

Gendered Citizenship, Suffrage and Reproduction in the Writings and Lives of Nineteenth Century French Feminists Jeanne Deroin and Jenny P. d'Héricourt

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Abstract:

This article analyses the writings and lives of Jeanne Deroin and Jenny P. d'Héricourt as examples of the notions of reproduction and motherhood, gendered citizenship and suffrage in nineteenth century feminism in France. Relating each to canonical male thinkers, historiography has failed to view Deroin and d'Héricourt together and to take them seriously as thinkers in their own right. Therefore, this article uses the concepts of *gendered agency* and *reverse discourse* to look at the relation between Deroin's and d'Héricourt's individual gendered experience and their feminist aims. Their example demonstrates that the discourse of suffrage and citizenship in nineteenth century France was inherently gendered; concomitantly gendered experience was linked to the discursive power relations. This reveals why it was possible and necessary for feminists to relate to the dominant discourse of sexual difference to articulate their feminist demands. It justified the need for women's citizenship, suffrage and equal rights by positively re-evaluating women's qualities connected to motherhood and sentiment; and viewing reproduction as the fulfilment of a citizen's duty to be rewarded with citizenship.

'I claim the rights of woman, because it is time to make the nineteenth century ashamed of its culpable denial of justice to half the human species.'¹

These are the words of Jenny P. d'Héricourt (1809-1875). She and Jeanne Deroin (1805-1894) were two of several French feminists of the mid-nineteenth century who derived from the utopian socialist and religious movement Saint-Simonianism. Both in their distinct ways, claimed full citizenship and the equality of rights in a political society which was after the Revolution of 1789, underlined by an invisible though universal male citizenship, enshrined in the *Code civil*.² In those times, sexual difference was perceived as a natural fact causing this very exclusion of women from the political sphere, based on the 'weakness of their bodies and minds', as well as viewing women as capable solely of reproduction and domesticity.³ Nevertheless, this notion of reproduction became one of the key arguments in the feminist fight for equal rights and citizenship, since sexual difference was 'an ontology not possible to dismiss'.⁴ Though, at the same time as it restricted, it also created the basis for feminism in nineteenth century France by

¹ Jenny P. D. d'Héricourt, *A Woman's Philosophy of Woman or Woman Affranchised: An Answer to Michelet, Proudhon, Girardin, Legouve, Comte, and Other Modern Innovations* (New York: Carleton, 1864), p.x.

² Robert Nye, 'Women, Work and Citizenship in France since 1789', *Gender & History*, 19:1 (2007), p.186; Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), p.18.

³ Joan Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p.ix.

⁴ Nye, 'Women, Work and Citizenship in France since 1789' (2007), p.186.

enhancing the identification as one sex and thereby shaping a feminist consciousness.⁵ After a brief overview of the context of Saint-Simonian feminism and of the lives and writings of Deroin and d'Héricourt, this article will attempt to balance the correlation of the individual lives and the broader political impact of these feminists, striving to deepen the understanding of gendered agency as well as reverse discourse in the struggle for equal rights and female citizenship in nineteenth century French feminism.

Saint-Simonianism, based on the writings of Henri Saint-Simon (1760-1825), flourished from 1825 under the leadership of Barthélemy Prosper Enfantin and came to be 'the first influential socialist school in France' until it was banned in 1832 for 'offences to public morality', challenging the double standard and advocating free love and extra-marital sexual relationships.⁶ Enfantin preached the equality of both sexes, paralleling an androgynous God (Father and Mother); 'the man and the woman, this is the social individual... this is the basis for the morality of the future.'⁷ Furthermore, the movement was concerned with divorce rights and the emancipation of women, though claiming the inherent difference as well as complementarity of both sexes.⁸ Male rationality and female sentiment, even though radically different, were seen as the fundamental unit of society, resulting in a positive re-evaluation of women's assumed qualities and their social role.⁹

