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Marie-Eve Thérénty, *Femmes de presse, femmes de lettres: De Delphine de Girardin à Florence Aubenas*. Paris: CNRS Editions, 2019. 400 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. €25.00 (pb). ISBN 9782271117922.

Review by Whitney Walton, Purdue University.

Marie-Eve Thérénty accomplishes several objectives with this comprehensive and engaging book. She brings to scholarly awareness many women journalists who were famous, even celebrities, in their own time, but who are largely absent from the history of the press in France, and from history generally. More important, Thérénty explains their many innovations in journalism deriving from the restrictions they experienced because of their sex, and the complex workings and manipulations of gender in their reporting. According to Thérénty, these innovations furthered the distinctive connection between literariness and journalism in France.

The book is explicitly a work of genealogy, tracing the influences and adaptations among women journalists over time, rather than a gender analysis of women and men synchronously. It does not propose a distinctive feminine journalism, but it persuasively asserts the variety of ways that the feminine body and the constraints upon women journalists manifested in their reporting. Thérénty scrupulously credits other scholars, mostly French and some North American, for their work on the French press and on women journalists, including histories of the feminist and feminine press, and individual biographies. This extensive existing scholarship in no way diminishes the originality of her work.

Covering over a century of a constantly growing French press from 1836 to 1944, the book teems with familiar and forgotten journalists who engaged in and often created a variety of types of reporting. It is impossible in this review to do justice to all their innovations and to Thérénty's sharp gender analysis of their writing and judicious selection of quotations. Thérénty structures their biographies and especially their writing, within different journalistic roles that many of her subjects legitimized through mythical archetypes: columnists with Penelope, political commentators with Cassandra, investigative reporters with Bradamante, travel/adventure writers with Amazons, professional writer-editors with Sappho, and grand reporters with Delilah (p. 20).

Thérénty designates Delphine de Girardin as the first woman journalist, though she acknowledges eighteenth-century precursors. According to Thérénty, *la chronique*, or list of facts, was common in French newspapers of the early nineteenth century, but in 1836 Girardin recreated it as a modern genre. Her *Courrier de Paris* was a witty commentary on cultural and

social events that appeared every other Thursday on the front page of her husband's newspaper *La Presse*, contributing to its success as the first mass-circulation daily to rely on advertising and thereby reduce the cost of an issue. Thérenty details the stylistic innovations and subversions of Girardin's writing because it serves as a baseline for the subsequent creativity and adaptiveness of later women journalists. Girardin wrote under the pseudonym of the vicomte de Launay, she deconstructed the press itself (analogous to Penelope unweaving and reweaving her work) and suggested the real news was in her column, and she poetically addressed the politics of the July Monarchy, though politics was supposedly the domain of her husband's reporting. After Girardin, *la chronique* changed over the course of the Second Empire and early Third Republic. Different women journalists deployed it to write about politics, and men journalists adopted feminine pseudonyms to partake in the writing of this feminine, and very popular, genre. Finally, the right-wing anti-Semite Gyp, pseudonym of Marie de Mirabeau, introduced dialogue and scandal as well as politics into her column, stretching the boundaries of the genre almost beyond recognition.

The second chapter analyzes women journalists who wrote explicitly about politics from the middle of the nineteenth century through the 1930s. Under the pseudonym of Daniel Stern, Marie d'Agoult charted the failure of the Second Republic in a series of letters that ended with her self-characterization as a Cassandra, predicting in November 1848 "une révolution prochaine, terrible et sanglante" in the German states, and finally revealing her identity as a woman with the end of the revolution in France (p. 101). Thérenty also examines the variety of forms George Sand's highly personal and literary political journalism assumed under the July Monarchy, Second Republic, and early Second Empire; Juliette Adam's warnings against Germany under Otto von Bismarck; Louise Weiss's anti-fascist reporting in the 1920s and 1930s, and other women journalists whose personal ties to men in politics enabled their political reporting. Denied the right to vote and therefore officially excluded from politics, these women journalists made their careers anticipating the future based on their acute understanding of politics in their own time.

Bradamante, a cross-dressing figure from Ariosto's Renaissance poems of Roland, signifies the work of professional, investigative women journalists starting with Séverine and covering the period of the Belle Epoque. Unlike their predecessors, these women were journalists first rather than authors of poetry, fiction, drama, or essays who also wrote journalism. They competed with men as reporters, and they were feminists, most having worked for the all-women-produced newspaper *La Fronde* (1897-1903). Séverine was notable for many reasons, including her descent into a coal mine following an explosion in 1890 to rally readers in support of survivors and victims' families. According to Thérenty some women investigative journalists adopted a reporting of care or human-interest story from the Anglo-American press. A significant change here from Girardin and others was eyewitness reporting in contrast to armchair reflection. Some commentators and women journalists themselves even suggested that women were inherently more adept at eyewitness reporting because of their attention to detail, empathy, and exclusion from power. During World War I women journalists in France reported on nurses and the home front since they were barred from combat reporting. Similar to the experience of women generally in France, the war proved their capability equal to men since all engaged in a national total war effort.

