

THE EFFECTS OF PUBLIC DISCOURSE ON SEXUALITY

AND CLASS: THE EXAMPLE OF JACK THE RIPPER AND OUTCAST LONDON

"Murder, Murder, Mutilation, Whitechapel", the headline of a London news story in the year 1888, was also the title of a talk given at the Graduate Center on November 14. Judith Walkowitz, an Associate Professor of History at Rutgers University, spoke on Jack the Ripper and the effects of public discourse on sexuality and class on the working class neighborhood of Whitechapel.

Walkowitz opened her talk with an account of the events in London in the autumn of 1888, when "the attention of the classes, as well as the masses, was riveted on a series of brutal murders of prostitutes residing in lodging houses in the Whitechapel area of London. Jack the Ripper was abroad." The case had particular notoriety for three reasons: First, the murders involved savage sexual mutilation of the victims; second, a letter, supposedly from the killer, had named the murderer as "Jack the Ripper", an illusive person; and finally, the social profile of the victims was strikingly precise. They were all poor, middle-aged prostitutes who lived in common boarding houses.

The resulting public discussion of the crimes was notable. The case obsessed almost every sector of the population, and involved members of every class, including Queen Victoria. In addition, the discussion of the specifics of the case gave way to a sweeping and self-conscious analysis of what was wrong with England. Contemporary thoughts on religion, science, fear of revolution, and failure of authority were incorporated into the debate. This discussion, Walkowitz pointed out, must be viewed in the context of continuing political conflicts over class and gender in the late Victorian period. She summarized the events in years preceeding the murders, and pointed out that in earlier discussions over vice, feminists and radicals had been dominant. However, the case of Jack the Ripper brought a shift in the balance of power in public discourse on sex. The conservative press dominated the debate, and the intervention of feminists and socialists was strikingly limited and ineffective.

Walkowitz analyzed how feminists and socialists had lost control, as she traced how different social constituencies formulated the problem of Jack the Ripper and how they mobilized over the murders. The police were the first to advance theories, which reflected their own prejudices about the Whitechapel population, including the Jewish community there. However, when the coroner announced that the mutilations demonstrated some anatomical skills, new theories emerged. A doctor proposed that the killer was "a homicidal maniac of the upper classes, evidenced by the perverted cunning with which the killer had performed the mutilations and escaped justice." This shifted suspicion from the working class residents of Whitechapel to the medical establishment and the upper classes. Doctors denied accusations, but came to see themselves as interested parties in the debate. They, in fact, became experts in the case. This, Walkowitz noted, was only one of the ironies of the case: the suspects became the experts, the avengers were indistinguishable from the killer. With the shift in suspicion, the police lost control of the discussion and the upper classes began to dominate.

Women's Studies Courses

The interdisciplinary curriculum in Women's Studies at the Graduate Center will include five courses for Spring, 1981. They are:

*Proseminar on the Sociology & Economics of Women and Work, taught by Cynthia Epstein and Charlotte Muller. (1.5 cr., Wed., 4:15-6:15)

*Women, Power and Public Policy, taught by Joyce Gelb. (3-4 cr., Thurs., 11:45-1:45, Room 1713)

*Psychology of Women, taught by Florence Denmark. (3 cr., Tues., 9:30-11:30, Room 1029)

*Social and Biological Bases of Gender Roles, taught by Mary Brown Parlee. (3 cr., Tuesday, 2-4 pm, Room 537)

*Sociological Approaches to Women and Work, taught by Gaye Tuchman. (3 Cr., Weds., 2-4 pm, Room 603)

Classes begin on February 2, 1981. For more information, contact the Registrar or Rolf Meyersohn, Committee on Interdisciplinary Study and Research, Room 901, 33 West 42nd Street, New York, 10036. A brochure on the interdisciplinary concentration in Women's Studies is available in the Center

Conferences

The Association for Women in Psychology will hold its eighth annual national conference on FEMINIST PSYCHOLOGY: THEORY, RESEARCH, PRACTICE AND CELEBRATION on March 5-8, 1981 in Boston, Massachusetts. For more information on the conference and for registration materials, write to Sharon Jenkins, Department of Psychology, Boston University, 64 Cummington Street, Boston, Massachusetts, 12215.