Saint-Simonian notions of the complementarity of the two sexes influenced several feminists. For instance, Jeanne Deroin used their language to reverse society's exclusion of women of the public sphere due to motherhood and reproduction by declaring them as the most important works of all which should be rewarded with citizenship: 'Child-bearers are rights-bearers!'¹⁰ Moreover, Saint-Simonianism provided French feminists with the possibility to print articles in the magazine *Le Globe* or to launch their own, *La Femme Libre*, edited by Jeanne Deroin, which solely featured female authors who signed their articles only with their Christian name, abandoning their surname as a sign of female suppression.¹¹ Deroin, for example, used Jeanne-Victorie as her

⁵ Ibid.; Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (1984), p.18.

⁶ Julian Strube, 'Socialist Religion and the Emergence of Occultism: A Genealogical Approach to Socialism and Secularization in 19th-Century France', *Religion*, 46:3 (2016), p.364; Pamela Pilbeam, *Saint-Simonians in Nineteenth-Century France: From Free Love to Algeria* (London: Palgrave, 2014), p.62.

⁷ Prosper Enfantin, 'Extrait de la parole du Père dans la réunion générale de la famille, le 19 Novembre 1831', *Oeuvres des Saint-Simon et d'Enfantin*, XLVII (Paris, 1878), pp.114-119, tr. Karen Offen.

⁸ Evelyn L. Forget, 'Saint-Simonian Feminism', *Feminist Economics*, 7:1 (2001), p.80.

⁹ James F. McMillan, *France and Women. 1789-1914: Gender, Society and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.81.

¹⁰ McMillan, *France and Women. 1789-1914* (2000) p.87; Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer* (1996) pp.58, 71.

¹¹ Pilbeam, *Saint-Simonians in Nineteenth-Century France* (2014), p.64; Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (1984), p.65; Karen Offen, *European Feminisms 1700-1950. A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 99.

pseudonym. Later on, she launched other papers such as *La Voix des Femmes*, which lasted until June 1848, *La Politique des Femmes* and *L'Opinion des Femmes*.¹² Deroin and others participated actively in the February Revolution of 1848. She was arrested in on 29 May 1850 and accused of refusing 'to accept that married women should be subject to the control of their husbands'¹³. In 1852, she was exiled and from then on lived in London, meanwhile she was still in communication and discussion with French feminists and anti-feminists of that time.¹⁴ Jenny P. D. d'Héricourt, born as Jeanne-Marie-Fabienne Poinsard, was also affiliated with Saint-Simonian feminism. After studying philosophy and medicine in the 1830s, she was involved in the feminist activism of 1848, where she met Jeanne Deroin.¹⁵ Thereafter, in 1860, she published her most famous book *A Woman's Philosophy of Woman, or Woman Affranchised* and emigrated to Chicago in 1864 where her book was translated by American feminists.¹⁶

The fact that both women were situated in similar political and intellectual circles, contrasts with the historiography on French feminism in the nineteenth century which separates Deroin and d'Héricourt in its narrations. Deroin is mostly associated with feminist periodicals as well as her active involvement in the 1848 revolution and her subsequent candidacy for National Assembly in 1849; whereas d'Héricourt's story is closely linked to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, since her well-known publication is labelled as "An Answer to ... Proudhon".¹⁷ This failure of historiography to view these women together suggests that they have not been taken seriously as thinkers in their own right, but instead have been discussed in relation to the more canonical male thinkers. However, since there are several links between those two women, both biographic through their shared activism in 1848; and discursive over their shared controversies with Proudhon.¹⁸ This

¹² McMillan, *France and Women. 1789-1914* (2000) p. 85.

¹³ McMillan, *France and Women. 1789-1914* (2000), p.89.

¹⁴ Felica Gordon and Máire Cross, *Early French Feminists, 1830-1940: A Passion for Liberty* (Cheltenham: Edward Ergar, 1996), p.5.

