

Jacqueline de ROMILLY

Lieu de naissance? Chartres  
26. 3. 1913

I have been very fortunate. I belonged to that generation when all [sorts of opportunities] opened up for women. The first year that girls were permitted to study Greek at the lycée was <sup>(when I was in the right class for that (1927))</sup> the year I ~~was admitted (193?)~~. I obtained a fair amount of recognition by being the first woman to win <sup>two</sup> prizes in the general competition for all the lycées in France. But since that time there are women who win prizes each year. This shows how general progress has become [for women]. However in my case, since studies for boys and for girls were not the same, I <sup>(undertook?)</sup> ~~(attended)~~ the École Normale for boys <sup>entered</sup> ~~program~~ and did the masculine agrégation [for boys]. Since that time the <sup>programs</sup> have become identical <sup>(1937?)</sup>. At that time it was exceptional to accede to a higher level, which was that of the boys.

I am a professor of Greek. My career followed the usual pattern that it does in France. Initially I was a lycée teacher, although not for very long. I taught the preparatory classes for the Grandes Écoles, which was very exciting and rewarding. After a year at both the Universities of Bordeaux and the Sorbonne, I became professor at the University of Lille in 1949 and remained there until 1957 when I was appointed professor at the Sorbonne. Now I have been at the Collège de France since 1976 (the first woman named to the Collège since it was founded by François I in 1530). While I was not the first woman to occupy posts in those universities, there were very few women professors then. Now there is nothing particularly <sup>u</sup> unusual in being a woman professor. There were two women among the eight professors in Greek at



X the Sorbonne for example. <sup>Being younger,</sup> [Most however, <sup>are</sup> in the lower ranks; <sup>still</sup> 6% of the total of full professors in 1982].

As it turned out, I was the first woman in the next two institutions I was fortunate enough to be named to: the Collège de France and the Académie d'Inscriptions <sup>et Belles Lettres.</sup> Now the entry of women into the upper levels of the French national educational system is under way. What was needed to reach these higher levels was the necessary training; the proper formation. When you start at the right time (as I did), you arrive at the right moment at the end; at the top posts. ↵

At the Academy....which is one of the five Academies that make up the Institut de France, the first women have been voted in recently. For example. Marguerite Yourcenar was elected to the French Academy. Now there will be others.

During my academic career I paid little attention to the fact that I was a woman. Nevertheless, if I had been refused certain things; if I had been told you can't do this or that because you are a woman, I think I would have been indignant; ready to fight. But, as you have seen, I was there at the propitious moment. I was welcomed in fact. I can't recall any instance where there was any objection to my candidacy because I was a woman. On the contrary, I would say that the majority of the men seemed quite pleased to show their open-mindedness by voting for a woman. I believe that there were some who voted for me at the Collège de France who would not have voted for me had I been a man. While it is not something that can be proved, I believe they were pleased to make the



gesture [of voting for a woman].

My career paralleled that of my male colleagues. I was not hyptonized by the [celebrated] difference. What counted was my professional accomplishments, not my sex. With time research became an increasingly more important part of my work. That is how higher education is organized. The higher the grade, the more research is expected, and the more time is freed [from teaching duties] for it. Nevertheless teaching is a joy without parallel for me. With the exception of the war years when Jews were not permitted [under Vichy laws] to hold teaching posts, I have taught all my life. I am probably an extreme case. My father was a <sup>teacher</sup> professor of philosophy: my mother's father and grandfather (~~Verify~~) were <sup>teachers</sup> professors. I was born for that. I love it and I think that is good.

My subject is Greek. That means that I devote a good deal of time--not to teaching Greek, not <sup>to</sup> doing research in Greek--but championing the language <sup>and literature</sup>. As in many other countries, Classical Studies are undergoing a period of crisis in France. When you realize all that such studies can bring, whether it is to high school or colleges students, or to adults later in life, to help form their critical spirit; to the joy that these studies can bring, you say to yourself is is a duty to do all in one's power to help encourage these studies. One of the reasons for the danger of recent years (diminishing interest<sup>?</sup>) in Classical Studies is that French schools were opened up to a large group of the population~~y~~—not just women—in a comparatively short period.



< Consequently many younger, [more recently appointed?] teachers today have not had the opportunity to study Latin or Greek. They are not aware of the importance of those subjects. Several years ago I became the president of the Guillaume Budé Association. The association exists to promote and encourage Classical Studies and to edit Latin and Greek texts. This ongoing project takes much time and efforts, more than I anticipated. But I believe it is a very important task.

Earlier I mentioned that my father was a <sup>teacher</sup> professor. However he was killed in combat in the beginning of the First World War. I was one at the time; an only child. What I think is remarkable is my mother's accomplishments; <sup>more notable than all the career successes</sup> She had no professional training, no occupation, and she had no money. Yet she wrote and published books, plays, and other works. She brought me up in an environment of warmth, happiness and constant joy. Undoubtedly she influenced me and inspired me for I never knew my father and without brothers or sisters she was the only family I had. Her brother was killed in the war, like my father.

Above all I admire the women pioneers who worked so hard to obtain education at all levels for women. Education is more important than rights. In 1982 the centenary of the Collège S<sup>é</sup>vigné was celebrated. It was one of the first institutions to try and ~~spread~~ [extend] education to girls. In my opinion, those who were involved in that effort were the ones who undertook the real battles [for] women. Now the major battles have been won.

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