GENES AND GENDER IV, the fourth in a series of conferences, will focus on how health practices are derived from economically based exploitative policies and justified by hereditarian theories. The conference will take place on Saturday, January 31, 1981, beginning at 9 am, at Horace Mann Auditorium, Teachers College, 120th Street, New York City. For more information, or to register, contact Myra Fooden, c/o Ethel Tobach, Room 609, CUNY Graduate Center, 33 West 42nd Street, New York, New York 10036.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Members of the International Psychohistorical Association and registrants for the annual conference are invited to submit proposals for papers. Deadline for proposals is January 15, 1981. Papers will be read at the convention on June 12, 13 & 14. The maximum length of papers is to be 10 pages, doubled spaced. Among the suggested topics are: sexuality; men, film, contemporary social problems, and childhood and adolescence. For information, contact Bernard Flicker, PACE Program, Herbert H. Lehman College, CUNY, Bronx, N.Y., 10468.

The Society for Menstrual Cycle Research is seeking papers for an interdisciplinary conference on menarche which will be held June 12 & 13, 1981 at the College of New Rochelle, New Rochelle, N.Y. Directions for paper submissions and further information are available from Dr. Sharon Gelb, Conference Director, College of New Rochelle, New Rochelle, N.Y., 10801. The deadline is February 15, 1981.

Publications

An upcoming issue of the Newsletter, to be edited by Ethel Tobach, will be devoted entirely to book reviews. If you are interested in writing brief (500 word) reviews for the issue, or if you want to suggest books for review, contact Ethel Tobach, Room 609, The Graduate Center. In particular, Ethel Tobach is looking for reviews for the following four books at this time:

K. Bock, *Human Nature and History: A Response to Sociobiology*

E. Wallerstein, *Circumcision: An American Health Fallacy*.

E. Fisher, *Woman's Creation: Sexual Evolution and the Shaping of Society*

E. Tobach & B. Rosoff, *Genes and Gender III: Genetic Determinism and Children*.

RECENT AND RECOMMENDED

Women: A Bibliography of Bibliographies, Patricia K. Ballou (G.K. Hall, New York, 1980)

This comprehensive and annotated reference source, compiled by Pat Ballou, archivist at Barnard College, lists 557 bibliographies published between 1970-1979. A valuable acquisition for libraries, the book will also prove to be an important resource for women's studies teachers and feminist scholars who cover a range of disciplines in their work.

Equal Employment Opportunity for Women, Ronnie Steinberg Ratner (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1980)

A comprehensive anthology of original essays by leading scholars on the strategies for implementing equal employment in the United States, Canada and Western Europe.

Women and Psychotherapy: An Assessment of Research and Practice, edited by Annette Brodsky and Rachel Hare-Mustin (Guilford Press, New York, 1980)

Based on an American Psychological Association project funded by NIMH, this volume presents the approaches of researchers and practitioners to the subject of women and therapy.

Mother, Sister, Daughter, Lover, Jan Clausen (Crossing Press, 1980)

Many readers will be pleased to know that Jan Clausen, a poet, editor and former staff member of the Center, has produced her first volume of short stories. This is a collection of stories of contemporary women, both old and young, which acknowledges the complexity and contradictions of women's lives.

Women Have Always Worked: An Historical Overview, Alice Kessler Harris;

The Sex Role Cycle: Socialization from Infancy to Old Age, Nancy Romer;

Household and Kin: Families in Flux, Amy Swerdlow, Penate Bridenthal, Joan Kelly and Phyllis Vine (The Feminist Press, Old Westbury, N.Y., 1980)

Three new books in the Feminist Press "Women's Lives/Women's Work" series. Designed for classroom use, each book is accompanied by a teaching guide and annotated bibliography.

The Future of Difference, edited by Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardin (G.K. Hall, New York, 1980)

This welcome volume has emerged from the "Feminist and Scholar" conferences held at Barnard College annually since 1974, and reflects the concerns and questions of feminist scholars in the late 1970s. The collection includes classic essays by feminist writers such as Elizabeth Janeway, Nancy Chodorow, and Audre Lorde.

A Grand Domestic Revolution: Materialist Feminists and the American Home, Dolores Hayden (MIT Press, Cambridge, 1980)

An analysis in changes in buildings, the social position of women and American culture in the years 1870-1930.