¹⁵ Alice Primi, 'Women's History According to Jenny P. d'Héricourt (1809-1875), 'Daughter of her Century', *Gender & History*, 18:1 (2006), p.153; Jenny P. D. d'Héricourt, 'Madame Jenny P. d'Héricourt', in: *The Agitator* (8 May 1869), reprinted in: Karen Offen, 'A Nineteenth-Century French Feminist Rediscovered: Jenny P. d'Héricourt, 1809-1875', *Signs*, 13:1 (1987), p.153.

¹⁶ Primi 'Women's History According to Jenny P. d'Héricourt (1809-1875), *Gender & History*, 18:1 (2006), p.152.

¹⁷ Furthermore, Deroin usually solely appears in publications on French feminism or feminist writings of the nineteenth century in general, while several distinct articles on d'Héricourt are written, see Arni and Honegger (2008), Offen (1987), and Primi (2006) as examples.

¹⁸ In her alleged autobiography, d'Héricourt characterizes Deroin as 'so sweet and courageous' and describes both their efforts in 1848 as different, though nevertheless complementary; see: Héricourt, 'Madame Jenny P. d'Héricourt', p.153; Notably, although seldom mentioned, Jeanne Deroin argued with Proudhon, mostly because her candidacy in 1849 'drew down [his] wrath'; see: Offen, 'Madame Jenny P. d'Héricourt', p.153.

article will use a joined examination of Derooin and d'Héricourt to apply the theoretical concepts of *gendered agency* as well as the *reverse discourse*.

The basis for *gendered agency* is the thought that the way one acts or is able to act in society is related to one's bodily perception as a gendered being. Various scholars acknowledge the importance of the body for identification, communication and experience in general.¹⁹ The social world is made of bodies and their interrelation; moreover, individuals recognise others and are recognised by them through their bodies. The body is the *medium of culture*. Therefore, a subject in society is always an embodied subject which perceives its surrounding world and acts in it as an embodied being; there is no disembodied subject which controls an exterior body.²⁰ According to Judith Butler and others, bodies in society are recognised as gendered bodies.²¹ Consequently, subjects are gendered embodied beings acting in discursive limitations which restrict the subject's agency to an embodied and concomitant *gendered agency*. In other words, subjects as embodied beings can perceive the social world and act in it only in a gendered way, hence, social/discursive agency is always gendered. Through the combined study of Derooin and d'Héricourt this article evaluates the relation between their distinct individual gendered experience and their feminist aims and impact.

As adherents of Saint-Simonianism, Derooin and d'Héricourt carried on their visions of the equality of the sexes regarding sex, marriage and divorce.²² Nevertheless, due to their personal experiences as women in nineteenth century France, this shared ground was modified in their individual feminist agendas. Jeanne Derooin, on the one hand, was concerned with marital equality. She states that any man 'who is not sufficiently generous to consent to share his power' is not considered as a possible choice for a husband, since women should not be obliged to submit to them; and even celibacy would be preferred to an unequal marriage symbolising slavery.²³ As illustrated above, this bid for marital equality and her refusal to take on the name of her husband were the reasons why Derooin was convicted in 1850. On the other hand, d'Héricourt assumed marriage to be the end of love, after all 'in marriage, woman is a serf.'²⁴ Then, the existing marriage laws would cause the alienation of the couple, since 'the wife *belongs*

¹⁹ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

²⁰ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p.165; Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, p.20; Alexandra Howson, *Embodying Gender* (London: SAGE, 2005), p.58.

²¹ For the discursive link of sex and gender see: Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), *passim*.

²² for Derooin, see above; for Héricourt, see: Primi, p.38.

²³ Jeanne Derooin, 'Appel aux femmes', in: *La Femme Libre*, 1 (1832), p.1, tr. Karen Offen.

