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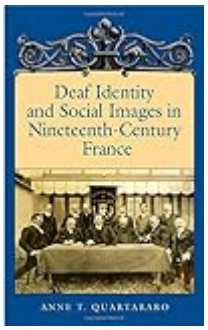

Anne T. Quartararo. *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France.* Washington DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2008. xi + 285 pp. $60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-56368-367-1.

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A Deaf Revolution in Revolutionary France

Within the deaf world, whether locally, nationally, or internationally, one of the most debated and contested issues is the way deaf people are identified, both by themselves and by others. In this book, Anne T. Quartararo addresses the way in which a collective and internal deaf identity emerged in France during the nineteenth century, and she investigates how this was influenced by and had an impact on external perceptions of deaf people, particularly those marginalized from society through their use of, and reliance on, sign language. In doing so, Quartararo produces some interesting insights by focusing on the development of deaf education in the country and through highlighting the short-lived but hugely important deaf banquets movement that flourished in the middle of the century.

Although a comparatively short book (the substantive text runs to less than two hundred pages), Quartararo manages to cover a range of factors in the development of deaf identity and draws on contemporary records of deaf schools and their administrators for much of her source material. She shows the direct links between the attitudes of the revolutionary authorities and the political infighting among deaf educators, and indeed deaf people themselves, about the methods employed within deaf schools and the consequences for the emergence of a collective deaf identity. The education of deaf children has always been a hugely contested topic, with debates and even open hostility between those supporting manual communication (signed languages in various forms) and those who argue that the main purpose of deaf education should be to prepare deaf children to live, work, and communicate in a predominantly hearing and speech based world (known as oralists). Quartararo shows the way in which the revolutionary authorities initially supported signed education for deaf children when this began to emerge on a large-scale basis in the early nineteenth century. In doing so, the authorities were promoting their agenda of equality for all, but they were also heavily influenced by the work of the first great educator of deaf children, AbbÃ© Charles-Michel de lâÃpÃ©e. A proponent of the eradication of social disadvantage through adequate and appropriate education, de lâÃpÃ©e founded

his own school for deaf children in the mid-eighteenth century and he achieved great success in teaching deaf children to read, write, and speak. He arranged public demonstrations of the abilities of his most successful pupils, which helped to show that, rather than being uneducable savages, through the use of signs and gesture as a means of education, deaf people could achieve educational success on par with their hearing counterparts. De lâÃpÃ©e based his teaching on the use of signs, many of them devised by him but also drawing on the natural signs used by his deaf pupils, as the basis for developing written language literacy among his pupils. From this it was then possible for many of his pupils to learn to speak in a clear and intelligible manner, employing high levels of French-language knowledge and understanding. Following his death in 1789, de lâÃpÃ©eâs work was continued by his protÃ©gÃ© AbbÃ© Sicard who succeeded de lâÃpÃ©e as director of the Paris Institute for Deaf-Mutes (Institution Nationale des Sourds-Muets Ã Paris). When the revolutionary government turned its attention to deaf education as a means of ensuring deaf people could enjoy the full benefits of the new social order, it came out strongly on the side of signed based education. However, despite the success of the Paris Institute, internal divisions and power struggles among deaf educators, combined with the rise of strict oralism in Germany and other European countries under the influence of Methodist values, ultimately placed signed based education under serious threat. In addition, the restoration of the monarchy in France in the mid-nineteenth century, before a return to republican rule in 1870, saw official attitudes toward the most appropriate communication methods for deaf education undergo radical change.

Quartararo sets these changes in deaf education within the wider social changes within France during this period and demonstrates how these influenced educational provision. In turn, these reflected the altering perspectives on the role of the state in supporting deaf people and ultimately the attitude of the state toward the capabilities of deaf people as productive members of society. Quartararo illustrates how arguments against separate deaf schools in favor of what would now be classed as âmainstreamingâ–the placement of deaf children within classes of hearing children–was predicated on the need to impose respect for authority and discipline within the classroom, in order that these deaf pupils would ultimately become respectable members of society. Little mention was made of their educational needs and what was best for them in this respect, and this represented a radical alteration in official attitudes. As with so many other countries across Europe and beyond, the 1880 Congress of Milan was to see oral education become the norm in state-funded deaf education, although signed based education was not eradicated completely as many opponents of oralism claim. The Congress of Milan was a gathering of influential deaf educators who argued that it was the duty of all educators to ensure that deaf children were taught to speak clearly and to read and write. Sign language had no role to play in deaf education, despite the successes of de lâÃpÃ©e and his successors, as the use of sign was seen to mitigate against the development of spoken language and was only to be used for those who were seen as academic failures under the oralist philosophy. Although not representing governments as such, the delegates at the Milan Congress represented huge political influence and the effects of Milan were felt immediately. Quartararo shows how the supposedly egalitarian principles of the republican government in France were conveniently ignored when it came to deaf children and oralist education was imposed across the country. The golden age of signed education in France was well and truly over. Quartararo tells this part of the story in a largely narrative style, but this nevertheless draws on her source material very effectively to underpin both the story and the arguments she puts forward in terms of the effects on deaf people.

Despite all these negative perceptions and impacts on deaf education, Quartararo goes on to outline the growth of deaf organizations, run by deaf people to support each other and to promote more positive images of themselves, both to each other and to the wider world. These emerged as the successors to the deaf banquets that had taken place mostly in Paris from the 1830s onward. Originally a fraternal gathering of deaf people, these were subsequently promoted as deliberate responses to the negative perceptions of deaf people, which celebrated through the use of sign language the unique culture of deaf sign language users. The first banquet was arranged in 1834 to celebrate the anniversary of de lâÃpÃ©eâs birth, and Quartararo shows how the banquets went on to provide a public identity for deaf people, to which prominent hearing people were invited. Although the movement lasted little more than fifteen years before internal divisions once again brought about its demise, a collective deaf identity in France had been established and would not die out with the banquets. Instead, a number of regional and national organizations to promote the views and wishes of deaf people emerged, and as the nineteenth century drew to a close, these culminated in a number of international gatherings of deaf people in France, which

served as the model for similar events in other countries.

Quartararo is to be congratulated for producing an interesting and illuminating insight into the development of deaf identity in France. Not only does she provide a detailed picture of the factors that influenced this development, but she also shows the way a number of external factors that have not been previously considered had major impacts. The changing attitudes of revolutionary and republican governments and the restored monarchy all played major roles in the education provided for deaf people. These in turn affected the development of deaf political activism and identity as responses to the conditions deaf people found themselves subjected to and their disadvantaged and discriminated position within wider French society. In writing this book, Quartararo also underlines the important but somewhat neglected contribution deaf people in France have played in the emergence of a broader conception of deaf identity that crosses artificially constructed national and political boundaries and that focuses more on shared deafness and all that this brings with it in terms of shared outlooks and experiences. This is a fascinating book that will be of interest to everyone interested in deaf education, disability politics, community formation, and a wide range of other disciplines.