

Kennedy, Elizabeth Lapovsky, and Madeline D. Davis. *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*. New York and London: Routledge, 1993. Pp. xvii, 434. 16 black and white plates, bibliography, index. \$37.50 (Cloth)

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ing argued against a pre-lapsarian state of reform grace, Crocker must allow that, in most of her seven cases, there was at least a shift from one kind of conservatism to another, or from mild variety to a severe one. These are not the dramatic changes in social relations that figure in the Hull-House-centred historiography. But perhaps in Crocker's smaller cities, subtler shifts were important ones. Where even a thin version of respect for immigrants or an old-fashioned variant of women's power was remarkable before the 1920s, so too would have been the repression in the 1920s of these small innovations.

With respect to the client-social worker relationship, the main change Stadum observes in the lives of "hard working charity cases" is that the 1920s cohort was less likely to get "practical services" from their social workers. Stadum's interpretation of these data shows very clearly the influence of present-day social work precepts. Today's social worker may be taught (at least in a feminist social work course) that the best the professional can offer is unobtrusively to assist clients in their own self-help initiatives. Compared with that approach, neither the sending of pre-determined grocery orders nor the scientific investigation of a poor woman's life is politically acceptable. As Stadum points out, in both of these older modes of social work practice, the hierarchy was the same. But this political judgement, with which I agree, unfortunately relieves Stadum from discussing the historical meaning of the change.

For historians of Canadian cities, both of these histories confirm that research in "marginal" areas is valuable. For example, Stadum's book echoes some of Suzanne Morton's more historically-situated findings about the lives of working-class Halifax women in the 1920s. And Crocker's depiction of the settlement

houses allows us to see that religious enterprises such as Winnipeg's All Peoples' Mission and Halifax's Jost Mission were representative of part of the North American settlement house movement. In other words, by analysing places other than the acknowledged centres of social change and people other than the well-known heroes, these American historians have demonstrated what all Canadians should know: that "central" is not typical.

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Kennedy, Elizabeth Lapovsky, and Madeline D. Davis. *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*. New York and London: Routledge, 1993. Pp. xvii, 434. 16 black and white plates, bibliography, index. \$37.50(Cloth).

The development of contemporary gay and lesbian communities has been traced by historians of sexuality to the upper-class lesbian salons of Paris in the 1920s and to the military single-sex communities of the 1940s. Here we have a very important study documenting a competing predecessor, namely the working-class lesbian communities organized around downtown bars in the 1940s and 1950s. Kennedy and Davis' careful and massively detailed study of the women who socialized in Buffalo bars in the days before gay liberation argues that the young women who in the 1970s established lesbian-feminist communities eschewing the butch-fem roles of earlier lesbian cultures owe more to their foremothers than has hitherto been acknowledged.

The study is based on a relatively small number of lengthy and intensive oral his-

tories, usually gathered over a series of interviews. The authors clearly experienced difficulties in getting women to begin talking—many were suspicious of academic studies, some were afraid of exposure, others were simply not interested in recounting the details of a life that they now regard as a closed chapter. But once sitting down in front of a tape recorder, these women talked and talked, engaging in lengthy and sometimes self-critical analyses of the mores of the golden era of the "diesel dyke." The authors deserve credit for letting their sources do a great deal of the analysis, not just the storytelling.

During the period covered in this study (1940 to 1960), women who wanted to be part of the women-loving community had to choose between being butch, and hence adopting certain hypermasculine behaviours, or else being a fem and having to constantly defer to butches. This study shows that many of the women felt this to be unnecessarily restrictive: a good number changed roles depending on the situation, and some dressed butch but acted fem or viceversa. While playing around with the binary opposition, however, women did not seriously question it. The authors imply that it was only with the rise of a strong women's movement, in the late sixties, that it became possible for women to love other women without constructing themselves as either masculine or feminine. And yet, the butches were not simply imitating men: as the authors point out, they were very clearly distinct from those women who disguised their sex and passed as men. One of this book's most valuable contributions is revealing the complexities of the butch identity assumed by women who wanted to act like men and yet still be perceived as women, not men. Many butches, for instance, acknowledged that they wanted to be mothers, and some were. *And the butch* sexual style, which revolved around

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pleasing the fem rather than being pleased, certainly stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing norms of masculine sexuality.

