

# Historiographic Hassles: Class and Gender, Evidence and Interpretation

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*Historiographic controversy in Canada has produced concentric circles of often quite charged disagreement. Two relatively new areas of Canadian historiography — the serious scrutiny of labour and gender and their significance in the past — have been central to ongoing challenges to historical interpretations and evidence. Some curious, largely unacknowledged chains link the critiques provided by working-class histories from the 1970s and 1980s to newer 1990s gender perspectives. A scrutiny of two major texts of gender history, *Gender Conflicts* edited by Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde and *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, reveals the tensions that connect as well as separate labour and gender historians. We need to reconstitute a dialogue, not through surrender, pique, overblown claims, or caricatures, but on the basis of parallel, if sometimes divergent, projects of modest accomplishment.*

*La controverse historiographique au Canada a souvent jeté de très lourds pavés dans la mare. Deux domaines relativement nouveaux de l'historiographie canadienne — l'étude sérieuse de la vie ouvrière et du sexe et leur importance dans le passé — ont joué un rôle central dans la contestation continue d'interprétations et de preuves historiques. Des chaînes curieuses et largement inconnues font un lien entre les critiques issues des histoires de la classe ouvrière des années 70 et 80 et de nouvelles perspectives des rapports hommes-femmes des années 90. L'étude de deux textes majeurs sur l'histoire des rapports hommes-femmes, *Gender Conflicts*, publié sous la direction de Franca Iacovetta et de Mariana Valverde, et *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, de Lynne Marks, nous révèle les tensions qui unissent tout autant qu'elles divisent les historiens de la vie ouvrière et des rapports hommes-femmes. Nous devons reconstituer un dialogue, non pas par l'abdication, le ressentiment, des allégations exagérées ou les caricatures, mais sur la base de projets parallèles, quoique parfois divergents, d'accomplissement modeste.*

HISTORIOGRAPHIC fashion is now a fickle, often cruel taskmaster. Rare is the historian who has managed to secure a reputation who will not find

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him or herself challenged, if not castigated, by those for whom new ways of looking at the past, often influenced by significant departures in theory and sensibilities to new questions and aspects of historical process, demand a radical revisiting of interpretations and evidence. Two relatively recent areas of Canadian historiography — the serious scrutiny of labour and gender and their significance in the past — have been central to this process of challenge. Their shifting reciprocities have evolved from the so-called “new” working-class history and a feminist women’s history in the 1970s and 1980s into concerns with the gendered nature of public as well as private life, in which complex and often contending masculinities and femininities are juxtaposed to traditional understandings of “natural” spheres, where power’s moorings had supposedly rarely been interrogated.

This essay explores the uneasy relationship of some working-class and gender historians, focusing on texts written against the backdrop of a contemporary destabilized historiographic context. As such it offers a more fractious reading of our historiographic times than is normal. By avoiding the overdetermined opposition of a beleaguered conservative plea for histories of the nation’s meritorious past versus the social-cultural demand for a history attentive to pluralism and diversity, it aims to complicate our appreciation of historiographic difference.<sup>1</sup>

The complex and often overlapping circles of intentionality that both bind labour and gender historians to one another and draw them apart are central to what has emerged as a particular historiographic hassle. There remain some curious, largely unacknowledged connective chains that link older 1970s and 1980s critiques of working-class histories to newer 1990s gender perspectives. The tensions that connect as well as separate gender and labour historians are important to explore, if only to attempt to reinvigorate a dialogue. It might be suggested, for instance, that younger male and female historians were more closely linked in the project of 1970s revisionism (even acknowledging their differences), aimed as it was at the hegemonic traditionalism of a much stronger mainstream historiography, than are many gender historians and advocates of class readings of our past in the historiographies of the 1990s. Researches into class formation and struggle or into the obscured histories of women, which matured over the course of the 1970s, shared a marginal space and a kind of intellectual-institutional geography very different than the prevailing relations among gender and working-class historians in the present. The absence of genuine dialogue and the abdications of analytic position characteristic of our postmodern *fin-de-siècle* militant particularism provide a contrast to the endeavours of Marxists

<sup>1</sup> Consider, for instance, J. L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1998); A. B. McKillop, “Who Killed Canadian History? A View from the Trenches”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 80 (June 1999), pp. 269–299; Bryan D. Palmer, “Of Silences and Trenches: A Dissident View of Granatstein’s Meaning”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 80 (December 1999), pp. 676–686.

and feminists in the 1970s. The argument that follows, much of which elaborates positions scaffolded on what some will regard as a rather old-fashioned engagement with questions of evidence, attempts to rekindle relations among these camps. If this is indeed to happen, however, it will not be on the sacrificial altar of social constructionism, with its conceptual tendency towards an evidentiary relativism, its distortion and dismissal of past interpretive gains, and its refusal of what new paradigms of thought have to offer the shared project of rethinking that lies at the root of class and gender studies. If gender history advances our understandings, as all must agree that it does, it is important not to forget, in staking new claims to historiographic advance, the ways in which working-class history also expanded awareness and, indeed, fought for conceptual ground that others can now productively work.

### **Preamble: The Changing Face of Historiographic Difference**

As Peter Novick and Carl Berger have emphasized in their respective overviews of the historical professions in the United States and Canada, by the 1960s and 1970s fresh winds of change blew across the ground of convention on which interrogation of the past often walked.<sup>2</sup> This is not to suggest that Canadian historians have always been a homogeneous, undifferentiated mass, their congealed essence forged by a fundamental sameness. A reading of any historian's papers prior to the 1960s will most likely convey a sense of the divisions within the profession, which were especially acute along the lines of personality and mainstream politics. Within such boundaries of individual differentiation, however, analytic argument was not so much fought out on the social democratic margins as it was waged in a men's parlour where identifications separated Tory and Grit. Much of the fragmenting focus of contemporary historiography was not even seen as a legitimate historical project, let alone allowed entry to the clubrooms of narrowly political and economic discussion.<sup>3</sup>

By and large, professional historical writing in Canada at mid-century was thus blind to what would later, at the end of the 1960s, come to be called the "limited identities" of the country's past, a term that originally designated region, ethnicity, and class (but not, significantly, women or gender, which would only be recognized later) as submerged categories of historical analy-

2 Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), in which the pertinent chapters are "The Center Does Not Hold" and "There was no King in Israel", pp. 522–629. Carl Berger's *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing Since 1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986) is more guarded in its presentation, the parallel chapter bearing the more understated and general title "Tradition and the 'New' History", pp. 259–320.

3 Consider R. Douglas Francis, *Frank H. Underhill: Intellectual Provocateur* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986); Kenneth McNaught, *Conscience and History: A Memoir* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1999).

sis worthy of exploration.<sup>4</sup> To be sure, writing in such areas, especially that of the working class and its organizations and mobilizations, occasionally punctuated the pages of scholarly research.<sup>5</sup> Yet, within the mainstream of professional historiographic practice, it was as though the 1929 warning of A. R. M. Lower, ironically an historian more sympathetic than most to researching the obscured pasts of work and wages and described by Underhill as “our most philosophical historian”, had been taken deeply to heart: “the study of the common, or common-place man, if overdone, would no doubt make for common-place history”.<sup>6</sup>

When, in 1965, S. R. Mealing outlined the possibilities of a class interpretation of Canadian history, it was not surprising that he concluded, “The established themes of Canadian historiography cannot be said to exclude the idea of class, but neither do they seem especially to invite it.” Mealing’s pragmatic injunction was not to neglect “lower-class history” and the material, class-ordered structures of society, but he saw no case for what, in the loaded, gendered language of the time (which was a linguistic measure of the lack of concern with women and their histories), he referred to as an “intellectual monogamy” in which class alone was understood to guide historical process. Revelling in what he jocularly designated a productive philandering, Mealing advised Canadian historians “to play the field”, a pastime surely coded as male.<sup>7</sup>

A dual meaning lay buried in this first Canadian historiographic survey of the interpretive possibilities of class. The obvious initial point about Mealing’s article was its strawperson character: whom, precisely, was he arguing against? He could cite barely a dozen Canadian articles that addressed, however eclectically and loosely defined, the experience of class in Canada. None even hinted that class, in and of itself, explained the development of Canada. Mealing managed to avoid discussion of Stanley Ryerson’s Communist Party publications on the 1837 rebellions, the conjuncture of class and nation within the history of Quebec, and the materialist origins of the founding of Canada, books that, for all their flaws, certainly brought a class analysis to bear on some staples of Canadian historiography. It is a blind spot

4 The major statements were Ramsay Cook, “Canadian Centennial Celebrations”, *International Journal*, vol. 22 (Autumn 1967), p. 661; J. M. S. Careless, “‘Limited Identities’ in Canada”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 50 (March 1969), pp. 1–10.

5 See, for some comment, Gregory S. Kealey, “Looking Backward: Reflections on the Study of Class in Canada”, *History and Social Science Teacher*, vol. 16 (Summer 1981), pp. 213–222, and “Writing About Labour”, in John Schultz, ed., *Writing about Canada: A Handbook for Modern Canadian History* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1990), pp. 148–160.

6 A. R. M. Lower, “Some Neglected Aspects of Canadian History”, *Canadian Historical Association Report* (1929), p. 66; Underhill, quoted in Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History*, p. 135.

7 S. R. Mealing, “The Concept of Social Class and the Interpretation of Canadian History”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 46 (September 1965), pp. 201–218, especially p. 218. I am more guarded in my assessment of Mealing’s article than McKillop in “Who Killed Canadian History? A View from the Trenches”, who rather one-sidedly claimed that this essay, in conjunction with other developments, forced “class into the mainstream of historical attention” (p. 296).

that has continued, somewhat surprisingly, into the 1990s.<sup>8</sup> The second, unmistakable significance of Mealing's essay and other *Canadian Historical Review* (*CHR*) publications in 1965, the year that John Porter's analysis of class and social structure, *The Vertical Mosaic*, was published, was that they gestured toward the changing analytic direction of Canadian historiography.

First, Mealing drew extensively on an international literature, citing the British Marxist historians of labour, writings on the French Revolution, and even modern Russian historiography. His article suggested a different sensibility toward historical practice in Canada, where an influential dialectic of empire and nation had long framed professional writing on the past. Mealing's use of secondary sources bypassed the traditional fixation on imperial relations, concentrating instead on drawing from non-Canadian historiography analytic approaches that would not only widen, but creatively reconfigure, the canvas on which a national history was painted.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, in the same year that Mealing's article appeared, the *CHR* also published W. J. C. Cherwinski's pathbreaking and underappreciated account of the displaced Wingham (Ontario) WASP William Henry Jackson, a.k.a. Honoré Joseph Jaxon, who turned Metis supporter and Riel lieutenant and later became a Knight of Labor, Chicago Federation of Labor agitator, aboriginal advocate, and anarchist libertarian,<sup>10</sup> as well as an early instalment of Eugene Forsey's encyclopedic compilation on the history of nineteenth-century Canadian

8 See Stanley Ryerson, *1837: The Birth of Canadian Democracy* (Toronto: Francis White, 1937), *French Canada: A Study in Canadian Democracy* (Toronto: Progress, 1943), and *The Founding of Canada: Beginnings to 1815* (Toronto: Progress, 1960). Oddly, Mealing also ignored the extensive nineteenth-century work of Edwin C. Guillet, whose *The Lives and Times of the Patriots: An Account of the Rebellion in Upper Canada, 1837–1838 and of the Patriot Agitation in the United States, 1837–1842* (Toronto: Thomas Nelson, 1938) was premised on the view that the rebellion was a “workingman’s movement”. Guillet acknowledged Ryerson’s interpretive significance on p. 14. It is equally strange that neither Guillet’s nor Ryerson’s writings on the events of 1837–1838 receive much comment from Allan Greer, who acknowledges positively the influence of Ryerson’s later *Unequal Union: Confederation and the Roots of Crisis in the Canadas, 1815–1873* (Toronto: Progress, 1973) in the *CHR*-commissioned “1837–1838: Rebellion Reconsidered”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 76 (March 1995), p. 1, but then proceeds largely to ignore the perspective he supposedly champions. In Greer’s *The Patriots and the People: The Rebellion of 1837 in Rural Lower Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), Guillet goes unmentioned and Ryerson receives a solitary reference as Greer draws on him for a quote from a primary source (p. 130). Allan Greer and Ian Radforth, ed., *Colonial Leviathan: State Formation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) is no different. Robert C. H. Sweeny, in “Stanley Brehaut Ryerson: Prescience, Politics, and the Profession”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 80 (September 1999), pp. 464–469, discusses Ryerson’s exclusion but understates his reception by social historians of the working class, ignoring, for instance, a 1981 conference on class and culture at McGill University that honoured Ryerson. Sweeny also too easily bypasses Ryerson’s Stalinism, a fault evident as well in Gregory S. Kealey’s *Workers and Canadian History* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), pp. 48–100.

