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Jeanne de Flandreysy, *Correspondance de la Grande Guerre à Folco de Baroncelli, tome I (1914 – 1915): Sauver le grand homme, réhabiliter l'image de la petite patrie*, Colette H. Winn and Colette Trout, eds. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2018. 870 pp. Bibliography, index, illustrations. ISBN 978-2-406-07217-1; 67€ (pb).

Review by Martha Hanna, University of Colorado Boulder.

The intellectual and cultural elite of France suffered grievously in the Great War. Marcel Etévé, young and unmarried, and Robert Hertz, a *père de famille*, were but two of the many *normaliens* with brilliant careers ahead of them who died as a result of their military service. Folco de Baroncelli, a disciple of Mistral and an ardent—one might say obsessive—defender of Provençal culture was determined that he would not be similarly sacrificed on the altar of French patriotism. And Jeanne de Flandreysy, his former lover and ardent—one might say equally obsessive—acolyte, was likewise determined to spare him the stress and danger of military service. This is the dominant message to emerge from the copious correspondence, numbering more than six-hundred letters, de Flandreysy sent to de Baroncelli between the outbreak of war in August 1914 and the last days of 1915. However much she believed in the justice of the French cause, she was even more convinced that the very survival of culture depended upon sparing de Baroncelli from front-line service.

As the editors of *Correspondance de la Grande Guerre: à Folco de Baroncelli* acknowledge, Jeanne de Flandreysy is almost unknown in France today; they might well have added that her reputation as a woman of letters is even more obscure outside of France. So, too, with Folco de Baroncelli: were it not for Robert Zaretsky's charming and illuminating study, *Cock and Bull Stories: Folco de Baroncelli and the Invention of the Camargue*, we would know almost nothing of this idiosyncratic (and, truth be told, frequently annoying) champion of Provençal culture.[1] The letters Jeanne sent to Folco during the first sixteen months of the war reveal how their intellectual passions convinced them that Folco should be exempted from military service. As disciples of Frédéric Mistral, the poet who in the late nineteenth century almost single-handedly revived the language and culture of Provence, Jeanne and Folco shared an ardent commitment to Mistral's mission. Convinced that Mistral had recognized in Folco a singular poetic talent, second in brilliance only to the master himself, Jeanne believed that it was essential that Folco, a married man with three children to support, be spared military service. It was, she was convinced, more important that he write poetry and raise bulls (a symbol of Provence's ancient culture) than fight to defend France. Jeanne was neither a pacifist nor an anti-patriot. By political inclination she was a neo-royalist and like so many sympathetic to the Action française she believed that the French Revolution was responsible for the moral decay of modern France (p. 365). She did insist,

however, that it was necessary to support the French war effort. Outraged by the burning of the library at Louvain and the bombardment of Reims cathedral, she absorbed and embraced the cultural arguments of the French intelligentsia: without a French victory over German “Kultur,” Provence and all she held dear would fall under the brutal yoke of German militarism. By contrast, Folco became ever more disillusioned, outraged by criticism early in the war about the lack of military élan evidenced among troops from the south.

Born in 1869, Folco was called up only in February 1915. Assigned at first to a unit stationed in the south of France, he experienced none of the miseries and murderous conditions of front-line service. And yet he remained increasingly determined to secure a military deferment. Jeanne urged him to place his own discomfort in context. There were so many families of their direct acquaintance who were suffering the profound grief of military losses, could he not recognize that his own suffering paled in comparison? He, however, seemed unwilling or unable to accept the relative inconvenience of military life—albeit far from the firing lines—and became ever more disconsolate. In the spring of 1915, he ran afoul of the military authorities when, it was alleged, he muttered (or proclaimed) anti-patriotic sentiments. Anonymous letter writers insisted that he had denounced the war and had either urged (or applauded) the women of the Midi to do all in their power to prevent the departure of their menfolk to the front. Had he indeed said such things? Or had he muttered something inoffensive in Provençal, only to be misrepresented by hostile northerners eager to believe the worst of men from the Midi? The record is unclear, but the upshot was certain. In June 1915, he was transferred to a non-combatant regiment in Toul, far from the tinderbox atmosphere of the Midi where, it was feared, his presence would only further inflame the anti-war sentiments allegedly rife in Provence. His transfer to Toul marked a critical moment in his life and that of Jeanne de Flandreysy who dedicated the next six months to rehabilitating his reputation and securing his transfer back to the south of France. She worked indefatigably, calling upon family friends in high places—including General Gallieni, the Minister of War—to secure his transfer. She organized petitions, pleaded incessantly with her principal collaborator, Jules Charles-Roux, to exert his considerable influence with Generals Gallieni, Lyautey, and de Torcy in order to liberate Folco from the “martyrdom” which he (and they) believed afflicted him in Toul. After many months—and many, many letters—they succeeded: General de Servièrre, commander of the 15th military region, acceded to their request and approved Folco’s transfer to Nîmes. Moved by Charles-Roux’s argument that Folco had a family to support and a prestigious vineyard to manage, de Servièrre had first proposed a transfer to Aix. This, Jeanne insisted, would not do: Folco had to be assigned to Nîmes, not because this would place him closer to his wife and children but so that he could tend his beloved herd of bulls.

Jeanne de Flandreysy emerges from these letters as a woman increasingly obsessed: preserving the bulls of the Camargue and the poetry of Provence was as important as defending France itself. Folco comes across as petulant, ungrateful, and increasingly irascible. Perhaps he suffered from clinical depression, but his insistence that his service in Toul during the second half of 1915, when France was engaged in massive battles in Champagne and Artois, was a form of “martyrdom” betrays a profound lack of empathy or understanding. When he chastised Jeanne for not securing his release more quickly, when he had to be reminded to thank those who devoted their waking hours to his cause, he appears more like a spoiled child than a man deserving of their extraordinary efforts.

The editors of this collection contend that Jeanne de Flandreysy’s wartime correspondence offers an invaluable insight into the experiences of French women during the Great War (p. 26). This

surely overstates the case. Jeanne de Flandreysy's experience of the war was, in nearly all regards, exceptional. A childless widow of considerable wealth and enviable social connections, she suffered neither the immediate anguish of women whose sons or husbands were in direct danger nor the economic insecurity of women living on paltry separation allowances. A close friend of Gallieni's daughter, she could (and did) call upon her extensive network of acquaintances in high places when seeking special favors, either for herself or her circle of friends. In January 1915, when the son of local dignitaries was killed in action, she hurried to Paris to seek an interview with Gallieni, hoping to secure permission to recover the body of the fallen officer (p. 216). She was not the only well-educated French woman to seek such favors: the mothers of *normaliens* killed in action besieged Ernest Lavissee with similar requests, hoping to retrieve their sons' bodies and bring them home for a respectful burial. Such requests invariably failed, as did Lavissee's demands that *normaliens* trained in the sciences be transferred from the infantry to the artillery. By contrast, Folco de Baroncelli benefited from the unceasing efforts and extraordinary connections Jeanne de Flandreysy brought to his case. Whether he was deserving of such energy and affection is another question entirely.

NOTE

[1] Robert Zaretsky, *Cock and Bull Stories: Folco de Baroncelli and the Invention of the Camargue* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

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