

## Culture

**James B. TWITCHELL, *Forbidden Partners: The Incest Taboo in Modern Culture*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1987.  
311 pages, US \$24.95 (cloth)**



David Kettel

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B.C. Medical College and the Ministry of Health once again refused to act. The federal government did however, provide funds for a Health Clinic on the reserve staffed by another physician.

For those who are immersed in the study of Native health and health care in Canada, "An Error in Judgement" will be a gold mine of detailed information. For those less familiar with the topic, the book would benefit from more analysis interspersed with the narrative. Additional analytic chapters relating the events of Alert Bay to the wider medical anthropological and sociological literature would have strengthened the book. In Culhane Speck's defense however, the book is intended for a general readership. As well, the data is so detailed and carefully researched, that the scholarly-oriented readers could use the book for their own analytical or comparative purposes.

According to Culhane Speck, the original manuscript for the book used pseudonyms for most family and community members. After Renee Smith's family read the manuscript, they insisted that real names should be used. They apparently felt this was a "truthful" telling of her story, and did not wish to see the power of that story reduced through the use of pseudonyms.

I used this book as required reading for an undergraduate course offered through the Department of Native Studies on "Native Medicine and Health". Generally, this class is comprised of roughly fifty percent Native students (some pursuing health careers) and fifty percent non-Native health and social service professionals. The reaction to the book was overwhelmingly positive. The professional students were outraged that the events could occur, and were universally impressed by the need to understand wider historical and political factors in clinical work. The Native students were saddened; largely because the book forced them to confront memories of their own personal tragedies which had occurred in similar circumstances. As one student stated at the end of her book review; "So what else is new?" She intended this as a criticism of the book, that it merely described what most Native people from remote communities already know. But if the task of ethnography is to reflect our subjects experience in a way which they recognize, Data Culhane Speck has succeeded brilliantly.

"An Error in Judgement" is a book that should be required reading for everyone involved in Native health, including researchers, administrators, physi-

cians, nurses, C.H.R.'s and consumers. While some may be offended or angered by her analysis, and others saddened, no one will read this book casually. The book's bias is clearly and admittedly that of the native community; a bias that rarely appears in scholarly discussions of Native health problems.

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James B. TWITCHELL, *Forbidden Partners: The Incest Taboo in Modern Culture*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1987. 311 pages, US \$24.95 (cloth).

By David Kettel  
University of Toronto

James Twitchell, a scholar of English literature, has written a book on the incest taboo which is unusual compared with the rest of the literature on this subject. His book analyzes representations and uses of incest as a theme in intellectual and popular literature from the late eighteenth century to the present, and to a lesser extent in visual media and advertising. It deserves serious attention. But having said this, I must point out that all but the preface, first two chapters and the appendix fall outside of the theoretical concerns of anthropology, the current interest of some anthropologists in literacy criticism notwithstanding. This is why this review concentrates on these sections of the book. This should not be taken as a suggestion that anthropologists will not enjoy the rest of Twitchell's book; quite the contrary, since it is a witty, insightful, elegantly written work.

In the sections of the book germane to anthropology, Twitchell discusses the 'expert' literature,

both scientific and confessional-crusading, i.e., works written by victims of incest, or their concerned supporters, who have political demands in mind, interests which I find reasonable and legitimate, I hasten to add. In this he provides us with the best and most literate synopsis of this contentious field of textual production available.

Twitchell also discusses with wit and insight the incest theme as it appears in advertising and the popular media in recent years to illustrate the increasing concern with the topic and the ambiguity of feelings about it. The motivation behind much of this is to attract mass attention to entertainment productions an advertising in order to sell consumer products through titillation, shock, and/or appeals to vanity. Frequently, the subtext is that the approval of middle-aged males is necessary for success and that stimulating sexual interest is a highly effective way to get it for women. This is acceptable so long as it is indirect and not blatant. "The more things change, the more they remain the same."