9 Note, as well, the discussion in Ramsay Cook, “Good Bye to All That”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 49 (September 1968), p. 275.

10 W. J. C. Cherwinski, “Honoré Joseph Jaxon, Agitator, Disturber, Producer of Plans to Make Men Think, and Chronic Objector...”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 46 (June 1965), pp. 122–123.

unionism.<sup>11</sup> With three of the four 1965 issues of the *CHR* containing articles relating to labour and class, the character of the country's historiography seemed poised for a shift.

Over the course of the next 20 years that shift indeed took place. Pluralism reigned; Canadian historiography diversified as never before.<sup>12</sup> That this was a social process related to the expansion of the university, the emergence of a New Left, and the increasing integration of immigrant Canadians, working-class people, and women into the social fabric of society, including the long-standing bastion of privilege, academic life, is undeniable. In this change, however, lay a fundamentally new intellectual current, marking the last third of the twentieth century as Canadian historiography's "bourgeois revolution": "Constant revolutionising ..., everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned...."<sup>13</sup>

The escalating revisionism of the post-1970 years had its origins in two different, but related historiographic turns. First, a decisive expansion of social history opened the floodgates to a plethora of "limited identities" that would eventually so broaden the subject of historical inquiry that early champions of pluralism, such as Careless, found themselves reconsidering their original manifestos and backtracking in their advocacy.<sup>14</sup> The identities of historical inquiry were now virtually unlimited: region, ethnicity, "race", and class were soon challenged by legitimate demands to include women's history and, by the 1990s, to explore the gendered meaning of historical process, an injunction that threatened to overturn all previous ways of looking at past experience.<sup>15</sup> At the point that Canadian historiography was looking decidedly different, a second, equally potent shift occurred.

If the initial wave of social history altered quantitatively the substance of

11 Eugene Forsey, "Some Notes on the Early History of Unions in P.E.I.", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 46 (December 1965), pp. 346–351. For the final statement of the Forsey project, see *Trade Unions in Canada, 1812–1902* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982). Forsey had commenced his immensely important research into nineteenth-century unions in 1963, commissioned by the Canadian Labour Congress to produce a book for its Centennial project. He would later comment: "Canadian labour history was not then the 'in' thing it is now. Labourers in that vineyard were few indeed." Unpublished, undated "Introduction" [reply to critics of the manuscript submitted to University of Toronto Press], c.1980.

12 For one account, focusing on the *CHR*, see Marlene Shore, "'Remember the Future': The *Canadian Historical Review* and the Discipline of History, 1920–1995", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 76 (September 1995), pp. 435–455.

13 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (New York: Arrow Editions, 1933 [1848]), p. 7.

14 Maurice Careless, "Limited Identities — Ten Years Later", *Manitoba History*, vol. 1 (Spring 1976), pp. 3–9.

15 See Joy Parr, "Gender History and Historical Practice", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 76 (September 1995), pp. 355–356, for one sweeping assertion.

Canada's past, a subsequent conceptual rupture reordered the very way in which many historians, particularly younger scholars fresh to academic postings, regarded the past and its varied contents. By the late 1980s theory moved oppositionally away from what had been a loose, social history embrace of historical materialism to champion a generalized attachment to discursiveness. Whether in the guise of Derridean deconstruction or Foucauldian discourses on the self and its governance, a colonizing body of thought, characterized as poststructural or postmodern, swept through liberal and ostensibly radical historical circles, bringing in its wake a hypersensitivity to metaphor and the many mirrors of representation. Proclaimed a "linguistic turn", this new postmodern orientation, premised on a deeper repudiation of so-called metanarratives and centres of power than anything imagined by social history's call to expand the subject of historical inquiry, pushed historiographic fashion further into an analytically charged theorization of plurality as something more than "limited identities". Nations, regions, classes, sexes, "races", genders — all were now discursive, destabilized pieces of a puzzle whose fictionalized structure had to be fractured before its socially constructed illusion of a totalizing historical narrative (seemingly the project of *all* past historiographic effort) could be reconfigured in non-essentializing, non-mythical ways.<sup>16</sup> Beyond "limited identities", apparently, lay a proliferation of limitless identities. As Joy Parr's *CHR* article on "Gender History and Historical Practice" suggested, the "knowing" of this could never be final and complete.<sup>17</sup>

### Reaction's Interlude: Chapters I and II

The post-1960s proliferation of histories that attended to what had, for decades, been considered marginal subjects of inquiry was initiated by regional, women's, and institutional labour historians, but the edge of differentiation was sharpest among social historians of the working class. Chapter one of reaction's interlude would be written in the pages of labour history. Berger declares, in his account of the "new" histories of the 1970s, that "[t]he most exciting and ideologically turbulent department of social history was the study of labour", further commenting that, with the published working-class studies of 1976–1982, "the so-called new working-class history sparked a debate among historians that was captious, intemperate, and confusing".<sup>18</sup> Even the relatively sedate *CHR* was not untouched, Marlene Shore indicating the direct linkage of social history, working-class history,

16 The text most often cited by Canadian historians drawn to postmodern theory is Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), a collection of understandably uneven contributions with respect to their theoretical relation to poststructuralism. For a critical introduction to poststructuralism, see Bryan D. Palmer, *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

17 Parr, "Gender History and Historical Practice", pp. 354–376.

18 Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History*, pp. 303, 306.

and interpretive tension: “As the literature of social and working-class history made its way into the *CHR*, hostility and contentiousness became palpable in the journal.”<sup>19</sup> In the words of Ramsay Cook, those pivotal in pushing the analytic agenda of working-class history “conducted not only a fairly respectful battle with the historical establishment, but also carried on much more pointed ideological wars with the ‘nationalist’ Marxists of the Watkins-Drache school, bitterly denounced Katz’s structural sociology, and quarrelled loudly with those who write mere labour history rather than devoting themselves to analysis of working class culture”. The resulting clashes were, Cook claimed, occasionally “ill-tempered and ill-mannered”, but they enlivened the intellectual discipline, and at their base was a formidable body of important research and writing.<sup>20</sup> J. L. Granatstein was more blunt. A war raged in Canadian historiographic circles. “It began,” he declared, “for all practical purposes, among historians of labor,” and it pitted Marxist and non-Marxist against one another in an “uncommonly vicious” confrontation.<sup>21</sup>

A peculiarity of labour history in Canada differentiated it from comparable fields of social history as well as from the experience of working-class historical practice in other nation-states such as Australia, England, and the United States (which had deeper traditions of radical, even Communist Party/Marxist, historical research and writing). Canadian labour history gave rise to two general “schools” of thought in a relatively short time frame, and these metaphorical generations of scholarship were marked by decidedly different impulses and engagements. The first contingent, which entered PhD programmes mostly in the mid-to-late 1960s, was largely untouched by Marxism and was either liberal or “liberal in a hurry” (moderately social democratic). Yet it moved decidedly gingerly in any arenas of theory or international literatures and, as a consequence of its resolutely empirical idiom, rarely challenged forcefully conventional historiographic method. (For all of these reasons, some in the historical profession praised its superiority to other modes of writing.) Its conception of the working class was one of institution, material inequality, and politics, traditionally conceived, and there was nothing wrong with that.<sup>22</sup> But the orthodoxies of the moment pinched the narrow countenance of labour into a particular mask: presentist in its grasp of

19 Shore, “Remember the Future”, p. 444.

20 Ramsay Cook, “The Making of Canadian Working Class History”, *Historical Reflections/ Réflexions historiques*, vol. 10 (Spring 1983), pp. 116–117.

21 J. L. Granatstein, “No Hostages Taken in War Between Historians”, *Toronto Star*, Saturday Magazine, June 24, 1989.

22 Among the major studies produced were: Irving Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour, 1935–1956* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); David J. Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations, and the General Strike* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1974); A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899–1919* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).



labour's presence, this school of thought stressed collective bargaining rights, the rise of the trade union, and the evolution of the labour-reform agenda of the parliamentary party of "socialism" as the respectable subjects of working-class history. This limited labour's identity in tangible ways and explains statements like those of Irving Abella, who declared in the introduction to a collection of essays on strikes: "Labour's trauma started in Winnipeg in 1919. Until then its horizons seemed unclouded and propitious."<sup>23</sup>

No sooner had this cohort of labour historians secured jobs (and this was the last time in professional historical practice that jobs would be readily available) than they were confronted by another body of scholarship with a decidedly different conception of working-class history. This emergent contingent of historians was never the tightly coherent collectivity that some imagined us to be, but we gravitated to one another, not so much out of an understanding of what we were for, but because we knew what we were against. Divisions were rife amongst us — personalities and politics were widely and often wildly out of synch — but there was a relatively common appreciation that we wanted to write the history of class formation, rather than that of the trade union, and in this sense it is not surprising that our original work addressed the years 1860 to 1930. Many of us went to graduate programmes in the United States, where we were schooled in the break from consensus historiography, and all of us, to one degree or another, read fairly extensively in the international literature. When the first major statements of this loose historiographic approach appeared — my *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, 1860–1914* and Gregory S. Kealey's *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867–1892*, followed by our jointly authored *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880–1900* — between 1979 and 1982, they unleashed a flood of mainstream critical comment. In its hostility and denunciatory antagonism, it broke somewhat new ground in Canadian historiography: a commissioned review essay in a major national publication caricatured the study of "Archie Bunker" cultures; a reminiscence of Creighton in the *Canadian Forum* by an historian of stature deplored the "gang running" of working-class and women's historians; and a rhetoric of repudiation appeared in international journals. One review described the new research as "pretentious, problematic, and tedious ... a Sunday sermon ... dry, boring, and devoid of any feeling for the workers".<sup>24</sup> There were awards and kind praise, to be sure, but within historiographic debate the shoe of power-

23 Irving Abella, ed., *On Strike: Six Key Labour Struggles in Canada, 1919–1949* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1975), p. xii.

24 For a taste of the times, sample the following: Kenneth McNaught, "E. P. Thompson vs. Harold Logan: Writing About Labour and the Left in the 1970s", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 62 (1981), pp. 141–168; H. V. Nelles, "Creighton's Seminar", *Canadian Forum* (September 1980), p. 6; Review of *Dreaming of What Might Be* by David J. Bercuson, *Business History Review*, vol. 57 (1983), pp. 589–591.

ful condemnation was lowered damningly by a cohort of scholars well placed to air their views.<sup>25</sup>

This interlude of reaction hardened debate in particular ways, making it rather difficult to get past “sides” of commitment — “revolution”/ reform, conflict/ accommodation, culture/ structure, class/ institution — and to concretize experience historically: at this point, the proponents of a social history of class tended to be writing about the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while their detractors, in contrast, had almost to a person immersed themselves in later, post-World War I periods. One seemingly contradictory pairing, deployed rather brazenly but destined to resurface in different dress more than a decade later, was that of class/ gender. In one critique of what he described as the culturalist variant of working-class history, David Bercuson asked rhetorically: “Can it be automatically assumed that class was a more important means of self-identification than gender?”<sup>26</sup> It appeared, perhaps, to be a reasonable question, but in its oppositional formulation, ordered through a male/female difference that seemed shorn of any moorings in material life, it posed the interpretive issues of class and gender in too bluntly essentialized and dichotomous a way.

Why revisit this “old” and impolite past? Put simply, this context needs to be remembered because it is a cornerstone of the more contemporary Bliss-Granatstein condemnation of “the disintegration of Canadian history as a unified discipline”.<sup>27</sup> Chapter two in reaction’s interlude has been unfolding over the course of the 1990s in the pages of the history of the imagined community of the Canadian “nation”.<sup>28</sup>

The discontents of Bliss and Granatstein are actually many and varied, but their more focused complaint is relatively straightforward. Social history’s proliferating “limited identities” have fractured concern with the Canadian nation and its historical evolution, as registered in a master narrative of conventional politics. Historians no longer address issues pivotal to the “national community”. In their introverted, ghettoized specializations, with their self-referential sense of subject and languages of arcane isolation, they have primed the engines of national disintegration. They have also cut themselves off from a reading public that has little concern with the privatized parochial-

25 I thus reject the attempt by Paul Craven, “Introduction”, *Labouring Lives: Work and Workers in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 4 and 11, to shift the onus of responsibility onto the shoulders of a so-called “New Left” contingent of historians.

26 David J. Bercuson, “Through the Looking Glass of Culture: An Essay on the New Labour History and Working-Class Culture in Recent Canadian Historical Writing”, *Labour/ Le Travail*, vol. 7 (Spring 1981), p. 107.

