

work quickly and cheaply; they were the public face of the telegraph companies. In the aftermath of the Civil War, they were fitted out in uniform — at the boys' expense whenever possible — as a means of advertising, providing the image of discipline and order, and acting as a kind of pass into private social spaces. A uniformed messenger boy could enter an office building without being challenged. But they were boys, and discipline was a constant challenge, particularly since much of their time was spent beyond the gaze of their employers. In the era of child-saving and debates about child labour, they also naturally caught the attention of social reformers. Segregating children from vice, of course, would have undermined the ability of the boys to do their job — circulating through the city unimpeded. Fearful of bad publicity, Western Union eliminated the youngest messengers, but in the twentieth century the problem of youth was redefined. Issues of moral danger retreated while concerns over educational opportunities, or lack of them, for the messenger boys took centre stage. Employers' old argument that messenger work acted as an apprenticeship for work as telegraph operators or — the boys having gained entry to business places — for other kinds of office work was readily challenged. This was, indeed, a dead-end job. On the defensive, Western Union responded with "continuation schools" that combined paid labour with education of a sort. The movement peaked in the 1920s and provides a fascinating insight into corporate responses to both social reform and the demands of their own workers, and into the boys' attempts to balance the demands and opportunities of work and schooling. On the heels of this movement came a peak in union activity by the messengers, itself an interesting story given their position on the boundary of the "adult" labour movement.

As all of these themes suggest, this rich book touches on a considerable range of topics. It is not a particularly disciplined work, and it spills messily out of Downey's efforts to constrain it with a discussion of the social construction of technology, time, and space. The insights are timely, as the "information economy" continues to require physical messengers. Curiously enough, Downey notes that it is still possible to send a "telegram" over the Internet.

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Elizabeth Faue — *Writing the Wrongs: Eva Valesh and the Rise of Labour Journalism*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002. Pp. xi, 249.

This is a well-crafted biography of Eva McDonald Valesh, an important labour journalist in the United States during the Populist and Progressive eras. Writing under the pen name Eva Gay, Valesh inspired Minneapolis workers with her exposés of factory life; as Elizabeth Faue shows, many of her writings have the flavour of first-person ethnographic reports. Valesh moved on to work in the fevered, muck-raking world of New York journalism and then to the more sedate offices of the American Federation of Labor, where she was instrumental in the production of the *American Federationist*. In her later years, she became a club woman and associate of some of

the wealthiest women in America. Moving from the Knights of Labor through the *American Federationist* to the *American Club Woman*, Valesh's career was one of upward mobility, growing conservatism, accommodation to capital, and avid consumption. It would seem to provide a labour historian with excellent material for the umpteenth rendition of the parable of idealism betrayed, selfish greed rewarded, proletarian virtue bourgeoisified.

Faue playfully resists this temptation. "A narrative junkie, and a true lover of parables, I looked in vain for the moral to Valesh's story. Abandoning the idealism of her working-class youth for the pragmatic adjustments of middle age brought her neither ultimate victory nor tragic defeat" (p. 195). Valesh's life is presented instead as a series of moments, each one intricately explored to reveal its complexity. The worlds of Knights of Labor activism, AF of L craft unions, cut-throat sensationalist daily newspapers, and the new "industry" of social reform are all imaginatively described in terms of the obstacles and opportunities each provided our protagonist. The result is a fascinating re-description of the world of labour reform which integrates class and gender not just as categories of analysis, but as performative projects within one person's life. The creation of "a working-class public sphere" was, in Faue's imaginative reconstruction, combined with the development of the arts of publicity; the political work of labour reform meant "making the politics of class visible" (p. 2).

Hence the indispensability in this period — uncommon before the 1870s and after the 1920s — of the labour journalist, who strenuously combined the worlds of working-class struggle and the cause of his or her own middle-class advancement. Canadian readers will inescapably think often, and in new ways, about the "brainworkers" associated with the Knights of Labor and about their own exemplar of the liminal man of modernity, the labour-journalist-cum-politician Mackenzie King. People of this stripe were entrepreneurs of labour reform, specially positioned to investigate and speak authoritatively about the labour world around them. It compelled such people, as the price of their individual success, to abandon (or at the very least greatly complicate) pre-existing class identities. They became "liminal" go-betweens, untrusted mediators, translators forever on guard lest their accounts be shown to be fictional. They aroused suspicions because they were trans-class and even trans-gender, expanding and even subverting conventional understandings of the proper roles of men and women, reporters and activists. They possessed not one state ("labour") nor another ("capital"), but, like Lillith or Satan, transgressively slithered between the two (p. 179). Women who were labour reformers and journalistic authorities were necessarily both intensely partisan and compelled to appear non-partisan.

If these women could assume a partisan role in state and national races but retain a reputation for nonpartisanship — that is, for being aloof from sordid political dealings — they enhanced the chance of reform success. Given the radical nature of proposals for women's suffrage, prohibition, and labor reform, cooperation from allies across the political spectrum was required, which in and of itself served as a break on partisanship. At the same time, if women could remain outside the partisan fray, they might be able to ride out the tides of personal factionalism and ideological conflict that seemed repeat-

edly to inundate reform movements. (p. 92)

Notwithstanding its focus on one labour journalist, this book revisits many old labour-history debates and says something new about most of them. The Eight-Hours Movement, to pick just one example, is suggestively probed for its profound implications for the social history of the concept of citizenship. Conventionally seen as a movement aimed narrowly at workplace issues and reflective of a “modernist” acceptance of wage work, the movement can be effectively probed as a campaign to transform the public sphere by making the conditions for public employment and government work legitimate topics of political debate. It can also be seen as an attempt to address

one of the most charged class issues of the time — the declining ability of “the people”, whether the producing classes or simply workers, to engage in a meaningful politics, in contrast to the growing and visible power of moneyed interests in public life, workingmen’s political leverage seemed to disintegrate with each turn of the wheel. By restricting labor to eight hours a day, labor advocates hoped to increase working-class political capacity — by encouraging workers to use their increased leisure time for education, political debate, and civic involvement. Symbolically, controlling the hours of labor meant that a man could limit his own obligation — and perhaps dependency — on wage employment. Devoting the best of his energies to the political realm, a workingman could restore his manhood in political striving. (p. 49)

Alertness to the gender as well as the class dynamics inherent in working-class liberalism is one of the many virtues of this fine monograph.

As a young adult, Valesh was a member of a Minneapolis circle called The Athenaeum of Crude Philosophers, wherein she learned the ABCs of progressive thought. Later she went on to write *A Tale of the Twin Cities: Lights and Shadows of the Street Car Strike in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota* (1889) and various articles on working women. Faue presents deft summaries of these writings; she situates them in their popular cultural context; yet one might have wished for a more detailed analysis of the rhetorical and narrative strategies at work within such texts. Yet to ask this would be to contemplate tampering with the book’s succinctness, which allows one to recommend it not just to professional historians but to students and the general public. Not many academic writers would conclude a treatise on labour journalism by invoking *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* — but Faue pulls it off. There is much to learn here, not only about nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American labour journalism, but about the problematic art of writing biography under the sign of post-modernism.

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Danièle Bussy Genevois (dir.) — *Les Espagnoles dans l’histoire : une sociabilité démocratique (XIX^e-XX^e siècles)*, Saint-Denis, Presses Universitaires de Vin-