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John R. Cole, *Between the Queen and the Cabby: Olympe de Gouges's Rights of Woman*. Montreal, Quebec; Kingston, Ontario; London; and Ithaca, New York: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011. 311 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography and index. \$95.00 U.S. and C.A. (cl). ISBN 978-0-7735-3886-3.

Review by Lindsay A. H. Parker, Trinity University.

Why have we never before known that Olympe de Gouges finished her famous *Rights of Woman* with a rant about cab fare? This charming and perplexing reality explains one key word in John Cole's title. The "queen" references the equally surprising, but better-known, dedication that begins her pamphlet. While it is what comes "between the queen and the cabby"—the Declaration of the Rights of Woman—that has made Gouges famous in our day, Cole draws our attention to the more confusing parts of the feminist's September 1791 publication. In the process, he places Gouges within the context of her own life story as well as the politics of Revolutionary France. The result is a new vision of this individual whom we so often quote and yet so little understand. In the next several paragraphs, I will explain in greater detail what this book offers to non-specialists and specialists, who will benefit differently from it.

The book is organized to analyze each section of the *Rights of Woman* in turn. Part one therefore considers the Dedication to the Queen; part two, the Declaration of the Rights of Woman; part three, the Postamble with its model contract between men and women, as well as Gouges's commentary on people of color and blacks; and part four, the Adenda where the cabby kerfuffle takes place. Each section also includes significant context. For example, when Cole analyzes the Dedication to the Queen, he also explains how it contrasts with popular attitudes toward Marie-Antoinette in the wake of the King's recent flight. Similarly, when Cole examines the social contract between men and women, he provides a history of marriage practices. He even gives us a brief account of new laws for cabbies in the Revolution. All of this context, sometimes consuming an entire chapter, will be helpful for undergraduates and others who are not familiar with the detailed timeline of the early years of the Revolution.

Indeed, non-specialists are Cole's intended audience. He makes several choices that benefit those readers, including especially a full transcription of the *Rights of Woman*, from queen to cabby, after the introduction. He assumes little knowledge about the French Revolution and devotes many pages to explaining political institutions, Enlightenment attitudes toward women, and the escalating conflicts resulting from laws that granted and then revoked suffrage for some men of color. Chapter four, which compares the 1789 Declaration to that of Gouges, is also written for students to the extent that it reproduces both texts, pairing the articles for easy comparison and following each couple with analysis.

Were this book to be assigned to undergraduates, chapter four would serve as the beginning of a discussion rather than an exhaustive analysis of the similarities and differences between the two Declarations. Many of Cole's commentaries are brief. He focuses particularly on interpreting Gouges's sometimes-awkward language and drawing our attention to how she

parses the original Declaration. Sometimes his analyses help us get to important themes within her Declaration. For example, in Article VI, Gouges "re-radicalize[s] propositions that liberals had initially directed against traditions of monarchical sovereignty and aristocratic privilege. She turns them back against gender exclusions and gender bias" (p. 120). In other cases, readers will likely be inspired to probe further than Cole takes us. In Article IX, Gouges does not include all of the rights that the original Declaration listed. Cole remarks that the omissions (the presumption of innocence and the prohibition of excessive force on the part of the police) are "significant omissions" (p. 122). Aside from the fact that those rights are important, what other significance might we draw from Gouges's rewording? In some cases, extensive interpretation is left to the reader, or for class discussion.

Perhaps because the Declaration of Rights, which Cole notes was "less than a quarter of [the *Rights of Woman's*] pages," has received such thorough analysis elsewhere, Cole's guiding question is not what makes the Declaration a radical document, but rather why the *Rights of Woman* was not popular in Gouges's lifetime (p. 5). That is to say, Cole turns our attention to the other components of the *Rights of Woman* that contained, in his estimation, ideas and opinions that "recklessly offended all imaginable readers" (p. 8). He frequently draws our attention to how Gouges's royalism, her reinterpretation of marriage, and her affection for men like Talleyrand, who became the target of another famous feminist, would have turned most men and women off. In the final chapter, he also shows that Gouges stands out among her contemporary feminists and seems not to have interacted with them, either socially or through the flow of printed ideas.

