

Conley's chapter on Jack Cornwell illustrates this point. His sacrifice for navy and nation was a traditional idea, but much of this idea was expressed in strikingly modern imagery. What dominates in official and popular depictions (two are printed in the book, which has excellent illustrations) is the massive 5.5 inch-gun on which Cornwell served. These are pictures of steel, weaponry and might, showing the devastation brought about by modern artillery. They symbolise the sailor's duty to subject his individuality to a modern war-machine fighting an invisible enemy. Here, as in other parts of the book, one wished Conley would have allowed for a more varied, complicated picture. Yet this should not distract from the fact that her book offers an important contribution, in particular to the social and cultural history of the navy.

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**Christine D. Myers, *University Co-Education in the Victorian Era: Inclusion and Exclusion in the United States and the United Kingdom* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 294. ISBN 978 0230622371.**

**Katharina Rowold, *The Educated Woman: Minds, Bodies, and Women's Higher Education in Britain, Germany, and Spain, 1865–1914* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 322. ISBN 978 0415205870.**

In 1987, the historian Gillian Sutherland described the historiography of women's higher education as 'one of the last bastions of a heroic fairy-tale, a story of great women battling against all obstacles'. In no small part thanks to her, the last twenty years or so have seen a move away from this tradition, as a plethora of books and articles has examined the story of women's arrival at university in more dispassionate – and convincing – ways. We now know a great deal more about the first women students and those who taught them. We know about the subjects they studied, the buildings they inhabited, even the clothes they wore and the sports they played. We are increasingly well aware of the paradox of women's higher education: that access to university might confirm rather than challenge existing gender roles. More recently, the current vogue for comparative and transnational history has also begun to shape writing on women's experience of higher education.

These two books are examples of this trend, and use comparative history to strike another blow against the 'heroic fairy-tale' that Sutherland described. For Christine Myers, who deals with Britain and America, the opening of universities to women actually represented 'a concerted effort by both institutional officials and students to reinforce the gender expectations of the community at large' (p. 26). For Katharina Rowold, who compares Britain, Germany and Spain, the debate about women's higher education was critically linked to a wider discussion about the nature of women's minds and bodies. Most alarmingly, she shows, this often meant that advocates of a female university education were drawn to use eugenic arguments and to embrace a 'language of racialized motherhood' (p. 208) in their campaigns.

Christine Myers's *University Co-Education in the Victorian Era*, which is a re-working of her doctorate, is also admirable in its determination not to revisit the familiar,

high-profile examples of women's university life. Instead of Girton and Somerville, Wellesley and Vassar, this study is focused on two-dozen other institutions – from Aberystwyth to Galway, Alabama to Tennessee. Although Myers has read very little non-printed material (and that almost exclusively in Glasgow), she has pored over the numerous publications issued by the colleges she studies, and as a result her book is a treasure trove of interesting details.

It is a shame, however, that so many of these details turn out, on closer inspection, to be errors. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, for example, did not graduate from St Andrews with a doctorate in law and then 'go on to be a well-known suffrage campaigner in the twentieth century' (p. 19). She was already a public figure, noted for her work as a suffragist, when she was granted this honorary degree. Likewise, Jane Harrison did not graduate from Aberdeen in 1899 before she 'became a "classical archaeologist"' (p. 177). This was also an honorary degree, awarded in recognition of more than twenty years of work on Greek art and thought. By the same token, St Andrews did not experience problems with accommodation because it was in a large 'established city' (p. 103); it is in a small semi-rural one. Equally, undergraduates at Oxford and Cambridge did not have to 'take an oath to the Church of England to be able to matriculate' (p. 35). Students at Oxford had to affirm the Thirty-Nine Articles on matriculation, but at Cambridge they did not have to do this until graduation. In any event, these requirements were abolished in the 1850s. Such mistakes may seem insignificant – and, on their own, they are. But the slow drip, drip, drip of factual inaccuracy is disconcerting.

