A Review of Taking the Trade

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Bibliography
The thesis of this article is not easily ascertained. On the surface, the article seems to convey the concept that through a culture of silence, the effort to maintain family prominence and the appearance of innocence and propriety, leads to the death of Sarah Grosvenor. The article does not forgive nor make excuses for the women’s part in the abortion and Sarah’s death, but like the court case from which the article draws much of its content, the men’s role is of greater concern. While the abortion and Sarah’s eventual death is the central topic, the primary focus seems to be on exposing the perception of responsibility in respect to the division of generational and gender roles of the era.

Cornelia Hughes Dayton uses the case study method in this article. This methodology involves painstaking, in-depth research and study of historical documentation and records gathering together individual and group accounts. This article draws heavily upon individual depositions and testimony derived from involved or affected parties—namely that of Sarah Grosvenor’s kin—or from the criminal cases brought against John Hallowell and Amasa Sessions. In addition, Dayton draws upon her previous works—published and unpublished—as well as other historians’ works to further demonstrate the societal precepts and climate of the era.

Piecing together the different accounts, the Dayton weaves a narrative tale of the death of Sarah Grosvenor, the events that led to her death, and the aftermath in the years that followed. The article is divided into subsections based on the different perspectives of the groups or individuals involved, and by level or type of involvement. The narrative recount Sarah’s pregnancy, the abortion attempts, the abortion methods used, the eventual successful abortion, and Sarah’s death. The community, the social norms, and societal expectations are described in detail. Given that Dr. Hallowell is the only person to be convicted, his background history—and how it fits into the story—comprise a significant portion of the article. As it fits the general
narrative, the male and female perspectives are highlighted and shown for their differences. From the legal aspect, the article depicts the lengthy court proceedings, the initial disinterest in prosecuting the different parties based on gender and/or prominence in the community which in turn leads to the only conviction being that of a male and community outsider. Finally, in the article summation, the author draws comparisons to social changes that occurred following the recounted era and draws ties to the modern social structures.

The abortion issue and gender relations are two subjects of great importance to modern and eighteenth century societies; this article attempts to combine the two into one thesis. However, taken separately the different subjects have many variances and many similarities between modern and eighteenth century societies. Similarly to today, as the article points out, abortions were legal up until a certain point in the pregnancy, however the current legal status is as a result—at least in part—to deaths caused by “back-alley” abortions performed in the past, but again this is similar to Sarah Grosvenor’s death and the reason for this article. Though the article made no specific endorsement of legalized abortion, simply having historical precedent is not necessarily a justification for legalization either. Gender relations as well have changed in some respects and have remained the same in others. Women still get negatively stigmatized and men are somewhat championed with regard sex outside of marriage, but women have far more rights and equalities today than there eighteenth century counterparts.