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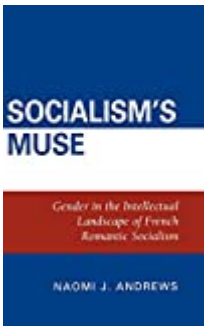

Naomi J. Andrews. *Socialism's Muse: Gender in the Intellectual Landscape of French Romantic Socialism.* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006. xxx + 179 pp. $66.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7391-0844-4.

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Boys Will Be Women: Gendered Solutions to Nineteenth-Century Socialist Problems

In 1831, the proto-socialist Saint-Simonians announced that they were putting their efforts to reform society on hold to "wait for the woman"–a female messiah who would dispense a new morality for the modern age. When she failed to appear, they scurried off to Egypt, hoping to find her there. Some years later, another socialist, Simon Ganneau, anointed himself the Mapah, an androgynous synthesis of maternal and paternal qualities who would soften the harder edges of contemporary social relations, ushering in an era of organic wholeness. Then, there was Louis-Jean Baptiste de Tourreil, a former sailor who concocted a utopia in which the sacred union between the first man and first woman–appropriately dubbed the Evadam–became the template for all social bonds. Such sexual mumbo jumbo provides easy grist for those who, from LÃ©on Daudet (*Le stupide XIXe siÃ¨cle* [1922]) to Philippe Muray (*Le dix-neuviÃ¨me siÃ¨cle Ã travers les Ã¢ges* [1984]) would speak of a "stupid nineteenth century"–an age far too enamored with ghosts, table turning, and the occult to produce serious thought. Yet, in her fascinating new book, Naomi J. Andrews turns the tables, as it were, on those who would judge these eccentricities too harshly. French romantic socialism's obsession with gender relations and androgyny were, she persuasively argues, integral to a social philosophy devised to counter the atomizing tendencies of the increasingly market-driven society of July Monarchy France (1830-48). In so doing, she makes valuable contributions to our understanding of early socialist thought and the political uses of gender in nineteenth-century France.

Andrews begins by situating the emergence of romantic socialism within the politically disenchanted climate that followed the overthrow of the Bourbon monarchy in 1830, which many contemporaries regarded as a "stolen revolution" (p. 12). In chapter 2, Andrews considers how disillusionment with high politics led young intellectuals, often steeped in the pervasive culture of romanticism, to flock to the socialist sects blossoming throughout Paris during the 1830s. Fusing a romantic sensibility with a concern for the working classes, the doctrines they dreamt up, Andrews argues, shared two traits: they were philosophically opposed to "individualism," and they believed that women provided the key to overcoming it. As her evidence, Andrews introduces

a motley crew of would-be socialist messiahs: Pierre Leroux, the dissident Saint-Simonian; Ganneau, the Mapah; Tourreil, the theorist of the Evadam; Alphonse-Louis Constant, a lapsed priest who touted the social significance of the Virgin Mary before founding modern occultism under the pseudonym Eliphas LÃ©vi; and Alphonse Esquiros, who documented the social condition of women under the July Monarchy. Each thinker, Andrews demonstrates, proposed an idiosyncratic variation on a common theme: that individualism could be overcome only through the ministrations of the feminine spirit.

Why were socialists so convinced that the solution to social fragmentation lay in women? In chapter 3, Andrews demonstrates that women–or, to be exact, an idealized notion of "the woman"–became central to socialist thought because they were believed to embody the virtues of relatedness and sympathy required to overcome the excessive individualism of July Monarchy society. This conception of woman, Andrews acknowledges, was hardly original; it drew on depictions of the self-sacrificing mother disseminated by Marian theology and popular religiosity. Rather, the novelty of socialist thought lies in the ways in which it mobilized these conventional representations to denounce a social order that it condemned as selfish and atomized. Some sought to rehabilitate Eve, seeing in her humanity's beneficent mother rather than Adam's evil temptress; others turned to Mary, arguing that as a woman born free of sin, she occupied a middle realm between men and God. Yet, as Andrews perceptively remarks, the messianic task that women were assigned was not quite the compliment that it appeared. For, if women could transcend individuality, then they were not really individuals; if they were nearly divine, their status as humans was uncertain.

Chapter 4 examines Leroux's and Constant's gendered articulations of community by highlighting the problematic implications of their warm embrace of the feminine. The basic tension in their thought, Andrews maintains, is that it could only erase one form of difference by reifying another; to overcome society's atomized condition, in which individuals appear to one another as irreducibly different, socialists praised women's innate predisposition toward love and sociability–thus giving sexual difference an ontological character. This insight informs Andrews's most original–and entertaining–chapter, dedicated to romantic socialism's strange fixation on androgyny. The idea of a being that is simultaneously male and female, Andrews argues, served as a potent metaphor for the transcendence of individualism. Moreover, Andrews demonstrates that, in socialist discourse, how one conceived of androgyny rigorously corresponded to how one understood the optimal relationship between the individual and society. Thus, for Leroux, androgyny meant little more than an ideal marriage, instantiating his desire for social relations and giving ample room to individuality without sanctioning egoism. Tourreil's desire to incarnate both sexes in a single being, however, dovetails with his longing to be released from the shackles of individuality altogether. The common denominator of these theories remains the assumption that surmounting individual difference is theoretically contingent on preserving sexual difference.

