

## ■ Revolutionary Love

*Allan H. Pasco, Revolutionary Love in Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century France, Burlington, VT/Farnham, UK (Ashgate Publishing) 2009, 227 S., 65 £*

In this engaging comprehensive study Allan Pasco investigates the changing attitudes about love and marriage in France from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century. His literary and historical analysis shows that perceptions about emotion and the institutions related to love were linked to the rise of individualism and reflective of the social upheavals of the eighteenth century. Pasco asks how we can know how people felt and behaved about something so intimate and personal as love and passion. In the face of insufficient historical documentation he turns to literature for answers and thoroughly mines numerous works of fiction to recover the »mentalities« of eighteenth-century subjects. By combining extensive literary investigation with archival research Pasco is able to understand not only how literate aristocrats felt and behaved but also how love and marriage played out across the classes. He believes novels and plays provide underexplored avenues that lead scholars to a better understanding of the beliefs and emotions of French people from all social groups. Pasco skillfully uses literature and historical documents in tandem to reconstruct a fuller vision of eighteenth-century life demonstrating that the legacy of love we live today is rooted in the eighteenth-century.

In Chapter 1, »French Literature as Historical Archive«, Pasco outlines his methodology while simultaneously defending the application of literature as historical archive. He acknowledges that while fiction may not provide exact information, facts and figures, it can and does provide insight into common attitudes and opinions. Pasco justifies the use of popular literature for several reasons: literature was a form of mass media driven

by the market and reflective of the desire and interests of the public; popular literature was consumed by the middle and petty classes meaning it grants access to how groups beyond the aristocracy felt and thought about love; and the tumultuous, indeed life-threatening events of the Revolution motivated families to destroy personal documents creating gaps in the historical record. Literature allows us to fill those gaps. Pasco convincingly establishes his criteria for confirming the veracity and applicability of popular literature and argues that by drawing from a broad sample, contextualizing the content of literature, and cross-checking against available historical documentation he is able to assess how people felt and behaved.

In chapters 2 and 3 Pasco considers how marriage functioned as a stabilizing force within seventeenth- and eighteenth-century society. Chapter 2, »Love and War«, explores the evolving relationship between love as emotion and marriage as institution from the seventeenth through the early nineteenth century. Using a range of well-known and lesser-known literary works, Pasco sets up a stark comparison between early models of marriage which preferred a permanent legal union built on affection and friendship, but not necessarily love, to the Pre-Romantic ideal that emerged in the mid-eighteenth century where marriage became the expression of a unique love and intense passion between two mutually consenting individuals. Chapter 3, »Thunderstruck at First Sight«, discusses the redefinition of love from the fulfillment of familial obligation within a closed marital relationship to an »extreme affection within or without marriage that was allied with passionate commitment to the other«. By the late eighteenth century, as major stabilizing institutions like the Catholic Church and the French monarchy were losing power, love became aligned with passion but in the face of these monumental changes forming lasting sentimental connection came to be highly desired. Pasco

argues anxiety over finding a life-long true love is evident in repeated literary motifs like the *coup de foudre*, love-tests, and suicide.

The permanence of marriage was ultimately challenged with the legalization of divorce in 1792 and chapters 4 and 5 take up the issue of serial love, social law, and the natural man. In chapter 4, »The ›Tahitian Mirage‹ and the Dream of Serial Love«, Pasco analyzes a favorite late eighteenth-century literary setting, the deserted island, and the specifically French fascination with Tahiti. Focusing primarily on Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*, Pasco argues that fantasies about Tahiti reflected the philosophe's desire to discover a new rule of law based on nature and to learn the virtues of »natural« man, someone pure of the corrupting force of civilization. In Diderot's idyllic vision of Tahitian life adultery is avoided through short-term serial marriages that produced legitimate offspring sustaining society through population growth. The concept of passionate serial love in France is taken up in chapter 5, »Divorce and the Death of Love«, where Pasco addresses the topic of divorce as it appears in Madame de Staël's *Delphine*. Here, Pasco uses de Staël's canonical work as an example of how the topic was treated in »scores« of novels in the last decade of the eighteenth century. According to Pasco in *Delphine*, »divorce and the Revolution are linked symbiotically: they symbolize a break between the past and the future«. Chapter 6 explores what the new future of sexual and emotional freedom holds.

In the last core chapter, »The Roses and Thorns of Love«, Pasco provides a synthesis of the major ideas presented throughout the book to solidify his overarching argument that literature chronicles the revolutionary change from a love defined as dutifully meeting familial obligations to a self-centered individual desire for overwhelming passion. This change was gradual, taking place over the course of nearly two hundred years, but its effects were monumental and

abiding. By the early nineteenth century, relationships were viewed in ways completely different from those a hundred years earlier. Literature of the period reflects some of the negative social side effects of the growing acceptability of open marriages, specifically prostitution and the spread of syphilis.

This extensively researched and rigorously analyzed book will be of relevance to scholars of Pre-Romanticism and Romanticism, sociology and psychology, literature and history. Pasco's interdisciplinary approach is reiterated in his inclusion of eight illustrations situated at the beginning of each chapter: Carle Van Loo's *La Lecture espagnole*, Fragonard's *Le Baiser à la dérobée*, Greuze's *Jeune Fille qui fait sa prière à l'Amour*, an engraving *Reveries* by an unknown artist, a Lesueur brothers' gouache, *Reconciliation*, Fragonard's *Le Verrou*, and *Le Feu: la sexualité débride*. Like the large sample of literature Pasco compiles these works of art to reiterate the enduring fascination with love and marriage throughout the eighteenth century. Passion, its positive and negative effects on the subject and society, inspired authors and artists alike. Using literature as a point of entry into the hearts and minds of eighteenth-century subjects Pasco convincingly reveals that marriage, love, and passion held enormous interest for eighteenth-century subjects, and literature not only reflected new manners and sentiments but also inspired people to emote and behave in the mode of literary heroes and heroines.

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