

H-France Review Vol. 4 (November 2004), No. 109

L. Leigh Westerfield, *"This Anguish, Like a Kind of Song": Resistance in Women's Literature of World War II*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004. 236pp. \$72.00 U.S./ €55.00 (pb). ISBN 90-420-1148-3.

Review by Joan Tumblety, University of Southampton.

The argument in this book is twofold. First, German and French women's resistance narratives provide a welcome window onto the complex social reality of resistance, a reality whose surprising and complicated texture has not often been rendered in historical accounts. Second, in the very process of placing women's various actions into that wider picture of resistance, these narratives sentimentalise their female characters, showing women mostly in terms of contemporary gender stereotypes--as beings indifferent to politics, desperate for male love and approval, driven by emotion. Thus its author affirms that "[t]he immediacy of women's narratives provides a unique view onto an emotional landscape that has rarely been revealed" (p. 183), but that "[i]n narrating the resistance, many women simply do not challenge the cultural codes that defined them out of the political picture" (p. 113). Leigh Westerfield suggests that women's narratives of resistance are thus marked by the same acceptance of the traditional gender order that, by and large, characterised women's resistance activity itself--that women do and should perform secondary, support roles; engage in care-giving activities; distance themselves from armed action; and, above all, fail to conceptualise their contribution in political or ideological terms. Even radically independent figures such as Simone de Beauvoir and Edith Thomas (despite, to an extent, transgressing gender norms in their own lives) resorted to conventional depictions of female characters in their fiction, a state of affairs that, according to Leigh Westerfield, is a function of female writers' implicit need in this period to gain acceptance by male colleagues and contemporaries and (consciously or not) to appeal to a conservative audience.

Both aspects of this argument are broadly convincing. Leigh Westerfield's discussion of her sources does show the nature of daily, lived experience under Nazism and Occupation in a way that resonates with recent social histories of this period in both France and Germany, even if the author rather under-estimates the extent of that literature.[1] It is also difficult to argue against the view that women's narratives and resistance activities themselves have been gendered in precisely the ways that Leigh Westerfield claims, and it is helpful to read her comparisons of the French and German examples which suggest striking similarities amid real contextual differences. What is less clear is how far the author sees women's complicity in this traditional gender order as unthinking acceptance of social norms and how far as a deliberate "strategy" for getting their voices heard (p. 90). That some female authors and resisters might have tailored their actions and words to achieve acceptance by both peers and the reading public remains in this text more an assertion than an argument, as little evidence is mobilised to support this latter view.

The German authors considered here are Ruth Andreas-Friedrich, member of the Onkel Emil resistance circle in Berlin (for the diary she kept 1938-45, *Der Schattenmann*), the bourgeois liberal exile Irmgard Keun (for her novella *Nach Mitternacht*), the Jewish-Catholic Elisabeth Langgässer, a survivor of forced labour *à domicile* during the war (for two short stories published in the late 1940s, "An der Nähmaschine" and "Untergetaucht") and Jewish communist exiled author Anna Seghers (for the novel first published in Mexico City in 1943, *Das siebte Kreuz*). The French list comprises the inescapable Simone de Beauvoir (for the novel *Le Sang des autres* written under the Occupation but published in 1945), Marguerite Duras (for her fiction-memoir, *La Douleur*), the Franco-German memorialist Clara Malraux (for a short story, "La Fausse épreuve", published in 1947), the communist historian and journalist Edith Thomas (for short stories "FTP" and "L'Arrestation"), and Elsa Triolet, writer of Russo-Jewish descent (for the novella *Les Amants d'Avignon*, published in 1943 by the Editions de Minuit).

The texts that form the main body of primary source material considered here were all published during or immediately after the Second World War, with the exception of Duras' fiction-memoir, which first appeared in print in 1985 although its author claimed to have begun work on it during the Occupation. While this list comprises women of different religious, cultural, and national backgrounds, and their experience of persecution and engagement during the Third Reich and Second World War varied, they were all bourgeois and (mostly) highly educated leftists. Crucially, not all were "resisters" in any conventional sense, most notably Beauvoir, who distanced

herself even from Sartre's efforts in this sphere and who worked for a time for an official, German-controlled radio station in occupied Paris; and Irmgard Keun, whose main act of defiance was continuing to write after her return to Germany from the Netherlands in 1940, despite having been blacklisted as an author by the Nazi authorities in 1933. In addition, this corpus comprises works of various genres, from diary and memoir to novel via the short story. For the purposes of this book, then, "women's resistance narratives" refers to a body of fictional and documentary literature written in relatively close proximity to the events in question by women who were not necessarily resisters themselves but who described and commented upon the ways in which individual (real or imaginary) women chose to resist Nazism. Indeed, the issue of resistance is reduced throughout to "anti-Nazi activity", which rather suggests the imposition of a conceptual framework derived from the German model onto the landscape of Vichy-era France and which, crucially, fails to recognise the significance of the Franco-French war in accounting for resistance activity there.

