

paupers to hospital beds and to distribute grain and, in the late eighteenth century, medicines to much larger numbers, their administrators confirmed their commitment to the local poor.

Direct dealings with the poor were normally undertaken by women. By the eighteenth century, seven of the eight hospitals were served by women; in five cases these women were members of religious congregations or an informally constituted religious community, and in the other two they were not bound by religious vows. When the administrators of several hospitals undertook to supplement hospital revenues and offer useful employments to the poor, women ran both workshops and schools. The example of the eight hospitals demonstrates the ability of such dedicated practitioners of the Catholic Reform to institutionalize effective means of poor relief as well as the tenacity of the administrators in both threatening and promising circumstances. There is a timelessness about the survival of the eight hospitals which is striking. Their example might well provide encouragement to people seeking to preserve local hospitals in late twentieth-century Canada.

For its content and argument, this book must be ranked with the outstanding works of this century on poor relief in *ancien régime* France by Camille Bloch, Jean-Pierre Gutton, Olwen Hufton and Colin Jones. It is a pity that McGill-Queen's University Press did not employ literary or copy editors capable of correcting the infelicities of grammar and composition — or even the spelling errors in both English and French — which mar too many pages of this otherwise important and impressive book.

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Ann-Louise Shapiro — *Breaking the Codes: Female Criminality in fin-de-siècle Paris*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997. Pp. vi, 265.

Ann-Louise Shapiro's title, *Breaking the Codes*, works on several levels. It refers first to late nineteenth-century French women who broke criminal laws and rejected gender norms. Secondly, the title describes Shapiro's goal in writing: to explain how *fin-de-siècle* discourse on the female criminal both revealed and obscured widespread anxieties not only about changing gender roles but also about the dangers of urban life, national degeneration, and shifting class relationships.

Shapiro argues that the female criminal, statistically insignificant compared to the male, became the central figure in all levels of discourse because she embodied the potential for disorder that obsessed the Third Republic. In particular, the crime of passion fascinated contemporaries because it symbolized the danger to male privilege and the bourgeois family. Yet women who killed their husbands and lovers were routinely acquitted. This lenience reflected contradictory rationales. First, many contemporaries recognized that the civil and penal law protected adulterous and abusive men; the *petit bourgeois* male jurors accepted that some

women's only recourse to justice was violence. In this way, it was hoped, an extra-legal code of domesticity reinforced the imperfect legal system. The ubiquitous image of women as irresponsible, "saturated by their sex", was a second factor promoting acquittals. Emotionally and physically out of control because (like all women) she was ruled by her reproductive system, the woman who killed was described in popular literature as bereft of free will, a "love-slave", even when there was evidence of premeditation. By promoting this love discourse, social observers were able to shift attention from the paradox of democratic political ideals coexisting with an authoritarian social structure centred on the family. However, Shapiro emphasizes that culture is made up of shifting sets of meanings, and that discourse alone is unable to dissipate tensions. By 1914 the crime of passion had lost its legitimacy. Female violence against men continued despite new divorce laws and other advances in the position of women; the *crime passionnel* failed to secure gender identities.

Shapiro tries to show women as strong historical actors in the theatre of the court, although the official tale about the crime and the defendant usually featured the "enforced collaboration" (p. 51) of the defendant. In the heyday of the crime of passion, many women formed their stories to emphasize their remorse and helplessness in the face of passion. Others risked guilty verdicts by ignoring the protocols of the love story. They defiantly told the court about their desire for revenge for economic, physical, and emotional abuse, thus "effectively challenging a cultural myth of male chivalry through which various forms of male privilege merged as the reward for their protection of women" (p. 159). Primarily, we recognize in their violence their demand for private justice. Yet we learn more about criminologists, psychiatrists, magistrates, and reporters, as well as what preoccupied these bourgeois men, than we do about the women who appeared in Paris's central *Cour d'Assises* in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

The relationship of psychiatry and gender has a hot historiography, and Shapiro treats it with subtlety. She notes that evidence of mental illness did not affect the outcome of trials: juries generally acquitted whether or not expert witnesses detected insanity. However, the testimony of medico-legal experts was faithfully reproduced in newspapers, and the view of women as victims of their "disordered biology", helpless to resist menstrual psychosis and other periodic insanities, pervaded popular crime literature. Because they testified that criminal women were essentially extreme versions of the normal woman, psychiatrists contributed a "scientific grammar" (p. 112) by which all women were linked to the criminal female. Therefore, Shapiro argues, the main impact of scientific discourse was not on the treatment of deviant woman, but on the elaboration of social theory about all women.

Medical discourse only verified rather than determined the heavy cultural weight of criminal women, since its base was an old and dense set of meanings centred on the equation of woman and womb. By examining the stereotypes of female deviants that populated criminological literature, mass journalism, and court narratives, Shapiro shows how old knowledges were updated by the new scientific knowledges of the nineteenth century. For example, *l'empoisonneuse* was at heart the archetypal witch, feared for centuries for her use of domestic arts for evil. Men worried that

their wives and mistresses might turn to arsenic or laudanum, readily available to the woman who contemplated “domestic treason”. Criminologists dressed this ancient figure with their scientifically derived knowledge of woman as innately deceitful in her primitive cunning and clever enough to fool experts by feigning hysteria and illness. In sum, the professionals were, above all, bourgeois men insecure about their authority over women and over the urban working classes, rather than confident wielders of hegemonic knowledge.

Shapiro’s study complements an impressive body of work on criminality and the justice system in late nineteenth-century France. The central argument of Marie-Christine Leps in *Apprehending the Criminal: The Production of Deviance in Nineteenth-Century Discourse* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992), a more traditional and less accessible discourse analysis, is that late-century discourses were porous and interdependent. Unlike Leps, Shapiro places gender with class in the foreground of her examination. She thereby qualifies Foucault’s (and Leps’s) finding, that psychiatric discourse worked to normalize and diminish the deviant, by pointing to the pathologization of all women in medical writings across the nineteenth century. In the elegantly written *Murders and Madness: Medicine, Law, and Society in the Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), Ruth Harris surveys female criminality and profitably includes male crimes of passion. Robert Nye is another major contributor on the topics of manliness and madness. However, by narrowing her focus to criminal women, Shapiro is able to make plain the intricate connections between politics and gender. She maps the achievements of the “new woman” in such areas as divorce, paternity laws, education reform, and the regulation of prostitution. By the end of the period the political was again obscured in the personal, however, and discourse on new meanings of love and marriage was displacing calls for further political remedies. Joining the female criminal were two new stock characters of the *fin-de-siècle*, the lesbian and the feminist, made ambivalent by their masculinity. These myths underline for us that women as well as men required new symbols on which to attach their anxiety about gender slippage.

Well-written, informed by feminist and literary theory, and ambitious, *Breaking the Codes* is a strong entry in the new cultural historiography of crime and criminal justice. While readers may find her “kaleidoscopic image of cultural exchanges among differently empowered historical subjects” (p. 220) demanding, Shapiro does an exemplary job of nailing jelly (theory) to the wall (the social, economic, and political context of *fin-de-siècle* Paris).

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François Dupuy — *Le pin de la discorde, les rapports de métayage dans la Grande Lande*, Paris, Maison des sciences de l’homme, 1996, xiii, 407 p.

La Grande Lande dont il est question ici est un triangle de quelques 200 000 hectares situé dans le Sud Ouest de la France. Jusqu’au début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, la