

Canadian Journal of Family and Youth, 10(1), 2017, pp 431-434
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.

Reviewed by: Michelle Wolak, MacEwan University

Dan Azoulay's book, "Hearts and Minds," is a refreshing insight into the romantic notions of young Canadians prior to, and during the First World War. Azoulay looks primarily at the letters sent to the "correspondence columns," Montreal's *Family Herald and Weekly Star* with the "Prim Rose at Home" column, whose main purpose was to "introduce" those people in search of a potential spouse (p. 9) and Winnipeg's *Western Home Monthly* as well as general etiquette manuals common for the time. The letters read, summing over 20,000, allowed for the first full-length study of Canadian romance through the perspectives of young Canadians themselves. Azoulay has encapsulated the information in the letters to gain insight as to what marriageable Canadians looked for in a potential mate, and the hardships they endured in the process of doing so, during the settlement and industrialisation of Canada at the time.

Upon gaining the choice to pick your own spouse, romance started to become an important aspect of marriage. Due to the strictness of the culture and time, sources for other studies looking at romance between young Canadians are very narrow, very elitist, or both. The letters Azoulay studied gave a much more reliable insight into the romantic advances by the general population or lower class. Prior to the First World War, men and women were, albeit simple, quite descriptive of their desires in a potential spouse. Azoulay states that due to the newness of settled areas, focusing on exaggerating regional differences would be wrong, as distinct regional identities hadn't yet been formed (p. 11). Although, this is almost contradicted

by the correspondence letters as they were mostly exchanged between the “Western Man” and “Eastern Woman” of the time. Through the combined descriptions of what writers were asking, Azoulay was able to piece together a general summary of the “ideal” man and “ideal” woman.

The ideal man had to be willing to work hard and capable of being a good provider for his future wife, be a complete gentleman, free of any vices such as drinking and smoking, of good moral and be kind-hearted. The importance of being gentle and kind were second to none, although many eastern women feared becoming ‘drudges’ as the wives of Western Men. They feared having to not only do the work in the home, but also work they were unsure they could do at all. Fortunately, most men thought the woman’s place was in the home and that having her work outside with them was shameful on their part.

As a fitting match to that of the ideal man, although, with more criteria to match, the ideal woman was “domesticated;” being able to cook, clean, raise children and anything else needed to run a household smoothly. One of the most common desires of a potential wife, was her looks and interests. Men did not want women who were frivolous, more concerned with the latest fashions or looks than the goings on of the household; plain women who were modest and reserved, and most definitely not a suffragette. Men were most commonly interested in a woman who would be happiest in the home, being able to provide intelligent companionship and be a devout Christian. The ideal woman was a little bit more difficult for Azoulay to describe as there were many things a man was and wasn’t looking for and none were more commonly requested than others. For men living in more urban areas, a woman’s appearance was a little bit more important and her ability to work on a farm less so as those skills weren’t required in a town or city (p. 51).

After finding a potential spouse, a couple could court. Azoulay was unable to present evidence of courting going on between two people. The information he found was based mostly off the advice and instruction given out by the Prim Rose column editor. This information could also be found in the general etiquette manuals of the time which stated what were proper interactions. An interesting point is how much power and respect it seemed women had over the process of courting. The courting process that was presented mostly represented those couples who lived close to one another. Sending letters was deeply frowned upon between those who were not engaged or already married, so there seemed to be a lack of insight as to how Western men courted women who were not from the west or within a reasonable traveling distance. In this instance, this study seems to lack a large aspect of Canadian interactions for furthering a relationship into a marriage.

The First World War had an enormous impact on the romance and roles of couples. The ratios of women to men increased significantly when the war started, as many men enlisted and were sent overseas or to training camps. Due to traditional views on romance and courtship, many relationships were put on hold or ceased altogether with the start of the war. Without being present, men were not able to continue their relations with their lovers and communications were difficult; a result of the unreliability of mail delivery and the constant moving of troops. The war was very catalytic in changing romance of the early twentieth century. The war lasted much longer than many anticipated, and the personal situations of soldiers saw a rise in infidelity. As well, the role of women in society and the economy rose to make up for the lack of men. The criteria of the ideal man changed almost solely to anyone who was a soldier. The role women started to play in society, getting jobs that men usually had before the war, could not easily be reversed. The desires of men and women were influenced greatly by the displays of patriotism by

Book Reviews

those who went to war and those who stepped up filling in roles that were left behind. Women's rights and participation in the workforce was no longer as undesirable to a man as it was before the war. Men's desire for the modern woman increased when they saw overseas the modern women of Britain. Women back in Canada were glad to oblige the men. The advancement of women in society was more welcomed than it was pre-war.

Azoulay sought to portray what romance was like in the years before the war and the effects the war, rapid colonialization, industrialisation and growth had on romance as it is scarcely documented due to the personal nature of romance. I found the book left out moderate chunks of information on certain groups of people of the time. It is hard to discern age groups of the people who wrote to the correspondence column, as well, understandably due to the limited source of letters, the study was unable to present information on the romance of any people who were not Anglo-Saxon. I believe the hardships in romance of minority groups was vastly different than those presented in this study but that is one of the limitations to be aware of when reading this book. An important thing to consider when critiquing this work is that it was a study and not a research presentation; limitations are therefore more a fault of lack of evidence and sources than a lack of methodology. If any other credible sources of similar nature were found, I think it would be a great addition to the presentation of the material of this study. Azoulay succeeded in presenting his findings in a beautiful and thorough inclusion of the writings he found. It gave an almost love story feel to book and I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in the historical and sociological aspect of romance in the early twentieth century and the effects of events going on in the world can have on it.