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Anne Verjus and Denise Davidson, *Le roman conjugal: Chroniques de la vie familiale à l'époque de la Révolution et l'Empire*. Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2011. 342 pp. Figures, list of characters, family trees, notes, and bibliography. 26 € (pb). ISBN 978-2-87673-546-0.

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In the wake of the pioneering work by Philippe Ariès on family life, historians have investigated childhood, marriage, and sexuality across social classes under the Old Regime as well as during the nineteenth century, following the emergence of the ideal of separate spheres for men and women. In between these two eras, the Revolution and Empire have received less attention from historians of family life, except with regards to changes in political culture and law on such family-related issues as divorce, inheritance, immigration, and citizenship. The scholarship on these topics has overlooked the daily experience of marriage and family during this tumultuous era. Co-authored by a French and an American scholar, this new book, based on a trove of 1,250 letters found in the private papers of two bourgeois families held at the municipal archives of Lyon, begins to rectify this neglect, by examining the ideals and experiences of two couples (and their entourages) regarding love, sex, children, marriage, property, division of labor, and death, from the 1790s to the 1810s.

To illuminate these themes, the book tells the story of the two couples from their marriage through middle age: one in Lyon, Antoine Morand de Jouffrey and Magdeleine Gouilloud, married in 1785 and parents to three children, Albine, James, and Eléonore, all born within ten years; the other in Paris (but with roots in Lyon and Rouen, respectively), Pierre Vitet and Amélie Arnaud-Tizon, married in 1801 and parents to two children, Ludovic and Amélie, born twenty years apart. Separated by generation as well as by locality, both couples shared a status as *héritiers bourgeois* whose patrimony was threatened during the radical phase of the Revolution.

Both Antoine and Pierre were the only sons of prominent fathers who were persecuted by the Terror. Antoine's father was the architect of a famous bridge over the Rhône in Lyon, who was guillotined during the winter of 1793-1794 for having sabotaged his own construction to prevent the Jacobins from taking the city. To avoid retribution for his own role in defending the city during the siege, the son Antoine went into hiding in Briançon. Pierre's father was an eminent doctor who served as the mayor of Lyon from December of 1790 to September of 1792 and then briefly as a deputy to the Convention, before fleeing with his son to Switzerland to escape the Terror and eventually settling in Paris. Their spouses, Magdeleine and Amélie, were both born to *négociants*. Like Pierre's, Amélie's father was implicated in the affairs of the municipality of Lyon during the Revolution. A moderate Rolandin, he was imprisoned for a time before re-settling his family in Rouen. Their stories have survived, thanks to a series of letters mainly between Antoine and Marguerite, who beginning in 1795 were often separated for political and business reasons, and Pierre and his mother-in-law, Cathérine Arnaud-Tizon, née Descheaux, who remained in Rouen after her daughter Amélie settled with her husband in Paris.

Through these letters, Verjus and Davidson first address the theme of love, both emotional and physical, in the revolutionary era. Characterizing the ideal of the era as "reciprocity," they emphasize the prevalence of *moeurs bourgeois* regarding marriage, including *tutoiement* and a common bed. However,

they insist that this era was not prudish about sexual matters. Citing the letters of Antoine, who enjoyed the pleasures of the flesh as well as the table, they show how bourgeois couples discussed—implicitly if not always explicitly—not just sexual desire, but *coitus interruptus*, masturbation, menstruation, and erectile dysfunction or *impuissance*, as it was then called. In contrast to the Vitets, who seem to have been affectionate but not passionate, Antoine felt an intense desire and tenderness for his companion, from whom he hated to be separated. To illustrate the eighteenth-century sense of love, Verjus and Davidson quote at length from Antoine himself, whose language retains its romantic power after more than two centuries, as in this passage from a missive from Paris to Lyon in 1796: “Adieu ma bonne et tendre amie, je n’ai pas besoin des secours de l’absence pour t’aimer plus que ma vie et j’espère que tu sens comme moi, que c’est cesser d’exister que d’exister séparément” (p. 47). Because the responses of Marguerite to such letters are missing, it is unclear to what extent such sentiments were in fact reciprocated. While Verjus and Davidson suggest that sexual equality reigned in bourgeois marriages before the nineteenth century, Antoine’s insistence elsewhere on his sexual rights, which he knows bring “worries” to his wife, indicate that women may not have been as intense in their physical desire as men, at least in writing.

Verjus and Davidson next examine the theme of child-rearing and, a little later in the book, the main concern of parents, a good marriage for their offspring. Emphasizing the danger of pregnancy and childbirth as well as the frequency of miscarriage, they describe the shifting opinions and practices regarding breast-feeding in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century as well as the custom of the *petit lit*, whereby the father would vacate the marital bed until the baby had been weaned, usually after its teeth had come in. They note the widespread preference for boys over girls, even among mothers, who feared disappointing their husbands and mothers-in-law if they did not provide an heir to the family name. Describing contemporary education practices, inspired by Rousseau, they assert that, while the father retained ultimate authority on these matters, the mother often played a large role in educating boys as well as girls, even pulling them out of a pension or *collège*, if they suffered illness or homesickness, to instruct them at home.