Leigh Westerfield's discussion of these works is influenced by her view that all writing is fictive to one extent or another in that it is inevitably representational and bound by linguistic tropes and conventions. As a result, she rather downplays the differences of genre within her main body of primary source material and does not anywhere in the book consider the significance of genre for the status of each literary artefact as evidence. One wonders if the diary entries of a German anti-Nazi resister living in Berlin offer the same category of "evidence" (or, at least, evidence of the same thing) as a deliberately fictive novel written by one who largely refused politics until after the Second World War, such as Beauvoir. While both narratives can be assessed as evidence of how a mid-century bourgeois urban woman understands her environment, it seems unlikely that both offer the same kind of evidence about the nature of women's lived resistance activities. Yet, in several passages, that is what Leigh Westerfield appears to want their narratives to do. Although even Beauvoir, herself, did not consider *Le Sang des autres* a "resistance novel", Leigh Westerfield claims that it nevertheless manages to "contribute to a general understanding of the French resistance" (p. 196). At the very least, the author ought to provide a rationale for reading literary fiction in this way, yet no convincing interpretive framework emerges from her initial discussion of the validity of sources. Having criticised oral testimony and conventional written documentation as "unreliable", Leigh Westerfield hopes that literary sources on resistance will "fill in some of the gaps" (p. 11). It is not clear how her own chosen source material, which the author does nothing to pose as less unreliable than the others, will tell us more about the resistance or about war than conventional historical sources: one would think that in creating its own "reality effects" such literature would merely compound the partial and subjective nature of all sources. In my view, the lack of care taken here in handling the source material, and the kind of interpretive slipperiness that results, seriously detracts from the authority of the arguments made.

In addition, the originality of the author's contribution to discussions about women, writing and resistance is vastly overstated. Leigh Westerfield's claim that her study "breaks new ground" in discussing lesser known authors calls to mind Henry Rousso's lament that to present erstwhile exposés of Vichy complicity in Nazi atrocities as late as the 1990s is a case of pushing at doors that are already open. So it is here. When Leigh Westerfield claims in her introduction that "literary critics have begun to situate women authors in the context of war" she underestimates the extent to which other writers have put their mark on this field (p. 10). It is difficult to maintain that the resistance narratives of these authors have been largely disregarded, for example, when all but two of them (Malraux and Thomas) are mentioned in a collected volume from the mid-1990s on European memories of the Second World War, a work that is absent from the book's bibliography.[2] Similarly, Claire Gorrara discusses, without exception, all of the French texts considered by Leigh Westerfield in her own work, albeit with a different focus and slightly different conclusions.[3] In general, the author does not adequately acknowledge the scholarly work on women's resistance narratives, and testimony in general, that has been a feature of academic writing over the last fifteen years or so.[4]

Leigh Westerfield states or implies throughout the book that women's resistance narratives are more honest and authentic than men's, more willing to render the physical and emotional difficulties of resistance lived on the daily level. "The end effect of such writing is a more realistic picture of what a clandestine existence was actually like" (p. 98). The focus on the everyday "breathes life into an otherwise sanitised resistance myth that has ordinarily been predicated on courage, heroism, and unattainable ideals" (p. 205). Men's tales, here often (erroneously in my view) conflated with "official" discourses, are blamed for not communicating a sense of their protagonists' anxiety or doubt: they "sound hollow; they fail to come to life for the reader" (p. 94). "[M]en fashion a resistance that dwarfs personal concerns or the worries of everyday survival" (p. 168). While it is unquestionable that male resistance

narratives such as Henri Frenay's *La Nuit finira*, often cited in this book, present accounts which focus much more on external organisation of resistance activity, there are counter-examples that Leigh Westerfield fails to mobilise. Perhaps most obviously, one cannot argue that Jean Bruller/Vercors' iconic call to resistance, *Le Silence de la mer*, published by Editions de Minuit in 1942, ignores the quotidian, domestic, physical, and existential struggle involved in working out what one's appropriate relations with the German occupier ought to be. In any case, it would have been preferable to see Leigh Westerfield discuss male texts as emblematic of a culturally-inflected (masculine) way of seeing than for her to dismiss them as flawed; to show how gendered assumptions about war and resistance determined the frame used by men to tell the story, just as they determined the nature of women's writing on the subject.[5] To discount men's narratives for unconsciously bearing the imprint of prevailing gender norms is an ironic thing to do since a key component of Leigh Westerfield's book is to argue that women writers were similarly afflicted.

NOTES

[1] For example, Dominique Veillon, *Vivre et survivre en France, 1939-1945* (Paris: Payot, 1995), H. R. Kedward, In *Search of the Maquis: Rural Resistance in Southern France, 1942-1944* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), Alison Owings, *Frauen: German women recall the Third Reich* (London: Penguin, 1993), Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[2] Helmut Peitsch, Charles Burdett and Claire Gorrara, eds., *European Memories of the Second World War* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999).

[3] Claire Gorrara, *Women's Representations of the Occupation in Post-'68 France* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1998). In Gorrara's analysis, it is the male narrator--and not the author--in *Les Amants d'Avignon* who succumbs to gender stereotypes in the description of the central female protagonist, Juliette.

[4] For example, the discussion of Jewish women's wartime documentary writing found in Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *Writing as Resistance: Four Women confronting the Holocaust – Edith Stein, Simone Weil, Anne Frank, Etty Hillesum* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); and the collection of essays on Jewish women's experience and memory of Nazism, the Holocaust and the Second World War, Dalia Ofer and Leonore J. Weitzman, eds., *Women in the Holocaust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).

[5] For a recent attempt to write a gendered history of men and war, see Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh, eds., *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004). See also Luc Capdevila, François Rouquet, Fabrice Virgili, and Danièle Voldman, eds., *Hommes et Femmes dans la France en Guerre, 1914-1945* (Paris: Payot, 2003).

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H-France Review Vol. 4 (November 2004), No. 109

ISSN 1553-9172