27 Michael Bliss, “Privatizing the Mind: The Sundering of Canadian History, the Sundering of Canada”, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 26 (Winter 1991–1992), pp. 5–17; Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?*

28 Bliss and Granatstein clearly want historians to be architects of Canada’s “imagined community”. See, for insight, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

ism of much contemporary academic writing. If Bliss and Granatstein gesture weakly to the gains of inclusion registered by social history's expansion of the boundaries of research and writing in Canada, they regard this as a very thin silver lining to what is indeed a dark cloud of obscurantism and irrelevancy hanging over the collective head of Canadian historians.

Among social historians the repudiation of Bliss and Granatstein has been too quick, too easy, and too unthinking.<sup>29</sup> Precisely because their points are scored with a perfunctory assumption that all of us are concerned with sustaining the "national project", often posed in insultingly narrow and cavalierly arrogant ways, Bliss and Granatstein have actually "lost" the argument by literal default. Few historians truly engage their challenge, except to raise the banner of pluralist accomplishment.

Just as there were important issues with which to grapple in chapter one of reaction's interlude (class), in spite of the problematic way in which they were posed, so too, in chapter two (nation) are there dilemmas we must confront, however poorly they are pushed into our faces. Social history, notwithstanding its necessary direction and positive impulse, has indeed led toward the privatizing of historical inquiry, immersing us in a fetishization of the particular that has an inevitable consequence of depoliticizing historical practice. This was never the intention of the social historians of the working class, who opted to study class formation in the particularities of nineteenth-century place. Because our research and writing were consciously articulated against the routinization of labour history's respectable institutional and social democratic face, however, we tilted our arguments too forcefully in ways that immersed us in the local to the detriment of the appreciation of larger settings, where provincial and national state power and policy were ensconced. At a more conceptual level, although we wrestled with the meaning of relationships that were developed at the interface of agency and determination, our accent was understandably on the former, to the point that we at times understated the latter. Had the historiographic hassles of the 1970s been more sophisticated and less crudely ideological, we might well have had a better chance of working through these matters of meaning, but that was not the case, just as it is not the case now. Our guide would have been a creative historical materialism, capable, in its appreciations of the dialectics of historical development, of situating process within ensembles of complexity and contradiction, but rooted in a resolute exploration of a range of available evidence.

What is troubling is that there is little indication that this path is being followed in our current historiographic conjuncture. Especially with the recent turn to subjectivity and pluralistic identity associated with Foucault and the paradigms of postmodernism, new paths have been charted away from social

29 For an early attempt to suggest this, see Bryan D. Palmer, "Canadian Controversies", *History Today*, vol. 44 (November 1994), pp. 44–49; I have elaborated on these points in response to A. B. McKillop in "Of Silences and Trenches".

history's broadly historically materialist origins, in which the purpose of focused research was always to shed interpretive light on larger regional, even national developments, located within the boundaries of political economy. Thus the march of 1990s cultural history, paced by the drummer of narrower and more esoteric subjectivities, tends to eschew studies of social structure and material conditions in favour of treatments of discourse and image (which perhaps explains the current fashion of tourism studies). Work is more narrowly restrictive in its textuality, often avoiding a broad canvas of evidence by favouring an exemplary set of documents, usually best probed as literary constructions. Research champions the perspective first openly suggested by Joy Parr, whose *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880–1950* (1990) echoed Virginia Woolf's assertion that what is commonly thought "small" is no less historically significant than what appears "big".<sup>30</sup> Finally, historians often refuse what they designate the binary oppositions of materiality and representation. The result are histories more "culturalist" than "social" and "economic".<sup>31</sup>

The achievement of this historiographic turn is proclaimed as diversity and difference. Yet the pluralism that has now become theorized as such an achievement, as an unprecedented and momentous historiographic advance, is not all that different than the centuries-old promise of "liberalism" that a Marxism attentive to property's powers and structural inequalities has always found deplorably deficient as a foundation of social transformation. Have we settled for so liberal little?<sup>32</sup> As more than a few of the injunctions of gender historians (which on occasion seem remarkably similar to some rather tired and timeless anti-Marxist homilies) suggest, in this settlement have we not given up the fight for a transformative history, content instead to advance inclusivity within the seemingly unalterable structures of oppression and exploitation? To address the dualisms of our earlier dilemmas — resistance versus incorporation, for instance — is to dead-end in depoliticized accommodation if the resolution is merely a one-sided repudiation of agencies of struggle. Moving "beyond" old positions entails necessary defences, not abandonment of the strengths embedded in such earlier stands. To the extent that working-class historians adapt to the theoretical and political content of postmodern pluralism, however significant its sensitivities to gender, they often abdicate ground they should simultaneously be defending and reconfiguring. One irony of difference is that gender historians would, in their his-

30 Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880–1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 11.

31 Parr's more resolutely historical writing can hardly be pilloried on this count. See, for instance, Joy Parr, "Shopping for a Good Stove: A Parable about Gender, Design, and the Market", in Parr, ed., *A Diversity of Women: Ontario, 1945–1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 75–97, and "Household Choices as Politics and Pleasure in 1950s Canada", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, vol. 55 (Spring 1999), pp. 112–128.

32 For a sustained critique of the contemporary fashion of radical pluralism, see Russell Jacoby, *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy* (New York: Basic, 1999).

torical practice, pose critiques of working-class historians that seemed to walk terrain well trod by earlier antagonists to the project of a Marxist social history of class.

### **Gender History and the Question of Class**

A gender history scaffolded on postmodern conceptions and orchestrated by poststructural critical theory has staked out one central analytic claim. Historical practice is the exploration of identities that are fluctuating and socially constructed within the particularities of variable times, places, and contexts. In and of itself, this proposition should occasion no great consternation, for giving context to historical experience is a fundamental premise of “doing history”. Poststructuralist gender history, however, revels in its destabilizing project to the point of refusing, at least at the rhetorical, even theoretical level, the very interpretive notion of causality, insisting on a playful indeterminacy. This is often posed in an hierarchicalization of meaning, by which identity’s limitlessness and unknowability is counterposed and coded as superior to other interpretive frameworks that accentuate the explanatory potential of certain historical continuities. It allows poststructural gender historians to have it all ways. They can avoid the difficult but necessary analytic work of weighing the relative significance of the layered aspects of experience, as these are embedded in time and place and as they affect historical process — not always, of course, in some packaged, predictable routine.<sup>33</sup>

This conceptual vagueness is perhaps given a theoretical gloss of rationale in recourse to the “fragmented, unstable subject” of poststructuralism that Mariana Valverde counterposes to the “readymade historical actors” of what she presents as traditionalist women’s and labour history. Her simplistically overdrawn, unreferenced, and congealed construction of liberals and Marxists, bound together in an “empiricist” quest for “Just the facts, ma’am”, registers well with some gender historians who consider the reconstruction and reclaiming of historical experience merely an act of “portraiting”. It slides over a vast range of historical practice, however. The question asked by Joy Parr, “What made some parts of experience remarkable and left others unmarked, as fleeting distinctions from which no difference was consciously or unconsciously distilled?”, is, of course, a legitimate one. But, as Marlene Shore has suggested, postmodernism has no privileged proprietorial relation to such queries, with which historians, some for better, some for worse, have always grappled.<sup>34</sup> If the new interpretive answer is that identity is unknow-

33 Note the contradictory statements on class, race, and women in Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885–1925* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991), pp. 12, 166.

34 Mariana Valverde, “Poststructuralist Gender Historians: Are We Those Names?”, *Labour/Le Travail*, vol. 25 (Spring 1990), pp. 227–228; Parr, “Gender History and Historical Practice”, p. 364; Shore, “Remember the Future”, p. 461.

able as well as limitless, then historical practice is destined to be trapped in a radical relativism, the entanglements and analytic refusals of which will deposit us in an unfortunate and unnecessary cul-de-sac.

As should be apparent from such positionings and a reading of gender history's recent productions, the issue of class is not a bit player in the making of new historiographies and intellectual agendas, both of which have a political and pedagogical content. Against what Valverde has dubbed the "naiveté" of a positivist "women's history" that "assumed one could collect quantities of facts about 'women's experience'" and the supposed economism of a Marxism premised on the notion that there is such a thing as "class interest" and that its material grounding is a "prime mover" of historical process "given in a structural reality existing prior to any subjective consciousness", poststructuralist gender historians proclaim a purpose more open and flexible. "In these times," concludes Valverde, "when both grand theory and empiricism have been discredited as equally dogmatic, the modest, ironic, politically sensitive, and tension-filled methodological framework [of poststructuralist gender history] ... might be just what we need."<sup>35</sup>

A call for openness should always be heeded. How does it actually work in terms of class? In Valverde's single most historically situated text, class is a shadowy presence, most emphatically so in its lower depths, and work is as much the production of allegories as of products, structured relations, and the dynamics of material exchange; the social world is organized by "the tropes of purity".<sup>36</sup> In her more abstract later writings, or in earlier projects centred in the women's movement, the treatment of class is barely a serious issue.<sup>37</sup> This is not a withering criticism, since Valverde makes no claim to be actually studying labour, and it is highly unproductive to demand mechanically that class always be the pivotal analytic category of historical practice. Given that a poststructuralist politics of identity universally demands attention to race, gender, and class, however, it is appropriate to point out that class is often the weakest-developed component of this trilogy.<sup>38</sup>

In a synthetic statement on gender, state formation, and nineteenth-century Canada, for instance, Lykke de la Cour, Cecilia Morgan, and Valverde state:

35 Valverde, "Poststructuralist Gender Historians", pp. 229, 236. Such a position also animates Parr's "Gender History and Historical Practice".

36 Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water*, p. 42.

37 Mariana Valverde, "Governing out of Habit", *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society*, vol. 18 (1998), pp. 217–242, and *Sex, Power, and Pleasure* (Toronto: Women's Movement Press, 1985), pp. 161–162.

38 I make this point because I consider that the outpouring of "postcolonial" studies address "race" centrally. See, as an example of this work, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995). Important conceptual contributions on "race" have also been provided by labour historians, among them: David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991), and *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working-Class History* (London: Verso, 1994); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).

Gender history goes far beyond descriptions of “women’s experience”: it analyzes shifts in the relations between masculinity and femininity, thus examining the whole social formation, not just women, and it consistently analyzes the fragmentation of gender along racial and class lines — and other divisions, such as the female moral/sexual roles crucial in the early Victorian period. It therefore attempts to look at history as a whole from the point of view of the shifting relations among race, class, gender, and other forms of social power, rather than taking for granted a unitary category (women) and then proceeding to document its particular history.

In the article that follows this call for inclusivity, however, class, as a significant marker of difference, as a structural process of change, or as a site of contestation pressuring developments in other spheres, is barely alluded to. Similar characterizations could be made with respect to both historiographic and theoretical statements, such as Parr’s “Gender History and Historical Practice” (which includes discussions of “discourse”, “experience”, “masculinity”, and a range of epistemological issues, but not of class) and rare monograph treatments of “gendered language”, where class formation and its tensions — to the point of armed rebellion in Upper Canada in 1837–1838 — are surprisingly absent.<sup>39</sup> Karen Dubinsky’s statement on feminist teaching, revealingly entitled “Integrating Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality”, actually says next to nothing about class, but concludes on a rather non-integrative note:

I will end with an unresolved rant on class, the topic no one seems to want to talk about any more. I’m frustrated and at a loss. I am toying with the idea of total recapitulation, of advocating that we shelve labour history and labour studies in general from the curriculum, at least for a while, maybe till after the recession. I have seen student after student open their minds to new and tolerant ways of thinking, about gender, sexuality, and race, only to shut down completely when the words “working class” or, worse still, “trade union” are mentioned.

Dubinsky’s assessment, that the hurt of class in contemporary Canada is such a despairing experience that it seems no “empowering” learning can

39 Lykke de la Cour, Cecilia Morgan, and Mariana Valverde, “Gender Regulation and State Formation in Nineteenth-Century Canada”, in Allan Greer and Ian Radforth, eds., *Colonial Leviathan: State Formation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. 163–191; Parr, “Gender History and Historical Practice”; Cecilia Morgan, *Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Language of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791–1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), and “‘Of Slender Frame and Delicate Appearance’: The Placing of Laura Secord in the Narratives of Loyalist History”, *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* (1994), pp. 195–212.

be generated out of labour's past, is, to say the least, a troubling statement.<sup>40</sup>

This translates, unfortunately, rather easily into one-sided constructions of class that are, in their implied meanings, forcefully hostile. Indeed, in a recent article, Dubinsky and Adam Givertz read the labour-reform experience of the Knights of Labor and "the Great Upheaval" in a seemingly totally negative light, commenting, on the anti-Asiatic rhetoric of the working-class press, that the pages of a pivotally important labour-reform newspaper in Hamilton-Toronto were dominated by "the generally racist campaign against Chinese immigration". As significant as the history of anti-Asian racism in the workers' movement of the 1880s may be, it does not justify "constructing" a depiction of class organs that is patently untrue. Moved to bewilderment by Dubinsky's and Givertz's assertion of the "dominance" of a racist campaign in the *Palladium of Labor*, I reread this newspaper. I was not particularly surprised to find so much on the anti-Chinese exclusionary movement, but I did see how Kealey's and my past understanding of this sorry campaign might well be interpreted by others as a masking of an ugly aspect of class formation. Yet I was also profoundly struck by how much more there was in the reform press about other, less problematic issues, including *class* views of political economy, radical thought from Henry George to John Brown (and a defence of John Brown is not without meaning in a discussion of racism), Riel, Native peoples, and the uprising in the Northwest, prisons and asylums, poverty, culture, labour politics, coercion and repression, and women's issues.

