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Daniel Denis and Pierre Kahn, Eds., *L'École de la Troisième République en questions : Débats et controverses dans le Dictionnaire de pédagogie de Fernand Buisson*. Berne : Peter Lang, 2006. vii + 283 pp. \$34.95. ISBN : 9-783039-111558.

Review by Sharif Gemie, University of Glamorgan.

This edited volume is a collection of sixteen essays examining themes loosely linked to the two editions of Buisson's celebrated *Dictionnaire de pédagogie* (1882-87, 1911). It is produced by a research group concerned with 'l'histoire de l'enseignement'. The choice of the term "l'enseignement" rather than "l'éducation" or "l'école" is more significant than may initially appear, for it implies a rather closed, inward-looking, institutionally-based review of the French — and specifically republican — pedagogic tradition, rather than a wider social history of local elites, parents and school-children.

It could well be argued that Buisson's dictionary is a founding text of a certain French pedagogic tradition. The "Introduction" by Denis and Kahn tries hard to prevent the collection drifting into an uncritical celebration of the work. The two editions of the *Dictionnaire*, they warn us, were neither official nor uniform volumes. However, in much of the first two-thirds of this work we find relatively well-researched but definitely non-controversial essays. The *Dictionnaires* are presented as "cette source monumentale", "ce gros herbier pédagogique" (p.11), and the first essays contextualize them within the growing French production of reference works (Jean-Yves Mollier) and compare French and German forms of reference works (Jürgen Helmchen). A number of these first essays also note various links that connect Buisson's work with, respectively, the ideal of *philanthropisme* (Loïc Chalmel), Pestalozzi (Michel Soëtard), philosophical sensualism (Pierre Kahn), Kantism (Jocelyne Béguery), Quinet (Mireille Gueissaz) and Sébastien Castellon, a sixteenth century Protestant writing (Anne-Marie Chartier).

Put together, these essays produce an elegiac, uncritical celebration of Buisson's legacy. This is a pity, as it is clear that Buisson never thought of himself as a patriarch of the Third Republic, and would probably have hated the idea that he would be remembered this way. Elements within his work mark him out as quite distinct: one is his consistent links with anarchist educational reformers (James Guillaume, Paul Robin, Pauline Kergomard). These first essays cautiously step round this issue: we are informed, for example, that Buisson's assistant, Guillaume was active in the First International (p.66), but never told that Guillaume returned to anarchist activism in the late 1880s, or that following his work on the first *Dictionnaire*, Guillaume turned to editing the works of Michel Bakounine. While Buisson's Protestantism is certainly noted, little is said in the first two-thirds of this work about how this quality gave him an awkward position within the Université, neither Catholic nor Republican-*laïque*. Lastly, the saving grace of Buisson's work, his consistent quest to link the Republican school to radical social reform is underestimated or simply ignored in the first sections of this collection.

We have to wait until page 125 for the first break with this easy consensus. Laurence Loeffel contributes a remarkably coherent, detailed and concise essay on the 'la présence religieuse' in the two *Dictionnaires*. He analyses how carefully Buisson interpreted the nebulous ideal of *laïcité*, seeing it more as a way to reform and develop religiosity than as an instrument with which to attack the Catholic church. Buisson presented both reformed Judaism and Protestantism as religions fully compatible with cultural modernity, and aimed, through interconfessional dialogue, to encourage Catholics to develop similar forms. Loeffel's essay is also the only contribution to refer (very briefly) to the role of the school in French imperialism (p. 130): a topic scrupulously avoided by all the other contributors.

Four further essays then address the more problematic areas of Buisson's work. Pierre Boutan considers the issue of Buisson's attitude to *patois*; Danielle Tucac surveys women, gender and schooling in the *Dictionnaires*, and Hervé Terral and Daniel Denis both contribute short essays on Buisson's ideal of *l'école unique*. These five problem-posing and rather more critical essays, however, fail to save this collection from its reverential, elegiac and almost hagiographic tone. There remains, however, a sting in the tail.

A postface by the two editors alerts the reader to some rather more urgent political issues, which build on Patrick Dubois's fleeting reference to the defense of the school during the crisis of the "foulards islamiques" (p. 14). The two editors note the development of a neo-Republicanism in recent years, to which Catherine Kintzler, Elisabeth Badinter, Régis Debray, Charles Coutel, Henri Pena-Ruiz and Jacques Muglioni have all contributed (p. 258). While Buisson's Republicanism was a progressive ideal which looked forward to the future, the new neo-Republicans have based their political project on the "restauration d'un âge d'or" (p. 272). Denis and Kahn refuse the political co-option of their research by this tendency, arguing — satirically — that if one accepts the political agenda of the neo-Republicans, then Buisson's legacy could not be credited as truly republican.

This important qualification, however, is presented too late to change the overall weight of this volume. With its reverential treatment, its under-estimation of all the problem areas (Empire, race, gender, class), and its backward-looking admiration for a founding father, it seems likely that the most important result of this collection of largely complacent essays will be to make a minor contribution to contemporary neo-Republicanism.

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