The mother, sometimes with the assistance of a son-in-law, in the absence of the father, also played a large role in the most important task facing parents, the arrangement of a suitable marriage for each child, which was viewed as an “investment” or “enterprise” (p. 213). In this arrangement, the main factors were not just the dowry, but the status and reputation of the prospective mate, a possible *particule* to add to the family name, the geographic distance between the families, and physical appearance. This last factor was not insignificant. The eldest daughter of the Morand family, Albine, rejected one suitor because he still wore a wig! In these arrangements, which were often conducted like a commercial transaction, the mother often took the lead in the preliminary solicitations and negotiations, as well as in guiding and comforting the child, especially a daughter. While the child was in principle given the right to choose among the available prospects, he or (especially) she was subject to considerable pressure from both parents. Nonetheless, according to the authors, most marriages were relatively happy. Among the entourages of the Morand and Vitet families, there were only two examples of unsuccessful partnerships: that of a nephew of Marguerite Morand, characterized with the feminine term *la maumariée*, in Avignon, who committed suicide over his marital troubles, and that of a cousin of Amélie Vitet, Adèle Arnaud-Tizon, who was forced into a *séparation des biens* from her husband, Gabriel Suchet, younger brother of the famous marshal and a spendthrift ne’er-do-well.

As their approach to child-rearing and marriage illustrates, these bourgeois families were concerned mainly with material well-being. This topic is the subject of three chapters (plus the chapter on marriage) in the middle section of the book: “Le corps et les choses,” “Le pouvoir partagé,” and “L’argent et la famille.” The first of these provides a vivid description of the texture of daily life in urban France in this era by detailing the main concerns of the letters between family members: health, leisure, travel (especially its difficulties and inconveniences), mail, favors and gifts, and servants. This chapter also highlights the lack of remorse among the bourgeoisie about the hiring of a replacement to avoid

conscription, in this era of war. As Pierre remarked with reference to his son Ludovic, who had drawn a high number in the lottery, “[I]l fait toujours partir son homme. De cette manière il sera tout à fait tranquille,” making the rounds of dances in Paris, according to the next sentence of the letter (p. 124). Another facet of this materialism is analyzed in the chapter “L’argent et la famille”: the way in which the management of the family patrimony by the oldest male often favored his interests at the expense of those of his widowed mother or married sister. While such action by the eldest son often caused tension, the mother (if not the sister) was usually willing to sacrifice some property out of love for her family.

Within the nuclear unit, however, the family economy was not always so unequal. In one of the most interesting and important chapters of the book, “Le pouvoir partagé,” Verjus and Davidson assert, largely through the case of Antoine and Magdeleine Morand, that despite Thermidorian and Napoleonic legislation re-instituting a “king” in the family, “. . . au-delà de cette conviction politique les couples de cette classe de la société ne pouvaient faire autrement que coopérer au gouvernement de l’économie familiale” (pp. 135-136). In the context of the turmoil of the Revolution, women such as Magdeleine had the opportunity—when their husbands were away in hiding, at war, or on business—to play a role in the management of the family patrimony. In Antoine’s absence, designated his *fondée du pouvoir*, Magdeleine proved herself to be very gifted—maybe even more gifted than her husband, who acknowledged his own laziness—in business and politics. For instance, she worked to appeal the sequestration of the family property and to obtain first a doubling of the toll and then an exemption from the tax on the bridge in which her family held shares, in part by hosting *dîners de veuve* at which she lobbied local political leaders, all while managing the country estate, educating her two oldest children, and nursing a baby (p. 145). Her power in the family economy was recognized by Antoine, most notably in a letter in which he crossed out “*mes affaires*” and inserted instead “*nos affaires*” (p. 157).

Based on this case, as well as the example of Catherine Arnaud-Tizon, who managed many of her own affairs, Verjus and Davidson suggest here that power within a couple was reciprocal and interchangeable in the revolutionary era, at least when the man and woman were separated. They acknowledge that the Vitets, who remained in the same household, shared power only in their social affairs, not their business ones. However, even this qualified assertion is undercut by the last two chapters, where the authors examine, first, a real conflict between Antoine and Magdeleine following the death of their eldest daughter Albine and, then, three representations of disillusionment with this ideal of reciprocity in contemporary novels: *Le mari sentimental* and two responses to it, *Lettres de Mistress Henley* and *Justification de M. Henley*. Contrasting the ideal of marital harmony with the reality of egoism or even autism on the part of one or both of the spouses, these cases, both real and fictional, show that most late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century couples were a long way from enjoying true equality. As Verjus and Davidson conclude the chapter on the separation and reconciliation of the Morands in the wake of tragedy, “La dame de Machi [their estate] n’a rien perdu de sa perspicacité. Ses sens ne sont pas affaiblis et la faiblesse qu’elle oppose à Antoine lui est, peut-être, juste un paravent contre un absolutisme dont elle a cessé de subir le charme” (p. 277). This “absolutism” on the part of her husband may have been subdued by force of necessity during the events of the 1790s, but, like the Bourbon monarchy, it was restored by the 1810s.

As this example suggests, Verjus and Davidson raise but do not directly address questions of representativeness. Supplementing the letters of the Morand and Vitet families with a handful of published correspondence collections and contemporary novels, the authors claim to provide “une vision d’ensemble de la conjugalité à l’époque de la Révolution” (p. 280). Yet, from these select cases, we do not get a total history of marriage in the revolutionary era among even the bourgeoisie, let alone the lower classes. To understand whether the differences between the Morands and the Vitets were caused by generation, locality, class origin, personality, and/or something else entirely, more comparative sources on both the ideal and the experience of family life will need to be analyzed. But this study provides a welcome starting point for such comparative work. What it lacks in breadth, it more than makes up for in depth. Due to the richness of the source base employed, this book provides a textured

description of family life during the transition from Revolution to Empire to Restoration, the likes of which we have not seen before. This *roman conjugal* is thus of major significance for the scholarship not just on marriage and family, but on the broader social and political history of post-revolutionary France.

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