Over the course of more than three years of publication, the *Palladium of Labor* appeared approximately 170 times. Each eight-page issue contained at least 20 long and short articles, editorial statements, and lengthy letters, many such items reprinted from other North American journals, as well as countless "shorts" of three to ten lines. As a guesstimate, it would seem that well over 3,500 major and minor statements appeared, as well as thousands of less consequential items. Within this body of production, I could locate (and I undoubtedly missed items) 46 references relevant, from a major to exceedingly minor extent, to labour's approach to the Chinese in the 1880s, including communications from the notorious correspondent "Ah Sin" and others whose letters were entitled "The Filthy Pigtails". This was, admittedly, not a pretty picture. Adding significantly to this content count, placing the figure of Chinese-related items at 70 (which would more than account for those I did not locate) and largely discounting the thousands of "shorts"

40 Karen Dubinsky, "Integrating Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality" in Bettina Bradbury *et al.*, eds., *Teaching Women's History: Challenges and Solutions* (Athabasca, Alberta: Athabasca University, 1995), pp. 93–94. This statement should be read alongside Dubinsky, "Who is Listening? Teaching Labour History to People Who Don't Want to Learn (or, Cry Me a River, White Boy)", *Labour/Le Travail*, vol. 31 (Spring 1993), pp. 287–292. I offer a more blunt response to this position in Bryan D. Palmer, "Class and the Writing of History: Beyond BC", *BC Studies*, no. 111 (Autumn 1996), p. 79.



(which I included in my search, thus overstating significantly the quantity of anti-Asian writing), puts the conservative relation of racially hostile material to the countless other concerns of labour reform at the ratio of about 1:50. Such figures, however impressionist, actually overstate the number of anti-Asiatic statements in the labour press. (In my judgement a realistic ratio would not be less than 1:80/100; if one did a sustained content analysis of the *Palladium of Labor* that addressed space allocation, the relationship of articles treating the issue of the Chinese to those dealing with other aspects of labour reform would further understate the overt racism of the times.) Moreover, they do not address the moral and racial panic characteristic of the coverage. Articles, letters, editorials, and treatment of labour-led events associated with this unfortunate racism clustered in specific periods, often no more than weeks in duration. Obviously this anti-Asian labour racism needs to be dealt with seriously, and gender historians have pushed us to do this. That said, this ugliness cannot be overblown, disembodied from the overall complexity of class thought and action, and presented as “dominating” the workers’ press. To do this is not “history” but distortion, and there are unmistakable tendencies among some gender historians producing such caricature.<sup>41</sup>

Fortunately, not all gender historians have taken this pessimistic route of caricature, castigation, capitulation, and retreat, although the trajectory of interpretive development, as indicated above, is not always a linear, whiggish march of progress. Historians of workers, women, ethnic groups, and gender identities can rightly point to a cluster of important studies that advance our appreciation of the layered meanings of production and reproduction, biological sex and socially constructed gender, in the experience of labouring for a wage and nurturing families within the constraints of capitalism’s “raced” and multi-ethnic socio-economic relations.<sup>42</sup> Some gender his-

41 Karen Dubinsky and Adam Givertz, “‘It Was Only a Matter of Passion’: Masculinity and Sexual Danger”, in Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan, and Nancy M. Forestell, eds., *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 72. No historian denies the anti-Asian racism of the working-class milieu in the 1880s. An old statement by Arthur Mann, “Gompers and the Irony of Racism”, *The Antioch Review*, vol. 13 (June 1953), pp. 203–214, repays consideration. Certainly it could be the case that in other regions, most notably British Columbia, anti-Chinese writing did dominate the labour-reform press. I am prepared to accept that this could well have been the case with the Knights of Labor newspaper in Victoria, *The Industrial News*, which actually fused the anti-Asian and labour-reform causes. But attention to these kinds of differences is important if our histories are to be at all related to the nature and weight of evidence.

42 The following, only a partial listing, come to mind: Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners*; Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992); Cynthia R. Comacchio, “*Nations are Built of Babies*”: *Saving Ontario’s Mothers and Children* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993); Karen Dubinsky, *Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Tina Loo, *Making Law, Order, and Authority in British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); Carolyn Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Joan

tory, such as Kate McPherson's examination of nursing, Cecilia Danysk's treatment of agricultural labour on the prairies, or Marg Little's account of welfare's underside as it was lived by poor single mothers, develops out of the conjuncture of the social histories of women, the state, and employment/unemployment, a loose materialism predominating over the rare analytic gesture to poststructural thought. Others, such as Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo, and most recently Christina Burr, adopt a more discourse-driven approach, but eschew either/or sensibilities, their focus on aspects of historical process that they highlight as "new" — Toronto's working-class women or its labour-reform milieu and British Columbia's colonization — all the more possible precisely because an older historiography provides a useful foundation.<sup>43</sup> Not surprisingly, in their co-authored *Making Good: Law and Moral Regulation in Canada, 1867–1939* (1997), Strange and Loo address "nation" and "class" in a gendered reading of the structured policies and subjective pressures evolving out of the intersection of law and the social construction of morality.<sup>44</sup> Joan Sangster attempts to negotiate the possibilities of socialist-feminist history in the face of postmodernism's analytic challenges, linking the worlds of gender and work in *Earning Respect* (1995) adroitly and forthrightly, a consequence of both her politics of interpretation and choice of subject matter.<sup>45</sup> Most such studies thus situate themselves differently, or not at all, in relation to the theoretical apparatus of postmodernism; even where some texts proclaim its conceptual guidance they often proceed in ways that seem defiant of the basic interpretive premises they espouse.<sup>46</sup>

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Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920–1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Cecilia Danysk, *Hired Hands: Labour and the Development of Prairie Agriculture, 1880–1930* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995); Kathryn McPherson, *Bedside Manners: The Transformation of Canadian Nursing, 1900–1990* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996); Margaret Jane Hillyard Little, "No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit": *The Moral Regulation of Single Mothers in Ontario, 1920–1997* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998).

43 Strange's *Toronto's Girl Problem* owes a considerable debt to Wayne Roberts, *Honest Womanhood: Feminism, Femininity, and Class Consciousness Among Toronto Working Women* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1976), while Christina Burr's *Spreading the Light: Work and Labour Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) is unimaginable without the previously published studies of a number of labour, intellectual, and political historians. Loo's *Making Law, Order, and Authority* draws productively on a wide range of writing associated with the fur trade, the Hudson's Bay Company, and the settlement of British Columbia.

44 Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo, *Making Good: Law and Moral Regulation in Canada, 1867–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

45 See, as well as *Earning Respect*, Sangster's discussion of oral history in "Telling our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History", *Women's History Review*, vol. 3 (1994), pp. 5–28.

46 I suggest this of Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners*, in "The Poverty of Theory Revisited; or, Critical Theory, Historical Materialism, and the Ostensible End of Marxism", *left history*, vol. 1 (Spring 1993), pp. 91–94. What is ironically evident in *The Gender of Breadwinners*, however, is that, for all its calls for an integration of class and gender, in virtually every explanatory instance Parr turns to gender to displace class.

No working-class historian, Marxist or not, can fail to recognize the important contributions gender historians have made in expanding our appreciation of the many faces of labouring life, not all of them pretty, to be sure. Like the social historians of the working class who preceded them, the advocates of gender history have produced a body of work that forces reconsideration of our historic pasts and our analytic futures. Labour historians in part helped to effect the generalized pluralization of historiography from which gender historians have benefitted, providing, at times, moral and intellectual support as well as publication outlets and course offerings congenial to the aims and aspirations of the “new” feminist historians. That said, the relationship of working-class and gender historians is not an uncomplicated one, as a scrutiny of two major texts of gender history reveals.

**In the Beginning was the Word: *Gender Conflicts* (1992)**

Central to the discontents of the more institutionally and reform-oriented historians of labour with the social histories of class produced in the late 1970s and early 1980s was the place of struggle in the history of Canada. Kenneth McNaught claimed that the so-called “new” history of workers was premised on a belief that “class conflict” was “the basic force in our history”, continuous in its presence. In the words of Bercuson, many of the “new labour historians” believed “that social history can only be the history of class struggle”, and he found claims for what he called “class war” to be exaggerated and unsubstantiated. Alongside the importation of foreign analytic models, especially the much-denigrated Thompsonian “culturalism” (which again placed aspects of everyday life within materialized understandings of class oppositions), the question of labour conflict was pivotal in the reception accorded social histories of working-class experience. These were clearly regarded as the thin edge of a dangerous wedge of “cannonading from the left”. As McNaught somewhat irreverently commented, in a language of deliberately patrician sensibility, “Hoisting the flag to the mast is always fun, particularly if the flag is red, and more especially if a mariner’s guide (even an imported one) is ready to hand.” The question of class resistance, and its significance in the unfolding of Canadian history, appeared a bitter, Marxist pill that few institutionally oriented, social democratic historians were willing to swallow in the early 1980s.<sup>47</sup>

To be sure, a tendency was exhibited in the first phases of a social history of class formation to accentuate the history of resistance and to read it in a generously positive light. Against mainstream historiographies, with their attachment to the mythologies of classlessness and peaceable kingdoms, the tensions and antagonisms of class understandably received a full and often sympathetic airing in much of the writing that was trying to erode a historiographic consensus of rarified complacency. This is how historiographies

47 McNaught, “E. P. Thompson vs. Harold Logan”, pp. 141–168; Bercuson, “Through the Looking Glass of Culture”, especially p. 111.

move, as gender historians know well, with previously understated phenomena receiving long overdue attention. Moreover, if the established institutional school of labour history, with its constitutionalist guise turned approvingly to protests of a legal and parliamentary sort, painted a picture of twentieth-century class discontent as resolved through the slow march of the trade union and the incremental legislative reforms pressured from a state far more guilty of “violence” than a moderate working class, other contexts and other histories were obviously there to be studied.<sup>48</sup> Many social historians of class conflict were drawn to the boisterous crowd which, in the nineteenth century, had few options of securing ameliorative concessions from a modern, liberal state yet to be born.<sup>49</sup> Looking at different places at different times, with a markedly different set of political and conceptual sensibilities, these roughly designated historiographic schools not surprisingly saw different things.

It is nevertheless not the case that the two major studies of late-nineteenth-century class conflict, Kealey’s exploration of Toronto and my examination of Hamilton, delivered crude and unmediated chronicles of simplistic class struggle. We did present detailed accounts of the history of the strike and, in varying degrees, interpreted non-workplace experience with an eye to its conflictual side, but we were not blind to currents of accommodation in class relations. Kealey’s appreciation of a junta of Conservative workingmen, pivotal players in softening the class antagonisms of the central events of 1872, and my outline of the importance of the idiosyncratic Tory merchant, Isaac Buchanan, in forging a producer ideology and manufacturer-mechanic alliance that would figure strongly in the election of Hamilton’s first workingman, Henry B. Witton, signalled the importance of the trade-offs of cross-class politics in Victorian Canada.<sup>50</sup> Out of this would come the first broadly based *Trades Union Act*, the Factory Bills of the 1880s, and the massive documentation of the first Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital (1889). If resistance did indeed figure centrally in our pre-

48 McNaught, “E. P. Thompson vs. Harold Logan”, especially pp. 166–168; McNaught, “Violence in Canadian History”, Desmond Morton, “Aid to the Civil Power: The Canadian Militia in Support of Social Order, 1867–1914”, and David J. Bercuson, “The Winnipeg General Strike, Collective Bargaining, and the One Big Union Issue”, all in Michiel Horn and Ronald Sabourin, eds., *Studies in Canadian Social History* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), pp. 376–391, 417–446,

49 Michael S. Cross, “Stony Monday, 1849: The Rebellion Losses Riots in Bytown”, *Ontario History*, vol. 63 (September 1971), pp. 177–190, and “The Shiners’ Wars: Social Violence in the Ottawa Valley in the 1830s”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 54 (March 1973), pp. 1–25; Bryan D. Palmer, “Discordant Music: Charivaris and Whitecapping in Nineteenth-Century North America”, *Labour/ Le Travailleur*, vol. 3 (1978), pp. 5–62; Ruth Bleasdale, “Class Conflict on the Canals of Upper Canada in the 1840s”, *Labour/ Le Travailleur*, vol. 7 (1981), pp. 9–40.

