
The French Teacher at Kelmscott House: Cécile Desroches, Jeanne Deroin and the Utopian Socialist Connection

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In 1888 Morris hired a French teacher at Kelmscott House to prepare himself and other members of the Socialist League for a forthcoming congress in France. He wrote to his wife Jane: ‘Did I tell you there is to be a Socialist Congress in Paris this summer? I suppose I shall have to go: in which [case] I ought to try to improve my French – don’t you think my dear?’¹ Among those who attended the classes were May Morris, W. B. Yeats, Emery Walker and Henry Halliday Sparling, secretary of the League. Other pupils included men whom Yeats referred to as ‘certain young Socialists [...] more or less educated workmen, rough of speech and manner, with a conviction to meet every turn’.² The teacher was Cécile Desroches who, with her mother Jeanne, was also a member of the League. One of Yeats’s biographers notes that the class was started because Morris wanted to find employment for a needy old Frenchwoman.³ We should not take this comment at face value, however. Desroches, like Morris, was fifty-four at this point and, furthermore, while his kindness, patience and humanity are well-documented, the employment of Desroches represents far more than an act of charity on his part.

Desroches’s mother was Jeanne Deroin, the renowned socialist, co-founder of the French feminist press and dynamic campaigner who had fought for women’s rights in France since 1830, and by this time the only surviving member of the group of ‘women of 1848’.⁴ She and her children had fled to Britain during 1852 after the disastrous defeat of the Provisional Government, and the crushing of the June Revolution in Paris, which had ushered in a prolonged period of severe state censorship and the suppression of political dissent. This crackdown was soon followed by Napoleon III’s *coup d’état*. Deroin and her family were among approximately nine thousand political refugees who arrived in Britain and the Channel Islands following the failed European revolutions of 1848.

Through the Social Democratic Federation, and subsequently the Socialist

League, Morris came to know many international anarchists and socialists. By the 1890s, however, many had passed away and their archives were being lost or destroyed while others have since been forgotten about. Overlooked throughout most of the twentieth century, Deroin's story before her exile is now better known, particularly in France and the United States, thanks to the upsurge in women's history during the past thirty years. Accordingly, her role as one of the leaders of the French women's movement of 1848, and as a world pioneer in her campaign for votes for women during the Second Republic, is now recognised.⁵ Yet little documentation remains of her life or that of her family following their flight to Britain where it is often assumed that she not only sank into poverty, but total oblivion, and that her voice was completely silenced.⁶ Sparse extant sources and newly discovered archival material provide evidence of her links, and those of her daughter, with the League and with Morris. But the lack of any mention of their membership to date throws light on the limitations of the historiography of the League, and the understatement of the role of women within it.

The aim of this article is to underline the political continuity created by the presence of these early socialists in the resurgent movement of the 1880s. The League's connection with utopian socialism is one that I argue Morris both recognised and valued. Through biographical accounts, I also aim to highlight the differences between the early French and British women's movements of the 1830s, as well as the divergence between utopian socialism and the feminism of the late nineteenth century.

Before her exile to Britain, Deroin was one of a small but significant group of women in the 1830s, many of whom were in the needle trades of Paris, who found that the ideas of the French utopian socialists offered a route to feminist consciousness. Certain isolated individuals within the French Revolution of 1789 had already given a voice to the women's movement, but its first organised theories emerged with the Saint-Simonian movement during the late 1820s, viewed as the foundation of French romantic socialism. Charles Fourier was the first to articulate the idea that the amelioration of the state of society depended on that of women in his *Théorie des Quatre Mouvements et des Destinées Générales* (1808). Both Henri de Saint-Simon and Fourier generated an abundance of feminist affirmations and wider societal aspirations that linked the state of society with the status of women. A distinct parallel, reinforced by the writings of Flora Tristan, was thus acknowledged between the struggle for women's rights and the cause of the working class as a whole.⁷ The theories of Saint-Simon and Fourier were part of a wider international movement, however, which included the ideas of Etienne Cabet, the German Wilhelm Weitling, and, in Britain, Robert Owen, who captured the imaginations of thousands of women for the next few decades with his secular dream of a New Moral World of class and sexual equality.

Significantly for Deroin and most of her fellow workers, despite their fervent criticisms of the Church and organised religion, society had to have God at its centre. While they sought to reorganise society along cooperative lines like Owen, a divine core was deemed essential, and the tone of Deroin's feminism always remained spiritual. Like many early socialists she believed that the world was guided by an omniscient spiritual force, and that the cause of women would lead to the transformation of the world.⁸ This conception of theology maintained that a true reading of the Bible revealed radical democratic socialism, abolitionism and feminism.⁹ In Britain, the Owenite movement offered a similar but nonspiritual route, promising an Eden of socialist hope by advocating communities of mutual association and promoting 'perfect equality and perfect freedom' to both men and women at every social level.¹⁰

Despite often differing in opinion, particularly with regard to their views on spirituality and Christianity, Fourierists, Saint-Simonians and Owenites shared considerable common ground, generating a strong transnational exchange of ideas. Saint-Simonian 'missionaries' first arrived in Britain in 1833 where they directed their propaganda to both women and workers. Consequently, Owenites in Britain and the United States began to be more open to early European concepts of socialism. It was Marx, together with Engels and their followers, who later dubbed them all 'utopian socialists', dismissing their ideas as eccentric, irrelevant and unscientific.¹¹ After 1850, the term was thus used derogatorily, whereby utopianism was seen as 'bad' in contrast to Marx's own 'good' brand of 'scientific socialism'; a socialism that had no more need for utopias.¹² Nevertheless, before 1848, the writings of these visionary thinkers had an undeniable influence on both Marx and Engels. When Marx planned his 'Library of the best foreign socialist writers' in March 1845, it included the works of Fourier, Saint-Simon, Cabet, Considérant and Gay.¹³ I argue that these figures also influenced Morris, who learnt about them through the writings of John Stuart Mill. A connection can thus be established between the ideas of the French romantic socialists, the Owenites and the socialism of the 1880s, specifically with regard to concepts of fellowship, association and the communitarian tradition.

