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Victoria Bissell Brown. *The Education of Jane Addams.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. 432 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8122-3747-4.

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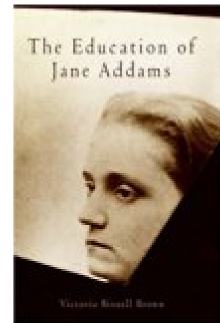

Reconciling Gender, Family, and Ambition: The Formative Years of JaneAddams

Victoria Bissell Brown's *The Education of Jane Addams* is an intellectual history of the early years in Jane Addams's life. Brown opens the introduction with Addams's 1895 speech to the United Charities in Chicago. In that speech, Addams links George Pullman, the railroad magnate, with King Lear. Both, she argued, "had used kindness to acquire power, not to redistribute it, and had thereby revealed the selfish nature of benevolence" (p. 1). But what was needed, according to Addams, was not to be " 'good to people' but to be 'good with people' " (p. 1). Brown brings out Addams's belief in the need for mutuality and cooperation in social action in this speech, and her book explores how Addams came to hold these beliefs. Brown's goal is to "focus on how it was that Jane Addams became Jane Addams" (p. 6).

Brown's initial aim was to reexamine Addams's life after she became a well-known public figure, but instead found herself drawn to the earlier years. She often pairs her findings with the narrative told in Addams's autobiography, *Twenty Years at Hull House.* Rather than seeking to disprove or dismiss that narrative, Brown complicates it and, when discrepancies emerge, seeks to explain why Addams constructed the autobiography as she did. Brown writes, "this study of Addams's development urges respect for the emotional authenticity of the autobiography while arguing for a careful reexamination of the evidence on her life" (p. 8). Brown mines Addams's letters and papers, as well as those of other key people in her life, including family members and Ellen Gates Starr. She analyzes Addams's writings while a student at Rockford Female Seminary, as well as those from the developmental stages of Hull House. What emerges is a carefully researched and readable intellectual biography that analyzes how Addams became one of the most progressive social reformers of the early twentieth century.

The themes of family, religion, and friendship are critical in Addams's early life. Brown provides an in-depth look at Addams's family, including her father, who was such a significant figure in the autobiography, but also her siblings, her stepmother, Anna, and step-brothers. One step-brother, Harry Haldeman, marries Alice, Addams's sister, and Jane Addams develops a close friendship with George, the younger son of her step-mother. Family is a key issue as Addams seeks to find her niche in a world that has no clearly defined place for her: unmarried, educated, and female. Addams constantly struggles with reconciling her ambition to engage in meaningful, productive work with her responsibilities as an unmarried daughter and sister.

Brown organizes the book chronologically, beginning with Addams's parents' history, and her mother's death when she was just two. Brown details John Addams's political views, and his service in the state senate, in part because they influenced Jane Addams's ideology. This presents the first contrast Brown identifies between the autobiography and the story emerging from Addams's papers. While Jane Addams speaks of the influence of Abraham Lincoln, Brown asserts that Henry Clay–the compromiser–is perhaps more significant. Moderation and diplomacy, often through reasonable compromise, were hallmarks of John Addams's po-

litical and business life.

Jane Addams also embodied those traits, and later faced criticism from those who wanted her to take a harder line on specific issues. Brown offers an explanation for the difference between the autobiography and the "reality" she finds in Addams's papers: Lincoln was a more popular figure with whom to link her own work, and her father did heavily identify with the Republican Party in its formative years, as well as Lincoln's own moderate views on key issues. Brown argues that Addams learned the importance of a strong national government from her father, in part stemming from the Civil War and the near dissolution of the Union.

Although Addams speaks largely in her autobiography about the lessons of democracy she learned from her father, Brown argues what she really took from him was republicanism: the responsibility of government "to foster a fair and honest climate for economic opportunity," and a belief that "those who had already benefitted from that opportunity were charged to act as community stewards for the rest" (p. 50). In her early years, Jane Addams believed that society needed a "ruling class" and that the elite had a responsibility to those with less; she did not question the structure of the economy or the availability of opportunity to all until later in her life.

Addams's struggle with religion and her own spirituality stemmed in part from expectations about Protestant faith in the larger society, and the faith upon which she was raised in her own home. Both her father and stepmother favored a practical religious faith, one that emphasized efforts to improve their community and those in need rather than religious ideology or formal church services. Although her father was not a Quaker, as she asserts in her autobiography, John Addams was a Christian. Like Jane, he never professed to be "saved" in the traditional sense, but "his tutelage consistently focused on responsible conduct, not obedient faith" (p. 59). Addams would come to believe "that faith in something beyond oneself was requisite to the pursuit of meaningful work," but she also sought a philosophy that fit with her own ambitions beyond family (p. 81).

