

H-France Review Vol. 7 (October 2007), No. 120

Rebecca Rogers, *From the Salon to the School Room: Educating Bourgeois Girls in Nineteenth-Century France*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005. xv + 335 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, bibliography and index. \$65.00 U.S. (cl.). ISBN 0-271-02680-4.

Review by Elinor Accampo, University of Southern California.

The primary concern of this book is to investigate how French bourgeois women formed their identities in the nineteenth century; its overarching argument is that female education after the French Revolution, despite its conservative ends, gave many girls and women the opportunity for emancipation in the form of self-awareness that undermined their sense of domesticity. Rogers situates this history of secondary schools for bourgeois girls (especially urban boarding schools) within the recent revisionist historiography arguing that private and public were not so rigidly separated along gendered lines from the French Revolution through the nineteenth century.^[1] The development of secondary schools from the end of the Revolution onward offered women—as teachers and as students—a means to influence modern urban society and, in bridging the gap between private and public, and gave women more agency than has generally been acknowledged.

Rogers' concern over the formation of identity largely focuses on the inherent tension in social and cultural prescriptions and practices that had a conservative intent, but at the same time gave girls and women access to knowledge and inadvertently encouraged independence. A key methodology in this study is thus to contrast pedagogical discourses about women's prescribed roles with actual practices. But this ambitious book is much more than a history of secondary schooling for girls: in seeking to establish the broader role that education played in society, it uses female education as a means to study and reinterpret the formation of bourgeois identity, particularly with regard to the increased emphasis on companionate marriage, the emergence of women professionals, gendered adolescent identity, and the actual physical spaces bourgeois women inhabited in urban landscapes.

Rogers' research is widely and deeply grounded in large array of archival sources, ranging from National, Departmental, and Colonial archives, to private collections, such as diaries, memoirs, and holdings of the societies that ran girls' schools. Her analysis is also informed by a long and useful bibliography of secondary sources in the history of education, the bourgeoisie, gender, women, feminism, and post-colonialism. The book is divided into three parts, mostly along chronological lines. Part one covers the years 1800 to 1830, when female education re-emerged in the wake of revolution and war; Part Two examines the enormous growth in girls' educational institutions between 1830 and 1870; Part Three analyzes the clerical/anti-clerical debates over girls' education in the Second Empire and early Third Republic, and concludes with a chapter on the exportation of girls' education to colonies and to the United States.

The first chapter documents how authors of pedagogy and other literature sought to negotiate a moral and practical path for women and girls in a world severely disrupted by the Revolution of 1789. Between 1790 and 1815, 1.3 million Frenchmen had died in battle, leaving many children orphaned and many women unmarried. Such disruption made it impossible for anyone to view the home as completely cut off from social responsibility and economic realities. Female pedagogical authors thus argued that women's functions as wives and mothers had to play an important role in social regeneration. The educational program of Jeanne Campan, for example, sought to train young women to be "civilizing agents in the consolidation of a new bourgeois order," and through charitable acts place them in a world

well outside the home (p. 32). Meanwhile, children's literature also imparted ambiguous messages. While it constructed a model of feminine identity based on self-sacrifice for family and community, in the face of hard realities it also encouraged girls to forge a "sense of self and a sense of place" in a fragmented and deceptive world "where families are not tidy or well-defined" (p. 42). It sought to instill a work ethic that would allow women to survive on their own economically. Bourgeois women, Rogers argues, did not simply retreat into the home, nor were they encouraged to; instead, they were expected to use their domesticity as a basis from which they would influence, if not act in, the outside world. This education thus not only afforded them the possibility of agency within a patriarchal framework, but the stage from which they could undermine it.

At the same time, however, reformers sought to temper the post-Revolution worldliness to which girls were exposed with religious values; the discourse about such concerns escalated as the number of girls' secondary schools rose dramatically between 1815 and 1830. But as Rogers shows in chapter two, the ambivalence in the earlier pedagogical discourse appeared in the curriculum of both lay and religious secondary schools. Rogers uses diaries and personal memoirs to investigate how girls responded to such instruction, and particularly to the roles that religious values and "ornamental" accomplishments played in their self-consciousness, and to the ways they imagined families. While she found that religious messages permeated school life, Rogers also discovered at least two factors that countervailed the domestication of women: the rigorously intellectual curriculum and the venue in which it was taught.