Born in 1805 to humble working-class parents, Deroin was self-educated. Beginning life as a seamstress, by 1832 she was working as a journalist. During the same year she married the engineer and fellow Saint-Simonian Antoine Ulysse Desroches, with whom she had three children. An ardent advocate for universal education, she subsequently qualified as a primary school teacher. Throughout her life she promoted universal women's rights, including suffrage, legal protection from husbands' brutality towards their wives and children, mothers' rights over their own children, state support for female higher education and job-training to foster economic

independence. One of her earlier contentions was that women should retain their maiden names after marriage. Her first links with Britain began when, with fellow journalist Pauline Roland, she worked with two other young seamstresses, Désirée Véret and Marie-Reine Guindorf, soon to be joined by Suzanne Voilquin, together editing the first feminist journal written entirely by women, *La Femme Libre* (later the *Tribune des Femmes*). Véret, the founder of the journal, had lived in Britain for four years as a follower of Owen, making contact with British Owenites and later marrying fellow-Owenite Jules Gay. During this period Véret and Gay liaised between Owenites, Saint-Simonians and Fourierists. While working for the *Tribune*, Deroin also met Irish Owenite Anna Wheeler, who translated the works of the French utopian socialists into English for Owen's *Crisis*, as well as Anne Knight, the English Chartist and anti-slavery activist.¹⁴ This group of women demonstrated a high degree of mobility for the time, and an international women's movement thus began to develop in a limited form in Paris before 1848.

For Deroin and her peers, the revolution of February 1848 temporarily brought renewed hope that the democratic and social ideals of the new regime would usher in economic and political benefits for women. The earlier French feminist movement regained momentum, and, at the age of forty-three, Deroin reemerged as a political activist. With fellow journalists Voilquin, Véret (now Gay) and others, she contributed to the first daily feminist newspaper *La Voix des Femmes*. This new socialist newspaper, aimed at all women, had a wider range of contributors and a wider circulation, even reaching Britain where its influence on Mill is said to have encouraged him to urge his future wife Harriet Taylor to finish her essay on feminism.¹⁵ Convinced that the right to work and the right to vote were indivisibly linked, Deroin defiantly but unsuccessfully stood for a seat in the legislature in the election of May 1849, shocked at the lack of support from her fellow socialists. The same year she initiated a federation of workers' associations, outlining the plan in her own new paper boldly named *La Politique des Femmes*, soon forced to change its name to *l'Opinion des Femmes* as women were now forbidden to engage in politics. After the June Days, the government reinstated security bonds for publishers in an attempt to control political opposition and, unable to raise the imposed bond, her newspaper folded. As co-founder of the *club des clubs* she was subsequently arrested and sentenced to six months in Saint-Lazare Prison with Roland for her role in an illegal *clubbiste* meeting.¹⁶

Following Deroin's release from prison, the group of women journalists involved in the early feminist press became isolated and dispersed. Roland, who had been transported to a penal colony in Algeria, died immediately following her return to France during 1853. With her newspaper shut down and most of her associates in exile, Deroin fled to London to avoid deportation, arriving in August 1852 with her

two younger children: Caroline, aged ten, and Jules, aged seven, who suffered from hydrocephalus. Her husband, who had developed a serious mental illness, then contracted typhoid fever, and died before he could join her. A year later her elder daughter Cécile joined her mother at the age of nineteen when she had finished her education. Cécile Desroches never married, remaining a constant support to her mother and helping to look after her invalid brother until his death in 1887. Deroin's younger daughter Caroline married an Italian hairdresser in London, Henrico Biagio Righetti, with whom she had five children.

At the time of their arrival in Britain, Deroin's name was not completely unknown. *The Morning Chronicle* had published news of 'a female socialist banquet held on Christmas Day 1848 attended by Pierre Leroux [...] at which Mme Desroches [Deroin] proposed a toast to the "coming of the rule of Christ on earth" in which socialism was enjoined in the name of Christ'.¹⁷ Many papers later published articles reporting her candidacy for the National Assembly, her electoral address, her role as a *clubbiste* and her subsequent arrest and imprisonment with Roland.¹⁸ Deroin and Roland's letters written from prison, and published in the *Northern Star*, were read out at the 1850 National Women's Rights Convention in Massachusetts. Lucretia Mott, the American women's rights activist, abolitionist and religious reformer, and Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman doctor on the English Medical Register, at the time living in New York, were subsequently appointed to correspond with them in prison.