²⁴ Héricourt, *A Woman's Philosophy of Woman or Woman Affranchised*, pp.ix, 252.

to the husband; she is in his *power*.²⁵ Therefore, to strengthen marriage, the right to divorce must be granted, during which ‘the wife should be as free as the husband.’²⁶ Thus, in spite of their shared intellectual origins, Derooin and d’Héricourt differ in their views on marriage and divorce. Research on d’Héricourt suggests that the reason for her great reluctance to marriage in general lay in her own experience with marriage and not being able to divorce.²⁷ In her own words: ‘When twenty years old she was married to a young man, who, under the guise of honesty, was a libertine and a base hypocrite. After four years of sorrow, she left him and returned to her mother.’²⁸ Whereas for Derooin, there is no indication of an unhappy marriage.

Then again, Derooin’s main concern was for women to obtain equal rights and suffrage grounding on full citizenship, which she justified with women’s ability to reproduce and be mothers²⁹. In other words: fulfilling a citizen’s duty.³⁰ Since ‘liberty, equality, and fraternity have been proclaimed for all’, Derooin declared, ‘the mothers of your sons cannot be slaves.’³¹ She considered women as entitled to equal rights carrying out ‘the sacred role of maternity’ for the sake of a peaceful and harmonious society, which can only develop if ‘the mother of humanity [will be] regenerated by liberty.’³² Moses explains Derooin’s focus on motherhood with her being a mother of three children by 1848.³³ Nevertheless, d’Héricourt, who did not have any children, viewed reproduction as one of the “functions” of women which should result in rights given by the state.³⁴ Since the woman ‘is the creator and preserver of the race’, they all ‘shall one day *have rights because they have duties*.’³⁵

As these examples illustrate, the gendered experiences of Derooin and d’Héricourt as married women in nineteenth century France probably influenced their opinions regarding marriage and divorce. However, even though having children may have effected Derooin’s stress on

²⁵ Ibid. p.275.

²⁶ Ibid., pp.282-283.

²⁷ See: Offen, ‘A Nineteenth-Century French Feminist Rediscovered’, passim; Primi, ‘Women’s History According to Jenny P. d’Héricourt’, passim; and others.

²⁸ Héricourt, ‘Madame Jenny P. d’Héricourt’, p.152.

²⁹ Jeanne Derooin, ‘Aux Citoyens Français!’, in: *La Voix des Femmes*, 7 (1848), pp.322-323, tr. Karen Offen.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Jeanne Derooin, *Almanach des Femmes* (1852), translation in: Gordon and Cross, *Early French Feminisms, 1830-1940*, pp.136, 138.

³³ Moses, p.134.

³⁴ Héricourt, ‘Madame Jenny P. d’Héricourt’, p. 152; Héricourt, *A Woman’s Philosophy of Woman or Woman Affranchised*, p.225.

³⁵ Héricourt, *A Woman’s Philosophy of Woman or Woman Affranchised*, p.227; Jenny P. D. d’Héricourt, ‘De l’avenir de la femme’, in: *La Ragione*, 3 (October 1855), p.62, tr. Alice Primi, ‘Women’s History According to Jenny P. d’Héricourt (1809-1875), ‘Daughter of her Century’, *Gender & History*, 18:1 (2006), p.153.

motherhood, the concept of gendered agency does not solely explain d'Héricourt using the same language and arguments as her contemporary.

