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Intervention to the Transversal Seminar "Un lecteur, un auteur, regards croisés" - Laboratoire Triangle UMR 5206.

Thank you for welcoming me to the Transversal Seminar. I am a historian at Saint Louis University, in Lyon to research portions of my current project on women, marriage, and religious vocation. I am grateful that you have come to discuss *Rousseau's Daughter's* with me and, equally importantly, that ENS-Lyon has offered me a warm welcome during my research time here. It has been very fruitful to talk with many of you and I thank you for your generosity in sharing your time and your intellect.

The premise of this seminar is cross-reading, and it offers us the hope that by stepping out of our comfort zones, we can learn more about our own disciplines, challenge assumptions, and enlarge our horizons. Professor Gautier, I was delighted by your willingness to read my work critically, in part because, while I am decidedly not a philosopher, philosophical thought is, as you know, important to the framework of the book. My graduate school training also tended to encourage literary and philosophical experimentation, and as I framed my project, it was at least partially in response to historical questions inspired by Carole Pateman, Michel Foucault, and Pierre Bourdieu.

Your reading, then, focuses on some of the underlying problems that pushed me toward my area of investigation, especially questions of autonomy, social education, and gender. On the one hand, then, it covers familiar ground, reminding me of questions and texts that have at turns inspired, frustrated, challenged, or puzzled me. However, given your interests and training, the questions and comments emphasize contributions that

some historians – unfortunately, even including me – have pushed aside. What a pleasure it was to be reminded of the "big questions" that inspired me in the first place!

This is all the more true given that some of those questions have resonance for my current research, and I had been so caught up in the details that I had lost sight of them. So, I thank you for your attentive reading and your time; it has already been helpful and encouraging. This seminar is a gift to me, and it is in that context that I look forward to the rest of our conversation today.

I thought I would answer your questions first and then address some issues that your reading brought to my mind.

Your first question centers on methodology. You note that I frequently insist on the cultural dimension of my research. When you ask me to describe this method and how it is different from social history I hear two questions. The first is "What exactly is cultural history," and the second is "Why don't you claim social history for yourself?" I'll answer them in order. Cultural history, at least how it has been practiced in the past twenty years, has tended to emphasize two things. First of all, it looks at the representation of values – rhetoric that has been passed on and believed to be the primary influence in how people understood and organized the world. It also looks at cultural practice, that is, what people from all walks of life actually produced and how they interpreted the art, music, literature, etc. that surrounded them. Here, one might think of Michel Certeau's work as influential; cultural historians wish to describe what values a society attempted to transmit through its culture, but they also might examine actual practices to find ways in which these values were contested or changed through transmission.

At the outset of this project, my goal was to explore ideas about education and autonomy, as I believed that would allow me to uncover cultural values that were central to

liberalism. I wanted to see how ideas that tended to promote individual freedom related to a governmental desire to mold citizens in a particular image. As you note in the chapter on clothing – and as we also know with the chapter on advice manuals – I ended up studying prescriptive literature of all sorts, which tells us little about actual practices at any single point in time. My work does not turn away from questioning the implementation and contestation of ideals, but rather than place it into everyday life, it takes multiple streams of normative rhetoric and compares them to one another. The first part of my research ended up being chapters one and five, so that the legislative and philosophical content served as a unifying framework of investigation. Then, I used the relationship between the philosophical and the normative political rhetoric to explore the tension between a demand for both education and autonomy. After all, the control of education and the newfound expectations of individual freedom do not sit easily together in the creation of a new citizen. As critics of Philippe Ariès have noted, it is a bit odd to assert that a regime that emphasizes individual autonomy would also result in a state-run school. I wanted to explore that tension. The research expanded outward from the political and intellectual content into an examination of the ways that a change in assumptions about the individual might also transform education. Instead of looking at everyday practice, then, I looked at the ways in which cultural and philosophical changes drove – and were themselves driven by – broader cultural trends, which required examining sources that many historians had dismissed as irrelevant or merely epiphenomenal. I not only found confirmation of the dissemination of ideas about self-mastery and individualism, but I also found adoption and modification of these same trends. For example, children's literature certainly used Rousseauan ideas even as its existence stood in opposition to the idea that small children should not be taught how to read, and Louis-Aimé Martin thought himself a Rousseauan through and through even

though he asserted that mothers were more effective than tutors at creating ideal citizens. Additionally, even if I don't look at "actual" practices at any specific moment in time, I can point to a substantial shift in norms, and those norms do correlate to practice. For example, little boys in Western society no longer wear dresses, perhaps with the sole exception of baptismal gowns, though even that practice is changing.