Once in Britain, most refugees first headed for Soho, already a centre of British and European radicalism, but Deroin and her family soon found lodgings near the new railway yards around Hammersmith. While they moved several times over the next forty years, they never lived more than a mile from Kelmscott House.¹⁹ Constantly short of money, Deroin and her daughters were forced throughout their lives to rely on the extra income provided by needlework. Her financial hardships were later recorded in her letters to her friend Léon Richer in Paris, to whom she constantly apologised for being unable to pay the subscriptions for the radical papers he sent her, though he continued to send her free copies.²⁰ Like Morris, Deroin was always convinced that education was the key to social progress, and intermittently ran small schools for the children of French émigrés from her various lodgings aided by her own children, but which ran at a loss.²¹ She also continued to edit a new yearly journal begun just before she left Paris, *L'Almanach des Femmes*. Three issues were published between 1851 and 1854, with the second two being published in London in French and English by the well-known Chartist publisher, James Watson. While a distinct utopian, feminist voice was silenced in France in 1852, it thus revived fleetingly in London.

Produced predominantly for women, the *Almanach* benefited from fresh



Figure 1: The Socialist League, Hammersmith Branch, in the garden of Kelmscott House, July 1888. Jeanne Deroin (Mme Desroches) and Cécile Desroches are seated in the front row second and third from the right. Mrs Clara Watt is seated sixth from the right between May and Jenny Morris. Hammersmith Socialist League, c. 1884 (Credit:Victoria and Albert Museum, London)

connections forced by emigration. Participants in Deroin's previous journalistic enterprises, including Knight, formed a new international network of radical feminist journalists, both male and female, seeing themselves at the head of a universal movement for all, advocating peace, anti-slavery and the abolition of the death penalty.²² Articles from it were republished in G. J. Holyoake's *Reasoner*, and in the American feminist journal *Una*.²³ It was also reviewed by *Reynolds's Newspaper* and the *Athenaeum*.²⁴ Notwithstanding their efforts, without funds and with few sales, no further issues appeared after 1854. While remaining a politically active member of the exile community, Deroin found herself no longer part of a feminist network, and henceforth her voice became increasingly isolated.

Self-proclaimed feminists like Deroin and her group of fellow journalists were a small minority, however. They were generally considered eccentric, and their lives deviated from the feminine norm, remaining until recently hidden from history. However, a few names did appear in various articles and feminist histories written in France between the 1880s and the early twentieth century.²⁵ Deroin's life in Paris was recounted in several articles in the *Englishwoman's Review* by the editor, Caroline Ashurst Biggs.²⁶ The same year, the American journalist and supporter of the women's movement, Theodore Stanton, son of the American feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, with whom Deroin corresponded in later life, also briefly recorded Deroin's life.²⁷

Adrien Ranvier, son of the Communard Gabriel Ranvier, who had known Deroin in London, wrote one of the first biographical articles in 1895 commemorating her achievements, but claimed incorrectly that she carried on no political action subsequent to 1855.²⁸

In fact Deroin became a member of most major transnational societies formed in London over the next forty years. Although by this time many fellow socialists did not share her utopian views, she earned a reputation as a hard-working and well-respected member of the French community. In 1855, Jules Troubat, a democrat visiting from France, recounted how he came to know ‘a saintly family, that of citizen Jeanne Deroin, a heroic and respectable woman, for whom work and wakefulness had replaced meal times and sleep’.²⁹ Nevertheless, she was increasingly viewed by many within the exile political community as an irritating lone voice, haranguing predominately male associations for ignoring their statutes regarding gender equality. She even courageously but unsuccessfully demanded to join the all-male, secular, radical masonic lodge in London, the *Loge des Philadelphes*. This was not out of conviction, she later claimed, but for the same reason that she had put forward her candidacy in the 1849 election; because in this male world, she felt she had ‘to knock on every door’.³⁰

In 1856 she joined the ‘International Association’, the forerunner of the First International. Gender equality had been a statute from its inception, something regularly reaffirmed in later manifestos, but not all members were in favour.³¹ Deroin took the floor at a convention in September 1857 demanding that the association respect its statutes and support the political and social emancipation of women. She pointed out that while the revolution had liberated slaves it had forgotten women.³² Her speech provoked intense disapproval as the members of the German Workers’ Educational Society opposed the emancipation of women.³³ When certain individuals proposed to elect women to the central committee, it ‘evoked great opposition’, since most felt that ‘the time was not yet ripe for women’.³⁴ According to the émigré Andreas Scherzer, this was the reason for the association’s eventual split in 1859.³⁵ While the ‘O’Brienites and Cabetists’ favoured the social and political involvement of women, the Marxist faction considered their views to be utopian folly.³⁶

Despite the cessation of her *Almanachs*, Deroin continued to contribute articles to other French publications.³⁷ In 1857 she set up the ‘Society for the promotion of solidarity of Socialist Women’, aimed at lending mutual assistance for education and work based at the headquarters of the charitable *Société fraternelle* at 8 Church Street, Soho.³⁸ She also became secretary of *Le Projet d’Assurance Mutuelle pour le Travail et le Prêt fraternal*, the programme of which stated that ‘it is the right and the duty of socialist women to unite, to educate each other and to [...] participate in the struggle for social

emancipation'.³⁹ No trace of this initiative has been found, possibly having succumbed to fierce opposition from members of the International Association. Eventually, in 1859, she was offered amnesty together with a small pension from the French government, but chose to remain in Britain. A few years later her name appears in the Minute Book of the International Workingmen's Association: the First International. Again, the statutes clearly stated that 'FEMALES are eligible as members'.⁴⁰ On 3 October 1865, at a meeting of the General Council, a letter addressed to the conference was read out from a 'Madame Jeanne Deroin by the President in the chair, George Odger'.⁴¹ The letter has since been lost, but it is likely that she was again reminding the committee to honour its statutes regarding gender equality.

