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Joyce Dixon-Fyle, *Female Writers' Struggle for Rights and Education for Women in France (1848-1871)*. New York, Peter Lang, 2006. Bibliography, notes, index, 168 pages. \$62.95. ISBN 0-8204-5531-8.

Review by Venita Datta, Wellesley College.

The topic of Joyce Dixon-Fyle's *Female Writers' Struggle for Rights and Education for Women in France (1848-1871)* is an important one. A study which examines the writings of all too often ignored women writers during this seminal period in French history is always a welcome addition to scholarship in the field, complementing the works of such American historians as Joan Scott, Karen Offen, Whitney Walton, and James Smith Allen as well as such French scholars as Michèle Riot-Sarcey.[1] While there have been a number of studies of women writers at the *fin de siècle*, fewer works have been devoted to women writers earlier in the century.[2] Dixon-Fyle sets out in her book to examine how women writers functioned within the context of the increased repression and conservatism of the Second Republic as well as during the Second Empire. She argues that the political climate, in combination with repressive laws forced women writers out of the public sphere, that is, journalism, into more individualized modes of expression—fiction, autobiography, travelogue, treatise, and fictionalized accounts of their plight. Through these modes of expression, “determined less by choice than by the repressive politics and censorship” (back cover) of the time, they were able to address various aspects of the “woman question” in the nineteenth century, including and especially the restrictive nature of the Napoleonic Civil Code. Nevertheless, due to the repression of both the Second Republic and the Second Empire, “their collective protest, so ably started, had mixed results. By 1872, almost twenty-five years after the promising start of 1848, women’s condition had barely changed.” (p. 154, conclusion)

The author’s goal of situating the writing of these women against the backdrop of the events of the 1848 Revolution as well as the anti-feminist writings of such major thinkers as Auguste Comte, Jules Michelet and Barbey d’Aurevilly, along with the blatantly misogynist work of socialist Pierre Proudhon is an admirable and necessary one, but she needed to do so in a systematic fashion, outlining the various events of the revolution as well as their implications. A chronology of the period would be extremely helpful, not only to those unfamiliar with the events of the 1848 revolution but also to scholars of France who do not work on this period. In addition, it would have been important for Dixon-Fyle to comment specifically on the major events of the Second Republic, including the change toward political conservatism after the June Days. While she alludes to these events, she needs to also explain their importance. So too is it necessary to comment specifically on the change of regime following the coup d’état that led to the Second Empire as well as the impact on women’s writings (she addresses this question briefly on page 83) of the liberalization of Second Empire during its latter years (again, these events are mentioned in passing throughout the book and then in its conclusion). Such a systematic overview would have provided a solid narrative to the book and given it a more coherent structure.

In her introduction, Dixon-Fyle cites 1848 as marking a “radical shift in women’s outlook. Deep disillusionment at the prospect of women’s continued political exclusion, even after actively participating in the violent *journées* leading up to the revolution, forced the *quarante-huitardes* to the realization that women needed to organize—in their own interest—if they were to be included in the fledgling industrialization process that was going on in France” (page 3). Thus, the author makes the case for beginning with 1848 since it marked a watershed in the women’s movement in France. The fall of the Second Empire in 1871 seems to be a natural stopping point but I would have liked Dixon-Fyle to

elaborate more on the importance of 1848 for French feminism and also state briefly why the fall of the Empire concludes her study. Moreover, here and elsewhere, it would have been helpful to lay out the theoretical framework in which feminists at the time sought their rights. In her chapter on Jeanne Deroin in *Only paradoxes to Offer*, Joan Scott does precisely that, explaining not only that the right to work and the right to vote were inextricably linked in debates of the period but also that the idea that women and children as property was explicitly stated in the Constitution of 1848.^[3] Indeed, Scott's explanation of how women pointed to the contradictions between the republicans' articulation of rights and duties in order to make claims for women is brilliant, and Dixon-Fyle would have done well to have presented some these arguments in her own book. While it is obvious that Dixon-Fyle is aware of these facts, she needs to provide adequate background for readers so that they may understand why feminists expressed their opinions as they did and the impact of their opinions. Such contextualization, it is true, is perhaps more the preserve of the historian than the literary critic, but such an analysis would have enriched the book. I also was disappointed that Dixon-Fyle, who lists both Joan Scott and Karen Offen in her bibliography and footnotes — although not Offen's important article on French and American feminism in 1848 — had not engaged with the works of these two historians and their different "takes" on French feminism, specifically whether French feminists, had "only paradoxes to offer."^[4] This debate is central to the discussion of French feminism and again, would have provided a necessary theoretical underpinning to the author's discussion of women's rights.