Social history, on the other hand, tends to explore institutions and offer quantification and, insofar as it is possible, relate direct experience. Why am I not a historian of the social? To be a social and cultural historian, I would need not only to confront how ideas about individuality and education came into being and how they changed over time and in response to cultural concerns, but I would also need to examine varied responses. We know this is an elite rhetoric; I would need to examine what non-elite families thought of it and how they reacted to it. I would need points of entry into actual readings rather than ideal or normalized ones. Additionally, even if I had a treasure-trove of letters that allowed me to reconstruct the worldview of domestic mothers under the Restoration, my research led me to the conclusion that the shift to domestic nurturing was fundamentally philosophical in inspiration, not an economic development driven by industrial change, and this decision led me to center my research on cultural causes and concerns. *Rousseau's Daughters* is not a "social history," because the causation and the exploration of the impact of the ideology do not delve into quantifiable, lived experience.

I will admit that early on, I had hoped to cover both social and cultural ground, but I soon realized that, given the time I spend on the ideal philosophical, legislative, and domestic worlds, I would not be able to do justice to the complexities of families, including perhaps, those where domesticity was hardly so well-integrated. It would certainly require a different book to approach those issues, and there are some works that have begun to do

this. For example, Christine Adams' work on maternal societies and the reshaping of ideas about motherhood across society is an excellent blend of social and cultural history, as it takes broad cultural currents and integrates them into social hierarchies and political trends.

So, if I never intended to determine how elite mothers actually raised their children or what working-class women might have adopted from Rousseau, what did I intend to accomplish? I think your second set of questions strikes at the heart of my concerns. As you note, I explored the gendered implications of the cultural and philosophical trends that drove political change. In the Rousseauan formulation, which I believe I demonstrate came to be the culturally prominent understanding of individualism – political man was understood as one who had the strength of will to respect the rights of others, and only the nurturing love of a mother could provide the proper foundation for the creation of this kind of man. That meant that domestic nurturing had an explicitly social component; the "private sphere" was civic in nature. If that is true, women were not "written out" of the social contract as inferiors, as Pateman claims, and perhaps, gender differentiation and even "separate spheres" do not imply a misogyny that is inherent in modernity (179), especially given that women were seen as having potentially superior self-mastery when compared to men.

With my first book, I more or less stop there. You challenge me on this point, saying that if we accept this premise, that the family is the source of political training, then we must also understand that the family may also be the location for the replication of inequalities. You cite Susan Moller Okin on this point, and of course you are right. Here is perhaps the difference between the historian and the political philosopher; I was interested in enunciating what I saw as an historical inaccuracy (political man was constructed against women and therefore women's acceptance of a domestic role was part and parcel of a

misogynistic shift in modernity). You ask for more: if the family is the political foundation of society, how can it also be the source of equality, rather than the source of inequality, especially gendered inequality? Clothing is one sign of this distinction, as material culture continued to replicate some inequalities, for example, toys that privileged physical freedom for boys, and clothing that emphasized feminine obligations. In his *Growing Up in France*, Colin Heywood tells the story of how at least one young man reflected that he felt superior to his sister after he receiving his long pants in the 19th century. Dresses remained a symbol of oppression, a sign of the social order and women's confinement to the home, and even a small boy knew that he was more grown up than his older sister when he wore pants and she did not.

However, if gender distinctions were not themselves the primary source of political exclusion, but were only one part of a set of cultural assumptions that resulted in the exclusion of women, it was not the emphasis on individual characteristics, including gender, that was problematic, but the hierarchy of values. One might, however far-fetched it might be, imagine a society in which dresses were a sign of moral superiority and a small boy would weep when he had to leave behind his skirts. I make this point neither because it is likely nor because such a situation would be unproblematic but only to emphasize the contingency of these values. The new situation did not involve a fixed hierarchy, like that found in Locke. Rather, it depended on cultural understandings of individuality. Gender certainly had a role to play, but what exactly that role encompassed had become more fluid and debateable, with such luminaries as Condorcet already willing to consider the idea that women had the same individual potential as men. Also, once women were no longer slaves but moral equals, they had to be integrated into society in concrete ways. Louis-Aimé Martin might not have been egalitarian enough to think of women as citizens in the way

that we do today, but he recognized that women had to be free to make real choices or their sacrifices would be of no value in inculcating liberal ideals.

