

Abstracts

Leonore Davidoff, A Like Unlike – Sibling Incest in the English Nineteenth Century Middleclass

Leonore Davidoff's "A Like Unlike – Sibling Incest in the English Nineteenth Century Middleclass" offers an analysis of the intimate relationship between the brother and sister William (1770–1850) and Dorothy Wordsworth (1771–1855) within the context of language practices, social patterns, and debates as well as demographic and family structures among the English middle class of the time.

The text opens with a discussion of the concept of incest and its aim is to stress that incest is an inappropriate term for the sibling relationship of the nineteenth century. However, a special term is needed because of their unique nature consisting of passion and friendship. It is irrelevant if these brother-sister relationships included a physical aspect or not, because the core consisted of the emotional strength, which was of an intensity that may never be resembled in any other relationship – not even in marriage. In several ways the sibling relationships and marriages of the period resemble each other. The sibling relationship constructed the gender specific behavior of individuals and thus served as a preparation for married life, the key difference being the question of reproduction. Intimate relationships between siblings were related to the family structures prevalent among the middle class.

Patrizia Guarnieri, Incest as public scandal. Legislation and Moral Standards in Italy Since 1861

Since 1861 Italian legislation has provided for punishment in cases of incest only if such cases caused scandal. Tying together different existing pre-unification pieces of legislation, the law assumes that, in the case of incest between relatives, in-laws or step-relations, legal action may be taken only if the offence provokes public scandal. In the eyes of the legislators, the participants in incest set a negative example and disturb moral standards, thereby putting at risk the institution of the family. Both parties, therefore, are to be called to account without differentiation between offender and victim. Investigations should be avoided in order to keep the case as secret as possible. Excluded from this law are only acts of physical violence which come under a different law. The law in force until the present day ignores the fact that different types of relation might be called incestuous: the relationship might be based on mutual agreement or may be an act of sexual abuse if an adult compels a minor to take part in an incestuous relationship. In both cases the fundamental criterion for punishment – that of causing public scandal – seems inadequate. From the moment the existing law came into effect, there have been discussions, disagreements and varying interpretations in defining what should be considered incest and in questioning the importance attributed to the scandal. Social tolerance or intolerance of incest has varied over time, depending on the nature of the relationship and on the social background of the incestuous parties. Placing examples from the end of the 19th century side by side with more recent examples, Guarnieri analyses the variety of interpretations, pointing out that, as evidenced by the paradoxical notion of giving equal responsibility to both of the incestuous parties, the primary intention of the law was to conserve the crisis-ridden institution of the family and to protect the head of the family by minimising his contingent guilt.

Christopher H. Johnson, The Sibling Archipelago: Brother-Sister Love and Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century France

This paper, utilizing voluminous intimate correspondence dating from the 1810s among brothers and sisters in the Galles and Jollivet families of Vannes (Morbihan, France), provides evidence from the world of ordinary bourgeois of the depth of brother-sister-love and its relationship to the relatively new phenomenon of close (cousin) marriage and its consequence, a consanguineous kinship system. It focuses on the period of courtship between cousins german, Adèle Jollivet and Eugène Galles, and the place, both as go-betweens and jealous rivals, of Eugène's sister, Aimée and Cécile. Ultimately,

the marriage was blessed by all because the couple had known each other "as brother and sister".since childhood, a situation deemed even stronger than a "love match". Thus we have a rare (non-fictional) glimpse into the interior world of love (and longing) that underpins the increasingly evident pattern of bourgeois class consolidation (economically, politically, and culturally) through consanguineous kinship that marks the nineteenth century.

David Warren Sabeau, Baroque and Romantic Incest

After discussing the concept of incest Sabeau presents an analysis of the very different seventeenth and eighteenth century discourses on incest. Based on the changes of discourse on incest and intimacy among siblings, he argues that the transition from the Baroque to the Romantic period included a transformation of the understanding of family structures: from a vertical (focused on lineage, decent and succession rights) towards a horizontal emphasis (focused on moral sentiment and strong emotional relations between siblings and/or cousins). This change resulted in an equal change of human's relationship to succession, inheritance and property rights and practices within the family. The main concern during the Baroque was the question of remarriage among in-laws. Following the needs to ensure that succession rights remained unchallenged and property stabilized during the Baroque marriage between cousins and second cousins remained prohibited throughout Europe. Around 1740 a significant increase in marriages between cousins can be observed and, simultaneously, a new intra-familial discourse developed. Siblings and cousins became the social framework within which both the language and the behaviour of affection was developed. The goal for marriage alliances now became compatibility based on sameness.