50 Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867–1892* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 124–153; Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, 1860–1914* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1979), pp. 97–122.

sentations of class relations, it never overwhelmed historical complexity. Few critics, however, grasped this effectively.

Critically important in any historiographic moment of transition, as I have suggested for the labour scholarship of the 1970s, is not only a grasp of what revisionist research is for, but also what it is against. As gender historians forged a new conception, not only of women's history, but of historical interpretation in general, they were unambiguous in posing their work as an act of differentiation, if not outright repudiation. This was evident in the "Introduction" to the collected essays presented under the title *Gender Conflicts* (1992).

Karen Dubinsky and her allied gender historians wrestled hardly at all with the conventional historiography of nation and traditional politics in their "Introduction", offering only a weak suggestion of desire, expressing the hope that the articles of the edited book would "offer a point of departure for integrating women's history into mainstream history". They considered labour historians but a component of this "mainstream". More forcefully challenged was a preceding generation of women's historians, whose work was credited with achieving much, but who were supposedly ultimately unable to break out of the confinements of histories that celebrated the reform achievements of "articulate, white, middle-class women". Acknowledging that such pioneering feminist historians were indeed "influenced by labour history and by traditions of historical materialism", which expanded study of working-class women, the gender historians of the 1990s nevertheless found new areas of deficiency in the "romanticized" construction of "heroines", be they suffragists or victimized female strikers. Oddly enough, the "model of middle-class heroines and working-class victims" that they attributed to a previous historiography lacked citation. The stated aim of the gender historians, the suggestion that "those with limited power could nevertheless find ways of exercising a measure of control over their own and others' lives", was perfectly congruent with the projects of recovery and interpretation associated with women's and working-class historians of the 1970s and 1980s. The authors of *Gender Conflicts* chose to stand against such writing, however, and most forcefully against a particular strand of the working-class component.<sup>51</sup>

Interestingly, "resistance" would be the lynchpin on which this oppositional differentiation turned, loosely linking the "theory" of gender historians to the empiricist discontents of the Bercuson model, and in the process fracturing an understated Marxist-feminist "alliance" of the 1970s. In the central analytic paragraph in the "Introduction" to *Gender Conflicts*, the only passage that makes even a remote gesture toward literatures of theoretical import, the authors proclaim:

51 Karen Dubinsky *et al.*, "Introduction", in Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, eds., *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. xi–xxvii.

We resist creating heroines of any type. Indeed, in this collection we gladly abandon the unfruitful model that counterposes research on heroines (whether middle-class suffragists or working-class strikers) to research documenting the implacable force of socioeconomic structures. We are more interested in showing that generalizations about universal oppression or about glorious resistance erase the complexity of women's (and men's) lived experiences. The problem is disguised rather than solved by historians who merely juxtapose descriptions of structures of domination with examples of resistance, a tendency evident in the writings of some working-class historians. The inadequacies of this juxtaposition suggest a need to rethink our fundamental assumptions about social power and human agency. Whether one accepts the philosophical challenge mounted by Foucault and other Nietzschean thinkers (and introduced into historians' discussions by Joan Scott and others), it is timely and useful for historians to critique the assumption that power and resistance are located in distinct and mutually exclusive social sites. Power does not flow from a single source, and it is not the exclusive domain of those who are "powerful".

To assert definitively their interpretive hierarchization on the unambiguous construction of a binary opposition, the authors declared with concluding gusto: "Seeing the people we study as subjects does not imply celebrating them as morally pure. The historical past is far too complex, and people's lives shot through with too many contradictions and ambiguities, to be easily captured by this tired, dichotomy of top-down domination versus bottom-up resistance."<sup>52</sup> The word was out.<sup>53</sup>

What texts, one wonders, are guilty of these oppositional sins? Who, for instance, ever posed the need to research the heroic oppressed as opposed to documenting "the implacable force of socioeconomic structures"? Is there an historian who does this who is simultaneously guilty of "merely juxtapos[ing] descriptions of structures of domination with examples of resistance"? Where are the writings that celebrate specific historical subjects as "morally pure"? These kinds of lapses, which Dubinsky and her allied gender historians never actually concretize with examples, can of course be constructed, in the absence of any specific reference to historical contexts or any serious attempt to deal with the complexity of argument, body of writing, or

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xvii–xviii.

<sup>53</sup> This appears to me a singularly problematic reading of Foucault, who, while he asserted the plurality and discursiveness of power, was not immune to an appreciation of the hierarchies of power. Moreover, resistance was never far from Foucault's sensibilities. The language of "moral purity" was, moreover, foreign to what we might designate the Foucauldian consciousness. On the importance of resistance, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon, 1977), p. 308, and, more generally on the issues addressed in this note, the many interviews of Foucault collected in Sylvère Lotringer, ed., *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961–1984*, Michel Foucault (New York: Semiotext[e], 1996).

changing face of a field of study, as a “tired dichotomy of top-down domination versus bottom-up resistance”.<sup>54</sup>

*Gender Conflicts* marks an advance in scholarship, and its essays, uneven as they may be, all offer insights, suggestions, and important research. But their value has little to do with the repudiation of “resistance” as a mere subject of moral construction and dubious worth, for almost all of the essays actually take us into realms of opposition, or at least suggest possibilities of understanding apparent acts of conformity in new ways. The subjects of these studies may not be “heroines”, but they are presented in a manner that cannot help but call attention to the myriad of ways in which subordination produced tensions, antagonisms, and often overt acts of struggle: Jewish women on picket lines, Salvation Army women, working-class shoppers at Eatons, youthful, working-class women seduced by sexual predators, militant socialists, immigrant women and their counsellors. Their experiences are all chronicled with an eye to the ways in which they stepped out of the limitations of their time, bounded by the stultifying confinements of class, gender, and race. Lynne Marks chooses to regard Salvation Army women as “enormously popular” working-class campaigners who, in their platform speeches and leadership of parades, expanded the very meaning of women’s public place. Cynthia Wright suggests that “shopping is the ultimate feminine pleasure and liberation”. Ruth Frager claims that female Jewish garment workers developed “innovative attempts at coalition-building” in the class battles of 1930s Toronto that were “critical to workers’ power”.<sup>55</sup> Such positionings hardly justify differentiating this writing from a working-class historiography caricatured as little more than a righteous reproduction of resistance. The “broad-based collective effort to invigorate Canadian scholarship”, proclaimed as the purpose of *Gender Conflicts*, will not be furthered by truly socially constructed oppositions of this strained sort. Nor will the

54 The only book cited in this paragraph of denunciation is *A Culture in Conflict*. It is curious that no other historian of the working class was cited, since Kealey’s *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrialism* would seem open to the same charges. It is also odd that no other writing of mine could be brought into the distorted repudiation. While some of *A Culture in Conflict* might be subject to the sort of critique raised by Dubinsky *et al.* in the “Introduction” to *Gender Conflicts*, if it was thought necessary to push in an antagonistic direction, the book as a whole contains significant sections that are hardly guilty of the charges suggested, including the entire chapter on “the producer ideology” and the discussion of the eclecticism of the Knights of Labor, where complexity and ambiguity abound. An obvious book to address would have been Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), in which the juxtapositions and dichotomies that, according to the authors of *Gender Conflicts*, characterize the scholarship of some working-class historians are hardly evident. It is difficult to reduce an article such as my “Discordant Music: Charivaris and Whitecapping in 19th-Century North America” to a chronicle of morally pure, heroic resistance; in the realm of theoretical statement, such characterizations hardly apply to Palmer, “‘What the Hell!’ Or Some Comments on Class Formation and Cultural Reproduction”, in Richard D. Gruneau, ed., *Popular Cultures and Political Practices* (Toronto: Garamond, 1988).

55 Quoting the essays by Lynne Marks, Cynthia Wright, and Ruth Frager in *Gender Conflicts*, pp. 104, 251, 220.

project of social transformation, in which both feminists and socialists are surely interested, be advanced.

**Pay, Pray, and Play: Revivals and Roller Rinks (1996)**

It will be regarded as bad form to defend one's writing from unfair typecasting. In a sense, however, the kind of distorting dismissal evident in the "Introduction" to *Gender Conflicts* bought into a condescending characterization of books such as *A Culture in Conflict* set loose by Bercuson's and McNaught's hostilities, setting a stage for future skewed distortions. Some of these, licensed in the cavalier manner of this pioneering collaborative gender history text, could develop into highly problematic discourses of debate and, more importantly, disturbing uses of evidence. "Polite" detachment in such a situation is no service to any useful quarter. As E. P. Thompson once said of the Hammonds and their critics:

The Hammonds, in their lifetime, turned too often towards their critics a genteel cheek of silence; and, after that, they were dead. For more than twenty years the ideological school of history has been able to knock "the sentimentalists" with impunity, in articles and in seminars. Meeting with only silence, they have become careless: a certain professional scowl, a suggestion of anti-sentimental rigour, has served to cover any lacunae in scholarship.<sup>56</sup>

This parallels developments in contemporary scholarship in Canada.

The critique of so-called working-class romanticization, linked to a seemingly undue emphasis on resistance and a sentimentalized approach to "culture", has been present since the inception of social histories of the working class in the 1970s. Launched most publicly by anti-Marxist advocates, it was also embraced by another group of critical labour historians who provided impressive studies of the post-World War I through World War II experience.<sup>57</sup> What separates the so-called "culturalists" from the "new institutionalists", according to David Bright, is the "desire to explain, rather than explain away, the historical divisions that have fragmented the working class".<sup>58</sup> In Lynne Marks's study of religion, leisure, and identity in three small towns in late-nineteenth-century Ontario, much of the implicit repudi-

56 E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 934. See, as well, Thompson, *Whigs & Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (Middlesex: Peregrine, 1985), "Postscript", pp. 310–311.

57 Among many possible texts, see Ian Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900–1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Craig Heron, *Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883–1935* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988); James Naylor, *The New Democracy: Challenging the Industrial Order in Ontario, 1914–1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); Craig Heron, ed., *The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917–1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

58 David Bright, *The Limits of Labour: Class Formation and the Labour Movement in Calgary, 1883–1929* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), p. 6.



ation of the early social histories of nineteenth-century workers would crystallize, albeit in an argument that was decidedly “culturalist”.<sup>59</sup>

Marks’s exploration of gender, leisure, and religion in three small Ontario towns — Thorold, Campbellford, and Ingersoll — was the first text to deal specifically with the same chronological time period and to confront many of the same cultural issues as the Palmer and Kealey writing of the years 1979 to 1983.<sup>60</sup> The book has untold strengths and, in its exploration of previously unstudied phenomena such as the Salvation Army, it makes stimulating contributions to our understanding of the social relations of late Victorian Ontario. There is an extremely useful compilation of data on church affiliation in two of the towns studied, Thorold and Campbellford, as well as occasionally suggestive examination of fraternal orders and other leisure activities, from the proverbial “hanging out” of youth to drink and its opponents in the temperance movement. A previously unexamined religious revival in Thorold in 1893, reconstructed mainly through a reading of the local press, provides Marks with an opportunity to address the important issue of conversion. Throughout all of this Marks consistently offers a stimulating gendered reading of many areas of cultural life too often presented as worlds of male interaction and sociability. This is particularly important given the unmistakable evidence of women’s overrepresentation in churches and more alternative forms of religious activity, such as the short-lived but significant Salvationist crusade.

Readers will thus gain from a scrutiny of Marks’s text, but it is also a frustrating book. Ostensibly about small-town Ontario, it actually presents very little in the way of a convincing depiction of the economic structure, demographic make-up, or cultural tone of this milieu, largely because it passes through these places only to pull out instances of disembodied experiences and statistics of membership in particular institutions, primarily churches and fraternal orders. Ingersoll is hardly present in the text: of the 33 tables in Appendix C, which present the statistical data on matters such as church affiliation and fraternal order leadership, no evidence from Ingersoll is available; in footnotes, where Marks uses assessment rolls, the manuscript census, and church and diocese records, the data are almost always drawn from a Thorold-Campbellford comparison. This problem of place is compounded because in other chapters, particularly those addressing the Salvation Army, Marks moves off the ground of small-town “community” into the wider provincial field (all of her tables on Salvationists are based on Ontario-wide evidence, making no discernment of small-town/ metropolitan

59 Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). With the exception of antipathy to “the cultural”, virtually all of the criticisms Bercuson directed at the labour scholarship of the 1970s in “Through the Looking-Glass of Culture” — its inattention to religion, its overemphasis on the class meaning of fraternalism, and its neglect of gender difference — reappear in Marks.