More important is the fact that this book – ostensibly a work of comparative history – actually contains very little comparison. Concluding (at the beginning) that 'Victorian sensibilities were relatively universal on either side of the Atlantic' (p. 29), Christine Myers does not draw out any important national differences in the development of co-educational universities. Perhaps this is right. But it seems odd not even to contemplate that these variations might exist.

In this respect, as in others, Katharina Rowold's *The Educated Woman* is a far more satisfying and satisfactory read. Based again on a much rewritten doctoral thesis, this is a work that succeeds precisely because it is so good at teasing out the differences as well as the similarities between separate countries. Rowold's doctorate compared Britain and Germany, and it was a really imaginative – as well as brave – decision to include Spain within her first book. Each of these countries slowly embraced the higher education of women, with Britain starting first (in the 1860s) and finishing last (when Cambridge voted to grant women degrees in 1947). In Germany, by contrast, the campaign did not get going until the 1880s and was concluded in 1909, as Prussia finally opened its universities to women. The Spanish case is different again, with women admitted to all universities in 1910 – well before the development of an organised women's movement in the country.

Rowold uses the debates provoked by these reforms to explore the ways in which women's bodies and minds were conceptualised in Britain, Germany and Spain. Her decision to divide the book along national lines – with separate sections for each country – does lead to some repetition. One might also wonder whether she could have widened her focus on religious discourses. At present, *The Educated Woman* seems to suggest that they were only important in Spain, whilst recent research has increasingly shown how significant and complex they remained in Britain and Germany too.

Taken as a whole, however, this book is an impressive piece of work. By examining scientific and medical theories about women's higher education, Katharina Rowold illuminates two key themes. In the first place, she shows how social Darwinist and eugenic thought was shaped and reshaped by different national contexts – and how this process helped to frame debates about the admission of women to university. Second, she explores how both those in favour and those against the higher education of women drew on the rhetoric of science to articulate their arguments. By the late nineteenth century, she concludes, 'In Britain the female body quickly became a prime focus of attention; in Germany commentators were strongly pre-occupied by the female mind' (p. 98). In Spain, by contrast, eugenics was less important than the generalised sense that modernisation implied – indeed, demanded – the admission of women to universities.

All this is a long way away from any fairy tale. Both these books illustrate just how much the field has changed, how wide-ranging it has become. In their own ways, each demonstrates that the history of women's higher education encompasses more than just the institutional development of universities or the evolution of feminism. It intersected with questions of identity, subjectivity, the nature of the body and the mind, and should be studied as such.

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**Patricia A. Tilburg, *Colette's Republic: Work, Gender, and Popular Culture in France, 1870–1914* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2009), pp.xiii + 231. ISBN 978 1845455712.**

With poetic flair and incredible articulateness, Patricia Tilburg's *Colette's Republic: Work, Gender, and Popular Culture in France, 1870–1914* has emerged onto the already inundated scene of *fin de siècle* French cultural studies, fresh and delightfully complex. Like her doctoral supervisor, Debora Silverman, Tilburg explores intersections in cultural history, visual culture, literary studies and politics with originality and conviction. Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette (1873–1954), one of the best-known French authors of the twentieth century, is Tilburg's focus, less as a titillating figure of romantic biography than as a case study with a fascinating subject-position through which to analyse larger cultural, pedagogical and political shifts during the early Third Republic. Tilburg artfully arranges her study around roughly chronological themes, milestones, locations and careers in Colette's life: from her schooling in Saint-Saveur (a village in the Yonne region of Burgundy); her move and troubled first marriage in bohemian Paris, coinciding with her first published writings; her scandalous nude performances in music halls, divorce and affairs; to her engagement with debates around pantomime as a valid form of art and completion of the *Claudine* series just before the First World War. The aim of the author? Through Colette's writings and her own self-representations as a stage performer, author and celebrity, Tilburg presents Colette as a product of Republican values of work, thrift and uneasy class effacement through a laic education. As Tilburg explains: