Pacific Northwest, 1890-1920," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2 (April 1992), 527.

Karen Dubinsky, "Love Among the Historians," *Labour/Le Travail*, 30 (Fall 1992), 223-31.

naturally that the one-sidedness of most studies of sex, courtship, and romance is thrown into sharp relief. *Love in the Time of Victoria* is a fascinating cultural mix: a sexual history of working-class Londoners, framed through the middle-class and heavily moralistic eyes of the keepers of a London foundling hospital, written by a French, female, social historian. It is a powerful and engaging work, sympathetic but not sentimental, and reveals how historians of sexuality have made imaginative use of source material.

Seidman's project is to historicize love; in his words, to "document a series of changes in the meaning of romantic love" in the USA since the 1830s. Specifically, he analyses the "changing conceptions and norms which define sex in relation to love." (2) It is a rather unique venture, as it mixes the history of courtship with marital relations, advice literature, and community mores. Seidman's two main sources, advice manuals and personal narratives such as letters, diaries, and autobiographies, provide a useful contrast to each other. His major theme, articulated clearly through the book, is that the "meaning and place of sex in relation to love, and therefore, the meaning of love" changed markedly between the early 19th and the early 20th century. Love changed from having "an essentially spiritual meaning to being conceived in a way that made it inseparable from the erotic longings and pleasures of sex," so much so that, by the early 20th century, the "desires and pleasures associated with the erotic aspects of sex were imagined as a chief motivation and sustaining source of love." (4)

His first two chapters sketch out the "spiritualization of love" in early 19th-century American culture. He asks, as Tina Turner might have then, what's sex got to do with it, and finds the answer is: little. Yet, like other revisionist historians of sexuality, Seidman is less prepared to accept the whole package of prudery we associate with the Victorians. (Indeed, according to Dorothy Thompson, even Victoria herself has gotten a bum rap over time; she was not quite the saintly matron her cultural legacy has depicted.[2]) Seidman argues that Victorian sexual discourses did not "advocate a repressive sexual ethic." Rather, they attempted to contain the dangers of sex, primarily the "possibility of erotic motivations controlling behavior," through a strict system of sexual regulation, which confined sex exclusively to marriage, and defined love not in sexual but in spiritual terms. Sex, in this period, was not a "way to demonstrate and sustain love ... to link sex and love was to risk a marriage awash in lust." (39, 42)

The spiritualization of love thesis is a compelling one, and is sustained by Seidman's own case studies, and other histories of 19th-century middle-class courtship. While many have been down this road before, Seidman's explicit contrast between a spiritual and a sexual model of love, which changes over time, strikes me as a useful way of understanding this period. It is also a good argument for studying social mores over a long period of time in order to observe change. In

[2]Dorothy Thompson, *Queen Victoria: Gender and Power* (London 1990).

this section Seidman also excels at not only describing how same and opposite sex intimacy operated in the 19th century, but integrating the two, probing the relationship between gender and sexuality skillfully. He puts more 'flesh,' as it were, on Lillian Faderman's arguments about the acceptability of female love relations by suggesting that female passionlessness was only part of the story; the spiritual conception of love also helped make the gender identity of the lovers "less pertinant." (52) He also adds an important, non-romantic twist to same-sex intimacy; homosexual love was not threatening, but neither was it a genuine possibility. "Whatever public hostility homosexuals countenance today," he writes, "at least there exists the possibility of homosexual love that is permanent and primary." (55)

