COURTSHIP, LOVE & INTIMACY

Upton Abbey: An Improvised Comedy of English Manors

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INTRODUCTION

Finding “the one” was just as popular in the post Edwardian period as it is today. However, marrying a man or woman out of pure love was nearly impossible. With strict family expectations, class issues, personal views, endless rules, a reputation or job to withhold, and the onset of the Great War - it was one obstacle after another.

ALL LOVE

COURTSHIP

- courting was very public
- a woman could not introduce herself nor speak to a man without a proper introduction
- a man could not court without receiving her family’s blessing
- a woman had to have a chaperone at all times
- no touching during courtship

ENGAGEMENT

- an honorable man never broke off an engagement
- a man asked the father for his daughter’s hand in marriage
- only hand holding and private walks during engagement
- couple was introduced to each other’s families after the engagement
- engagements lasted between six months and two years

MARRIAGE

- not sealed based upon love
- sealed based upon comfort
- provided women with a sense of freedom and identity they were not provided with otherwise
- a young woman’s knowledge of marriage was dependent upon her elders
- viewed as a necessity:
  - UPSTAIRS → a business
  - DOWNSTAIRS → an escape
- “If two people were of different social classes, the person from the higher social class could choose to ignore the other. Marriage outside of social class was discouraged.”
- provided protection from scandal and financial security
- soldiers married while on leave or before they left the front
● only 1/10 women would marry after the war
● a married woman was higher up in the social hierarchy (no matter her class or age)
● “accepting adultery as a part of married love”
● legality:
  ○ Marriage Act (1753) by Lord Hardwicke
    ■ “all marriage ceremonies must be conducted by a minister in a parish church or chapel of the Church of England to be legally binding”
    ■ no person under the age of 21 could marry without consent of parent/guardian
    ■ nonconformists and Catholics must be married in Anglican churches
  ○ changes by Parliament
    ■ 1836:
      ● “allowed nonconformists and Catholics to be married in their own place of worship”
      ● possible for non-religious civil marriages to be held in register offices
    ■ 1929:
      ● raised age limit sixteen years-old (remains today)

DIVORCE

● process was slow and complicated
● Matrimonial Causes Act (1857)
  ○ “gave men the right to divorce their wives on the grounds of adultery”
● rules:
  ○ men divorcing women: prove adultery
  ○ women divorcing men: prove bigamy, incest, or adultery for 2+ years
● social stigma attached
● statistics:
  ○ 1912 (pre Great War) → 587 couples divorced
  ○ 1919 (post Great War) → 1,654 couples divorced
● a divorced woman was:
○ shunned by society
○ not invited out
○ unlikely to never marry again

● “once divorced, the children became the man’s property and the mother could be prevented from seeing her children”

**INTIMACY**

● adultery was so common it did not raise an eyebrow
● a man in a single woman’s bedroom was not allowed
● relationships (even friendly ones) between a married man and single woman was prohibited
● an unmarried woman did not have sex
● being single and sexually active was the ultimate debauchery
● sex education did not exist
● illegitimacy was common and accidental
● several women entered sexual relationships in hope for marriage

**WAR**

● onset of war heightened the ardour of romance
● proposals were sealed even sooner
● leave often did not allow soldiers enough time to return to their loved ones
● casual relationships between men at the front and women on the front line were common
● British Army reported 416,891 hospital admissions for VD during the Great War

**HOMOSEXUALITY**

● sexuality could be known, but was kept quiet
● homosexual acts or a suspicion = imprisonment
● women that were left during war would choose to be lonely or become a lesbian
● “lesbianism wasn’t exactly forbidden, as long as it was discreet”

**LOVE AND THE UPSTAIRS CLASS**

● a woman was expected to marry a man of equal or senior rank to their father
● a woman could not hold a title or estate in her own right
• often settle for whomever one’s parents found suitable
• common for a woman to have a pool of suitors to choose from
• parents wished for their daughters to be settled immediately following their debut
• marrying multiple daughters off well was tricky
• women were eager to start making their own rules
• “The Season” → provided young women with the best opportunity to meet their future husbands
• a married women would often become a mistress to a rich man once they had their children
• women would often refuse divorce out of fear of losing social lives
• “Until her debut, she was all but invisible.”
• a woman would wait for a formal proposal before coming out
• “Once a wife had given birth to the heir and the spare for her husband, she was free to take a lover, perhaps falling in love for the first time.”
• men would marry later in life due to financial stability
• “a man must make sure to never lead a single woman on if he had no plans of marriage”

LOVE AND THE DOWNSTAIRS CLASS
• love between servants in the working class was strictly prohibited
• the butler and housekeeper protected their staff’s moral behavior
• if two servants were to marry, they were asked to:
  ○ both leave the estate and lose their jobs
  ○ both live elsewhere and keep their jobs
  ○ only the man could stay and keep his job
• impossible to meet a man outside of work:
  ○ 10:00pm curfew for women
  ○ time off was scarce
  ○ several men were lost during war
  ○ men that were left were either:
    ■ already married
    ■ offered to a woman in the upper class
• music and dancing were popular, as it was the only way to interact with another person intimately
• marriage was the only way out of being a servant
• marriage between servants was not as common as one would think
LOVE BETWEEN THE SOCIAL CLASSES

- strictly prohibited
  - upstairs man/woman $\rightarrow$ reputation lost
  - downstairs man/woman $\rightarrow$ job lost

LOVE AND THE ARTS

- Blending love and the arts will be a creative portion of our production.

LOVE SONGS

- Please view the Games and Pastimes Minifesto for examples.

LOVE POEMS

- Please view the Games and Pastimes Minifesto for examples.

LOVE LETTERS

- letters were the only way a couple could speak intimately without someone else overhearing
- To read sample love letters from World War I, please visit this website: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-one/10561261/First-World-War-love-letters-from-the-trenches.html.

LOVE IN UPTON

- The journey to courtship between an upstairs woman and multiple suitors:

- The forbidden love between classes:

- The accepted coupling of upstairs men/women and downstairs men/women:
REFERENCES