One of the consequences of the leadership role played by butches in this time period is that most of the sources for this study are butches, even though several acknowledge that with the years they have relaxed their standards. Fems, many of whom subsequently turned to heterosexuality (though a good number of these came back, often after raising children, to the lesbian community), are not as well represented. Furthermore, most of the women interviewed are white, though great efforts are made to mine the small number of Black oral histories (particularly that of a wonderfully opinionated fem). It is shown that in the 1940s Black lesbians relied on house parties for their social needs, and only began to frequent bars in the 1950s. Some of these were mostly white gay bars; others were mostly Black bars whose clientele seems to have included pimps and minor criminals, and which were also frequented by lesbians and gay men of various races. The lack of information about the non-gay bars and the other relevant contexts within which lesbians moved (e.g. the gay male drag community) is symptomatic of the book's tendency to exaggerate the autonomy of the lesbian community, and to neglect exploring the other, overlapping urban subcultures. Perhaps the authors are overly influenced by old-fashioned anthropology, with its emphasis on supposedly isolated cultures, and not sufficiently influenced by postmodern trends emphasizing intercultural processes such as translation, borrowing, and pastiche.

This incredibly detailed and lovingly compiled work (over 400 pages of small print) will be cited for years by historians of women, of sexuality, of the gay/lesbian community, and of the 'demimonde' of

rough bars. Its complex analysis of the sexual dynamics of butch-fem couples is likely to become the standard source on the topic: but the authors provide an equally sensitive analysis around issues of class, and this perhaps one might not have expected. It turns out that one consequence of assuming a seven-day-a-week butch identity was that one could not work in ordinary women's jobs: butches in the 1950s, then, were confined to cab driving, bar tending, some types of factory work, or unemployment. Some of them even earned money by encouraging or tolerating their girlfriends' prostitution (a fact that will shock many readers, as it shocked this middle-class lesbian-feminist reviewer!). Be that as it may, it is clear that there was a huge gulf between those women who had relationships with and even socialized with lesbians, but who appeared ladylike enough to keep white-collar jobs, and those who absolutely refused to play not just the feminine game but also the near-compulsory American game of upward mobility. The butch identity was as much a class choice as a sexual choice.

This wonderful study, which although clearly a labour of community love does not hesitate to point out the limits and flaws of the culture studied, will undoubtedly contribute to making future studies in lesbian/gay history much more nuanced in terms of class. Whether it has a comparable influence on working-class and urban studies, however, remains to be seen, since scholars in these fields rarely read studies of sexuality. This book gives urban historians a perfect opportunity to begin exploring the rich literature on the history of sexuality.

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Morris, Jonathan. *The Political Economy of Shopkeeping in Milan, 1886-1922*. (Past and Present Publications). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Pp. xv, 31. Bibliography, index. US \$64.95 (cloth).

In the two decades since Arno Mayer called for the examination of the *petite bourgeoisie* as a social phenomenon "in its own right," there has been a steady accumulation of studies adding appreciably to our understanding of the lower middle class. A regular refrain in this literature has been an emphasis on the intense localism of this social layer. Shopkeepers in particular played a myriad of social and economic roles within communities of all sorts and clearly their identities reflected the specific circumstances in which they found themselves. A community study, such as Jonathan Morris's intriguing investigation of the small shopkeepers — the *esercenti* — of Milan, is an indispensable entry into this world.

In the late nineteenth century, industrial capitalism and consequent demographic growth transformed Milan. The existence of an organized *esercenti* movement and newspaper throughout this period provides an excellent opportunity to examine the highly diverse "business of shopkeeping" and its relationship to these changes. Most striking was the extent to which the very specific problems of doing business in Milan shaped this movement. Shopkeepers were obsessed, for instance, with the problems created by the fact that the inner and outer city were subject to different taxation regimes, skewing any "natural" economic development and potentially undermining the emergence of a common *esercenti* voice. Similarly, local conditions such as the lack of corporatist traditions and the relatively greater challenge from co-operatives than from department stores or retailing chains established the terrain upon which