In the end, romantic socialism's reification of women trumped its ambivalent celebration of the feminine. When a new experiment in republican government began in 1848, two decades' worth of socialist tribute to women had little impact on the left's political priorities. Socialists, who extolled women's capacity for relatedness, had unwittingly raised the barriers to conceiving women as autonomous individuals deserving political rights. Moreover, by demanding enfranchisement, Andrews observes, women were "diving off the pedestal that had garnered them such moral suasion" (p. 132). Thus, the two alternatives that socialists offered women seem, from the standpoint of 1848, equally unpalatable: they could be praised as the embodiment of relatedness, providing they renounced their status as rights-bearing individuals; or they could fight for emancipation, but stand accused of endorsing modern egoism (that is, masculinity).

Andrews's study contributes significantly to our understanding of both the intellectual history of socialism and gender history. By zeroing in on socialists' obsession with androgyny, she reveals how what at first glance might appear to be marginal concerns are in fact central to their social ontology. She demonstrates that early French socialism's inner logic lies in its condemnation of atomized individualism, and that its discourse about gender must be plotted along these conceptual lines. By using gender to gain a handle on socialist thought, she rounds out our understanding of their philosophical outlook, building on and supplementing earlier studies that have examined these thinkers' views on such topics as art and religion.[1]

Moreover, *Socialism's Muse* makes an important intervention in a longstanding debate within feminist historiography concerning the relative efficacy of making political claims on the basis of women's difference from,

rather than their similarity to, men. Historians who have considered the role of women in Saint-Simonianism and its offshoots, notably Claire Moses (*Feminism, Socialism, and French Romanticism*, with Leslie Wahl Rabine [1993]), Susan Grogan (*French Socialism and Sexual Difference: Women and the New Society, 1803-44* (1992)] and Joan Scott (*Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (1996)], have maintained that asserting women's difference could serve an emancipatory political agenda. Considering male socialists' discourse on women, Andrews is considerably more skeptical. The same arguments that placed future social relations under the banner of the feminine, she contends, made it possible to deny women rights in the present–precisely because their allegedly underdeveloped sense of individuality made them unqualified to be full-fledged citizens.

In general, the term "individualism," which is so central to French political thought of this period, is conceptualized by Andrews less than one would like. For instance, while she is absolutely right to emphasize their critique of individualism, she does not venture to explain why many socialists–particularly those who were disturbed by the Saint-Simonian leader Prosper Enfantin's despotic inclinations–nonetheless believed in something like the integrity of the individual. Some of these thinkers sought less to condemn individualism outright than to demonstrate that true individualism could only be realized within a more cohesive framework. Andrews notes that Leroux defended the "individual" while bemoaning "individualism" (p. 83). Yet, such a distinction begs further explanation; if "individualism" was not synonymous with "the defense of the individual," then a more rigorous analysis both of the term "individualism" and of those discourses that critique it seems in order. Furthermore, Andrews's claim that "individualism" can be largely equated with "egoism" in contemporary political discourse is not entirely persuasive (pp. 30, 48, note 26). Some socialists endorsed "individualism" precisely as an *alternative* to "egoism." Thus, P. J. B. Buchez (a thinker not covered by Andrews) explicitly condemned "egoism," an attitude that privileges one's own self at the expense of others, while praising "individualism," understood as the legitimate regard for one's moral and physical needs–with which socialists should be rightly concerned.[2] A similar distinction is made, albeit in a different political register, by Alexis de Tocqueville in his two volume *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840). Andrews is clearly aware of this complexity, but does not attempt to tease out its significance for socialist thought.

Moreover, while she tends to associate individualism with capitalism, the term was just as likely to be invoked in this period to refer to the society created by the French Revolution, in which individuals were extracted from the intermediary bodies into which the monarchical society had embedded them. It was precisely to denounce the revolution's attack on the old regime's allegedly more integrated social order that conservatives like Joseph de Maistre first concocted the word "individualism." At least some of the ambivalence that socialists like Leroux expressed toward individualism reflected their mixed feelings toward the revolution–namely, that it had emancipated the individual while dissolving social relations. Given the concept's centrality to recent scholarship on French political thought, one would have to see a more systematic examination of what exactly "individualism" meant to the thinkers that Andrews otherwise illuminates so well.[3]

These points notwithstanding, Andrews effectively demonstrates just how central the philosophical question of the nature and limits of individualism was to early socialist discourse. Her deft analyses of gendered fantasies of social cohesion provide a useful roadmap through the often tortuous labyrinths of romantic socialist thought, inviting us to empathize with a time and a place in which evocations of a Mapah or an Evadam could be seen as provocative social commentary, rather than the incoherent ramblings of a few marginal eccentrics.

Notes

[1]. Neil McWilliam, *Dreams of Happiness: Social Art and the French Left, 1830-1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Frank Paul Bowman, *Le Christ des barricades 1789-1848* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1987).

[2]. P. J. B. Buchez, *TraitÃ© de politique et de science sociale* (Paris: Amyot, 1866), 1:234-237.

[3]. See Lucien Jaume, *L'Individu effacÃ© ou le paradoxe du libÃ©ralisme franÃ§ais* (Paris: Fayard, 1997). The theme is also central to many of the works of Marcel Gauchet and Pierre Rosanvallon.

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