I like this model of spiritual love, but the description and ultimate conclusions are more convincing than the explanation. Middle-class women, claims Seidman, were the "principal agents" behind this spiritualization of love, for as a "norm of intimate behavior that emphasized mutual respect and autonomy," this ideal was clearly in the interests of women. (57) This may be true, but how was it achieved? I would have liked to hear more about how women — at this time not represented in government, the law, medicine, and barely represented in the ranks of advice manual writers and religious teachers — could have generated such a massive social change, even if it was in their interests. It is difficult to reconcile this with the historical record of female sexual powerlessness: the sexual double standard, the suspicion of female sexuality, and sexual abuse. Seidman is on more convincing ground when he connects social class to this ideology of conjugal love. His suggestion that "the new conjugal ideology fostered a consciousness of class difference and moral superiority" by 'othering' groups which did not fit in, goes further in explaining how sexuality and power can collude to maintain class and racial/ethnic hierarchies. Much more could have been done to extend this analysis through the book. Seidman's study is confined to the middle class, but he fails to prove as much as he might have how sexual and romantic difference served to legitimate middle-class cultural hegemony.

Finally, while he is self-conscious about the reliance on advice manuals as a source, and devotes some time to a consideration of their strengths and limitations, Seidman does not problematize one important question: did women and men alike read these? I suspect that women, keepers of the home, family relations, and standards of respectability, were more often than men also keepers, and readers, of the advice books. Advice manuals were usually more advanced than the world, and certainly some of the men around them, in that they did not endorse wife abuse, sexual violence, or other forms of extreme cruelty. This does not doom them to extinction as a historical source, but it does raise questions which a manuscript so heavily dependant on these sources might consider.

Seidman continues his story, tracing what he calls the "sea change with regard to the place and meaning of sex in marriage" from the 1890s to the 1960s. (78). The same method is used in this section, contrasting advice literature with instances

of personal life, gleaned through surveys, diaries, and autobiographies. Seidman's extremely wide time frame is both fascinating and vexing. It is intriguing to learn that, as early as the 1890s, sexual "modernizers" were promoting a new fusion of sexual attraction and love, arguing that sexual compatibility was the key to creating happy and lasting marriages. Framed in this way, the sexual ethos of the 1890s, it is suggested, had more in common with the 1940s and 1950s than it did with the previous decade or so. Yet this formulation also blurs other important changes. Little is said, for example about how World War II opened up sexual possibilities, for both opposite and same sex couples, as American historian Allen Berube's work has brilliantly documented.[3] Neither does Seidman really consider how the changed political and economic climate of the 1950s restricted and pushed back the meagre sexual space opened during the 1940s.[4] The distinction between Victorian spiritual love and 20th-century sexual love is an important one, but within the 20th century itself love, sex and intimacy have undergone profound changes, which Seidman's broad canvas cannot appreciate.

The final two chapters bring us to the present, in order to document how sex in our times has become "uncoupled" from romance and love, and instead "legitimated for its pleasurable, expressive and communicative qualities." (121) Those familiar with contemporary 'sex debates' among feminists and lesbian and gay writers will find this section familiar territory. He takes a 'sex positive' approach in this debate, arguing against the radical feminist position that the sexual revolution was created by and for men by reminding us that *Cosmopolitan Magazine* and writers like Erica Jong also joined in celebrating sexuality as an autonomous realm of pleasure. That Helen Gurley Brown and Andrea Dworkin would not hit it off is hardly a new insight, but Seidman does present an interesting analysis of 1960s and 1970s sexual popular culture. Seidman concludes with a discussion of the differences and similarities between straight/gay and male/female intimate cultures in the 1980s, and reminds us that American culture is again at a crossroads, since "reforming campaigning to restrict choice and variety and to spiritualize intimacy are on the offensive." (202) I write this with the blast which ripped apart the Morgentaler clinic ringing in my (metaphoric) ears, and alarming reminder that moral fascism indeed has its adherents in this country also.

[3]Allen Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York 1990).

[4]On sexuality in the 1950s, see Elaine Tyler Mays, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Period* (New York 1988); John D'Emilio, "The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America," in Kathy Paiss and Christina Simmons, eds., *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History* (Philadelphia 1989). On Canada, see Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada* (Montréal 1987), 109-38, and Mary Louise Adams "Almost Anything can happen: A Search for Sexual Discourse in the Urban Spaces of 1940s Toronto," Paper Presented at 1992 Canadian Historical Association Conference, June 1992.