Therefore, this article will now analyse their discursive overlap with Proudhon to expand the concept of gendered agency by discursive possibilities and boundaries.³⁶ As illustrated above, the radical difference of the sexes was then the dominant discourse, shaping social and economic structures as well as ideals of womanhood and femininity. The suppression of women's rights was justified by the supposition of the fundamental difference between the sexes; simultaneously disparaging female attributes in relation to their ability to engage within economy and politics. This differentiation was grounded on bodily distinctions, determining identities by linking woman's role to her natural ability of reproduction; marriage and maternity were seen as a duty and the woman's ideal.³⁷ One major voice in this anti-feminist discourse was Pierre-Joseph Proudhon who reinforced the subordination of women by illustrating women's physical, intellectual and moral inferiority; which were all based on the bodily difference of the sexes. Men, 'the complete human being', would inhabit a 'virile energy' resulting in the 'fact of life that... the physical inferiority of woman is the product of her *non-masculinity*.'³⁸ The main difference lay in women's inability to produce a seed, resulting in the lack of idea, thought and genius.³⁹ For this reason, woman's place is in the family and the household, since she is only a passive being, 'lacking its own goal', with no other 'reason to exist other than in the couple and the family.'⁴⁰ Hence, women are reduced to motherhood and a passive part of reproduction which was the cause of their subordination. Nevertheless, man and woman are complementary, represented in man's public and woman's private work (in the household). The latter is not inferior to the former as such, rather are they 'necessary to one another as the two constituent principles of work.'⁴¹ Though not equalling man and woman in general, it does lead into the question whether women should be considered as citizens.⁴² Proudhon recognised the increase of the fight for women's emancipation, describing it as a:

³⁶ Here, "discourse" is not limited to language, but means all practices (forms of linguistic actions) which produce what they name.

³⁷ Lynn Abrams, *The Making of the Modern Women: Europe 1789-1918* (London: Longman, 2002), pp.18-24, 69.

³⁸ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, 'De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église' (1858), in: *Oeuvres complètes de P.-J. Proudhon*, tr. Karen Offen.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, 'Système des contradictions économiques, ou Philosophie de la misère' (1846), in: *Oeuvres complètes de P.-J. Proudhon*, pp. 196-99, tr. Karen Offen.

⁴² Proudhon, 'De la Justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église'.

‘feminine indiscretion [which] has caught fire; a half-dozen inky-fingered insurgents obstinately try to make woman into something we do not want, reclaim their *rights* with insults, and defy us to bring the question out into the light of day.’⁴³

According to Proudhon, this requested emancipation would backfire and result in woman’s misery and legalised servitude.⁴⁴ Due to the irreconcilable differences between the sexes, he would rather exclude women from society than grant them emancipation.⁴⁵

As a consequence, he got into an argument with Jeanne Deroin at the time of her activism in 1848, and especially when she ran for National Assembly in 1849.⁴⁶ Deroin asked the Democratic Socialist Electoral Committee to support her candidacy, since the democratic socialists vouched for the ‘complete and radical abolition of all privileges of sex, race, birth, caste, and fortune.’⁴⁷ This, she argued, is why her candidacy should not be excluded ‘in the name of a privilege of sex that violates the principles of equality and fraternity.’⁴⁸ Whereupon Proudhon ‘in the name of public morality and of justice’ encouraged all to protest against her attempt.⁴⁹ Deroin replied, likewise ‘in the name of public morality and in the name of justice’ precisely because woman is equal though not identical to man, society is in need of women’s engagement, to fill the ‘necessary elements that are lacking in man.’⁵⁰ Saying this, Deroin used the ideas formerly articulated by Saint-Simonians and, whilst repeating his words, reversed Proudhon’s argument:

‘It is especially this sacred function as mother, which some insist is incompatible with the exercise of a citizen’s rights... This is why women have been declared incapable – and this is why they must demand the right to intervene in order to aid stout-hearted, intelligent men to transform this politics of violence and repression, which... causes all suffering and social misery.’⁵¹

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Qu’est-ce que la propriété?* (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1866), p.275, tr. Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), p.152.

⁴⁶ See their letters in 1848 and 1849, accessible: <https://contrun.libertarian-labyrinth.org/jeanne-deroin-to-proudhon-january-1849> and <https://contrun.libertarian-labyrinth.org/proudhon-to-jeanne-deroin/>.

