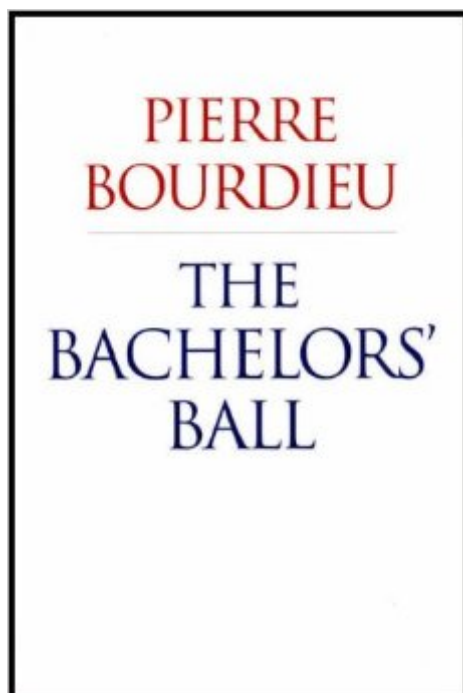


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The Bachelors' Ball: The Crisis Of Peasant Society In BÃ©arn



Synopsis

Over the past four decades, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu produced one of the most imaginative and subtle bodies of social theory of the postwar era. When he died in 2002, he was considered to be the most influential sociologist in the world and a thinker on a par with Foucault and Lévi-Strauss—a public intellectual as important to his generation as Sartre was to his. Bourdieu's final book, *The Bachelors' Ball*, sees him return to Béarn, the region where he grew up, to examine the gender dynamics of rural France. This personal connection adds poignancy to Bourdieu's ethnographic account of the way the influence of urban values has precipitated a crisis for male peasants. Tied to the land through inheritance, these bachelors find themselves with little to offer the women of Béarn who, like the young Bourdieu himself, abandon the country for the city in droves.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Bachelors' Ball is about the decline of the French peasantry due to the bachelorhood of its eldest sons. It's a re-publication of some of Pierre Bourdieu's earlier works that deal with: first, the increasing bachelorhood of most younger sons (that is, not the eldest) that Bourdieu investigated when he was a young anthropologist; and ending with the decline of the French peasant life due to the bachelorhood of its eldest sons and the migration of younger ones to urban life. The chapters span several decades of Bourdieu's life and you can see the evolution of his thinking (and the increasing opaqueness/denseness of his writing) - starting with an easy-to-read ethnographic account and analysis of French peasants' matrimonial practices, then the development of the

concepts of habitus and field to explain why the younger sons have allowed themselves to remain bachelors for life (to comply with the preservation of patrimony of the eldest sons), and finally, to his concept of symbolic violence by the dominant urbanites over the dominated "empeasanted peasants" (where the word "peasant" is used in a pejorative way) that have reduced the symbolic capital of eldest sons to the point that most of them have become unmarriageable and likely to remain bachelors for life, and which thus points to the loss of the old peasant way of life through the loss of heirs.

Although this is Bourdieu's last book, the material is mostly not new. It makes for an interesting read and is much more digestible than most of his other work. The issue of rural bachelorhood is a global problem not specific to France and so Bourdieu's theory is one worth learning and testing in other cultural contexts.

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