

his publishers for their increasingly successful attempts to subdue and exploit their authors. Nevertheless, anyone interested in the history of French business, publishing or the bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century will be grateful to Mollier for this rich harvest of facts.

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M. Jeanne Peterson — *Family, Love, and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989. Pp. 241.

Historians of nineteenth-century England have generally portrayed the lives of middle- and upper-class Victorian women as trivialized by the economic and social changes brought about by industrialization and urbanization. With the creation of the factory system and the professionalization of skills such as medicine, productive work was removed from the home. Domestic life was increasingly privatized, with a sharp sense of separation between it and the public outside world of productive activity. Women of propertied families usually did not enter the public world of work, which became gendered as the male sphere. Without economic responsibilities and confined within the domestic world, women became, according to traditional historical scholarship as well as Victorian reformers, mere ornaments, the emptiness of whose lives was cloaked by sentimental gush about their new role as “angels in the house”.

The Victorian prescriptive literature assigned married women the responsibility of supervising the household and raising children, but the large staff of servants, characteristic of propertied families, relieved them of much of the actual domestic work. They were also to soothe the troubled brow of their exhausted husbands, but they did not have to worry about soothing his body. Medical experts and social authorities agreed that true women had maternal but not sexual instincts. She should provide her husband with heirs, but his sexual needs could be satisfied by discreet engagements with prostitutes. The lady of the house focused her energies, such as they were, on playing social calls and displaying pleasing if superficial accomplishments in music and art.

Recent scholarship has challenged this stereotyped negative view of affluent Victorian women. Rather than seeing women as mere victims of Victorian patriarchy, revisionist historians are uncovering evidence that many Victorian women experienced productive, self-determined and satisfying lives. M. Jeanne Peterson, in *Family, Love, and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen*, makes an important contribution to this revisionist scholarship. Peterson, whose authority as a Victorian scholar was established in her earlier studies of Victorian governesses and of the Victorian medical profession, convincingly argues that many upper-middle-class Victorian women enjoyed much fuller and more productive lives than previous studies have suggested.

Peterson bases her study on a three-generational collective biography of women in the Paget circle, connected by ties of family, friendship or work. The men in the Paget circle are for the most part professionals, with occupations in law, medicine, the Church or the universities. They, therefore, compose what Peterson calls the new urban gentry. Analyzing the letters, diaries and other personal papers of the wives and

daughters of these professional men, Peterson reveals realities that are in sharp contrast to the view one would have from an examination only of the prescriptive literature.

Those who have assumed that the lives of Victorian gentlewomen were trivialized have stressed the poor quality of female educational institutions in early Victorian England. Educated mainly in the home by their mothers and by poorly trained governesses, women's formal education outside the home usually involved a few years in a finishing school, which emphasized accomplishments rather than rigorous intellectual training. Certainly one of the first goals of the women's emancipation movement was for better schools and, eventually, even university education for women. Peterson argues, however, that despite or even because of the lack of formal schooling, the women in her study achieved a high level of scholarship. The parents often engaged specialized masters to teach skills even beyond the governess's abilities. Their studies frequently included such ostensibly male subjects as classical literature, math and science. Encouraged by their fathers as well as by their mothers, they read extensively, motivated by intellectual curiosity rather than by concern to pass exams or win prizes. Peterson suggests that their education was therefore often superior to that of later women who were the products of female education reforms.

These educated women were then able to form companionate marriages based on mutual respect and love. Rejecting Lawrence Stone's view of Victorian marriage as repressive, Peterson argues that the women in the extended Paget circle expressed feelings of passionate and even sexual love. Even before the *Married Women's Property Acts* were passed, they controlled their own property through trusts and were often managers of the family finances. They also shared in significant ways their husband's work, and were content to let their efforts remain publicly unrecognized because of their acceptance of the hierarchical patriarchal structure of Victorian society. Their charity work was not the stereotyped fitful inappropriate efforts of bored women, nor as Frank Prochaska has suggested, merely the fulfillment of a mothering instinct, but was motivated by a concern to do meaningful Christian work, and was often hard, challenging and socially important. Peterson sees even the much maligned "social call" as a form of productive work, in that the calls were often an important means of networking and, therefore, professional advancement.