⁴⁷ Jeanne Deroin, ‘Aux Citoyens membres du Comité électoral démocratique et socialiste’, in: *L’Opinion des Femmes* (10 April 1849), tr. Karen Offen.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, ‘Protestation du *Peuple* contre la candidature de J. D.’, in: *Le Peuple* (12 April 1849), tr. Karen Offen.

⁵⁰ Jeanne Deroin, ‘Réponse à Proudon’, in: *La Démocratie Pacifique* (13 April 1849), tr. Karen Offen.

⁵¹ Jeanne, Deroin, ‘Mission de la femme dans le present et dans l’avenir’, in: *L’Opinion des Femmes* (10 March 1849), tr. Karen Offen.

A similar observation can be made regarding d'Héricourt. One chapter of her book is dedicated to Proudhon; there she published several letters of him and herself, followed by a discussion of his main arguments, including those illustrated above.⁵² She agrees with his assumption that women are inherently different from men, though they do not need each other as complement; woman and man themselves are already complete.⁵³ Furthermore, in d'Héricourt's opinion, woman is the one producing the germ, rebutting Proudhon's 'scientific' argumentation.⁵⁴ D'Héricourt likewise stressed reproduction as the significant difference between the sexes which engenders in distinct sexual attributes and moralities; men are 'harsh, rough, without delicacy, devoid of sensibility and modesty.'⁵⁵ Conversely, women are 'naturally gentle, loving, feeling, equitable, modest.'⁵⁶ Thus, women are the reason for social progress and should be granted the same rights as men.⁵⁷

As the historiography suggests, Proudhon's argument illustrates the dominating discourse at that time in France. In this discourse, the correlation of power structures, citizenship and suffrage; as well as male dominance in politics, science and philosophy in general, and knowledge in addition to the biological distinction of the two sexes; created the discursive truth about man and woman, their specific attributes and the associated political and social subordination of women. Thereby, women were produced as the 'other', the opposite of men's own identity. The purpose was to create a positive identity for men, which, cannot exist on its own, but needs to be maintained by an exterior other, the pure negative.⁵⁸ Deroin and d'Héricourt, as examples for nineteenth century French feminism, were part of this discourse and operated in the same power relations. They adopted its language, but *reversed* its meaning, hereby contesting the established truths.⁵⁹ Women and men were perceived as distinct sexes; their main difference regarded as reproduction. Nevertheless, for them, motherhood and reproduction had positive connotations, seen as the fulfilment of a citizen's duty, and, therefore, no reason for the subjugation in marriage or for the rejection of suffrage and citizenship.

As illustrated, the concept of *gendered agency* alone does not adequately solve the problem of the relation between Deroin's and d'Héricourt's gendered experience and their feminist aims. This is

⁵² Héricourt, *A Woman's Philosophy of Woman or Woman Affranchised*, pp.33-118.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.79.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.78, 227.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.227-228.

⁵⁶ Héricourt, *A Woman's Philosophy of Woman or Woman Affranchised*, pp.227-228.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ See: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction* (London: Penguin, 1978), passim; Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978), passim.

⁵⁹ Similar: Foucault, p.101; Said, passim: the concept of *reversed orientalism*.

due to the fact that their gendered experience is still individual, though tied to the surrounding discourse. These discursive boundaries, on the one hand limit them, and simultaneously give them the opportunity to *reverse* it by adapting its language and filling it with reversed and positive meanings. As a consequence, their example demonstrates that the discourse of suffrage and citizenship in nineteenth century France was inherently gendered; concomitantly gendered experience was linked to the discursive power relations. Examining Deroin and d'Héricourt jointly, made it possible to recognise the influence of their individual and discursive gendered experience on their impact on nineteenth century feminism in France. It revealed why it was possible and necessary for feminists to relate to the dominant discourse of sexual difference to articulate their feminist aims. This justified the need for women's citizenship, suffrage and equal rights by positively re-evaluating women's qualities connected to motherhood and sentiment; and viewing reproduction as the fulfilment of a citizen's duty, consequently to be rewarded with citizenship.

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