In recognition that girls needed to develop their reasoning capacity in order to be purveyors of bourgeois culture, they received training in solidly academic subjects as well as in religion. Moreover, the moralistic life lessons took place outside the home and the natural context of maternal role models that reproduced domesticity. Rogers also uses a less obvious source in her argument about how girls internalized their educations: prize ceremonies for academic accomplishments in which they competed for rankings according to their skills in writing, reading, grammar, geography, history, literature and politics. Such ceremonies encouraged girls to think of themselves in a public, competitive arena that prized a work ethic and intellectual accomplishment. She concludes this chapter by noting that the French bourgeoisie more often preferred to send their daughters to boarding schools, while the British preferred home or day schooling--and suggest that former provided more means for emancipation, while the latter more readily encouraged domesticity.

Chapter three examines debates about female education during the July Monarchy. But increased concern for maternal responsibilities at this time--possibly in response to the rapid socio-economic changes of the 1830s and 1840s--helped generate rigorous condemnation of women intellectuals. Thanks to Saint Simonianism and the feminist and women's press, discourse about girls' education became pervasive and gave rise to the concept of the mother as educator. The fourth chapter focuses on a subject previously ignored in secondary literature--the rapid expansion of schools in the context of urbanization, and the resulting growth in opportunities for female teachers and the public role they played. The prevailing discourse about domesticity and home education for girls produced an image of female teachers as culturally misplaced spinsters who took up their vocation as a "last resort." But Rogers uncovers evidence that defies such contemporary stereotypes: the expansion of schools in urban areas offered a path for lower middle-class women to independence; moreover, the majority of these women married either before or during their teaching careers.

Chapter five expands on the theme of female independence from domesticity by showing how religious teaching orders offered middle-class women a meaningful alternative to married life and motherhood. The role model of teaching nuns, moreover, communicated contradictory values to girls in boarding schools. How could nuns teach wifely and maternal duties, especially when they emphasized women's role as "ladies of charity" outside the home and instilled skills that made women "useful for society" (p. 157)?

Chapter six turns to an analysis of boarding schools themselves—their number, distribution, location, and ethos from 1850-1880. Rogers admits the difficulty of counting them, in part because of the way they were defined in the government records from which she draws her data. Her quantitative analysis, portrayed in maps, contains somewhat confusing evidence. An 1864 survey indicates that “Overall, religious boarding schools predominated, representing two-thirds of the total number of schools: 2,338 out of 3,480” (p. 164); but a few pages later, the author notes that between 1850 and 1880, a period of enormous growth, “Lay boarding schools tended to far outnumber those of religious orders, as in Paris, but they were also more ephemeral” (p. 169). The transient nature of lay boarding schools makes accurate counting difficult. Both kinds of schools, in any case, shared a similar ethos and academic culture: despite school advertisements that stressed religious morality and the goal of producing “tender and obedient girls” who would become “virtuous wives and good mothers” (p. 174), Rogers finds “frankly feminist visions of girls’ education” (p. 176) delivered in speeches at prize-giving ceremonies that stressed work, discipline, and intellectual achievement. Moreover, perhaps in response to the growing number of single women and expanding occupational opportunities for women, boarding schools began to state more explicitly their goal of training girls to earn a living.

Through an analysis of school-girl writings, Rogers further demonstrates that the practices of institutional life did not necessarily promote domestic ideology. The very act of keeping diaries, which in some cases girls were told to do for purposes of self-evaluation, was in itself an act that encouraged the development of an independent sense of self. But these teachings did not, Rogers argues, encourage feminism. A brief comparison with German and British schools, whose curricula grew in similar directions, concludes this chapter. While improved educational opportunities in Britain gave rise to a strong feminist movement, such was not the case in France. Rogers concludes that despite the conflicting messages of boarding school culture, the prevailing influence of Catholic teachings in both lay and religious boarding schools, as well as the religious communities that structured them, made it far more difficult for French women to forge individualist or feminist aspirations than did the British system.

Chapter seven examines the debates about girls’ education on the national and international level. The analysis focuses on the growing tension between the competing Republican and Catholic visions that came with the creation of *collèges* and *lycées* for girls after 1880, and with the establishment of the *École normale supérieure de Sèvres* to train secondary school teachers. Rogers skillfully demonstrates how complex these debates became in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War, the Paris Commune, and the Universal Exhibitions, events that fueled comparisons with other nations’ school systems. While feminists conservatively argued that female education would benefit family life, Catholic thinkers, such as Bishop Felix Dupanloup, encouraged the professionalization of female teachers and complained that religious instruction “too rarely gives young girls and young women a serious taste for work” (p. 219). In practice, growing numbers of women took the *baccalauréat*, which opened doors to higher education and the professions.