*Family, Love, and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen* should make scholars cautious from now on in generalizing about the oppressive effects of Victorian patriarchy. It is also an important reminder of the often wide gap between prescriptive social ideals and actual behavior. As Peterson herself would acknowledge, however, her study does not refute, but merely qualifies, the traditional view of Victorian women. Peterson has examined an elite group of self-confident professional families who were not so concerned to assert social status or to achieve social mobility. Women from *nouveaux riches* industrial and commercial families were probably much more constrained by pressures to conformity to the ideal of ornamental ladyhood. There was also change through time, even among Peterson's gentlewomen, a factor not analyzed in this study. Peterson applies her conclusions to all three generations, but most of her examples of productivity come from the last decades of the century.

Although a strength of this study is its thorough documentation, some of the evidence is questionable. Citing one woman's sensual pleasure in having her young son tickle her foot and ankle probably says more about eroticized Victorian mother-son relationships than it does about a woman's capacity for sexual pleasure with her husband. Given his pedophilic history, John Ruskin's attraction to a woman thirty years

younger is probably not a good example of friendships of mutual respect between older men and younger women. How much can one generalize from Charles and Fanny Kingsley's well-documented but perhaps exceptional pre-marital physical intimacy?

As do most revisionist historians, Peterson focuses her argument and evidence on challenging the conventional view without acknowledging the ways in which the old view is still valid. She shows how gentlewomen lived happily and productively, but she does not discuss the ways the women in her study were, in fact, constrained by patriarchy. They may, for example, have developed genuine artistic talent, but only in such genres as flower painting, and they were unable to paint from nude models. Some were excellent writers, but with the professionalization of literature in the late nineteenth century, fewer women were getting published. They earned money, but before the passage of the *Married Women's Acts*, this money legally belonged to their husband, which must have had psychological even if not practical effects.

Despite these qualifications, *Family, Love, and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen* is a welcome and significant contribution to Victorian and women's studies. It is important not only in what it says about Victorian women, but also as a model of historical scholarship. To understand past human experience, we must analyze it on its own terms, and with its and not our own value system. Examining the women's lives, Peterson does not assume what they should have felt, but rather focuses on what they actually said and did. The result is a valuable work that corrects and clarifies our understanding of Victorian women's history.

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Pierre Pluchon — *Toussaint Louverture : un révolutionnaire noir d'Ancien Régime*, Paris, Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1989, 654 p.

Dix ans après la parution de son *Toussaint Louverture : de l'esclavage au pouvoir* (Paris, L'École, 1979), Pierre Pluchon nous présente sa deuxième biographie de l'étonnant leader de la Révolution haïtienne. Cette œuvre est plus étoffée, étant basée sur un échantillon plus large des sources manuscrites et imprimées, mais elle garde le même caractère et utilise une grande partie du texte de la version originale. C'est un ouvrage de haute vulgarisation plutôt qu'une monographie académique, une biographie essentiellement politique qui dessine pourtant à grands traits la lente transformation de l'opulente colonie de Saint-Domingue en Haïti.

L'auteur souligne surtout la période du pouvoir personnel de Toussaint (1799-1801), et non les campagnes militaires des années 1790 et de la guerre d'Indépendance (1802-1803) qui sont privilégiées dans beaucoup d'autres biographies. Tout en dépeignant la rapacité insatiable des chefs militaires indigènes, vrais seigneurs féodaux, Pluchon affirme que Toussaint « nationalisait » les plantations des colons blancs. Tandis que la masse des ex-esclaves luttait pour devenir paysans propriétaires, les leaders de la révolution noire, anciens esclaves aussi, cherchaient à préserver les plantations en pratiquant la séquestration et en remplaçant l'esclavage par un régime de travail forcé. Toussaint était le garant de cette révolution foncière-militaire. Cette interprétation amène Pluchon à minimiser les aspects favorables aux Blancs de la