What is fascinating is that the father-daughter relationship is often chosen as a vehicle to convey this subtextual message. In advertising, this subtext serves the purpose of the pursuit of profit by conveying the message that consumption or display of the product being advertised is the best means to achieve this stimulation. Competition with some other female or females is implied or implicitly recommended. When recommended it is implied that the young woman take advantage of her resemblance to her mother, when the latter was her age, by the use of the product. Advertisers are able to turn this to advantage the other way as well by conveying the message that older women can retain the advantage of youth by consuming their products, or if they do not they will lose out to their daughters!

Even more fascinating is that the exploitation of these Electra representations is the fact that this is occurring at a time when intense concern has arisen over the realization that incest in Europe and North America, particularly father-daughter incest, has a far higher frequency than we have wanted to think. Females are overwhelmingly the victims of this. This is made all the more distressing by the fact that it is denied or the claim is made that the victims actually provoked the act and really wanted it to happen but are afraid to face up to this fact. Underlying this latter claim, traditionally made in ordinary rape cases, is long-standing European cultural notion that male sexual passion is naturally animal-like and is

uncontrollable past some point of provocation, and hence the male is not responsible for the consequences. Perhaps the most pernicious manifestation of this male hegemonic notion is the Freudian claim that women's stories of paternal or surrogate paternal incest are fantasies reflecting underlying repressed desires to experience incest.

This raises the question, perhaps unanswerable, as to whether the increasing frequency reflected in the statistics on incest in Western societies represents reality or is merely an artifact of increasing reportage. Twitchell seems to feel that incest is actually increasing and that this is predictable (pages 38-39) because declining infant mortality and increasing life-span has increased the probability of fathers and daughters being co-available; the average age of menses has lowered, and youth has been glorified and invested with enormous sexual desirability. These factors are irrelevant to sibling/first cousin incest and some instances of avuncular incest where uncle/aunt - niece/nephew are coevals. Twitchell also implies that the force of incest taboos is greater in societies which are systematically dependent on marriage alliances. Perhaps, but the difficulty with this claim is that some societies systematically dependent on marriage alliances do not taboo parent-offspring mating. This does not imply that such matings occur in these societies, I might add.

Twitchell's data actually suggest that the increasing frequency of incest is an artifact of increasing reportage and that rates of incest, whatever they may actually be, are not now greater than they have been at any other time over the era of industrial capitalism, i.e., Twitchell's modern period. Among these data are the claims, already commented on, made by many of Freud's female patients that they were the victims of incest or experienced incestuous advances. These patients were upper middle class and even upper class Austrian women of the Victorian era. They were likely the tip of an iceberg. Did their lower class sisters fare any better? Equally telling is Twitchell's analysis of the incest theme in classical gothic literature. This literature was consumed by middle and upper class women primarily. Twitchell argues, correctly I think, that gothic novels rang true to these women because they had all too often experienced incest, incestuous advances, or knew women who had. The other side of this nineteenth century coin was pornography, consumed largely and secretly by middle and upper class males, and written anonymously. The taboo was rationalized as being an absurd, stultifying conven-

tion blocking the rightful experience of pleasure. The description of incestuous encounters is a major source of titillation in this literature.

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N.C. MATHIEU (Ed.), *L'arrondissement des femmes : Essais en anthropologie des sexes*, Paris, EHESS, Coll. "Les cahiers de l'homme", 1985, 251 p.

Par Chantal Collard  
Université de Montréal

"Femme"; leur raison sociale. Objets de raisonnements réducteurs et réduites dans leur raison, soumises à persuasion ou raisonnées de force, souvent jugées déraisonnables mais sommées de rendre raison, inspectées, contrôlées dans leur tête et dans leur ventre tel un navire, sa cargaison, son état sanitaire ou son trajet : ainsi s'exerce, par de multiples moyens d'en tirer raison, l'arrondissement des femmes." (p. 16).