His questions are therefore markedly different from other scholars of the *Rights of Woman*. Cole especially notes where he differs with Joan Scott, whom he faults for imprecisely dating the document and for misrepresenting her meaning when she wrote, in another publication, about "paradoxes to offer." I believe readers will find his evidence in this regard convincing. Cole also explains that he seeks to contextualize Gouges's *Rights of Woman* more thickly than ever before. This focus is certainly a welcome addition to the scholarship on Gouges, and it casts other, more theoretical interpretations into some doubt. Gouges was such a contradictory figure that any coherent ideology we might want to ascribe to her only sticks at certain moments. However, readers who want answers to other questions, particularly those pertaining to the dialectic between feminist and non-feminist claims to freedom, will probably rely on others. Scott, for example, asks how feminists like Gouges articulated their claims within the confines of an ideology of gendered bodies, and with a vocabulary of universal categories that were truly coded male.[1] Those are not Cole's questions.[2]

Thus for scholars of the French Revolution and women, Cole offers new perspectives on Olympe de Gouges. Especially enlightening is his presentation of Gouges' publication history. In chapter three, Cole describes Gouges' politics leading up to September 1791. He analyzes several pamphlets that Gouges published in 1789, including writing that was hostile to the demands of the Third Estate. Similarly, in her plays, she exhibited little regard for women's equality. This context is enlightening because it proves that Gouges was not born a feminist or a revolutionary. The question that then comes to my mind is where did the *Rights of Woman* come from? Cole suggests that the Revolution inspired her feminism (pp. 24, 120). I would be very interested in learning what he thinks precisely triggered a change in her outlook.

This is not a question Cole takes up directly, though his insights into her personality and her biography might provide an answer. Cole marvelously brings Gouges to life through a close reading of many of her political and non-political writings. He finds that she wrote quickly and

preferred not to edit laboriously. She wanted her money's worth out of every inch of printable space. She also "had a weakness for prefaces," which she proves time and again, including a 1788 collection of plays with four prefaces (p. 108). She was impatient with her printer, cheap with her cabby, and arrogant in her belief that she was a noteworthy person. Before the Revolution, she pandered to the Orléans family in search of patronage. During the Revolution, she suggested that she should be given a government pension similar to the one given to Rousseau's companion, Thérèse Levasseur (p. 95). The element of personality is surely significant.

Cole's study shows us, deliciously, the temperament of an individual that the Revolution at least partially created. Piercing through the content of her writing, whether royalist or feminist, we see her desire to be heard among a throng of revolutionaries. Perhaps that desire is the most consistent cause behind all of her contradictory actions. This is truly the richness of Gouges' story: that she was so thoroughly inconsistent. I find this confusion precious. How better to understand this tumultuous period than to witness an ambitious, witty individual try to gain footing in a world where politics changed on a daily basis and political identities themselves were rough drafts? Cole references other scholarship on "becoming" French revolutionaries. Here we see another person in the process of "becoming." It can be an inelegant process. [3]

This is a beautifully written book. Gouges is a difficult person to get a firm grip on, but Cole's handling is agile. In fact, watching Gouges and Cole interact, one boldly announcing radical ideas and the other gracefully setting the scene around her—both, at times, with a sense of humor—is one of the greatest pleasures readers will enjoy.

NOTES

[1] Joan Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

[2] Candice Proctor's approach to Gouges is also different in that she sees Gouges as an active ("passive") citizen first and a woman second. Candice Proctor, *Women, Equality, and the French Revolution* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990).

[3] Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789-1790)* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996). I also try to understand how a woman developed a female, revolutionary identity. Lindsay A. H. Parker, "Family and Feminism in the French Revolution: The Case of Rosalie Ducrollay Jullien," *Journal of Women's History* 24/3 (autumn 2012).

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