When the next wave of French refugees from the Commune arrived in London in 1871, she and other 'forty-eighters' who had remained were well placed to welcome and support the three thousand and five hundred Communard refugees who landed on Britain's shores destitute and shaken from the terrible events in Paris. She soon opened a new school for the children of impoverished exiled Communards charging very low fees and often receiving no payments from those who could not afford to pay.⁴² Despite now receiving a pension, life remained a financial struggle. The American feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote in her diary on 15 December 1882 that she had visited Deroin aged seventy-seven, in London, and found 'a little, dried-up woman, though her face beams with intelligence [living] in great poverty and obscurity in Shepherd's Bush'.⁴³ In July 1886, her son Jules was admitted to Grove Hall Lunatic Asylum, probably because his hydrocephalus had deteriorated to a point where she and her daughter could no longer look after him. He died on 2 April 1887. The two women now found themselves with more free time to devote to politics outside the home together. They were proposed for election as members of the Socialist League on 25 July 1886, and elected on 2 August.⁴⁴

In the second half of the twentieth century various commentators attempted to place Morris firmly in the Marxist tradition. E.P. Thompson, however, argues that many of his ideas did not accord with the dominant reforming tendencies.⁴⁵ Looking back on his decision to join Democratic Federation in 1883, Morris admitted that 'I was blankly ignorant of economics; I had never so much as [...] heard of [...] Karl Marx'.⁴⁶ He wrote that he had, however, read something of Robert Owen whom he 'praised immensely', and also the French Utopian Socialists.⁴⁷ Miguel Abensour, in his discussion of *News from Nowhere* remarks that Morris's novel belonged to a new utopian spirit that arose in the wake of the three great 'changes of course' effected by Claude Henri Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier and Robert Owen at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁴⁸ Bernard Shaw had earlier maintained that Morris's conversion to socialism was inspired by Fourier through the writings of Mill, an

influence which he also claimed ‘is discernable in *News From Nowhere*’.⁴⁹ Morris himself noted that it was reading Mill’s posthumous papers that ‘put the finishing touch to my conversion to Socialism’.⁵⁰

While paradoxically it may have been Mill’s critique of socialism that finally convinced Morris to become a socialist, Morris’s thoughts clearly owe a great deal to his reading of Mill, who in turn professed that he had been ‘touched by the philosophic radicals of the 1820s’.⁵¹ Mill confirmed that he had partially learnt his own views on sexual equality ‘from the thoughts awakened [...] by the speculations of the Saint-Simonians’, and concluded that ‘the Saint-Simonians in common with Owen and Fourier have entitled themselves to the grateful remembrance of future generations’.⁵² Mill admired the philosophical individualism advocated by Fourier, a concept that also later inspired Morris who believed that socialism should allow for different lives and modes of thought.⁵³ Morris described those systems that subordinated the imaginative utopian faculties as ‘humbug’ and ‘utilitarian sham socialism’.⁵⁴ He acknowledged that his own conception of ‘attractive labour’ as a definition of non-alienated labour was indeed inspired by Fourier’s theory of pleasurable labour, acknowledging that ‘his [Fourier’s] doctrine [...] is one which Socialism can by no means do without’.⁵⁵

Between 1886 and 1888, Morris co-wrote a series of brief chapters for *Commonweal* with Ernest Belfort Bax entitled ‘Socialism from the Root Up’. Chapter Thirteen addresses ‘The Utopists: Owen, Saint Simon, and Fourier’. Although heavily borrowed from Mill’s writings, the ‘scientific’ and ‘practical’ views of both Bax and Engels are clearly apparent as the shortcomings of these socialist fathers are discussed. Chapter Fourteen alludes to the ‘unpractical and non-political tendency’ of the teachings of another utopian socialist, feminist and intimate friend of Deroin: Pierre Leroux.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the debt owed to these pioneers of socialism is firmly acknowledged. Although critical of Owen’s utopianism, Saint-Simon’s mysticism and Fourier’s dogmatism, the article mentions that these are ‘three most remarkable men, born within a few years of each other, whose aspirations have done a very great deal to further the progress of Socialism’.⁵⁷ Unsurprisingly, there is no mention of ‘the perfect equality of men and women’ essential to utopian socialism, and so strongly endorsed by Mill. This is likely to have been a deliberate omission on the part of the misogynistic Bax. Despite being a collaborator and close friend, Bax was nonetheless critical of Morris’s views, conceding that while his ‘socialist utopia’ in *News from Nowhere* was ‘the most successful, from the literary point of view’, it remained ‘unproductive of any practical result’.⁵⁸ Engels meanwhile categorically dismissed Morris as a ‘sentimental socialist’.⁵⁹

Deroin professed in 1886 that she had never attached herself to any specific

utopian socialist school, but she had nevertheless lived and worked among their most devoted disciples.⁶⁰ Although her membership of the League may have meant little to Bax, Morris would have valued her presence as the last living link to this pre-Marxist French utopian tradition fundamental to the development of socialism. Furthermore, Deroin was not the only member of the League with roots in utopian socialism. E. T. Craig had been the steward at the Owenite agricultural community at Ralahine in County Clare between 1830 and 1833, and was later a founding member of the Hammersmith branch of the SDF before joining the League. But while Thompson notes Craig's utopian socialist background, and his significance as a link between first-generation Owenism and the League, he makes no mention of Deroin or Desroches.⁶¹ Nor is there any mention elsewhere of their membership. Minutes show that the French class was in fact planned at a meeting of the League on 15 April 1888 where Desroches, as a member, 'promised to conduct a class in French', and where 'the following gave their names as members and Catterson-Smith agreed to act as secretary: W. Morris, Sparling, May Morris, Howe, Chamberlain, Fry, Tarleton, E. Walker, Mrs Tochetti, Mrs Grove, Catterson-Smith, Joseph Smith, W. Yeats, Beasley'.⁶²