Ce livre collectif édité par N.C. Mathieu, traite de la double face, matérielle et mentale, du contrôle et de la manipulation des femmes, dans une optique résolument féministe et matérialiste.

La faiblesse de la théorie marxiste en ce qui concerne une théorie de la sexualité et de la procréation a été soulignée depuis longtemps. Nous avons ici avec l'article impressionnant de P. Tabet (impressionnant à la fois par la documentation compilée et la rigueur théorique et méthodologique) un essai d'analyse marxiste de la procréation, et avec les articles de O. Journet et N. Echard, sur lesquels débute l'ouvrage, deux analyses de cas en provenance de l'Afrique de l'ouest.

Les Joola non islamisés de la région occidentale de la Basse-Casamance au Sénégal et les Hausa de l'Ader au Niger sont deux sociétés patrilineaires et patri-virilocales néanmoins très différentes eu égard aux rapports de sexe.

Chez les Joola, O. Journet a constaté une assez large indépendance économique des femmes, une relative égalité dans la répartition du travail et des produits, et aussi une assez forte mobilité matrimoniale. Les rapports qui s'établissent entre les sexes, que ce soit dans le domaine économique ou symbolique, relèvent plus de la compétition que de la domination ouverte. Le lieu de cette compétition hommes-femmes est tout entier situé dans le registre de la reproduction : c'est en effet en tant que mères, et non en tant que productrices, que les

femmes entendent concurrencer les hommes. L'article de O. Journet montre également la détérioration de la situation des filles, avec l'effondrement des structures traditionnelles joola; les filles sont envoyées comme petites bonnes dans les villes alors que leurs frères sont poussés par leur mère vers les études. L'auteure se demande si dans un tel contexte social changé, la victoire des mères ne signifierait pas la défaite des femmes...

N. Echard aborde un thème rarement étudié, celui des représentations de la sexualité chez les Hausa de l'Ader. Si on reconnaît dans cette société un nombre de termes équivalent pour les organes féminins et masculins et si on insiste sur la nécessité de l'orgasme simultané pour une conception réussie, le discours sur la sexualité est véhiculé par les hommes et le savoir est aux mains de spécialistes masculins : d'une part les métallurgistes qui enseignent les bonnes manières sexuelles par leurs propos et par leurs chants et ont un savoir théorique sur le processus de la gestation; d'autre part les adeptes du culte de possession institutionnel – en général les prêtres – et les guérisseurs non musulmans qui soignent les troubles de la sexualité. Si les liqueurs amoureuses des deux sexes font l'objet d'un traitement équivalent, le sang et le lait discriminent nettement la sexualité des femmes; comme le dit un proverbe : "même la viande est vendue avec le sang"; la femme est à prendre avec ses écoulements problématiques et incontrôlables...

En ethnologie, en démographie, comme dans la réflexion commune, les capacités reproductrices des femmes sont généralement pensées comme des données de la nature, une propriété naturelle des femmes, sur laquelle on reconnaît éventuellement que peut s'exercer un contrôle social limitatif : contraception, avortement, infanticide. Paola Tabet renverse complètement ces deux notions de fécondité naturelle et de contrôle limitatif. Elle passe en revue, selon une échelle croissante d'intervention sur le biologique, les mécanismes qui utilisent empiriquement les données biologiques, interviennent sur les données biologiques ou transforment les données biologiques même pour accroître la capacité génésique des femmes. Ces mécanismes ne sont regardés que du point de vue des rapports de sexe, de l'oppression des femmes ou de leur autonomie. Cet article montre que la procréation fait l'objet d'un traitement social dans toutes ses étapes et ce caractère social exige selon l'auteure qu'on s'interroge sur son statut en tant qu'activité et sur son classement parmi les activités humaines : est-ce du travail? Peut-on appliquer à la reproduction biologique les notions de travail aliéné, d'exploitation, d'appropriation-expropriation du produit?...