The book’s final chapter examines what happened when the “French model” of girls’ education was exported to colonized north and west Africa, and to predominantly Protestant North America and Great Britain. Both nuns and lay women went to Algeria and Senegal on a civilizing mission grounded in the same sense of French superiority as that of men. [2] Using missionary news bulletins and letters, Rogers shows that it was the fruits of their own educations—lessons in charity—that inspired women to travel to foreign lands; many explained their choice by reproducing a “discourse about self-sacrifice and even martyrdom that was common both in girls’ education and in religious orders more generally” (p. 230). They went to convert and civilize “savages.” The project unfolded very differently in Algeria with its large European settler population, than in Senegal, where white settlers constituted a small minority. It failed in both places. As Rogers shows, their actions contributed to establishing social, racial, and national boundaries that had long-term consequences and that constitute a fascinating and sometimes tragic history of cultural encounters.

Such encounters in the Anglo-American context were, of course completely different. Nuns and lay women had similar motivations in converting Protestants and in bringing French culture to the “less civilized” Americans. But in these countries, unlike the colonies, there was also a demand for “Frenchness” in the form of training in the French language and manners, in emphasis on ornamental accomplishments (which American Catholics deplored), and in the use of pedagogical methods such as memorization. Schools also incorporated the French system of awarding points, ceremonial prizes, and insisted on rules and regulations in the administration of everyday life. The French model of girls’ education produced “women of the world,” though it was shunned for boys as effeminate. Ironically, as Rogers points out, by focusing on exterior forms of poise and elegance rather than on inner worth, the exported version of French education left little room for female independence.

From the Salon to the Schoolroom concludes with the journal of eighteen-year old Catherine Pozzi who bitterly laments in 1900 that, officially of marriageable age, she “can’t bear the mere idea of marriage” and regrets that she has no opportunity to be “somebody” (p. 253). On the one hand, her example shows how little had changed in the realm of mores—education had prepared her for nothing but marriage—and how few opportunities other than marriage were available. On the other hand, the self-consciousness she expressed in penning these sentiments and the nature of her protest were the products of her bourgeois education. Pozzi inhabited a generation populated by a considerable number of women such as Marguerite Durand who engaged in “disruptive acts,” feminist or otherwise.[3] “Something had indeed changed...by 1900, and girls’ education and women teachers had contributed to this change,” (p. 254) as did feminism, Rogers concludes.

This meticulously researched and well-written book demonstrates convincingly that from the Revolution onward French bourgeois girls’ education promoted mixed messages in role models, curriculum, and cultural practices in a manner that bridged the private and public rather than separated the two spheres. Nonetheless, making concrete connections between this education and specific aspects of French bourgeois female identity—other than to conclude that it no doubt produced deep ambivalence, if not frustration in women such as Pozzi—is exceedingly difficult. Is it possible to detect its general effects? Did such education render women at once less domestic and less prone to feminist ideology? Might this education help explain France’s relatively low birth rates? Finally, could such an education even produce a definable bourgeois identity? (Rogers does not suggest that it does.)

From the Salon to the School Room inspires two further lines of inquiry. First, if Catholic education softened the divide between private and public life by encouraging women’s participation in the latter, it also, as Rogers points out, encouraged an ethic of self-sacrifice. To what degree did girls’ education play into French notions that women were meant to suffer, a cultural belief hauntingly emphasized in the recent work of Richard D. E. Burton?[4] Was this influence particularly French, or did Catholic education have similar influence on girls elsewhere? Second, did the Catholic boarding school educations to which many feminists were no doubt subjected shape French feminism more than did the political culture of repeated revolution, and more than the oft-touted crisis of depopulation, whose comparative statistics became an obsession among social reformers? That French feminists couched their own demands in non-individualistic terms, and in the language of motherhood made sense given the political culture of perpetual crisis.[5] These questions can be best addressed through systematic comparisons with models of education in other modernizing countries such as the United States, Great Britain, and Germany. Rebecca Rogers’s excellent book provides an inspiring and highly thought-provoking springboard for such an endeavor.

NOTES

[1] Rogers notes the works of Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), and Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001). See also Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

[2] Here Rogers draws on Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: the Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997).

[3] Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-siècle France* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2002). In 1899, at age 20, Nelly Roussel wrote a memoir expressing sentiments uncannily similar to Pozzi's when facing her first pregnancy. She shortly thereafter converted from devout Catholicism to radical feminism. Accampo, *Blessed Motherhood, Bitter Fruit: Nelly Roussel and the Politics of Female Pain in Third Republic France* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), pp. 29-32. It would be nice to know Pozzi's fate.

[4] Richard D. E. Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood: Women, Catholicism, and the Culture of Suffering in France, 1840-1970* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004).

[5] Karen Offen, "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France." *American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984):648-76.

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H-France Review Vol. 7 (October 2007), No. 120

ISSN 1553-9172