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George R. Whyte, *The Dreyfus Affair: A Chronological History*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. xxxiv + 526 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, appendices, and index. \$185.00 U.S.(hb). ISBN 1-4039-3829-6.

Review by Julie Kalman, the University of New South Wales.

What is there left to write about the Dreyfus Affair? The story of the French Jewish army captain Alfred Dreyfus and the false accusation in 1894 of high treason that led to his degradation, exile, and ultimate rehabilitation has been explored, analysed, and discussed countless times over and in countless contexts. In *The Dreyfus Affair: A Chronological History*, George Whyte has set out to restore the Affair itself to centre stage. In a work that is breathtaking in its thoroughness, he pares back the innumerable layers of interpretation and debate, to simply present the Affair, as it happened.

The book is divided into ten parts. Whyte devotes the bulk of his work to the vital years of the Affair, and he brackets this with two sections that enclose the Affair in its temporal context. Part 1 is the only section in which Whyte offers any explicit commentary on the Affair. Here, he presents his own outline of the nineteenth century and emerging themes that were to have importance in the Affair. In parts two to nine, Whyte has set out events from Dreyfus's initial arrest in 1894 to his exoneration in 1906 in diary fashion, and in great detail. These sections are divided by date. In a final section, Whyte tracks the major players and themes of the Affair up to the present day: what happened to Jews in France? To Zola? How has the Affair been remembered? Whyte presents a clear and painstakingly constructed chronology of events, supplemented with images of the protagonists and of important documents. The simplicity and directness with which the story is told gives it a great freshness and immediacy. The story itself is given depth through meticulous endnotes, where Whyte adds background to events and characters and discusses issues that remain points of contention for historians, such as the exact date when the incriminating note--the infamous bordereau--was written and the means by which it reached the German embassy.

This book comes across as a labour of love for the author, who is the chairman of the Dreyfus Society for Human Rights, and who has also written plays, musicals, and radio programs on the Affair. Whyte clearly has a sense of drama. In the two decades he has spent researching and reflecting on the Affair, he tells us, he encountered no summary more penetrating than that proffered by a Paris taxi driver whom he asked what he knew about the Dreyfus Affair. "Ah, Monsieur," the driver explained, "a strange story. It was all about a French officer who was accused of being Jewish" (p. xxvii).

The ten sections are followed by no less than fifty-five appendices, beginning with the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, in which Whyte has gathered descriptions of events such as Dreyfus' degradation and rehabilitation, the verdict following the second court martial hearing in Rennes, as well as responses to these same events. Included also are extracts from Dreyfus' diary and the correspondence between Dreyfus and his wife, Lucie. Some of these sources have previously been unavailable in English. To complete the picture, the reader is offered a series of biographical profiles, a list of the governments that were in office over the course of the Affair, a glossary, and a broad bibliography.

Yet ultimately Whyte's book is more than a mere reference, and I must take issue with what he appears to feel is the significance of the tale of Alfred Dreyfus. Whyte has set the Affair in a broader context, and

as part of this process, he makes implicit links with the experience of French Jews during the Second World War. For example, in the appendices, Victor Basch, President of the League of Human Rights, features on two occasions. On the first, we read his account of the appearance of Dreyfus at the second court martial hearing in Rennes, following his years of exile on Devil's Island. The Second appendix devoted to Basch, entitled "Victor Basch and the Dreyfus Affair," tells of the murder of the then octogenarian Basch and his wife by the collaborationist *milice* in 1944. In his own preface, alliteratively entitled "From Dreyfus to Drancy--The Power of Prejudice," Whyte has antisemitic writer Edouard Drumont "planting the signpost which would eventually lead to Drancy" when the latter states that the Jews would be "taken away as scrap" (p. xxv). Dreyfus himself chooses "the hazardous march of an assimilationist Jew," "trespassing the threshold of tolerance in a bigoted terrain" (p. xxvi), ignoring the warnings that are the expressions of antisemitism he experiences in the years before his arrest (p. xxvi). He pays "for his illusions" (p. xxvii).

In his recent work on representations of Jews in eighteenth-century France, Ronald Schechter exhorted his readers to forget that some 150 years after France emancipated its Jews, a French collaborationist government was proactively cooperating with the Nazis in the arrest and deportation of their descendants. Schechter argued that if we view French Jewish history through this lens, we are forever condemned to ask whether emancipation was ultimately good or bad for the Jews, rather than simply seeking to understand the event itself in its context. [1] Schechter's arguments have enormous importance and implications well beyond the eighteenth century, and this is only too well illustrated here. The teleology in Whyte's approach is troubling. Dreyfus's arrest and exile were not foreseeable, or even, for that matter, inevitable, and nor was the experience of French Jews--including members of the Dreyfus family--some fifty years later.

This issue notwithstanding, this is a work of meticulous research, of impressive and increasingly unusual depth and breadth. Whyte has produced a valuable and authoritative reference on the Affair.

NOTES

[1] Ronald Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France 1715-1815* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

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