Despite my reservations about the blurriness of his time frame, I admire Seidman's reach. My major complaint is with his lack of analysis of the changes he describes. There is of course no obligation for a writer covering such a broad time period to explain change, but I rather wish he had engaged in more analysis of the changes he has portrayed so well. The problem lies beyond one writer, of course, and I am not sure anyone in the field of sex history has come up with answers to some of the 'big questions.' In the history of sexuality, what forces determine change? What are the connections between changing political and economic climates, and gender and sexuality? Seidman has provided a useful model of attitudes and practices towards love, intimacy, and sexuality and the white, non-immigrant American middle class, which others can use to ask different questions.

Love in the Time of Victoria is a more confined, but much richer book. Barret-Ducrocq's principle source, the records of the London Foundling Hospital from the 1850s to the end of the 1870s (sources now closed, for another 50 years, to researchers), has allowed her, in her words, to "extract from the past this image — certainly incomplete but, I believe authentic and alive, of the sexual and moral behavior of the London poor." (3) And her book is indeed alive. Her introductory chapter, detailing how external signs such as crowdedness, gregariousness, and dirtiness provided potent signifiers of the immorality of the working class to alarmed moral reformers, bristles with vivid scenes of London streets, the "drawing rooms of the poor." (9) Her writing reminds me of the cinematic talents of Christine Edzard, whose recent film *The Fool*, brought Mayhew's London to the screen. This is high praise for a work of academic history, but this is a marvellous book, full of both insight and imagination, and beautifully written.

The records of this Foundling Hospital seem well suited to a historical reconstruction of the sex life of the London underworld, for the administrators of the institution were a remarkably snoopy bunch. Financial constraints dictated that certain admission criteria had to be upheld, and moral factors were an easy way to determine fit candidates for assistance. Only victims of "male cynicism and sexual immorality" were considered for admission; the mother had to be able to prove, for example, that she had "given way to carnal passion" only after a promise of marriage or against her will. The unwed mothers' nightmare, however, has become the historians' good fortune, for the amount of personal information contained in these case files is amazing. The Board of the Hospital operated as investigator, judge, and jury of a criminal trial, observing none of the legal niceties about proper procedures. Any question seemed fair game for the hospital, and women, desperate to find a home for their infant, produced long narratives of the life histories, supplemented by statements from witnesses such as family members, neighbours, and employers. To prove their 'wronged' status, some women also deposited love-letters from their boyfriends. Several files even contain the man's 'Dear Jane' letter, written as he boarded the next boat out of town, leaving his pregnant and impoverished girlfriend behind. One young man, acknowledging "the wrong I have done you," frames his abandonment in terms of the "happiness of either of us," and

concludes with a few admonitions to her to "avoid bad company," leaving us to ponder the many brutalities of 19th-century sexuality; rapists were certainly not the only men who did considerable harm to women. (62) Another benefit of this source is that is sometimes provides more than the freeze-frame view of women in crisis which criminal case files, for example, illustrate. Barret-Ducrocq is able to 'follow' some of her women, through their regular correspondence inquiring about the health of their children. Unwed mothers, she argues, bore their "emotional mortgage for life," though a fortunate few were able to reclaim their children sometime later, when their circumstances had improved (for example, when they found a stable male breadwinner, willing to take on a wife and "illegitimate" child).

