

Marta Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood, and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1920*, edited by Paul-André Linteau, Alison Prentice, and William Westfall, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1987)

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF social history has evolved considerably during the past twenty years. While researchers have not rejected the underlying assumptions and research orientation promoted in the 1960s, recent work reveals far greater theoretical nuance and methodological complexity. The early tendency to pursue a discrete question by thorough examination of a single source has increasingly given way to analyses of integrated relationships revealed through disparate primary sources. One welcome result is studies which address the *problématique* of more than one field of social history. A fine example of this trend is Marta Danylewycz's *Taking the Veil* which is far more than a contribution to the history of women in Quebec. Rather, the book emphasizes the importance of viewing the historical process first and foremost in terms of context. In the case of nineteenth-century Quebec nuns, this means understanding the history of the family, the Catholic Church, education, work, and the ideologies of secular women. The author's tragic death prevented her from completing the revisions which she was undertaking on this study but thanks to the initiative and affection of Paul-André Linteau, Alison Prentice, and William Westfall, we now have a book which contributes significantly to the continuing evolution of socio-historical debate.

The study begins with an efficient synthesis of recent work on the Quebec version of the Catholic Church's devotional revolution of the second half of the nineteenth century. The author agrees with those who have contested the image of a timeless priest-ridden society by emphasizing the ebb and flow of Catholic Church influence since the seventeenth century. The dramatic increase in the Church's institutional presence after the

1830s is situated within an evolving international context which found particular resonance in the post-Rebellion St. Lawrence valley. The Catholic hierarchy was able to achieve a division of labour and power with secular leaders, and to also gain popular support by channeling nationalist sentiment into a conservative and religious articulation of *survivance*. This process opened the door to 81 new religious communities by World War I, two-thirds of which were female.

The institutional growth of the Catholic Church in Quebec provides the framework for understanding the initial decision and subsequent experience of those women who took the veil. Danylewycz argues that the sharp increases in female religious vocations reflected a changing material context marked by new patterns of work, marriage, and education which denied sexual equality, and left women with limited opportunity for personal fulfillment. Thus, proportionately more women than men contributed to the numerical growth of religious orders not because of a greater female spirituality but rather because of gender-specific material constraints. Particular attention is given to the sexual division of paid labour in Quebec society which only offered women low-paying and low-status jobs in teaching, manufacturing, and service fields. The attraction of convents for women is thus defined in material terms with nuns considered as career workers. Quebec's changing social setting encouraged women to seek an alternative to subordination and exploitation in a man's world including family life. The proportion of religious women in Quebec rose from 1.4 per cent of the total female population over 20 years of age in 1851 to 9.1 per cent in 1921.

Having interwoven the contextual strands of recent Quebec historiography, Danylewycz probes to the level of individual experience by reconstructing the lives of women in two Montreal communities, the teaching order of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame and the nursing order of the Sisters of Misericorde. The value of church ar-

chives has long been appreciated by social historians but the rich holdings of these religious communities allow research which goes far beyond familiar topics such as demography and clerical control. By gaining access to these archives, the author examines in detail the social background of the religious women with particular attention to their fathers' occupations. She shows that the orders reflected different social groups in Quebec with the Congregation of Notre Dame attracting middle-class women, and the Sisters of Misericorde drawing the daughters of farmers and workers. Within the religious communities, individual backgrounds were reflected in social and occupational hierarchies, although Danylewycz emphasizes that, at least in certain cases, social origins could be transcended. Unlike the secular world, religious orders did offer the possibility of administrative power to women from even working-class families. The chance for a female career with increasingly important occupational roles distinguished these orders from the patriarchal world of work outside the convent doors.

While significantly separate from secular society, religious women were not isolated from the general Quebec population. Rather, continued ties with family and kin reflected the extent to which joining a religious order was part of a family strategy as much as an individual decision. Moreover, it appears that religious women used family connections to recruit new members especially by emphasizing the importance of undertaking social work. The result was that religious women were exceedingly relevant to the secular society, a fact which raised complex questions about the role of women in the new social service activities of the turn of the century. Danylewycz explores the evolving relationship between nuns and lay women activists, and shows how both the Church and political hierarchy tried (but not always successfully) to discourage support by the religious women for social feminism.

This compact study reveals Marta Danylewycz's appreciation of a vast so-

cial historical literature as well as her ability to use rich archival sources to advance current historical debate. Perhaps most of all, the book reflects the reintegration of ideas and behaviour within the best recent research. By pointing to the complex relationships among demography, work, institutions, and ideology, Danylewycz's book implies a massive research agenda in which the history of women would be a central component of all social history. The tragedy is that this research agenda can now only be pursued by others. All historians owe a great debt to Linteau, Prentice, and Westfall for incorporating the author's last notes on the manuscript, and for bringing the book through the production process.

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Bruce S. Elliott, *Irish Migrants in the Canadas: A New Approach* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 1988).

STUDIES OF EARLY MIGRATION FROM the Old World to the New have generally confined their methodologies to the analysis of statistical data or the examination of descriptive material such as official reports, private correspondence, published memoirs, and immigration tracts. Valuable as all these sources are, they fail to provide a comprehensive picture of who the typical immigrant was, what motivated his or her move, and what degree of success was ultimately met with. Bruce Elliott's path-breaking volume takes a large step in redressing these limitations, for he has employed the methods of the genealogist to compile files on some 775 families who left North Tipperary principally for Upper Canada's Ottawa and London areas between 1818 and 1855. By capturing a surprising amount of personal detail on the Protestants who emigrated from this 30-by-40 mile district, Elliott has made a valuable contribution not only to migration history but to the social history of Ireland and Canada.