

*H-France Review* Vol. 15 (November 2015), No. 158

Thomas Bouchet, *Les Fruits défendus: Socialismes et sensualité du XIXe siècle à nos jours*. Paris: Editions Stock, 2014. 352 pp. Notes and index. 20.99€. (pb). ISBN: 978-2234-0-710-63; 14.99€ (digital file).

Review by Naomi J. Andrews, Santa Clara University.

Thomas Bouchet's new book, *Les Fruits défendus: Socialismes et sensualité du XIXe siècle à nos jours*, is an engaging and informative exploration of the theme of sensuality, in particular of questions of sexuality, gastronomy, and pleasure throughout the nearly two-hundred-year history of socialism in France. Beginning with the pivotal works of Charles Fourier and his sometime rivals, the Saint Simonians, published in the first third of the nineteenth century, and continuing to the present day, Bouchet's work explores the importance of the problem of desire and passion for socialists of all stripes—from “utopian” or romantic socialists of the 1830s and 1840s, to the ascetic militants of the French Communist Party in the mid-twentieth century, to the socialists who have held state power off and on since 1981. This approach proves interesting and useful as a way of understanding socialist views on issues beyond sensuality: human nature, social order, and a host of others. Questions that are at the very heart of socialists' highly varied approach to modern life are illuminated here, most importantly the status of women. Perhaps most importantly, attitudes toward the senses turn out to inform the nature of socialist critiques of capitalism and bourgeois society. Throughout its history socialism has been tremendously diverse, a fact driven home by the focus of this volume: sensuality, as Bouchet shows us, is at once a thread that binds many generations of socialists together, a consistent source of division within the movement, and a target for its critics.

This book is structured chronologically, considering important periods of modern French history as coherent moments in the development of socialism, beginning with Fourier's foundational work and ending with a chapter on socialism between 1981 and 2013 that considers the effect of mainstream political power on the agenda of the Socialist Party from François Mitterrand to François Hollande. Within each chapter, Bouchet outlines both dominant and minority voices in the debate on morality within and among socialist groups. His method is to carefully examine certain key actors and texts, bringing into the center of his discussion writers and activists not often seen as central, but nonetheless important to the unfolding of the larger discussion of sensuality. Thus figures such as Claire Demar, Daniel Guérin, and François Jollivet-Castelot appear at important junctures to pivotally influence the discussion, despite their relatively peripheral role in mainstream socialist historiography. This approach is particularly effective in giving the reader a sense of the tone and language of the writers considered. This approach does, however, privilege rhetoric over action, with a few notable exceptions including accounts of several intentional communities and details of the “Affaire Lip” at the clock factory in Besançon in the mid-1970s, when workers occupied and managed the factory to avert its closure.

Even in brief discussions, Bouchet is a sensitive reader of primary source material, and he uses it to excellent effect here. Among the more unusual pleasures to be found in his forays into historical texts are wonderful descriptions of meals, ranging from the prison meals of figures such as Prosper Enfantin to the *fêtes socialistes* of the twentieth century, to the cantine menu at the Lip factory. Although sensuality invokes for most readers sexuality before all else, as Bouchet notes, taste and touch go

together as the most visceral of the senses. Throughout the volume, Bouchet also pays appropriate attention to context, making clear the importance of historical circumstances, such as warfare in the twentieth century, in shaping the debates among socialists and communists. He shows that the aftermath of the Great War and World War II, Bolshevism in the USSR, the economic downturn of the 1970s, and the AIDS crisis in the 1980s each strengthened the ascetic cast of socialism, further marginalizing the sensualist wing of the movement.

Bouchet begins with a chapter devoted to Charles Fourier's ideas on human drives and appetites and the place of the passions in his vision of a better, more harmonious social order. As Bouchet notes, "le socialisme de Fourier est gastronomique" in the broadest interpretation of the term (p. 23). Equally, however, and scandalously for his day, Fourier honored the centrality of sexuality and of attractions that individuals feel--both for other people and for their various vocations--to human happiness. Fourier is widely known for his radical view that the condition of women in a society is, in effect, a barometer of the health of that society. What was effectively suppressed in his day and beyond, however, is the importance he attributed to both male and female sexual desire and satisfaction. In his 1804 work, *Théorie des quatre mouvements*, Fourier argued for sexual freedom and against compulsory monogamy, suggesting that each woman could have as many as three sexual partners to serve her varied needs--a spouse, a father for her children, a lover, for example. These and other radical aspects of Fourier's philosophy were censored by his followers in the 1830s and beyond for their perceived shock value. The publication in 1967 of his *Nouveau Monde amoureux* was one of the pivotal events in the debate on sexuality and social order in the late 1960s in France, but the subversive nature of Fourier's theory of passionate attraction was well understood for decades before that. As Bouchet effectively demonstrates, Fourier founded a strain of sensual socialist thought that shaped the internal debate on the subject.

