

Book Reviews

Canadian Journal of Family and Youth, 10(1), 2018, pp 399-402
ISSN 1718-9748 © University of Alberta
<http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/cjfy>

Azoulay, Dan. (2011). Hearts and Minds: Canadian Romance at the Dawn of the Modern Era, 1900-1930. Calgary: University of Calgary Press.

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In his book, “Hearts and Minds,” Dan Azoulay explores what romance was like in Canada in the early twentieth century. He does this through his use of a variety of entries taken from publications and columns of the time, and personal letters which helped create a sense of understanding of how people went about pursuing romance at this time in history. Throughout the book Azoulay covers three major concepts: the first is what men and women wanted out of a romantic partner, the second was the rules and experiences of courtship, and thirdly the aftermath that World War I left on Canadian romance. Overall, the book does a solid job of giving the reader a perspective of what it was like to be pursuing romance in Canada at the dawn of the twentieth century.

Throughout the early chapters of the book, Azoulay explores the traits and desires men and women had for their ideal romantic partner. The men wanted partners who primarily were “domesticated,” intelligent, non-vain and ready to live and help on the land. Their intent was not to marry a slave but rather they desired someone who could ease the burden of frontier life by managing the household and being a companion who preferably shared the same faith and had some sort of talent, such as playing piano, to help get through the long winters. The women on the other hand wanted a good provider, one who was free of evil vices such as smoking and drinking, and was willing to help in the home. Physical attraction played a small role, with men preferring talents and skills over pure beauty; and women cared more if the man was well kept

Book Reviews

rather than good-looking. Past the ideal man or woman, the desire for a romantic partner boiled down to a core point for each. Men wanted a companion to make life a little easier, and women wanted someone of good moral standing who could provide for them.

The biggest difference between romance today and in the early twentieth century is the rules of courtship. In the book Azoulay goes over the process of courting, and what the expectations for the couple would be. Courtship during this time was very similar to that of Victorian England. To begin the courting process, the man would have to introduce himself to a woman through a third party. After introductions were made, a background check would be performed to ensure he would be a worthy suitor and then the courting process would begin. Once courting began, the couple would have dates which would consist of conversations in the girl's family parlor, and chaperoned walks. It was also expected that marriage would follow shortly after courting. With courting, Azoulay explores through the articles not just the process but also the competition involved. At the time, in Canada, finding a female companion became more difficult the further a bachelor moved out west. It was common for a girl to have multiple men courting her. The competition between bachelors was not just local but national, with the bachelors of eastern and western Canada fighting in periodicals to sway future wives to their side of the country.

The last concept Azoulay covers in the book is the effect of World War I and how it affected romance within Canada. According to Azoulay, a big effect of the War that hit home was the decline in romance. With the War, much of the population of eligible bachelors went overseas to fight as they felt it was their duty to do so. This created a large disparity in the number of eligible suitors for women. Alongside fewer men being available, many women also took charge to assist the war effort back home and made a conscious decision to not indulge in

Book Reviews

frivolous things such as dating while the men were off dying in trenches. Azoulay also mentions that the loss in potential bachelors was not the only change that occurred in Canada. With young Canadians going overseas to fight in the War, their perspective of the world began to change. Over in Europe, many Canadian soldiers experienced culture shock when they interacted with the women of Europe. Upon their arrival back home post war, the attitudes on romance began to shift away from the Victorian style romantic norms and began moving towards a more casual and free approach. As time went on, dating would become more and more common and casual, with individuals treating it more as a recreational activity rather than a way to secure their future livelihood.

Throughout the book, the Azoulay's intentions for the book are fairly clear. He uses editorial columns and personal letters from the time period to create an image of the attitudes and behaviors that were associated with romance in Canada during the twentieth century. Through these examples and his own commentary, we the readers begin to gain that image and understand the rules of romance, the struggles of trying to find love, and how the old ways began to change into something more similar to the contemporary romance experience of today. The intention of the writer in the book really focuses on what it was like for individuals in that time period, giving insight into how they felt, the hardships they endured, the competition between bachelors, and how people reacted to change overtime.

Overall, Azoulay is successful in creating the narrative he wanted to achieve with the book but some aspects do seem to fall short. One of the biggest issues with the book is how Azoulay uses his references in the text with his arguments. While useful to help the reader understand romance during the time period, at times it feels like Azoulay over relies on his sources. Many of the points in the book follow the same trend of Azoulay stating his point and

Book Reviews

then following it up with an excerpt from one of his sources. This could be improved by either shortening the excerpts or including fewer of them in the text. Another shortcoming of the book, albeit a minor one, is many of the points in the book could be improved with more statistical backing. Though some statistics are presented, they tend to be quite scarce and far apart.

Azoulay's book is an interesting read which gives perspective into the process of romance in Canada. The book itself may be very useful for use in academics as a secondary source for those doing research in sociology and Canadian history. Dan provides a great perspective into understanding romance at the time and it can be useful to help gain a beginning understanding of romance at the time, or as a secondary source to help reinforce their arguments. Much of the contents of the book are useful for understanding early family life in Canada, cultural norms, the effect of World War I, and gradual changes in social norms.

Overall, Dan's book offers an interesting and informative view into the subject of romance in Canada in the early twentieth century. Throughout the book Azoulay takes the reader through the struggles and hardships of early settler life and how the social norms of romance at the time affected those looking for love. In the book, Azoulay's intentions for his writing are clearly presented, and though at times it can feel like there is an overreliance on sources from the time period, "Hearts and Minds: Canadian Romance at the Dawn of the Modern" is an enjoyable and extremely informative read.