

Academic readers who might criticize the book for a lack of analysis or discussion of the criteria upon which Sager selected and presented evidence will have missed its point. This is not a work designed to sample representatively seafarers' memories, but to emphasize memories which have a transformative potential in shaping workers' consciousness. The design of this book will do much to attract a working-class readership as much as it will academics. Lavish use of illustrations and boldfaced type of quotes from the seafarers' own words set this book apart from the often monotonous presentations of more pedantic efforts. *Ships and Memories* may be brief in content, but it is not superficial in intent. The purpose of this book is not to give readers a dry study of workers in the shipping industry, but rather to set a new course by encouraging seafarers and other workers to value, and build on, the memories of their own experiences.

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Arlette Farge, *Fragile Lives. Violence, Power and Solidarity in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, translated by Carol Shelton (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1993).

Fragile Lives is an attempt to get at the life, aspirations, and mental world of the Parisian labouring classes in the eighteenth century. The book deals with two major questions. The first is the relation between public and private spheres; the second is the nature of power and resistance to authority. With its excursions into the role of women, of the family, and of the workshop, the book touches on many central issues of social history.

The approach is narrative. Arlette Farge has burrowed into the archives of the *Châtelet* and other Parisian law-courts, but she does not approach these quantitatively. From the outset, she makes clear her fascination with individual stories and her belief in the telling example. She is eager to let her sources speak for themselves, restoring the "voice" of the

forgotten. Her actual analysis of the cases is punctuated with reflections on the work of the historian. The historian must be sensitive to nuances and complexities even while trying to extract meanings and structures from past events.

The work revolves around the disputes brought before the police. The police, attempting to preserve the public peace, served both as guardians of order and as mediators of local conflicts. Yet by relying on rumours and by investigating them, the police actually relayed information and thus instigated resistance. Abstract goals, such as social control, were challenged daily. Life in the Old Regime capital, Farge thus concludes, involved a delicate balance. Everyone, the authorities included, had to reconcile hopes and expectations with real life. This gap intrigues Farge, and her book is an attempt to illuminate it. The fragility of life, as she defines it, is not primarily economic. It lies instead in the complex negotiations demanded by society.

For, despite the title which underlines the precariousness of existence, Farge is more interested in the positive ways in which people managed their lives. She stresses networks and support mechanisms. Farge's premise about this period is that people led much of their lives in public, within the confines of a neighbourhood. People relied on others but they were also defined by others. Preserving one's reputation was therefore crucial. One had to be careful not to challenge local norms and expectations. At least not too brazenly, for scandals ruined reputations and entailed loss of clients. Public approval mattered greatly, then, but exemplary punishment also had an effect, as did the *lettres de cachet* where private individuals obtained the imprisonment without a trial of wayward wives and children.

Farge has important things to say; then; about the nature of interpersonal relations. Here, through stories told by the victims, we read about the shattered hopes of unwed mothers, the attachment (even if not always sentimental) to children. We may, as Farge warns us, never know the truth about individual situations, but we can at least reconstruct a series of expectations of proper behaviour.

The book is far less successful in the next section, dedicated to work. We feel that this is not where Farge's interests lie. The workplace complicated neighbourhood networks and public solidarities. For we have entered, especially by the later eighteenth century, a world fragmented by competition, a world where individual goals came into graver conflict with collective aspirations than was the case, let's say, with love. A real chasm existed between masters and journeymen, despite their close contact. Journeymen wanted to be free to come and go and to work as they pleased. Masters needed them docile. They often reached a *modus vivendi* and even banded together against the police; nonetheless, masters and journeymen relied on different networks and different solidarities.

Farge's neighbourhood is not idealized and leaves room for conflicts. Nonetheless it is predicated on some degree of stability (for what else does reputation mean?), which the realities of the workshop belied. Yet, there were times when the neighbourhood did act as a unit, when it came together as a crowd. Here, once again, Farge's sensitivity to complexities serves her well. If the public intervened in the public sphere, here we see the private spilling onto the public arena. Crowds came together regularly: it was a basic fact of life. People constantly mingled in the street. More importantly, they attended public events, as spectators to monarchic displays of power. They were present at executions and at celebrations, and they attended these in their daily garb. These were not special events one dressed up for: they were part of daily existence.

This is why, although Farge has separated her discussion of the crowd into three segments (one where the crowd is invited, the second where it simply interacts, and a third where it turns violent), in fact she does not see them as distinct phenomena. Violence erupted when the "moral economy of the crowd" was challenged, and the people felt they had to secure their livelihood and see justice done. In other words, their response was tied to everyday concerns and to the private sphere. Farge's framework in this section is thus derivative, but we are less interested in her re-writing of Foucault or E.P. Thompson, than in

the light she can shed on individual responses, and the fine gradations that she can introduce by her close reading of her documents.

This is Farge's major contribution. She can tell us what life was actually like, how a society navigated between norms and their fulfillments. As such, she deserves a wide readership, but this awkward translation may stand in her way. Farge's language is complicated but carefully chosen to suggest nuances. In English, this leads to inelegant and cumbersome constructions. Too often, the translation is plainly wrong. Thus "le pouvoir pense la foule, tout autant que la foule pense ce qu'il lui est donné à voir" is rendered "The crowd had it thinking done for it by the authorities, whilst believing what it was given to believe." (171) The crowd's autonomy, one of Farge's fundamental points, is thus denied.

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Christopher H. Johnson, *Maurice Sugar: Law, Labour, and the Left in Detroit 1912-1950* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1988).

Christopher H. Johnson has written an exhaustive biography of Maurice Sugar, a well-known Detroit labour attorney, leftist and the general counsel for the United Automobile Workers of America from 1939 to 1947. In this work, Johnson pays tribute to the life of an interesting idealist and activist; he also hopes to highlight larger issues in American history through his appraisal of Sugar, labour and the left in Detroit from the end of the Progressive era to the Cold War. Sugar, although never a member of the Communist Party, was sympathetic to its causes and closely involved with the Party's activities during "the decade of its greatest influence [the 1930s]." Johnson believes that an understanding of "fellow travellers" like Sugar may be more illustrative of the effect of the Communist Party upon American labour than critiques which merely wish to examine the "errors and 'wrong turns' [or] the vacillating pronouncements of Party leaders or even the