The classes began officially in September 1888, running every Friday evening from eight to nine o'clock. They were clearly a success, being regularly advertised in the 'Lecture Diary' of *Commonweal* from 22 January 1889 until April 1891, apart from breaks for the summer season. The fees were 'quite nominal' and members of the League were 'invited to join'.⁶³ Yeats noted that 'a French class was started in the old coach-house for certain young Socialists who planned a tour in France, and I joined it, and was for some time a model student constantly encouraged by the compliments of the old French mistress'.⁶⁴ He recounted:

I have been twice at the French class at Morris's [sic]. A queer jumble it is of all sorts of scholars from Sparling who doesn't know a word of French to one or two quite instructed. William Morris himself has not joined us yet but may be expected next time or next after. It is rather amusing every one tries to talk French whether they know any or not.⁶⁵

After discussing the classes at home, Yeats's sisters, Lily and Lolly, for whom such opportunities would have been rare, became interested in joining.⁶⁶ Yeats was persuaded by his father to take them, but was anxious about having his sisters in the class.⁶⁷ He noted: '[h]ow could I pretend to be industrious, and even carry dramatisation to the point of learning my lessons when my sisters were there and knew that I was nothing of the kind?'.⁶⁸ Lolly wrote in her diary:

Went to French [...] Willie's dramatic intence [sic] way of saying his french with his voice raised to telling distinctness & every pronunciation [sic] wrong as usual, seemed to amuse Mr. Sparling more than ever, he simply doubled up when Willie commenced. Willie of course divided it up into any amount of full stops where there were not any so Madame said "Mr Yagtes you don't read poetry like that do you." "Yes he does Yes he does" volunteered Mr. Sparling & in truth he was rather like his natural way of reading.⁶⁹

While Lily attended the French classes, she also became an embroiderer under May Morris. Yeats wrote: 'Lily likes going greatly to the Morrisises [...]. Every day he [Morris] has some little joke. The other day he said "all hands talk French" and he began the most comic mixture of French and English'.⁷⁰

As part of Morris's milieu, Deroin and Desroches would have met a younger generation of British first-wave feminists such as Helen Taylor and Annie Besant who attended Kelmscott House as visiting lecturers.⁷¹ Around this time, Deroin resumed a correspondence with her old friend Hortense Wild with whom she had worked on the *Almanachs*, and also began to correspond with members of the new secular women's movement in France such as Hubertine Auclerc, sometimes called 'the French Suffragette'. Deroin's outlook always remained spiritual, however, and her feminism, faith and socialism were inextricably linked. But there were other fundamental differences between her position and that of the new generation of feminists. While their ultimate goals were similar, Deroin's generation had always insisted on gender 'difference'. A woman's role was viewed as inherently maternal, and it was this common bond of motherhood that was used to validate their demands for greater benefits for women, including increased financial and job security, education, property rights and the right to vote. These prerogatives were viewed as essential to their vision of a successful interdependent socialist state organised predominantly through cooperative associations.

As members of the League, Deroin and Desroches also came into contact with a new generation of international socialists and feminists through women such as Eleanor Marx and Louise Michel, 'the red virgin of Montmartre', now a Communard refugee.⁷² As a schoolteacher, anticlerical and ultra-revolutionary anarchist within the most radical wing of the Commune, Michel believed in the necessity of a violent offensive against the government, and was prepared to kill for her beliefs. Gone was the spirituality, optimism and idealised vision of womanhood of mid-century utopianism, with no longer any trace of the theories of gender 'difference'. The idealism of French romantic socialism was unsuited to the class-based, pragmatic and militant politics of late nineteenth-century France.



Figure 2: The Hammersmith Socialist Society in the garden of Kelmscott House, 1891. Jeanne Deroin and Cécile Desroches are seated in the centre of the front row beneath the banner. Annie Cobden-Sanderson is seated first from the right. Mrs Watt is seated fifth from the right. The Hammersmith Socialist Society possibly by Emery Walker (Credit: National Portrait Gallery, London)

Following Morris's split with the League in December 1890, the whole Hammersmith branch seceded, forming the Hammersmith Socialist Society (HSS). A photograph taken in 1891 shows Deroin and Desroches seated in the front row of a group of fifty-two members (Figure 2). They had clearly chosen Morris's socialism over the ardent anarchist faction within the League, which is unsurprising considering that Deroin was a lifelong pacifist totally opposed to any form of violent revolution.

Deroin's long and full life came to an end on 2 April 1894, having spanned most of the nineteenth century during which she witnessed many changes; as she herself declared, she was born under imperial despotism. She died at home at Myrtle Cottages, aged eighty-nine. Morris, together with many others, attended her funeral, recorded in the *West London Observer* under the title, 'A Socialist Funeral':

The remains of Mdme Jeanne de Roche [sic] the lady who obtained considerable notoriety during the French Revolution of 1848, were laid to rest in Hammersmith Cemetery on Saturday afternoon. There was a large attendance of sympathising friends, including a contingent of local Socialists, who attended the funeral, headed by their banner. Mr. William Morris, Mr. Sparling, and other well-known holders of advanced ideas spoke at the graveside. At the conclusion of the ceremony, one of Mr. W. Morris's chants for

Socialists entitled 'No Master' was sung.