Although a daughter, Jane Addams received an education equal to that of her brother and stepbrothers. She graduated from Rockford Female Seminary, which also awarded her a bachelor of arts degree. She grew up in a household without rigid gender stereotypes, and which valued the education of both sons and daughters. She was treated as an intellectual equal by both brothers and her father. Addams did not identify strongly in her youth "with the 'cause' of womanhood." Brown argues that this reluctance likely stemmed from her upbringing, and the encouragement of her intellectual development: "Only much later would Jane Addams realign her loyalties and identify with an assertively female political culture" (p. 37). She spent many of her first years after her formal education ended seeking to find a place for herself, as an educated woman with ambitions outside family responsibilities.

Brown devotes significant attention to Addams's education at Rockford Female Seminary, including her frustration with the limits of her education as well as the Christian dogma espoused by the school's head, Anna Peck Sill. But Brown disputes the notion that her father stymied her attendance at Smith College. Brown argues that Addams's own lack of preparation for such study was the initial reason she did not apply; later ill health after her graduation prevented her from applying to Smith, although she did attend medical school for a semester. The more important point, Brown believes, is that Addams faced a large potential for alienation at Rockford, in part for her religious beliefs, but "her daily refusal to give in to that alienation (not some imagined melodrama with her father) is what deserves notice here" (p. 62). She was admired by her classmates and teachers for her intellect, dignity, and diplomacy, skills fostered in her by her father.

Addams's years at Rockford, as described by Brown, contrast markedly with what Addams writes in her autobiography. As with her childhood, Addams hid the complexities of her experience. Brown writes that in the autobiography, "Addams presented her seminary self as far more democratic, and far more superficial, than she actually was at the time" (p. 102). She creates a story of communal girlhood and intellectual development, and removes the school's headmistress, Anna Sill, almost entirely from the narrative. Brown calls the chapter "a study in conscious and unconscious reconstruction," reflecting in part her anger at Sill and the educational limitations she believed her responsible for (p. 102). Her rewriting of her experience with other students, as a member of an intellectual community rather than a leader of it, also makes her seem more typical and suggest "that any coed could become a social reformer" (p. 103). The autobiography also greatly simplified her conversion from an ideological youth to a socially conscious reformer.

Ill health plagues Jane Addams after she leaves Rockland, and her foray into medicine ends shortly after it

begins. This is a period in Addams's life when family demands dictated her role, and she felt trapped by family expectations and gender conventions of the time. Her father's sudden death while on vacation with his family the summer after her graduation further clouded her future as she dealt with the loss. She moves to Philadelphia with her stepmother not only to attend medical school, but also so that Anna could be closer to her son, Harry, married to Jane's sister, Alice. The autobiography emphasizes health reasons for her withdrawal from medical school, but Brown argues it more likely was in part from the burden of family responsibilities, which "came at her from every direction in a dizzying array of demands that denied her every opportunity to plan her own course" (p. 119). She returned to the family as a "dutiful daughter," limited by gender conventions (p. 115).

After her father's death and her departure from medical school, Addams travels to Europe twice: first with her stepmother and a cousin, and then a few years later with close friends Ellen Starr and Sarah Anderson. It is during these trips that Addams's social consciousness is transformed, and she begins her quest to open Hull House. As with other elements of her life, however, she simplifies the sequence in her autobiography. The first trip is much more centered on studying the art and culture in Europe. Addams greatly exaggerates her encounters with the poor on this trip, and little evidence of direct encounters with poverty, or the influence of such encounters, emerges in her letters and diaries of this time. Instead, when she does address issues related to poverty and class, her focus is more on what the elite "ruling class" should do to address these problems.

It is in her second trip to Europe, a few years later, that Addams begins to see the poor in a new way. In the interim she is caring for her family and continues to be the family mediator. She gets her first hands-on view of the poor while in Baltimore in this period, and she works with a group of black women at a local shelter. It is also in this period that, Brown argues, Jane continues her skill of mediation, but now with the aim of creating connections between people, rather than simply avoiding conflict. Her second trip to Europe, when she visits the Toynbee settlement in London, prompts her to rethink her notions of poverty and its causes. She begins to believe that poverty, rather than an individual failing, was a societal and environmental problem.

This is part of Brown's work that delves deeply into the autobiography and Addams's construction of this part of her life. Brown complicates Jane's presentation, which simplifies her realization about poverty and its causes. Addams also presents the years after she left Rockford as wasted, and completely ignores the family demands on her during that time. But Brown argues that the transformation that emerges through Addams's letters was more valuable than Addams might have realized. Her transformation may have been slowed by her health and family demands, but they also were critical in her own intellectual development and her social reform consciousness. Those years "taught her to value the caring and intimacy fostered by female culture, directed her eye away from the hero on stage and toward the individual on the street, and forced her to realize that in a world of bent backs, dying children, filthy factories, and selfish power, heroism was not romantic flight of the disembodied will but a daily decision to show up and hold on" (p. 205). She would have been much less effective, Brown argues, in her Hull House endeavors, and other social reform activities, without this informal education.