The new political ideology became important because it offered the foundation on which one might conceptualize family and civic equality, where one can easily make sense of Moller-Okin's question. I realize that is not yet itself an answer to your reframing of Moller Okin's question, which is: when society is sexist and inegalitarian, how can the family change that dynamic rather than merely replicate it? I do think that my research provides more than one answer, and offers the shift to individual autonomy as a moment of increased hope for equality, not one of diminishing possibilities for women.

First of all, I would note that the fact that education believed itself to be the same for all pre-rational children is significant. Emotional and intellectual equality was an ideal among all young members of the family; and the first years were believed to be the most formative ones. In other words, the conditions of education for autonomy within the family were indeed intended to be egalitarian. Adding to that point, I would suggest that reading adult male clothing as "not role-driven" is misleading in its own way. John Tosh's work on masculinity and male dress delineates the ways in which young men were incorporated into cultural norms just as young women were, if at a later age. They were dressed as "men," but that was no less constructed. In other words, there was a tension between individuality and social training for both sexes, and an emphasis on gender need not always be indicative of oppression. As Lori J. Marso has noted, the new model of equality based on individuality has to account for difference, which means accounting for femininity and masculinity.

I am not attempting to efface the oppression of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – or contemporary society, for that matter. Rather, I am arguing that if one is going to focus on individual characteristics, one will consider gender, among other things,

and the way to effect change is to neutralize the negative valuation attached to being female. It is also important to understand that the terms "woman" and "citizen" were not mutually exclusive in the new philosophical vocabulary that rose to cultural prominence by the early nineteenth century, which afforded women the possibility of seeing themselves within the polity, even if the legislators themselves were not using a political language that envisioned such a shift.

Similarly, we know that at one point, revolutionary legislators considered removing education from the home altogether, considering it too important to be left in the hands of just anyone. Ultimately, this most radical vision of state-controlled education did not win. Primary education, though not primary instruction, was left in the hands of women and throughout the nineteenth century, the state emphasized ways in which it might assist the expanding domestic function through assistance to nursing mothers, through maternal societies, and eventually, through a welfare state. The state did not enforce a vision of separation, where education of citizens was to be completed outside the home. Women were to remain central in the first (and most foundational) shaping of future citizens.

Importantly, the women in this picture were mothers, not wives. Certainly, the early nineteenth century generally believed these to be one and the same, though the Saint-Simonian model demonstrates that at least one utopian scheme recognized the important difference between the two. Not entirely unlike the Saint-Simonians, I think it is important that the mother and not the wife was the general model for the creator of citizens. Both were legally inferior in the post-Napoleonic regime, but philosophically, the mother stood in a relationship of power and authority to her children, where the wife was defined by her subservience to her husband. (In *Constested Paternity,* Rachel Fuchs has also demonstrated how this difference gave single mothers some unique legal leverage during the nineteenth

century.) When rhetoric emphasized the mother and not the wife, it stood a greater chance of modeling autonomy, control, and independence, thus giving women a vision of themselves as capable of shaping the future as individual women.

Modern liberalism is not perfect – and the family is not an idyllic, naturally egalitarian, sphere. Even today, there remains a problem of inequality, one that we confront in terms of representation, employment, housework, and the division of childcare. To accept gender differences may mean, at least in a contemporary sense, to seem to apologize for imbalances based on gender. If women find their paths to advancement blocked because of maternity, this may seem to be "natural" rather than unacceptable. As your final question implies, this could be the fault of this link between nurturing domesticity and the construction of the polity, and could end up driving women – certainly women as mothers – farther from the public sphere. Certainly, the nineteenth century saw an increased emphasis on biological determinism in an attempt to exclude women from the public sphere because of their "nature." Contemporary society has hardly avoided this shift; one prominent strain of the "mommy wars," as they are referred to in the United States, is a demand that mothers not just breastfeed their children but even efface themselves in attempt to fully nurture their children. And yet, the fact is that if society is to continue, women's bodies will be the ones to give birth and, in many cases, to feed and nurture the infant. Only a politics that comes to terms with an embodied individual will be able to envision a society that can cope with physical difference. For what it's worth, I think an inability to envision a non-masculine politics is also what is behind much of the virulence of the abortion debate in the United States, a nation where paid maternity leave is functionally non-existent for workers.