The picture of working-class romantic and sexual relations which emerges from these files is rich and compelling. One long chapter, the bulk of the book, amusingly titled "Love and Marriage" takes us on a tour of the many ways intimacy could go awry for London's young working-class women. The minority of rape-related cases reveal fascinating information, and contrast remarkably with the social circumstances of rape which emerge through criminal case files. Almost half of the rape cases in this study occurred when employers, primarily in households, assaulted their domestic servants. As Barret-Ducrocq puts it, "the use of working girls by certain middle-class men, and sometimes their families or friends, recalls feudal serfdom and suggests that the professional duties of maids sometimes extended, unofficially, to the sexual servicing of another class." (49) Other historical studies of rape have found that the crime tended not to cross class boundaries so starkly — servants assaulted other servants, professional men raped the wives and daughters of the upper class. But Barret-Ducrocq has helped shed important new light on this pattern: many of the domestic servants whose tales of workplace assault she documents did not bother reporting the crime to the police, but rather returned to their family for support and then turned up at the Foundling Hospital. Other young working women "granted their favours" to middle-class men in return for gifts, sociability, and simply attention. For many, "walking in St. James' or Regent's Park on the arm of a well-turned-out gentleman, getting loveletters, being desired when really you were everyone's slave ... might well have been thrilling enough to take, for a time, the risks of pregnancy." (64)

The vast majority of these women, however, were involved in romantic relationships with men of their own class and age. Working-class Londoners, male and female, knew each other through a myriad of employment, family, and neighbourhood connections. Their love affairs arose, "not from the depravity of the streets, but from the close friendship networks binding young people together." (82) The most fascinating documents Barret-Ducrocq has unearthed are the love letters exchanged between couples before the disaster of pregnancy took place. The flirtatious, joyous teasings between women and men show the "other side of the Victorian coin," and provide historians with a rare glimpse of working-class agency off the shop floor. Couples 'courted' — which might mean anything from a walk down the street to a day at the park — for an average of six months before sexual

relations took place. Barret-Ducrocq argues strongly that within 19th-century urban working-class culture, a promise of marriage could clearly "authorize pre-marital sexual relations," since it provided "insurance against the material consequences of pregnancy." (98, 101) Yet, as Christine Stansell also found in her analysis of New York working-class romance, this was hardly an exchange between equals, since as Stansell notes, the woman "delivered on her part of the bargain — and risked pregnancy — before the man came through with his."[5]

This picture of a distinct working-class sexual culture, which did not reify female virginity to the heights that the dominant culture celebrated, is intriguing. Yet, in a sexual climate which punished pre- or extra-marital sexual transgressions on the part of women more severely than men, and in which contraception was faulty, at best, it is not surprising to find that women approached sexual relations with a certain ambivalence. Barret-Ducrocq notes that women and men met in a "climate of mingled love and mistrust." Mistrust was obviously well placed, for the men who abandoned their pregnant lovers were remarkable only in their ordinariness. A few men could be classed as "libertines," married men who had no intention of carrying out their promise of marriage, for example, who reacted with extreme cruelty to the news of their impending fatherhood. Most men were more "respectable" types, whom Barret-Ducrocq hypothesizes had taken Malthusian and evangelical doctrines to heart and were convinced that marriage before they were economically established would condemn them to lifelong poverty. Leaving their girlfriends behind was, for these men, the "lesser of two evils."

These are, of course, the stories of tragedy, which reveal the precarious position of women in the 19th century sexual barter system. In light of the myopic earnestness with which these men tried to convince their girlfriends that they were leaving to guarantee future happiness for both, it would be interesting to find out more about the loop-holes in this masculine honour system. Records such as these tell us something about the social and emotional scars left on women, but what of the men? Could men shirk their 'responsibility' with impunity and never pay, in the eyes of their family, friends, and community? Obviously, some men did not construct or understand this sense of responsibility for the consequences of pre-marital sexual relations in the same way as women: how did they understand it? The regularity with which women negotiated a promise of marriage from men before sex suggests that this practice was a working-class cultural norm, but how did men construct their place in the barter system?

Barret-Ducrocq hints at answers to these questions in her analysis of the effect of the Poor Law reform of 1834. In this legislation, "bastardy clauses" were added, leaving the workhouse as the only option for unwed mothers. The situations which resulted in the abandonment of pregnant women were not new: a cooling or transference of male affections to someone else, economic insecurity, the necessity

[5]Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York 1986), 87.

for mobility in one's trade, or simply crude self-interest. What was new was what Barret-Ducrocq terms the "depenalization of male neglect" after the 1834 Poor Law legislation. Men reneged on their promises because they could. Women and their families lacked the power to challenge this, and the state, it seemed, lacked the inclination.