Fourier's role in the development of socialism is appropriately highlighted in this volume--both in the introductory chapters and throughout the book itself--not only because of his affirmative influence, but also because of the lightening rod his ideas proved to be both for the debate among "sensualist" and "ascetics" socialists, and for the castigation of socialism's critics. Beginning with Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and continuing through the nineteenth and into the late twentieth century, socialists in France have been divided between poles defined by Proudhon's abhorrence of all things sensual--and his closely related hostility to women's equality and emancipation--and by Fourier's, and Saint Simonian leader Prosper Enfantin's, endorsement of the importance of sensual pleasure to the full realization of human happiness, pleasure that included, for some, sexual love beyond the bounds of conventional morality. As Bouchet deftly demonstrates throughout his narrative, this duality persists, fed by critics of socialism across the political spectrum, including figures such as Louis Reybaud and Gustave Flaubert whose fictional accounts of romantic socialists helped to solidify their blanket association--inaccurate to be sure--with the sensuality of Fourier. In fact, for most of this history, it was the ascetics who ruled the day: the militant ascetics of socialism, from Proudhon, to Jules Guesde, to Maurice Thorez, dismissed the pleasures of the body as bourgeois indulgences, liable to sap the strength of the workers in their fight for justice. As Bouchet characterizes this view, "[d]ésirer peu, c'est se placer à l'abri des tentations et des risques de dépendance" (p. 152). During and after the Vichy period and the Occupation, the PCF remained both radical in its asceticism and deeply conventional in its views on women's status within the family, reinforcing patriarchal social norms and denouncing sensual pleasures of all forms. During these years, as Bouchet notes, "l'émancipation, au sens large, est suspect" (p. 200).

As already suggested, the central division traced in this book has important implications for the status of women, as the ascetics tended to discount the woman question and endorse a traditional morality underpinned by patriarchal family relations. Bouchet's careful explication of a wide range of "minoritaire" voices in socialism, from the 1830s to the 1980s, shows us, however, how central an alternative vision of women's emancipation--sexual and otherwise--was to an important sector of socialism, beginning with Fourier but continuing through the twentieth century with figures such as the anarchist socialists Sophia Zaïkowska and Madeleine Vernet. Throughout the 1960s and 70s, in

tandem with the growing gay liberation movement, a subset of socialists took the sensualist view in support of women's liberation, arguing for the importance of "épanouissement" to the human spirit, both female and male. The events of May 1968 were, in Bouchet's account, the expression of this by then longstanding socialist theme, as the old-guard parties of the left struggled to reconcile the demands of the burgeoning youth movement, and their desire for fulfillment and freedom on all fronts, with more traditional views of class and gender relations.

As full of the promise of radical emancipation as the sensualist socialism of the 1960s and 1970s was, however, it was always voiced by a minority within the movement, as Bouchet regularly reminds us. The long-term history of socialism, however, was far from the inheritor of Fourier's theory of the passions. Rather, as Bouchet's rather depressing conclusion lays bare, the ascent to state power of Mitterrand's socialism in effect stripped socialism of its radical potential, bringing to the fore a brand of socialism devoted to the material and sensual pleasures but expressed largely within the confines of bourgeois convention. Ultimately the deconstruction of conventional morality that Fourier and his fellow travelers envisioned has been achieved not by socialism, Bouchet argues, but by the rise of the hedonist--and ultimately normalizing--consumerism of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Bouchet's thought-provoking book raises key questions that reach far beyond the history of French socialism, prodding us to consider the role of pleasure and sacrifice in the building of a collaborative and just social order.

Naomi J. Andrews  
Santa Clara University  
[nandrews@scu.edu](mailto:nandrews@scu.edu)

Copyright © 2015 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/ republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172