The chapter on adventure or travel writing strays the farthest from journalism, for as Thérenty notes, these women journalists, unlike most reporters, were fleeing civilization rather than

confronting it. A common feature of this adventurer-journalist was cross-dressing or disguise (somewhat analogous to warrior Amazons), as in the cases of Isabelle Eberhardt and Alexandra David-Neel. By contrast, Ella Maillart, who, like Eberhardt and David-Neel sought remote locations that few Westerners and especially women could access, traveled as herself. The transgressive nature of such travel, and of certain actions, such as Titaÿana stealing a buddha from Cambodia, provided tension in the narrative that appealed to readers. Thérenty claims that these women traveler/journalists wanted to escape from the hate-filled Europe of rising fascism, which presumably resonated with readers. Often these women were ethnographers who practiced journalism simply in order to pay for their travels.

For women in general, and women journalists in particular, World War I changed and did not change their situation. Numbers of women professional writer-editors increased, but the public generally perceived them as sexually and socially deviant; like Sappho they were literary but associated primarily with sexuality. Thérenty provides information on the demographics of women journalists (educated, upper middle-class, usually connected through men to the press), and the challenges of professionalization since they were excluded from men's press organizations and deprived of professional training. The association of literature with journalism was strong among this group of interwar writer-editors, which included Colette and Marcelle Tinayre, and writer-editors innovated with genres, further transforming the column, writing short stories for newspapers, and expanding the realm of small reporting by writing about court trials and sports. Another trend among interwar women journalists was stunt journalism, borrowed from Anglo-American precedents. To cite only one example, Maryse Choisy went undercover as a prostitute in 1928.

At the beginning of the final chapter on grand reporting, Thérenty quotes journalist Françoise Giroud from 1960 referring to women journalists as Delilahs because they threatened the masculine exclusivity of the genre. Grand reporting covered diplomatic, military, and other critical events around the world, and practitioners varied more by generation and personality than gender, though gender differences were never absent, including the near impossibility of women grand reporters also having families. Weeklies joined dailies as mainstream mass media, and they were more open to hiring women reporters and to photojournalism. Gerda Taro was a photojournalist who died in 1937 at age twenty-seven while reporting on the Spanish Civil War. In passing Thérenty notes that the majority of women reporters in the 1930s (Simone Téry, Marcelle Prat, Titaÿna) “se promènent avec leur Kodak” while their male counterparts did not themselves take photographs for their reporting (p. 312). This is an interesting gender difference that merits further exploration.

Following a compelling account of the three greatest women grand reporters of the interwar years—Titaÿana, Simone Téry, and Andrée Viollis—and reasons why no one remembers them today, Thérenty analyzes the particular ways that gender intervened in grand reporting, even as women adhered to the same practices as men in this genre. Reporting on colonialism in Indochina, Tunisia, Morocco, and elsewhere, women grand reporters called attention to abuses, but did not advocate decolonization. In a fascinating passage from Magdeleine Paz assuming the voice of a Moroccan woman in 1937, the “author” remarks upon the foreign journalist in their midst: “il y avait une femme. Elle a posé des questions en français. Ahmed les répétait dans notre langue. . . . Ce que nous faisons, ce que nous étions, ce que nous pensions, elle voulait nous l’entendre dire. Chacun de nous s’était enhardi, nous répondions tous à la fois, et pendant ce temps-là, elle écrivait sur un petit livre” (p. 344). As she does earlier in the book, Thérenty

suggests that women journalists, who were “subalterns” in the journalistic profession, gave voice to the subaltern, or colonized, and even working French, people. Thérenty also asserts that French women journalists could emancipate themselves, but not the indigenous people they reported on. While women journalists clearly experienced discrimination, it is not clear how Thérenty’s argument benefits from labelling them subaltern.

The conclusion explains the endpoint of the study in 1944 because after World War II, suffrage made women less marginal, standardized journalism training became available to women and men, and professional journalism became less literary. So, if the book ends with 1944, why does the title end with Florence Aubenas (b. 1962)? From a marketing perspective it makes sense to include the name of a well-known, living woman journalist in the title, rather than that of an important but obscure figure from 1944. Moreover, Thérenty’s effective conclusion includes Aubenas, along with Françoise Giroud and Marguerite Duras, as examples of the ways that gender continues to affect the writing of women journalists.

Several plates with images of women journalists are welcome additions, though the selection is puzzling. For example, there is no photograph of Andrée Viollis or Simone Téry who rightly occupy many pages, and there is an image of Madeleine Pelletier who hardly figures in the book. Equally, perhaps even more, illuminating are photos of the newspaper front pages featuring women journalists. These allow readers to chart the changes in layouts and manner of signaling women’s authorship over time. A list of the many women journalists with their names, dates, and pseudonyms would help, but kudos to the publisher for the footnotes and selected bibliography.

Femmes de presse, femmes de lettres is a superb work of interdisciplinary, literary and historical scholarship. Noting French women reporters’ adaptation from abroad of stunt and human-interest journalism, and the global range of their reporting in the twentieth century, the book invites an international perspective on women journalists as a future project.

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