An alternative, perhaps more cynical, way to understand this phenomenon would be to question the authenticity of the stories told by women to the Foundling Hospital. Legal historians have encountered distinct social scripts, played out by people who found themselves in front of a judge and jury. As Joan Sangster has recently argued, sometimes the scripts followed by women in Peterborough's magistrates court played on legal prejudices about proper female behavior, and sometimes they subverted this, by humour, 'tall tales,' or outright defiance.[6] Knowing that the keepers of this Foundling Hospital insisted that their aid would only be granted to women who conformed to a certain model of feminine sexual comportment, is it possible that women fabricated the broken promise of marriage in order to embellish their 'wronged' status?

Barret-Ducrocq raises several such questions about authenticity, but suggests that the patterns she discovered in these case files reflect working-class cultural norms. There is no sign that working-class Londoners engaged in the "bestial, anarchic copulation so insistently alleged and described" by their social 'betters.' The working class, she argues, "lived by a set of rules common to everyone — albeit rules whose principles and practice set them apart from the dominant code of sexual morality." (180)

These insights about a distinct working-class sexual culture are important ones, but I still am troubled by questions of authenticity, pertinent not only to this work, but to all studies which use case files as their principle source. Anyone who is interested in uncovering the intimate lives of the marginal — worker, immigrants, lesbians, and gay men — must rely to at least some extent on the often hostile gaze of middle-class observers and reformers: the legal system, the medical system, and institutions such as this Foundling Hospital. Given that the sexual 'othering' of non-hegemonic groups was so much a part of systems of power in this period, historians must approach the voyeuristic reforming gaze with caution. Sexuality was (and, to an extent, remains) an important part of the arsenal of the weaponry of racial and class hierarchies. American historians Jennifer Terry has recently admonished historians of same-sex sexuality to avoid looking for a fully crafted gay "identity" in the annals of medical and psychiatric case research, but rather, to "locate the sites of conflict, tension and resistance" between doctors and subjects. This method of tracing the production of what Terry calls "deviant subjectivity," defined as "the process by which a position or identity space is constructed

[6]Joan Sangster, "Tales From Magistrate's Court: Women, Criminality and the Courts in Peterborough County, 1920-1950," paper presented at "Law, State and Society in History" Conference, Osgoode Hall, Toronto, 16 May 1992.

discursively by sexology and medicine and strategically seized upon by its objects of study," strikes me as a useful one for historians researching the intimate lives of other socially marginal groups.[7] Barret-Ducrocq's portrait of working-class romantic and sexual mores differs markedly from the horrified imagings of contemporary observers, and this is a significant historical milestone. Yet I would have liked Barret-Ducrocq more fully to problematize her sources, rich and exciting as they are, in order to think out more clearly the tensions inherent in 'rescuing' other sexual cultures.

These books, read together, raise some important questions about cross-class comparisons of sexual intimacy. Both challenge the stereotype of the carnal, sex happy working class, breeding like bunnies under the scandalized noses of the repressed, asexual middle class. Barret-Ducrocq's sources force her to place working-class subjects in the context of contemporary middle-class moralizing, and thus illustrate nicely the way sexuality and intimacy were a part of class formation and identity. Seidman's study is less contextualized, though it is an important addition to the literature on the creation of a middle-class cultural identity. To understand the place of sexuality historically we need more studies such as these. Even more, we need studies which cross class, racial, and ethnic lines, not only to fill in the many gaps in our historical knowledge, but to understand how sexuality, along with gender, race, and class, operated as a system of power.

[7]Jennifer Terry, "Theorizing Deviant History," *differences* (Summer 1991).