Mr. E.S [sic] Craig of Ralaheen [sic] Cottages, Hammersmith, writes to us concerning the deceased as follows: My dear old friend prince Kropotkin has received [sic] the following letter:

'The bright and happy exile from home is dead. Louis the Little feared her more than foreign foes. He sent his bloodhounds to catch her and force her into St. Lazare for twelve long months and more. She fled to the happy Isle of Liberty, there to teach the young how to speak the truth she knew and loved so well. She, like myself, condemned the explosive bomb which hoist me with their own petards'.⁷³

Deroin was laid to rest at Margravine Cemetery in Hammersmith on 7 April 1894 in unconsecrated ground.⁷⁴

Desroches meanwhile followed in her mother's footsteps, becoming an elected officer of the committee of the Women's International Progressive Union (WIPU) in 1898. Her niece Eliza Righetti, the daughter of Deroin's younger daughter Caroline, was also a committee member. This was an offshoot of the Women's Social and Political Union of which the socialist and suffragette Annie Cobden-Sanderson was a leading member.⁷⁵ As well as universal suffrage, the stated aim of the WIPU was to 'extend and develop' the freedom of women and place them 'securely in a position of perfect equality on all points with men'. Annie Besant was a regular speaker. Other branches were founded in Dublin, Belgium and Russia and a new branch was proposed in Scotland. In 1898, the WIPU announced that it had held fifty meetings in the past twelve months.⁷⁶

Little is known of Desroches's life over the next two decades other than what the censuses can tell us. Between 1901 and 1911 she lived at 6 Theresa Terrace, Hammersmith where she was a boarder with Andrew and Clara Watt, and their daughter Clara, who had been members of both the Socialist League and the HSS, and who appear in both group photographs (see Figure 1).⁷⁷ Desroches is registered as a 'shirt needlewoman'. On 13 December 1920 she was admitted to Nazareth House at the recommendation of her 'friend' Annie Cobden-Sanderson 'of 16 Upper mall, Hammersmith', who paid £54 and 12 shillings per annum for her maintenance.⁷⁸ She died on 23 February 1921 aged eighty-six, two months after her admission. She was also buried in Margravine Cemetery in unconsecrated ground.

Despite the grinding poverty in which she lived, Desroches was not merely a needlewoman as censuses would have us believe. Like her mother, she had been a teacher and a member of both the Socialist League and the HSS and a participant in the international suffrage movement. She was firmly part of the group around

Morris, and her friendships with the Watt family and with Annie Cobden-Sanderson indicate that she remained part of this circle until the end of her life. Morris may well have wanted to help her and her mother financially by offering her the job of French teacher, but these women represented much more. Deroin was among the original pioneers of feminism and her courage and uncompromising dedication to her cause in a harsh and inexorably male world was remarkable at that time, in particular her candidacy for the 1849 election; it would be almost one hundred years before women in France would receive the vote. Her voice, along with those of her peers, had been largely suppressed in France after 1851 as these early French feminists became exiled and scattered. But while she remained politically active, and continued her struggle for equality over the ensuing decades in Britain, it was only during the latter part of her life as a member of the Socialist League, and subsequently the HSS, that she was once again part of a political coterie. Morris and his entourage provided Deroin and Desroches with a supportive environment of like-minded people who afforded them friendship, dignity and respect. Here was not only a connection between the League and French utopian socialism, but also a living link between the revolutionary women's movement of the 1830s and the new generation of first-wave feminists and the early suffragette movement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Florence Boos, general editor of the William Morris Archive; Anne Wheeldon, archivist at the Hammersmith and Fulham Archives; Helen Elletson, curator at The William Morris Society; and Peter Hughes, archivist of the Sisters of Nazareth Convent in Hammersmith, for their assistance.

NOTES

1. *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, ed. by Norman Kelvin, 4 vols in 5 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984-1996), III, p. 18. (Afterwards Kelvin). The congress, planned for 14-20 July 1889 would become the foundation of the Second International.
2. Philip Henderson, *William Morris: His Life, Work and Friends* (London: André Deutsch, 1986), p. 302.
3. Joseph M. Hone, *W. B. Yeats 1865-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 65. (Afterwards Hone).
4. 'Feminism' is sometimes judged to be an anachronistic term when applied to the women's movement before 1880. See Karen Offen, 'On the French Origin of the Words *Feminism* and *Feminist*', *Feminist Issues*, 8: 2 (Autumn 1988), 132-43. Its first recorded use was by Hubertine Auclert in *La Citoyenne*, 64 (4 September-1 October 1882).
5. See, for example, Pamela Pilbeam, 'Jeanne Deroin: French Feminist and Socialist in Exile', in *Exiles from the European Revolutions*, ed. by Sabine Freitag (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003), pp. 275-94.
6. See, for example, Adrien Ranvier, 'Une Féministe de 1848: Jeanne Deroin', in *La Révolution de 1848: Bulletin de la société d'histoire de la révolution de 1848*, 4 (1907-8), 317-55. (Afterwards Ranvier). Michèle Riot-Sarcey, *La démocratie à l'épreuve des femmes: Trois critiques du pouvoir 1830-1848* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994), p. 278. (Afterwards Riot-Sarcey). James McMillan, *France and Women, 1789-1914: Gender, Society and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 117; Bonnie S. Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement 1830-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 191-92. (Afterwards Anderson).

