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Leslie Derfler. *The Dreyfus Affair.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002. vii + 167 pp. $44.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-31791-0.

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Teaching the Dreyfus Affair

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The Dreyfus Affair was the culmination of the major conflicts that raged in nineteenth-century France and Europe and in Hannah Arendt's words it "offers a foregleam of the twentieth-century."[1] Roselyne Koren has explored how what the French simply refer to as "the Affair" has become the archetype of all political crises and Franco-French conflicts[2]. This is because the Affair crystallized certain aspects of modernity, including the struggle over human rights, equality before the law, democratic control over political institutions, the role of the masses, and how they are influenced by the new media, and created the modern intelligentsia as arbiters of social values and defenders of the oppressed. The Affair staged the enduring conflict of national security and raison d'etat versus individual rights and pitted moral exigencies against political expediencies. The Dreyfus Affair was, thus, "a decisive episode in political–as well as in the intellectual and cultural–history of modern France" (p. 39) and Europe more generally.

Leslie Derfler's clear and concise introduction to the Affair is an excellent beginning point for students and a welcome resource for faculty who need to write lectures on the topic or who want to open up the events with students from a multiplicity of perspectives. In examining the Affair with students, he is correct to urge instructors not to forget that it was a heroic tale of the struggle for justice waged by a few against the indifference or outright hostility of the majority. Moreover, the twisted plot line of the event reads like a detective novel, making it a compelling topic to teach. Derfler has followed to a tee the requisite structure of the Greenwood series of which it is a part and makes evident the utility of the types of books they are putting out. He offers a basic chronology, places the episode into its political context, examines the role of antisemitism, considers how socialists responded (his area of greatest expertise as the author of numerous books that address this topic directly or tangentially), and reflects on how historians' own biases have shaped the representations of what happened, concluding with the impact of the Affair on French politics in its aftermath.

The work contains helpful biographical sketches of most of the main protagonists (pp. 65-115), several images from the events, and sixteen primary source documents, well chosen to highlight the major turning points and ideological issues of the competing sides that are each lucidly introduced (pp. 117-49). The annotated bibliography is a useful overview of the main works on the Affair in English with pointers toward deeper research for those who read French. It even contains a separate section on Internet sources and films. Along with Norman Kleeblatt's catalog of the 1987 exhibition arranged by the Jewish Museum of New York City,[3] these documents offer students rich sources for working with the visual representations of the Affair. They can use them to consider how the major conflicts of the Affair were translated into images, symbols, and even parlor games, demonstrating how political events were interpreted in everyday discourse and given meaning that would literally be played out both privately and publicly.

Even as an introduction, however, one wonders about the extent to which Derfler might have integrated some of the more current research on the topic. His contextualization of the Affair, for example, is a straightforward political narrative, to the exclusion of an exploration of the shared cultural frameworks of Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards. As Venita Datta has shown,[4] both those who became Dreyfusards and those who became anti-Dreyfusards opposed the literary and political establishment, needed to negotiate the new marketplace, scorned the bourgeoisie, were elitist, defended heroism and male codes of honor, used organicist metaphors, and converged in the extent to which Jewish difference was ultimately excluded from their conceptions of the nation. In addition, DerflerÎÒs overview of the historiography indicates that after World War II, historians like Marcel

Thomas and Guy Chapman emphasized an understanding of the role of institutions like the Intelligence Service, the General Staff, the Church, and Parliament (p. 45), but little of this history makes it into his overview. The biographies do not include Maurice Barres, a debatable omission, and Edouard Drumont was not "of peasant origins" (p. 82), but the son of a city-clerk in the Hotel de Ville.

It is pedantic to criticize a work for what it does not cover and for minute errors, especially a book that is a short introduction to lower-level students where tone and space already determine many choices faced by an author. Notwithstanding, Derfler's analysis sometimes glides a little too smoothly between phenomena, such as his chapter on antisemitism, which fails to point to the differences between antisemitism in differing national contexts. His brief overview of Judeo-phobia from the ancient world to the fin-de-siecle is outstanding in its ability to incorporate the key moments succinctly. But he does not indicate that Comte de GobineaûÒs racial theories took root in Germany, "that he was attacked by Maurice Barres ... for supporting a cosmopolitan nobility rather than national unity,"[5] and that the French extreme right was ambivalent about racial antisemitism, as opposed to cultural antisemitism. Drumont's scientific sources were medical, psychological, and sociological. French antisemitism was not the same as the biological scientific racism that developed in Germany and differed from the emphasis on social Darwinism and eugenics that evolved in England. Naturally, these ideas crossed borders and cross-pollinated, but indicating the variances in the dominant strands is nonetheless important to characterizing the nature of antisemitism in the context of the Dreyfus Affair.

Moreover, claiming that "during the Vichy period (1940-1943) [sic!] all anti-Dreyfusards defended–at least initially–the regime and all Dreyfusards opposed it" (p. 62) has been shown to be more complicated by Simon Epstein's work.[6] Since stereotyping is built upon the amalgamation of often conflicting opinions and doctrines, it is too static to make claims like "if the heated passions of the Dreyfus Affair cooled in the decade before World War I, the negative stereotype of the Jew persisted" (p. 26). (Was there only one negative image of Jews and Judaism?) Antisemitism, like all ideologies, is not stagnant, but transforms and accommodates to its contexts, leading to the amplification of different elements to accomplish different ends. Even in a short overview, attention to these modulations is important, since students (at all levels) need to be sensitized to differences within the spectrum of racism and to distinguish between prejudices, social ostracism, religious anti-Judaism, political antisemitism, and scientific racism. This is certainly one pedagogical outcome to be accomplished in discussing the Dreyfus Affair, since precisely what needs to be explained is how a case in a military tribunal became such a hot affair in the most liberal society of its time. What needs to be explained is precisely what political, social, and cultural vision was proposed by those who sought to overthrow the so-called "decadence" of the Republic, as well as the framework of beliefs shared by those who defended Dreyfus as a symbol of the values of the Republic.

These critical remarks aside, while the price in hardback makes it prohibitively expensive to assign for courses, Derfler has written an eminently useful introduction to the Dreyfus Affair that ought to be purchased for library shelves around the country. He is attuned to not only how the Affair reveals the tensions between the French at the time of the crisis, but the enduring insight that studying the Dreyfus Affair can offer for the conflicts we face in our own day and age.

Notes

[1]. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 93.

[2]. Roselyne Koren, "Vices et vertus d'une reference obligee: L'Affaire dans l'argumentaire de textes recents," in *Les intellectuels face a l'affaire Dreyfus alors et aujourd'hui*, ed. Roselyne Koren and Dan Michman (Paris and Montreal: ÎÒHarmattan, 1998).

[3]. Norman Kleeblatt, ed., *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth and Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). In addition to the catalog of the show, it contains superb essays by Benjamin Martin on the legal system, Michael Marrus on popular antisemitism, Paula Hyman on the Jewish community, and Susan Suleiman on the ways that the Affair was transformed in literary works.

[4]. Venita Datta, *Birth of a National Icon: The Literary Avant-Garde and The Origins of the Intellectual in France* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999).

[5]. George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 57.

[6]. Simon Epstein, *Les Dreyfusards sous l'occupation* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001).

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