60 Burr’s *Spreading the Light* appeared subsequent to the writing of this essay. Its grasp of class is more sure than that exhibited by Marks; its tendency to overstate its innovations rather transparent.

differentiation possible). When she discusses the Salvation Army and the Knights of Labor or presents a gendered analysis in a chapter on the “Hallelujah Lasses”, some of her impressionist evidence is garnered from Thorold, Campbellford, and Ingersoll, but it may also come from Petrolia or Kingston, Toronto or Hamilton. This methodological lack of discrimination is particularly evident in the insistence on discussing questions of “class consciousness”, trade union and reform organization, and labour values and perspectives as if they were unproblematically comparable across the experiences of industrial towns with a long history of class conflict and workers’ mobilization and of locales such as Campbellford, almost devoid of such developments.

For the most part, we are offered concrete small-town evidence only on Thorold and Campbellford, towns with populations of roughly 2,400 in the 1880s. In her discrete explorations of association life, be it church, fire company, or sporting club, the quantitative evidence Marks presents, always masked in the actual text in its formulation as percentages, is often quite small. Per annum we are usually dealing with minuscule numbers. Even in church data, where one would expect the size of the sample to be much greater, the figures are not large. The *Campbellford Herald* noted in 1883 that less than one-third of the town’s inhabitants attended church services on Sunday. By casting the net over church affiliation as widely as possible, Marks claims that 50 and 41 per cent of the Protestant families of Campbellford and Thorold, respectively, contained one or more church members. The actual numbers of working-class families that could be discerned to have one member who, presumably at any given time over a seven-year period, declared a church affiliation (regardless of belief, nature of attendance, or tithe payment, among other things) were 122 in Campbellford and 90 in Thorold. Other data assembled do not alter the conclusion that Marks’s study rests precariously on extremely small numbers, the singular exception being the province-wide lists of Salvation Army officers.

Marks presents her analytic treatment of smallness against the backdrop of a polemical challenge to particular quarters. In the book’s first footnote, Marks cites Bliss’s article “Privatizing the Mind”, proclaiming that she is not fragmenting Canadian history but calling for a totalizing integration of aspects of historical experience usually studied in isolation. In her conclusion she admonishes the gender-blindness of Canadian religious history, declaring, “Only future work that integrates the study of leisure and religion and incorporates an analysis of gender, class, and other relevant categories of identity into the exploration of the ‘big’ questions of Canadian religious history” can get us where we need to go.<sup>61</sup> Be this as it may, it is doubtful that mainstream historians of any sort will find this book an answer. Religion, as central as it is to this text, is often no more than a nebulously defined church affiliation. In congealing denominational difference in the interest of

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 218.

presenting a picture of Protestant hegemony, Marks bypasses many questions of importance, Catholicism, in particular, being alluded to weakly. For all its call for integration, *Revivals and Roller Rinks* is wilfully resistant to situating religion at the crossroads of spiritual and intellectual currents, political economy, nation building, and culture, broadly conceived. Some “big” questions of the 1880s and 1890s, with their “national” and “religious” meaning long embedded in conventional historiography — Riel, the Manitoba Schools Question, the National Policy, and the clarification of party positions in Parliament, to name but four — are passed over very lightly if not totally overlooked in this treatment.

Part of what derailed Marks was what she was against. Far from aiming at conventional historiography’s narrow grasp of the political, she chose to set her sights on what she calls “the culturalist labour historians”. Proclaiming that she has gone beyond such work and that it has ignored religion, Marks introduces her account, which is resolutely empirical and routinely atheoretical, with the required gesture toward poststructuralism’s insights. Her grasp of subjectivity is surely rather uninformed by postmodernism’s appreciation of the meaning of identity, however. “Religion and leisure are particularly valuable for exploring questions of identity”, Marks argues, “because they were spheres in which late-nineteenth-century Ontarians had the widest latitude of choice about their lives.” Such agents of free will, Marks suggests, “could more readily choose whether to go to a bar or a church on Sunday, for example, than whether to stay away from work on Monday”.<sup>62</sup> If this is not a conceptual act of “privatizing the mind”, it is hard to know what is.<sup>63</sup>

In the debate that Marks pursues with working-class history a series of differences emerge. She deplures, for instance, the lack of attention to religion in the studies of late-nineteenth-century working-class experience that appeared in the 1970s and early 1980s. On one level the criticism is true, and neither *A Culture in Conflict* nor *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism* dealt seriously with the issue of working-class religiosity. Our focus was elsewhere. While all working-class historians will welcome thorough examinations of labouring people’s religious lives, church attendance

62 *Ibid.*, p. 5. Marks does follow this statement with a new paragraph declaring that “choices regarding religious and leisure options were not made completely freely”, but the voluntarist tone of her text is established and is never entirely overcome.

63 For a poststructuralist discussion of relevance to this simplified construction of freedom versus necessity, see Valverde, “Governing out of Habit”. My point is not that issues that seem to involve “choice” are unimportant, secondary subjects of study. Rather, I am suggesting that, if identity (and event) is constructed as the outcome of “free” choice, we are in a rather bad theoretical space. However much historians want to claim that identity is a social construction, to the extent that class, race, and gender are important considerations in the making of identity, then surely they all, at the very least, operate at the interface of objectified structures (necessity) and subjective choice (desire); in their complex making nothing can be simplistically attributed to “free” agency, all human activity taking place within boundaries of determination. Note the useful discussion of this issue in Norman N. Feltes, *This Side of Heaven: Determining the Donnelly Murders, 1880* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

and religious belief were, however important, seldom the singular defining feature of nineteenth-century identity, being but one component of labouring people's subjective sense of themselves. This was especially true of working-class settings where the nature of class formation was such that the institutions and rudimentary forms of consciousness associated with the labour movement had taken some root.

Marks then moves beyond this repetitive (it appears in her book as well as a number of articles) truism of what we did not explore to suggest that, in the Kealey-Palmer study of the Knights of Labor, religion is misinterpreted. She takes various routes into this claim.

*Revivals and Roller Rinks* argues forcefully that the membership of the Knights of Labor and the Salvation Army drew on the same working-class constituency and that the two bodies existed in many locales. The inference is that their memberships overlapped, but Marks has virtually no evidence to sustain such a position. One Thorold worker, George Doherty, who played in the Salvation Army band and was buried by the Knights of Labor, is the only concrete indication of the Knights-Salvationist connection that Marks suggests, and this is hardly evidence of much since we are told nothing about Doherty's involvement in either organization. She draws attention to Kingston's Order having led strikes at workplaces that four years earlier had been sites of Salvation Army activity, and she notes that a solitary newspaper account from Belleville in 1883 indicates that ironworkers, whom she identifies as belonging to "a local assembly of the Knights" (present in Belleville at this time for only a matter of months) "also appear to have attended Army meetings".<sup>64</sup> In the case of Kingston, some unspecified numbers of workers holding noon-hour prayer meetings in their factories at the peak of the Salvation Army's presence in the town, reported once in 1883 in a letter written to the *Thorold Post*, can hardly be decisively linked to strike activity of Knights of Labor members in the same workplaces four years later.<sup>65</sup> As to the Belleville suggestion, the article I read in the local newspaper does not say what Marks says it does. It relates to Hart's stove foundry's moulding room, which could have employed no more than 50 men, all of whom are described as connected "to the Union", which is just as likely a reference to the Iron Moulders International Union as it is to the Knights of Labor. The connection of "the Union" to the Salvation Army is also conjecture. "[M]any [unionists]", noted the report, "must attend the services of the Salvation Army, as they sing a number of songs contained in the Soldiers' Song Book."<sup>66</sup> The single most exhaustive treatment of class and religion in

64 *Ibid.*, pp. 143–144.

65 I have not examined the Thorold newspaper, but the Kingston report of Salvationist activity in the *British Daily Whig* of March 12, 1883, contained no evidence relating to workplace meetings. It is of course possible that my reading of this issue in the local press missed something that Marks has seen.

66 "The Stove Foundry", *Belleville Daily Intelligencer*, October 15, 1883. It is possible that Marks is referring to another article in the newspaper, but I could find no indication that this was the case. On the matter of songs, the issue of cultural transfer is an important one, but it should not be mechani-

Belleville, Doris O'Dell's unpublished PhD thesis, finds absolutely no links connecting Knights and Salvationists.<sup>67</sup> No membership lists have surfaced to tie members in the crusading bodies of class and fervent religion together, and no historian over the course of the last 15 years, scouring local and provincial sources, has turned up more than a funeral and a song. Contrary to Marks's contention of overlap, the only reasonable conclusion to draw is that there was little such connection.

This is not to say that there were no members of the Knights of Labor who also had some relation to, even membership in, the Salvation Army; there clearly could have been such people. In general, however, the lack of evidence suggests, and strongly so, that it is more likely that the different bodies appealed to different kinds of workers. (The same, for instance, cannot be said for fraternalism, where the evidence is quite strong that Knights of Labor members often belonged to lodges of various voluntary societies.) Most probable is that the Knights of Labor and the Salvation Army, which generally peaked at different times in the southern Ontario of the 1880s (the latter in 1883–1884, the former in 1886–1887), both represented a robust distancing from the genteel, mainstream churches, but nevertheless posed different alternatives. Workers were drawn to both the Order and the Sally Ann, but different workers were more likely to gravitate to each; as well, at different historical moments, even within the short span of a decade, it is possible that the same workers might well be drawn to different organizations. Such an interpretation, stressing not some lumpish commonality, but the differential appeal of a disorderly street-ordered “church” compared with a labour-reform body, and relating it to the oscillating nature of a pivotal decade's political economy and the ebbs and flows in the tempo of class struggle, seems to me a far more fruitful approach than a blunt insistence that religion mattered. Many workers indeed negotiated some kind of relation to generalized Christian belief, a point with which there can be no disagreement. This interpretation also has much to recommend it over the vague gestures of Marks's treatment, which depends on statements that slip from unverified assertion that “support for the two movements was not completely distinct” to inference of “the probable extent of overlap in membership” into the ever muddier waters of essentialist argument by associa-

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cally assumed to translate into organizational affinities. After all, Phillips Thompson's *The Labor Reform Songster* (Philadelphia, 1892) as well as many of the IWW's songs in the early twentieth century, including a number created by Joe Hill, staples of the various editions of *The Little Red Song Book*, “borrowed” from the Salvation Army without embracing the politics of evangelical religion.

<sup>67</sup> See Doris O'Dell, “The Class Character of Church Participation in Late Nineteenth-Century Belleville, Ontario” (PhD thesis, Queen's University, 1990), especially pp. 232–305. On a more general level, there is not yet evidence from Hamilton that there was great overlap between labour-reform leaders in the 1880s and those working people active in churches. See, for instance, George Addison, “Life and Culture of Three ‘Blue Collar’ Churches in Hamilton, Ontario, 1875–1925” (MA thesis, Queen's University, 1999).

tion, in which bodies that opened their doors to women and that were working class must both have recruited the same people. It also underscores the importance of timing in any analysis of the meaning of membership in the Knights of Labor and the Salvation Army, a fundamental issue that Marks ignores.<sup>68</sup>

Marks suggests, again rather bluntly, that Kealey and I are also wrong in our admittedly suggestive attempts to locate the relation of the Knights of Labor and religion. Once more her argument rests largely on misreadings, skewed presentations of arguments, and rather small numbers. Marks intriguingly suggests new ways of looking at labour sermons as a parallel process of religiosity, akin to that of the relation between the fraternal lodges and the churches. This is a valuable interpretive contribution, but in and of itself it does not repudiate our attempts to explain evidence of Knights of Labor antagonism to the worldliness of the mainstream churches and the creation of separate spheres for the labour-reform movement to articulate its understanding of religious brotherhood and sisterhood. When Marks notes that in Ingersoll and Thorold male Knights of Labor leaders were just as likely to belong to churches as the rest of the working class, her numbers, buried in footnotes, are revealing. Taking the entire period from the late 1880s to 1893, Marks can locate 9 of 42 identified labour leaders in the towns of Thorold and Ingersoll for whom it was possible to ascertain some, however modest, level of church affiliation. Suggestively, given Thompson's understanding of Methodist conversion as the "chiliasm of despair", four more Knights became church members after Thorold's 1893 revival, affilia-