7. Flora Tristan, *The Workers' Union*, trans. Beverley Livingston (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983).
8. *L'Almanach des Femmes*, 1854, 38-39.
9. For more on radical Christianity and early feminists, see Anderson, pp. 161-65.
10. For more on Owenism, socialism and feminism, see Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Virago, 1983); Sheila Rowbotham, 'Feminism in the Early Socialist Movement', in *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It* (London: Pluto Press, 1973), pp. 42-46.
11. For discussion of Marx and Engels's attitudes to utopian socialism, see Edward Thompson, 'Romanticism, Moralism and Utopianism: The Case of William Morris', *New Left Review*, 1/99 (September-October 1976), 83-111 (95). (Afterwards Thompson, 'Romanticism, Moralism and Utopianism'). See also, Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), ch. 2.
12. Thompson, 'Romanticism, Moralism and Utopianism', p. 95.
13. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, 50 vols (London: Lawrence and Wishart: 1975-2004), IV, p. 667. (Afterwards MECW).
14. Knight co-created the Sheffield Female Political Association in 1851, believed to be the first women's suffrage organisation in Britain which persuaded the radical Earl of Carlisle to petition the House of Lords demanding the vote for 'adult Females'.
15. [Harriet Taylor], 'The Enfranchisement of Women', *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review*, 55:2 (July 1851), 289-311.
16. For more on Deroin before 1852, see Riot-Sarcey; and Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1996).
17. *Morning Chronicle*, 28 December 1848; 'History and progress of the French Republic', *Examiner*, 30 December 1848 and April 1849. The *Examiner* was a weekly paper whose contributors included Mill.
18. These included *The Times*, 12 April 1849 and 30 April 1849; *Daily News*, 12 April 1849, 3 June 1850; *Lloyds Weekly*, 15 April 1849; *Manchester Times*, 5 June 1850; *Northern Star*, 8 June 1850, 14 June 1850, 2 August 1851 and 9 August 1851.
19. Census records show the family living at the following addresses: 1861: 12 Woodstock Road; 1864-67: 5 Verulam Terrace, The Grove, Hammersmith; 1871: 3 Ashchurch Terrace; 1881: 4 Myrtle Cottages (later renamed 58 Cobbald Road); 1891: 58 Cobbald Road. Her schools were run from Verulam Terrace and Ashchurch Terrace.
20. Deroin to Richer, 10 December 1874, also undated letter c1875, and 5 January 1880. Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, CP 4247 (afterwards BHVP). Richer was a republican journalist and militant campaigner for equal rights for women and for the cause of women's freemasonry.
21. Hammersmith and Fulham Archives. Rate books for 1865 indicate that she left leaving unpaid rates and list 'Madame Desroche's French School' at 5 Verulam Terrace, The Grove, Hammersmith (now Hammersmith Grove). (Afterwards H&FA).
22. As well as Knight, now back in London, these included Angelique Arnaud, Eugène Stourm, Jenny D'Héricourt, Jean Macé (until 1852) and 'Henriette' (the pen name of Hortense Wild), who wrote articles for all the issues.
23. *Reasoner*, 1, 8, 15, 22 March 1857. Paulina Wright Davis's *Una* would serve as the next international women's forum, appearing from 1853 to 1855. See Anderson, pp. 192-93.
24. *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper*, 15 January 1854. *Atheneum*, 1337 (11 June 1853), 704.
25. See Jules Claretie, *La vie à Paris 1880-1885* (Paris: Victor Havard, 1886), pp. 35, 536; *Revue Historique* (Paris), 1908 and 1913; *L'Intermédiaire des chercheurs et curieux: Questions et réponses Littéraires, historiques, scientifiques et artistiques* (Paris), 10 July 1913.
26. [Anon.], 'The History of the Women's Movement in France', *The Englishwoman's Review*, 133 (15 May 1884), 202.
27. See Theodore Stanton, 'France', in *The Woman Question in Europe* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1884), p. 243.