Female Writers' Struggle for Rights and Education from Women in France (1848-1871) traces through the course of four chapters, an introduction and conclusion various women's journals during these years, beginning in Chapter 1 with Eugénie Niboyet's *La Voix des Femmes*, and continuing in chapter two with Jeanne Deroin's *La Politique des Femmes* (later *L'Opinion des Femmes*). In chapter three, Dixon-Fyle addresses the founding during the Second Empire of *L'Almanach des Femmes*, published by Jeanne Deroin in exile in England, along with the treatises of Jenny d'Héricourt and Juliette Lambert against male anti-feminist writing and within the context of censorship in France. She continues in chapter two with *Le Droit des femmes*, founded by Léon Richer and financed by Maria Deraines. Yet nowhere in the brief introduction (of five pages) does the author explicitly state the outline of the book. Instead, she introduces a discussion of *La voix des femmes*, asking why this collaborative effort failed: "Was the failure due to any political developments of the period? What role did censorship play in the turbulent tenure of these early feminist writers and their ephemeral periodicals? What was the role of censorship in this failure?" (p. 4) After explaining that censorship led to the use of alternative genres, including fiction, she asks if "these works are based on established criteria delimiting genres? Can we even use them to examine the course of women's social history along the lines of history (chronology) or genre? What do these texts reveal about women's educational status and material conditions of life?" (p. 4) Then, the author moves to a discussion of Olympe Audouard and Maria Deraines and their role as powerful orators. She returns to a discussion of repressive policies of government officials of the period, asking to what extent policies undermined collaborative efforts of the women's campaign for rights (p. 5). Finally, she turns to a discussion of George Sand, who while held up as a model by some of these women, rejected their calls for her to run for election, before restating the premise of the book "to identify signposts in the debate of woman's condition in France, and to underline questions central to the critical controversies raised in French women's writings between 1848 and 1871, just after the fall of the Commune [.]" (p. 5).

The introduction is too brief to adequately present the thesis of the book and lacks focus. Instead, the author moves quickly from one topic to the next, often without making clear the connections between the different subjects discussed. Moreover, the rhetorical questions are distracting. Dixon-Fyle would have done better to state that women writers were forced to choose alternative genres in order to deal with government repression and that such repression eventually led to fragmentation and eventual failure of the collaborative efforts of women during this time (as she does in the conclusion). An introduction that set up the problematic of the book and outlined the various chapters and themes to be covered would have been useful. Indeed, some of the points made in the conclusion (like the discussion

of the various newspapers and their similarities on page 143) as well as the fact that the women's movement was fragmented by class difference (p. 154) should have been included in the introduction in order to guide the reader.

As a result, the reader has to work hard to get a clear sense of the author's goals and the connections between the various chapters. The use of numerous direct quotations from secondary sources is also somewhat distracting. Often, one has to look at the notes to learn that the quote is from a secondary source and not a primary one. It would have made more sense for the author to summarize the arguments of other scholars. In this way, she could have built upon fellow colleagues' ideas. Furthermore, elaboration and analysis of certain quotes cited from primary sources would also have been instructive. Moreover, the quotations, all of which are kept in the original French, should have been translated so as to appeal to a wider audience. While Dixon-Fyle's work does add to our body of knowledge, greater contextualization, tighter organization, and some judicious editing would have made for a book with broader appeal to specialists and non specialists alike.

NOTES

[1] Joan Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996); Whitney Walton, *Eve's Proud Descendants: Four Women Writers and Republican Politics in Nineteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); James Smith Allen, *Poignant Relations: Three Modern French Women* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Michèle Riot-Sarcey, *La Démocratie à l'épreuve des femmes* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994)

[2] For the *fin de siècle* see, for example, Jennifer Waelti-Walters, *Feminist Writers of the Belle Époque: Love as a Lifestyle* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) and Rachel Mesch, *The Hysteric's Revenge: Women's Writing in Nineteenth-Century France* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2006). On the earlier part of the century, see Bénédicte Monicat's *Itinéraires de l'écriture au féminin : voyageuses du 19ème siècle* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996). See also Alison Finch *Women's Writing in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[3] Scott, p. 68.

[4] Karen Offen, "Women and the Question of 'Universal Suffrage' in 1848: A Transatlantic Comparison of Suffragist Rhetoric," *NWSA Journal* vol. 11, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 151-175. The title of Scott's book comes from a quote from Olympe de Gouges.

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