68 Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, p. 144. On the importance of timing and the relationship of class mobilization and religious upheaval, see the discussions around Methodism in E. J. Hobsbawm, "Methodism and the Threat of Revolution in Britain", in Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), pp. 23–33; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1963), pp. 350–400, in which Thompson suggests that "religious revivalism took over just at the point where 'political' or temporal aspirations met with defeat" (p. 389). Marks chastises working-class historians for not appreciating Thompson's understanding of the significance of religion in labouring life, but she fails to consider what Thompson's understanding of religion actually was. This is especially evident in her reading of Thorold's 1893 revival, which developed in the context of economic depression and the demise of the Knights of Labor. While Marks reads the revival's meaning almost entirely in gendered terms, a class analysis could easily have complemented her interpretation. Thompson saw religion decidedly differently than does Marks, as this central passage from *The Making of the English Working Class* (p. 388) indicates: "Rising graphs of Church membership are misleading; what we have, rather, is a revivalist pulsation, or an oscillation between periods of hope and periods of despair and spiritual anguish. After 1795 the poor had once again entered into the Valley of Humiliation. But they entered it unwillingly, with many backward looks; and whenever hope revived, religious revivalism was set aside, only to reappear with renewed fervour upon the ruins of the political messianism which had been overthrown. In this sense, the great Methodist recruitment between 1790 and 1830 may be seen as the Chiliasm of despair." Such a perspective places the significance of Marks's claim, undoubtedly true, that some workers who were once members of the Order likely later became Salvationists under the question mark of interpretation (p. 145). This issue will be raised again in the next paragraph with respect to the relationship of the Knights of Labor and religion in general.

tions brokered in the face of the Order's collapse and the economy's catastrophic decline. Even these paltry figures cannot sustain the case Marks proposes unless we know when the identified Knights of Labor were church affiliated (and it would be nice to know what this meant) precisely because in both Thorold and Ingersoll no Knights of Labor assemblies existed, to my knowledge, after 1889; in Ingersoll the solitary local assembly appears to have lapsed as early as 1887, and Thorold's three local assemblies faded from view between 1886 and 1889. Virtually the entirety of Marks's text is severely compromised in its capacity to address the Knights because her statistical data are drawn from the years of 1886 to 1894 without any chronological differentiation, and there is no subtle appreciation of the Order's initial strength and fairly quick demise after 1886–1887. If we do not know that the Knights' leaders were members of churches at the peak of labour reform activity, we do not know very much. It is reasonable to conclude that all such church affiliations of Knights of Labor leaders could well have been the product of concessions made to established religion in the face of the working-class movement's decline, rather than being, as Marks suggests, a linked project of religiosity by mainstream churches and the Knights of Labor.<sup>69</sup>

Nor is Marks's effort to recast working-class comment in labour newspapers such as the Knights' Hamilton-based *Palladium of Labor* convincing. She states that Kealey and I cite a letter from "Well Wisher" to buttress our "argument that, for many workers, the Knights displaced the church". In fact, we made no such claim for this letter, although we did rightly point out that "Well Wisher's" religious needs were as much met by the Knights of Labor as they were by the mainstream churches.<sup>70</sup>

I could tell you how for years I attended church regularly, but for want of that brotherly society and sympathy fell away, and how becoming a K. of L. my soul rekindled with that human love, with that desire to help my brother man, and it grieves me to say that when I go to church instead of having more fuel placed to that fire it becomes quenched and smothered by the cold and intensely refined religious atmosphere which pervades the churches, and I would fair cry out with thousands of of my fellow churchmen, O for a warm, kindly, Christ-like Church, a common place where we could all meet on an equality, and be brothers in Christ in this world, even as we hope to be in the next.

69 On Thorold's and Ingersoll's Knights of Labor assemblies, see Kealey and Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be*, pp. 67, 70, 81; Jonathan Garlock, *Guide to the Local Assemblies of the Knights of Labor* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1982), pp. 563–564.

70 In a later paragraph, relating to different evidence, Kealey and I wrote: "Language like this suggests that the Order easily assumed a religious role, perhaps displacing the church or, at the very least, fulfilling certain working-class spiritual needs while it rooted them firmly in the worldly context of a particular community." *Dreaming of What Might Be*, p. 312. This passage is not the same as saying "the Knights displaced the church" (Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, p. 155).

“Well Wisher” concluded that such a church would “address questions of the working classes ... for in these questions rest to a large extent the growth and prosperity of that church whose foundation [lies] in the humble Nazarene, Jesus Christ, himself a carpenter and a workingman”. Evidence is often ambiguous, but this letter is not. Marks interprets it to mean that “Well Wisher” wanted something more than the Knights of Labor, which is undoubtedly true, but which also unfortunately misses the main point: a labour-reform critique of the established churches and their indifference to class oppression, which was exactly the issue we highlighted in quoting the letter.<sup>71</sup>

The generalized problem of the relation of the Knights of Labor and the Salvation Army drifts into Marks’s troubling blurring of issues of identity and working-class consciousness. For her, these are almost synonymous aspects of historical process. Yet they are clearly distinct and, as a Marxist understanding of class consciousness would suggest, they should be.<sup>72</sup> There is no doubt that Marks is right to appreciate the extent to which the Salvationist army was a fundamentally plebeian body, open to the rougher and more subordinate sections of the Ontario working class. In this sense it had the stigmatized mark of class difference all over it. In its raucous processions and “blood and fire” representation of religiosity, the Sally Ann wore the badge of inequality with a fervent pride that proclaimed the significance of class and the powerful need of some segments of the downtrodden to present themselves publicly as both workers and godly people. This was class at

71 “Well Wisher’s” letter from *Palladium of Labor*, November 28, 1885, cited in Kealey and Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be*, pp. 311–312. In the footnote where we cite “Well Wisher” we also provide references to 17 other newspaper articles and letters offering working-class criticism of the established church and often linking “true religion to the cause of the Knights of Labor” (Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, p. 155). It is, I suppose, flattering to have one’s writing “source-mined”, but the difficulty with this method, practised to some extent by Marks when she deals with the Knights of Labor, is that you cannot simply gut a book like *Dreaming of What Might Be*, reproduce quotes that have appeared in it, and then make them say what you want. On “source-mining”, see J. H. Hexter, “The Burden of Proof”, *Times Literary Supplement*, October 24, 1975, pp. 1250–1252.

72 For Marxists, class consciousness is a term used with some care, designating an advanced awareness of the class divisions in society that translates into a politicized consciousness of the need to maintain the social order, in the case of the bourgeoisie, or, for the proletariat, to unite all workers and other oppressed peoples to overturn the structures and institutions of class dominance. Class consciousness among workers, whose lives are constrained by bourgeois hegemony, is thus historically a rare, but critically important phenomenon. Between class as an inert objective structure of the relations of production and class consciousness as an awareness of the need for a programme of socio-economic transformation lie a plethora of issues associated with labouring people’s identity and culture, including basic perceptions of class differences and a host of behaviours and social affiliations, virtually all of which, because of contemporary feminism, we can appreciate as gendered. It appears that when Marks uses the term class consciousness she is actually gesturing toward this large middle ground of culture/ identity/ status/ experience. For brief statements on class consciousness and the Marxist tradition, see Tom Bottomore, ed., *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 79–81; Istvan Meszaros, *Aspects of History and Class Consciousness* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).



work in the religious arena, a consciousness of class if you will; it was not necessarily class consciousness. The strike, the nascent political party, the evolving sophistication of labour's political economy — these developments of the Knights of Labor, not the rough religiosity of Salvation, were the stuff of the struggle to produce the class consciousness that would change the material world of 1880s workers. In equating identity and class consciousness, Marks glosses over fundamental features of difference between two working-class bodies and manages, as a consequence, to produce a strikingly ahistorical meltdown. "The presence of the Knights of Labor or the Salvation Army in various Ontario communities in the 1880s", she declares, "reinforced the significance of class-consciousness among working-class inhabitants."<sup>73</sup>

To be sure, as a generally excellent and well-documented article on the Salvation Army and the labour movement in England suggests, at its point of origin among the dangerous classes of the urban residuum of outcast London and other British cities, especially in the post-1885 years, Salvationism was indeed capable of making what often seemed to be common cause with labour reform.<sup>74</sup> For Thompson, the Army's English history is composed of three periods:<sup>75</sup> a traditionalist variant of late Methodist revivalism, stretching from 1865 to 1885; the uniquely and profoundly ambiguous period in which the potential, never quite realized, of a Salvationist/ Socialist/ Labour Reform coalition appeared, running from roughly 1885 to 1900; and a sorry denouement, in which Salvation gave in to impulses always present in its programme, through which it became little more than an officially sponsored damper on class discontent.<sup>76</sup> Marks situates her entire discussion in the chronology and interpretive field-of-force of Thompson's second period of possible class coalition, but she strips away all of the "profound ambiguities" Thompson highlights.<sup>77</sup>

The key problem, however, is more fundamental. In Canada there never was the same kind of potential for the "social Salvation" that many English Christian Socialists saw germinating in the Army's march through the slums and its parades paralleling the labour movement. No class conflict compara-

73 Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, p. 16.

74 Victor Bailey, " 'In Darkest England and the Way Out': The Salvation Army, Social Reform, and the Labour Movement", *International Review of Social History*, vol. 29 (1984), pp. 133–171.

75 E. P. Thompson, "Blood, Fire and Uncion", *New Society*, no. 128 (March 11, 1965), p. 25.

76 For an interesting discussion of the Salvation Army relating to this third phase in Canada, see Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water*. Canadian trade union perspectives, anything but conciliatory, can be gleaned from: Robert H. Babcock, *Gompers in Canada: A Study in American Continentalism Before the First World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 114; Harold A. Logan, *The History of Trade-Union Organization in Canada* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928), pp. 194–196, 204, 207.

77 Marks seems unaware of Thompson's direct comments on the Salvation Army, and *Revival and Roller Rinks* does not cite his "Blood, Fire and Uncion", a review of Collier's *The General Next to God*, the General being Booth.

ble to the British dock strike of 1889 brought labour radicals and Salvationists together, as happened in England. Commissioner Smith, a Salvationist on the way to becoming a socialist, had no counterpart, to my knowledge, in Canada. Given the late start of Canadian Salvationism in the early 1880s (at precisely the moment the Knights of Labor was also emerging in Canada, with its quite different message of what “spreading the light” entailed), as well as the poisoned “ideological” climate occasioned by the Haymarket events of 1886, followed relatively quickly by a devastating depression in the early 1890s, it is not surprising that Canadian Salvationism skipped its middle English phase, bypassing the ambiguous moment of possible connection with labour reform. This does not make it unimportant, but it does suggest that Marks has misunderstood the relationship of the Salvation Army and the Knights of Labor. There is little basis for thinking that “the chivalry of the nineteenth century”, with its solemn purposefulness, carefully evolved procedures, and unmistakable commitment to the worldly transformation of material inequalities, shared all that much with the “Hallelujah” crowd.

Misreadings as fundamental as this do not fall from the sky. They grow in a cultivated soil of opposition, in which implacable stands overwhelm the seeds of conceptualization. Marks so clearly wants the “cultural historians of class” to be wrong that she takes research that could have produced important interpretive breakthroughs and pressures its analytic potential until it shatters. She seems driven to turn meanings on their head.

A case in point is her early capacity to shift gears on Engels’s interpretive intentions so crudely that she mangles the meaning of his brief commentary on Salvationism and class in Victorian England. In a published article on the Knights of Labor and the Salvation Army, in which Marks articulates her positive reading of the “Hallelujah” men and women, she quotes Engels approvingly on the critique posed by Ontario’s plebeian army of religious redressers: “the Salvation Army ... revives the propaganda of early Christianity, appeals to the poor as the elect, fights capitalism in a religious way, and thus fosters an element of early Christian antagonism, which one day may become troublesome to the well-to-do people who now find the ready money for it.” Such a presentation of Engels is possible only by severing the quote from its interpretive context and surgically removing its political heart, beating with a righteous antagonism to the role of religious evangelism in stifling a politics of working-class opposition. The paragraph in the 1892 preface to Engels’s *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* that Marks quotes is actually headed by an account of the working-class defeats of 1848 to 1851. Engels then presents a view of working-class religiosity and its origins that is hardly open to the unambiguously favourable reading it receives in Marks’s presentation, referring as it does to the “bourgeois ... necessity” of “evangelicizing” “the lower orders”, a project upon which Engels claims was expended tens of thousands of pounds sterling annually with the expectation that it would serve property’s interests well. If this crass expenditure in “religion as a trade” entailed some dangers as a consequence of the Salvation Army’s ten-

dency to appeal to the poor, Engels can hardly be understood as viewing “fighting capitalism religiously” as an act of “class consciousness”.<sup>78</sup>

All of this suggests a highly problematic use of evidence and a willingness to tilt quotation and the language of interpretation in skewed directions to score rather small debating points or obscure critically important differences. This, as well as the familiar problem of an evidentiary base that is at times less than convincing, also appears in Marks’s discussion of association life and class, especially fraternalism. When Marks tells us that 40 per cent of the officers of fraternal lodges in Campbellford and Thorold were working class, her actual figures, over a seven-year period, include the following numbers: for Thorold, 31 Orangemen, 12 Ancient Order of United Workmen, and 5 Masons; the comparable figures for Campbellford being 18, 5, and 3. A glance at the work Marks is criticizing reveals an entirely different evidentiary base, including membership figures spanning half a century that approach 1,000, of whom almost 650 were identified occupationally, and hundreds of fraternal lodge officers who could be located in the skilled trades or labouring employment. Yet a dispassionate reading of all of this seemingly differentiated scholarship reveals a common pattern: a strong working-class presence in lodge life. By the mid-1990s what should have been apparent, and what deserved analytic emphasis, was the two-sided meaning of this history and the distinct possibility that the class nature of fraternalism would surely have reflected contextual difference when embedded in milieux where the institutions and ideas of the labour movement were stronger or weaker.