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28. Ranvier, p. 317
29. Jules Simon Troubat, *Souvenirs du Dernier Secrétaire de Sainte-Beuve* (Paris: C. Levy, 1890), p. 142.
30. Deroin to Richer, c1875, BHVP, CP 4247.
31. *L'Homme*, 18 July 1855. See also Arthur Lehning, 'The International Association 1855-1859', *International Review for Social History*, 3 (January 1938), 185-286. (Afterwards Lehning). Christine Lattek, *Revolutionary Refugees: German Socialism in Britain 1840 to 1860* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 177-78. (Afterwards Lattek).
32. *Le Prolétaire*, 3 November 1857.
33. *Londoner deutsches Journal*, 113 (26 September 1857), 117 (24 October 1857).
34. Andreas Scherzer, *Neuer Social-Demokrat*, 18 February 1876, quoted in Lattek, p. 178.
35. Lehning, p. 263.
36. *Documents of the First International: General Council and Minutes and Other Documents of the International Working Men's Association, 1864-1872*, 5 vols (Moscow: Progress Press, 1964), V, pp. 323-32. (Afterwards Documents of the First International).
37. See *L'Homme*, 3 February 1854; Leroux's *L'Espérance* (9 June, 1858), and later Richer's *Le Droit des femmes* (1871 onwards).
38. Later renamed Romilly Street.
39. *Le Drapeau*, 8 November 1857; see also *Londoner deutsches Journal*, 25 August, 1 September 1855, 7 June 1856, 24 October 1857, 8 May 1858, quoted in Lattek, p. 164.
40. Letter dated 24-25 September 1865. The name index of the Minute Book for 1864-66 includes the name of Jeanne Deroin. See *Documents of the First International*, I, p. 105.
41. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 73-74.
42. Deroin to Richer, undated c1875, BHVP CP 4247.
43. *Elizabeth Cady Stanton as Revealed in Her Letters, Diary, and Reminiscences*, ed. by Theodore Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch, 2 vols (New York: Harper & brothers, 1922), II, p. 201.
44. British Library, MS 45891. (Afterwards BL).
45. E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, 2nd rev. edn (London: Merlin, 1977), p. 791. (Afterwards Thompson, *William Morris*).
46. *The Collected Works of William Morris*, ed. by May Morris, 24 vols (Longmans, Green and Co., 1910-15), XXIII, p. 277. (Afterwards CW).
47. Thompson, *William Morris*, pp. 269, 207, 306; see also CW, XXIII, pp. 71-73.
48. Miguel Abensour, 'William Morris: The Politics of Romance', in *Revolutionary Romanticism*, ed. by Max Blechman (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1999), p. 126. On reading Abensour and John Goode, Thompson revised and republished his 1955 biography of Morris with a postscript in 1977. See Thompson, *William Morris*, pp. 786-87. It is important to note here Abensour's largely anarchist position.
49. John William Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1922), I, p. 481.
50. CW, XXIII, p. 278.
51. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. by John M. Robson et al., 33 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963-91), I, p. xvi.
52. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 257, 175.
53. Florence Boos and William Boos, 'The Utopian Communism of William Morris', *History of Political Thought*, 7: 3 (1986) 489-510 (506).
54. Morris lectures of the 1880s, quoted in Thompson, 'Romanticism, Moralism and Utopianism', pp. 98, 107.
55. CW, XXIII, p. 73.
56. Leroux first introduced the term 'socialisme' into French political discourse in 'De l'égalité, précédé de De l'individualisme et du socialisme', *Revue encyclopédique* (Paris, 1834).
57. William Morris, *Political Writings: Contributions to 'Justice' and 'Commonweal' 1883-1890*, ed. by Nicholas

- Salmon (Bristol:Thoemmes, 1994), p. 563.
58. Ernest Belfort Bax, 'The Socialistic Situation', *Justice*, 8: 385 (30 May 1891), 2.
 59. Letter to Friedrich Sorge, April 1886. Engels described Morris as a 'sentimental dreamer' to August Bebel in a letter in August 1886, and as a 'settled sentimental socialist' to Laura Lafargue in September 1886. See *MECW*, XLVII, pp. 471, 484.
 60. Deroin to Hubertine Auclert, 10 January 1886, BHVP, CP 4247. Deroin felt that, while they had promoted much good, some leaders had made grave errors. She disapproved of the schools' hierarchical structures and disagreed with the Saint-Simonians, particularly Prosper Enfantin, on aspects of morality including 'free love', something which she believed encouraged 'the selfish male desire for immorality'.
 61. Thompson, *William Morris*, p. 520.
 62. BL, MS 45892.
 63. 'Lecture Diary', *Commonweal*, 5: 192 (14 September 1889), 295.
 64. W.B.Yeats, *Autobiographies*, ed. by William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald (New York: Scribner, 1999), p. 133.
 65. *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, ed. by John Kelly et al., 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), I, p. 64. (Afterwards Kelly). See also R.F.Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), I, p. 74.
 66. Lily and Lolly, otherwise known as Susan Butler Yeats and Elizabeth Butler Yeats.
 67. Joan Hardwick, *The Yeats Sisters: A Biography of Susan and Elizabeth Yeats* (London: Pandora Press, 1996), p. 62. (Afterwards Hardwick).
 68. Hone, pp. 143-44.
 69. Lolly's diary entry for 18 January 1889, reproduced in Kelly, I, p. 64.
 70. Kelly, p. 123.
 71. Other women who lectured at this time included Beatrice Webb, the American anarchist Lucy Parsons, Edith Simcox, and Charlotte Wilson, the English anarchist who co-founded *Freedom* with Kropotkin, and who lectured on 'The Social Revolution' on 6 November 1887.
 72. After several previous visits, Michel – 'la pétroleuse' – lived as an exile in London from 1890-95 where she became a member of the Socialist League, writing for *Commonweal*.
 73. The last line of the penultimate paragraph should probably read: 'Kropotkin has "sent" the following letter [...]: "Ralaheen Cottages" should be Ralahine Cottage. *West London Observer*, 14 April 1894, p. 6. No traces of an obituary notice or eulogy have been found.
 74. E.T. Craig was also buried in Margravine Cemetery.
 75. Cobden-Sanderson, a close friend of the Morris family, had lived at Kelmscott House during the 1880s, and had been a member of the HSS. She was a founder member of the British Women's Freedom League and the Independent Labour Party. When she married Thomas Sanderson, he adopted her name as well as his own.
 76. See 'Current News', *The Woman's Signal*, 157 (10 March 1898), 219.
 77. Later renamed 30 St Peter's Grove. Andrew Watt was 'first secretary' of the Hammersmith Branch of the Shop Assistants' Union. A list and description of those in the photo of the League was given by Mrs Watt to her daughter Clara (later Sparrow) during the 1930s identifying 'Madame and Mme De la Roche' [sic] in the front row, and recounting Deroin's achievements.
 78. Sisters of Nazareth General Archive, Nazareth House, Hammersmith Road, London. This Catholic foundation, founded in 1857, was the first of many in the UK caring for the elderly poor and infirm children.