Moving to Chicago and establishing Hull House does strain some family relationships in Addams's life and is one reason that Brown argues she omitted that issue from this part of her autobiography. Brown argues that Addams dealt with this conflict by ignoring it, or assuming that her family supported her efforts, despite evidence to the contrary, particularly from her stepmother, Anna, and her son and Addams's brother-in-law, Harry Haldeman. Addams finally had found her niche, one that allowed her "to finesse her womanhood into a secular stewardship that others saw as eminently feminine" (p. 226). It enabled her to put into practice her belief in a religion of action that valued the individual. She believed she had found a rationale for her work, despite the sacrifice of some of her responsibilities to her family. Ironically, Addams learned many of the skills she used in the creation and operation of Hull House from Anna, her stepmother. But Anna was also the most vocal critic of Addams's diminished role as family caretaker and spinster daughter.

Throughout the text, Brown analyzes the personal relationships Addams has with friends, including Ellen Starr and Mary Smith. She again mines personal letters, those that were not destroyed, and Addams's journals to reconstruct these friendships. Starr was a key part of Addams's transformation, traveling to Europe with her the second time Addams went, and helping in the establishment of Hull House. Starr was an intellectual partner throughout their friendship and also a spiritual discussant; although the two differed on religious views, Starr did help Addams formulate her own beliefs about faith and stewardship. Their relationship became more

strained as they shared the early years in Hull House. Another key woman in Addams's life was Mary Smith, a volunteer at Hull House who also was a financial contributor. Because of the lack of evidence and the nature of female friendships, Brown does not attempt to label the relationships sexual, but her analysis shows the effect both women had on Addams's intellectual, religious, and personal views. They provide another glimpse into the female culture that became so valued by Addams, despite the unclear boundaries of those relationships.

The final few chapters of the biography examine the early years in Hull House, including the entrance of Florence Kelley and the role Addams played in social reform. Addams successfully defended her work from an infusion of Christian evangelism, although she was often criticized by some for the lack of attention to Christianity and faith. Some, including Samuel Barnett of the Toynbee Settlement in London, feared that "such incessant "doing" in the pursuit of particular issues would obscure the religious side (p. 262). In these chapters, Brown documents and defends Addams's role as a compromiser or mediator. She spread a message of interdependence and cooperation, which often frustrated those who wanted her to take a more firm stand on specific issues: "In the rough and tumble events in the early 1890s, her stubborn even-handedness was at once admirable and immensely irritating" (p. 272). Brown highlights this trend in several key issues, including the Pullman strike in 1894. Coinciding with the Pullman strike was another family crisis, when her sister, Mary fell ill and eventually died. Again family responsibilities conflict with Addams's public life, but Brown argues that by this point Addams's public role had made her the effective head of the family. She arranged for her sister's care and for someone to help with Mary's children, and becomes their guardian after her sister died that summer. The spinster daughter became the second mother of her nieces and nephews.

Brown's biography of Addams is carefully researched and well documented.

She closely analyzes her sources to untangle Addams's intellectual development, and her arguments about Addams's transformation from her father's daughter to one of the era's most well-known social reformers is convincing. She adds another layer to our knowledge about Addams, as well as the experiences of an upper-class, educated, single woman in this period. Women's education, family responsibilities outside of marriage, health issues, and relationships are illustrated through Addams's experiences. Her life is also a window into how unmarried women negotiated family responsibilities. Too often we assume that unmarried women were "free" of family concerns, as they had no husband or children in an era when marriage was such a central part of women's roles, but Brown shows through Addams the complexity of their family lives, even for a woman left financially independent by her father.

The portrait of Addams is largely sympathetic and positive, and Brown seeks to explain the reasons why Addams behaved as she did, rather than to criticize her decisions and choices. Although it is sympathetic, it is also a critical examination of Addams's life, and seeks to examine the myths about Addams's work and life, many of which are rooted in *Twenty Years at Hull House*. The sections where Brown closely complicates the autobiography with her own research are perhaps the most interesting. What is lacking in the study is a closer look at Addams's views on immigrants and minorities. Brown successfully traces Addams's views on poverty and class, but her interrogation of why Addams viewed immigrants in the way that she did, and how that changed, is not dealt with in the depth that it could be. The issues of poverty and class intersect with race, ethnicity, and nativity, but that does not appear in this text. In part this could be a function of the chronological organization, but her study of Addams would benefit from more attention to that aspect of her life in those years.

The book is well written and readable, and will be of interest to women's historians as well as intellectual historians and those interested in the Progressive Era. It is an important book for those who use, perhaps in the classroom, Addams's autobiography. Brown does not invalidate the value of Addams's text, but provides a careful analysis of Addams's reconstruction of her life. Anyone interested in the genre of autobiography and in that text in particular, will find Brown's work illuminating.

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