Marks opts for another conceptual course. She polemically misrepresents past research on nineteenth-century workers and the associational realm, distorting the interpretive content of books such as *A Culture in Conflict*. She claims this work presents a view of fraternal orders as “primarily working class”, nurseries of a simplified labour solidarity, when the actual arguments on the page are far more nuanced, acknowledging cross-class memberships and suggestive of interpretive complexity even when they originally leaned in the direction of mutualism’s positive features. Kealey and I are indiscriminately regarded as crowning the Orange Lodge “a bastion of working-class culture”. Of fraternalism, my 1979 book concluded that the lessons workers learned within it were varied: “the benefits and attractions of equality, fraternity, and cooperation, on the one hand ...; or, on the other hand, deference, accommodation, and an exclusionary contempt” (in roughly four pages this point of two-sidedness was made repeatedly). A

78 Marks, “The Knights of Labor and the Salvation Army: Religion and Working-Class Culture in Ontario, 1882–1890”, *Labour/Le Travail*, vol. 28 (Fall 1991), p. 110; Engels, 1892 Preface to *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress, 1968), pp. 393–394. In quoting Engels, Marks relied on a presentation of the quotation in Bailey, “In Darkest England”, p. 133, but interestingly she eliminated the first words of Bailey’s reproduction of the passage from *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*: “The British bourgeoisie ... finally ... accepted the dangerous aid of the Salvation Army, which...”.

*Culture in Conflict* never denied the presence of bourgeois and petty bourgeois elements in fraternal orders, acknowledging their disproportionate influence in some societies and lodges. It stated unambiguously that sectarian conflict associated with the Orange Order exposed “the potentiality of divided loyalties that could foster antagonism between two distinct working-class groups”.<sup>79</sup>

Unfortunately for Marks, much has also been written on the subject since 1979, and the literature on fraternalism has advanced considerably over the course of the last 20 years.<sup>80</sup> Studies of the topic now generally address the gendered content of fraternalism, as well as the importance of reading the fraternal experience as located in networks of identity such as “nation” and “race”. Even if the fraternal order was deeply gendered and reflected sectional attachments, which is where Marks places her interpretive accent, it was not impossible for fraternalism to articulate the negotiated values of working-class mutuality. This is as legitimate a conceptual point now as it was in the late 1970s; so, too, is the insistence that all fraternal orders contained a working-class presence and that the values of mutual aid bore a striking social and rhetorical similarity to the language of the labour movement. To ignore this, especially on the basis of numbers, experiences, and evidences as limited as those highlighted in *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, is to stand against research that has earned a more subtle response.

The point is not that scholarship conceived more than 25 years ago cannot be criticized. Research and writing should not be scapegoated, however, and cheap distortion, even in the service of advancing a new and important interpretive agenda — that of gendered readings of experience — is not acceptable, especially when large claims are made on the basis of small evidence. The study of small-town Ontario is certainly a legitimate topic, and

79 Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, pp. 109, 115. Marks is simply wrong in her representations of what *A Culture in Conflict* said, as pages 39–43 of my book make abundantly clear. David Bright gets the arithmetic facts on this wrong as well. *The Limits of Labour* claims that a part of my empirical argument established that fewer than 21% of one lodge’s members were workers (p. 57), when the actual figure exceeded 43%.

80 As indicated in my publications, the evolution of this literature is treated inadequately by Marks: *A Culture in Conflict*, pp. 39–43; *Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800–1980* (Toronto: Butterworth’s, 1983), pp. 78–81; *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800–1991* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), pp. 95–98; “Mutuality and the Masking/Making of Difference: Mutual Benefit Societies in Canada, 1850–1950”, in Marcel van der Linden, *Social Security Mutualism: The Comparative History of Mutual Benefit Societies* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1996), pp. 111–146. (The latter essay had been circulating in unpublished form since the early 1990s, but, since it remained unpublished until after Marks’s book appeared, she cannot have been expected to address it.) A balanced assessment of this work would not obscure the two-sided appreciation of fraternalism in earlier statements, but would correctly locate a stress in such publications on working-class fraternalism’s mutualism. As this writing evolved, it grappled with critiques and treated far more seriously the limitations of this mutualism, addressing gender, race, and nation. For Marks to write in the mid-1990s as though this scholarship had not moved misrepresents the nature of intellectual development in the field.

much can be learned from it, especially when inquiry is guided by a sensibility to the interconnections of class, gender, and religion. Such a project is fundamentally different than that undertaken by social historians of the working class in the 1970s and 1980s. Studies of class conflict, major labour-reform mobilizations such as the Knights of Labor, and working-class ideas and cultural activities, whether located in the industrial-capitalist metropolises or, in the case of the Great Upheaval, spread more widely across the province, bear little relation to such localized examination of places like Campbellford. As Marks acknowledges in her introduction, “working-class activities and beliefs can sometimes be less than fully visible at the small-town level”.<sup>81</sup> Why, then, is it necessary to take the singular statements of a Marxist assessment of class in Ontario’s major centres and smaller communities in the late nineteenth century, poke it into the shape of a strawman, and knock it about? Doing history, gender sensitive or not, is as much about what you are against as what you are for. *Revivals and Roller Rinks* chose the wrong target, and its shots, cheap as well as fruitful, land largely wide of the marks.

### **Conclusion: Our Names, Their Names, Being Named**

We live in an age of identity, or so we are told. Historians are doing much of the telling. Identity, in this construction, is about being made and about making oneself. It is an old story. “Men make their own history,” Marx wrote, “but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.”<sup>82</sup> Making/ made: the relationship of these meanings is at the core of what most historians study. In the process they name a historical experience, and for themselves secure an interpretive name. They become an historiographic site. Built on projections of the self, such edifices of reputation are soon claimed by many others and, in the contrasting uses to which they can be put, quickly lose their individualized moorings, becoming something other than what they were.<sup>83</sup>

A name, in this sense, is not forever. It can be conferred, constructed, celebrated, castigated, or cancelled. Honoured at one time, it can be displaced, even despised, at another; such oppositions can, as well, coexist in the same period, proclaimed and promoted by those occupying legitimate grounds of interpretive difference. Historians have long been aware of the power and

81 Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, p. 11.

82 Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, p. 97.

83 Consider Thompson, discussing the evolution of the concept “moral economy”, in which he invested an interpretive reading of the eighteenth-century crowd and which subsequently came to designate something of an historiographic analytic minefield: “if I did father the term ‘moral economy’ upon current academic discourse, the term has long forgotten its paternity. I will not disown it, but it has come of age and I am no longer answerable for its actions.” *Customs in Common* (London: Merlin, 1991), p. 351.

significance of this naming.<sup>84</sup> The authority of designation, posed with brutal clarity in Denise Riley's "*Am I That Name?*", a title reaching back to Shakespeare's *Othello*, is a subject of concern for all historians:

Desdemona: Am I that name, Iago?

Iago: What name, fair lady?

Desdemona: Such as she says my lord did say I was.<sup>85</sup>

In Canada many of us have wondered if we are indeed those names. Historiographic controversy has produced concentric circles of often quite charged disagreement. We need to reconstitute a dialogue, not through surrenders, turned backs of pique, overblown claims of theoretical breakthroughs, and caricatures, but on the basis of parallel, if sometimes divergent, projects of modest accomplishment.

The names some Marxists and feminists had for one another in the 1970s, to be sure, cannot be unproblematically reintroduced in the 1990s. Much has changed, and gender historians have been in the forefront of valued developments. Historiography, like history, is not necessarily all whiggish advance, however. Blurring the advances, pushed by gender historians to such good effect, have also been some less than exemplary acts of naming, in which the names of other times have been too easily forgotten and those of conflicted presents too brazenly and thoughtlessly presented.

Little is to be gained, I think, by denying difference (of the theoretical and historiographic sort) in the name of studying it (as the diversity of the past); nothing can be accomplished by denigrating dichotomy when such oppositional thought and appreciation of subject matter clearly divides the discipline. Useful exchange can never thrive if debate, discussion, and difference, even to the point of seemingly dichotomous opposition, are suffocated in a consensual pluralism that in effect embraces only one position.<sup>86</sup>

84 See, for instance, the discussions associated with slavery in Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), pp. 230–256; Eugene G. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), pp. 443–450. Note the poem, E. P. Thompson, "Powers and Names", *London Review of Books*, January 23, 1986, pp. 9–10, cited in Bryan D. Palmer, *E. P. Thompson: Objections and Oppositions* (London: Verso, 1984), pp. 151–153.

85 Denise Riley, "*Am I That Name?*": *Feminism and the Category "Women" in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Othello, The Moor of Venice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965), Act IV, Scene ii, p. 117.

86 This is at work in the introductions to two texts in which gender history either figures forcefully or is the central focus. These introductions display a congealing of theoretical traditions, embrace a lowest-common-denominator postmodernism, and deflect discussion away from Marxist critiques of contemporary analytic fashion. See Franca Iacovetta and Wendy Mitchinson, eds., *On the Case: Explorations in Social History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); McPherson, Morgan, and Forestell, eds., *Gendered Pasts*. This relates to the warnings of Roger Chartier, "Why the Linguistic Approach can be an Obstacle to the Further Development of Historical Knowledge: A Reply to Gareth Stedman Jones", *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 46 (Autumn 1998), who deplors the ten-

This will indeed happen if the “sides”, however complex and multifaceted, celebrate the proclamation of virtue — the imagined community of Canadian nationhood here, the endlessly discursive heterogeneity of unlimited identities there — and turn their collective backs on the silences screaming from their slogans: the “large” structured picture of politico-socio-economic power, differentially conceived by various quarters, on one hand, and the “small” subjectivities negotiating exploitation and oppression, again not seen through some universal lens, setting the stages of resistance and accommodation, on the other. Theory and evidence will inevitably be incorporated into these oppositional readings in ways that bear little likeness to one another. But to the extent that evidence is interrogated seriously, which at this point in our historiographic hassles is not, I would argue, an assumption that we can make with any degree of certainty, there should be grounds for dialogue, even productive exchange and cooperative labours.

One foundation of such an exchange should be awareness that all that seems new has often, in slightly different guises, appeared before. Our names, their names, being named — it has been going for some time, even if we have managed, blinded as we are by our presents, not to have seen it for what it has been. Going “beyond” is not really what is required in this situation, just as “returning” to some past age of pristine standards leads to equally unproductive paths. It is both reassuring and somewhat disturbing to realize that more than 30 years ago a conservative historian put his finger on the paradox of modern historiography. Writing in the *Journal of Contemporary History* in 1967, J. H. Hexter complained loudly, “Never in the past has the writing of history been so fatuous as it is today; never has it yielded so enormous and suffocating a mass of stultifying trivia, the product of small minds engaged in the congenial occupation of writing badly about insignificant matters.” Such a body-blow to the practice of “doing history” was followed by Hexter with a salutation, the seemingly disgruntled critic turning a proud page of congratulation: “Never in the past have historians written history so competently, vigorously, and thoughtfully as they do today, penetrating into domains hitherto neglected or in an obscurantist way shunned, bringing effectively to bear on the record of the past disciplines wholly inaccessible to their predecessors, treating the problems they confront with both a catholicity and a rigor and sophistication of method hitherto without precedent among practitioners of the historical craft.”<sup>87</sup>

Both of these statements were “true” in 1967; they remain “true” today. As small a step forward as it may seem, agreeing to agree around such a two-

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dency to deny “that distinctions between discursive and non-discursive practices have any relevance, and saying that to keep up such distinctions is tantamount to a return to the old social history, which itself is simply a variant of marxism” (p. 271).

87 J. H. Hexter, “Doing History”, in *Doing History* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1971), p. 136.

sided assessment might be the opening sentence in a useful dialogue. Given the state of our historiographic hassles, we have only the chains of our comforting isolation to lose, some of which have been forged in the reciprocal making of names. That is not much of a price to pay.