All of that admits that life is not perfect; modern liberal societies find it hard to balance between often competing ideals: children and society, autonomy and community, equality and individuality. Even Rousseau couldn't make Sophie, constructed for Emile, really behave as the perfect wife. So yes, Susan Moller Okin is right to remind us to be critical of unthinking diversity and a return to families that replicate inequality. But she is also right, as was Rousseau, to note that our political society does not exist apart from the construction of the gendered and embodied individual within families.

I admit at the beginning of *Rousseau's Daughters* that I hated Jean Jacques Rousseau when I first read him. And, for that matter, when I read him a second and a third time. Years in to my research, I horrified myself by reading Joseph Reisert's book, *Frend of Virtue,* and nodding along at the sentence, "When I read Rousseau, I think he is speaking to me." I say that now, because perhaps I have read and sympathized too much with Rousseau, but I do find that ultimately, I place hope for a renewed polity in a properly-constructed citizenry, one where autonomy and individuality are tempered by social obligations and community expectations, including demands for civic equality that begins in the home.

My answer then, is that this rhetoric, which linked women and citizenship, made a persuasive argument that the family was the central site for the creation of a new society because of the unique role of the self-controlled mother. This idea, which found its most prominent voice in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, influenced the domesticity of the coming century. It did not eliminate inequality, nor did it immediately change the political system, which appeared more determined than ever to eliminate women from power. However, it did change the expectation of what women's contributions and autonomy meant, and it demanded a great deal of women as independent actors. This, as much as anything, I think,

provided a foundation from which women expected to be full participating members in liberal society and began to question their exclusion on sexist grounds.

That (finally) leads me to my current project, which takes the methodology of cultural history slightly further into the realm of actual experience. At the end of my book, I felt as if I had promised readers that the opportunities of the nineteenth century came out of Rousseau and domesticity; yet, most scholarship on feminism in the later nineteenth century reflects no possibility that domestic life offered a way of conceptualizing public activism. I thus started my research with two questions. First, if I am right, and domestic ideology is a pervasive cultural influence by about 1830, what happens to women who are not mothers, or whose primary self-identification is not physical maternity? Martin and Rousseau both actively argue against the possibility that women could operate publicly and politically outside of the family. We thus need to know: Is that what women themselves thought? Did public women see themselves as subversive, acting against domestic ideology, or were they positively informed by it? Secondly, women's public activism and feminism are consciously linked in historical scholarship to radical movements, and with good reason. If my first book is actually correct, however, one would also expect to see women who are not radical, who did not reject domesticity and family, who used their understanding of the civic role that was inherently theirs to change society to be more egalitarian. This would not preclude movements that we are already familiar with, like social work and maternal charity, but I primarily intended to explore the question in a cultural and intellectual sense. That is, I wanted to know if women who accepted domesticity and maternity were developing the role of the mother in progressive and egalitarian ways, or if there were cultural currents that might have fed their willingness to do so.

Given the both the general conservatism of religious ideology as well as the ways in which religious and biological destiny were combined intellectually (ie, "God has ordained that women should remain within the home; God has given all children a mother," etc), the first place that I look for an answer to this question is in the documents of Catholic religious formation. I have examined catechetical teaching, hagiographical literature, books on vocation, etc. I ask what girls were being told about marriage and motherhood in an official sense. I then look at how these same ideas were dealt with in secular literature (novels in particular) and then in the images and material culture that surrounded elite young girls (everything from board games to hot chocolate pots). I use those to draw a picture of how culture intended to shape young women as they moved toward marriage, or at least a marriageable age. I then examine the life and writings of three Catholic women who were raised as this ideology came to prominence: Rose-Philippine Duchesne (a missionary to the United States and consecrated religious), Pauline Jaricot (consecrated celibate and Catholic activist), and Zélie Martin (most famously known as the mother of Terese of Lisieux, but also a woman who explicitly confronted questions of vocation and her role within the world). I hope, by examining the cultural rhetoric of marriage and motherhood in conjunction with ideas about vocation, I will be able to tease out some of the ways that individual women might have embraced, adopted, and modified the domestic rhetoric in their own life even as they sought to change the world.