



American Women Report World War I: An Anthology of Their Journalism ed. Chris Dubbs.

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This anthology, edited by military historian and former journalist Chris Dubbs, concerns the largely overlooked contributions of women to First World War press coverage, from their front-line experiences to their reporting on French and Belgian civilians caught between the massive, mechanized armies of the Allies and Central Powers. Though some of the thirty-eight pieces¹ are already available in book form, scholars of the First World War and of press history will welcome their inclusion here in a single volume. Mental images from the articles will long persist in readers' memories—a French farmer plowing stolidly on, his barn and farmhouse riddled with shell holes; a Belgian priest-turned-soldier keeping solitary watch from a wrecked village in No Man's Land; an eyewitness account of the signing of the Versailles Peace Treaty seen through the feathers of a novelist's hat!

Until recently, it was assumed that journalism, the "first draft of history," was nearly entirely the purview of males prior to 1950, particularly as it applied to politics, diplomacy, foreign correspondence, and war reporting. Current scholarship, however, has unearthed growing evidence for women's participation in international news reporting for mainstream newspapers and magazines right through the twentieth century. Carolyn Edy, for instance, has established that several women, not just the often cited Peggy Hull, were on official US Army lists of accredited correspondents in 1918. To this scholarly recovery work, Dubbs now adds reports in these women's own words, adding color and depth to their writings.

The anthology is both chronological and thematic in format, beginning with some highly unusual accounts from the front lines, from which most war correspondents were banned. Americans benefited from their country's neutral status during the first three years of the war and enjoyed greater access than did correspondents of belligerent states. British correspondents, corralled far behind the lines, could visit the trenches only under strict conditions. This resulted in much fabrication and subsequent ridiculing of British newspapers by the soldiers who knew all too well what was actually going on. Thus Mary Roberts Rinehart's *Saturday Evening Post* report (8 May 1915) is one of the rare accounts of No Man's Land by any journalist, man or woman. Rinehart, a writer of mystery fiction, was granted access through the Belgian Red Cross. Her dramatic story takes the reader across fields deliberately flooded by fleeing Belgians hoping to slow the German advance.

I wish I could make those people who think that war is good for a country see that Belgian outpost as I saw it that night under the moonlight Suddenly the *fusées* [rockets], which had ceased for a time, began again, and with their white light added to that of the moon the desolate picture of that

1. An appendix with a brief biography of each reporter (287-92) is very welcome.

tiny island was a picture of the war.... There was the beauty of the moonlit waters, there was the tragedy of the destroyed houses and the church, and there was the horror of unburied bodies. (17)

There follow chapters on reporting from the civilian point of view in France and Germany, with an interesting piece on the female pacifists from around the world who attended the Women's Peace Congress in The Hague in 1915. The reporting here is the closest to diplomatic correspondence that women got at this time; it quashes the view that women were neither interested in nor able to understand international affairs. Several of the selected writers, pointing to a difference between men and women, note that women want to create and cherish life, while men want to destroy it through their war-mongering.

A piece on "Wartime Adventures" contains some of the most vivid reporting in the anthology. Take, for example, Eleanor Franklin Egan's *Saturday Evening Post* story of an encounter with an enemy submarine in the Mediterranean. Thinking they were about to be torpedoed, the ship's passengers jumped into the sea. Egan comments, "Hereafter ... I think I shall always know a twelve-pounder when I see one, because I looked straight into their muzzles from where I floated in the sea" (158).

We now reach the point in the collection when the United States ceased to be neutral (1918) and sent troops to France. Mary Boyle O'Reilly wrote an account of her crossing of the Atlantic from Liverpool (Feb. 1917), just as Pres. Woodrow Wilson severed diplomatic relations with Germany. She evokes the terror of being aboard a ship that had overnight changed from a safe, neutral haven to a sitting duck for enemy submarines. Her report for the *Seattle Star* begins ominously with an order for passengers to sleep with their coats on and handbags at the ready in case of a night time evacuation. She sees children competing to see who could get their lifebelts on the fastest, watched by their "patient, sad-eyed mothers" (164). She references both the *Titanic*, and the *Lusitania* in her report, signaling to readers the Atlantic's ceaseless ravaging for human souls.

One chapter, on the Russian Revolution, includes well known accounts by Louise Bryant and Bessie Beatty. Others cover the period when American troops were involved in the fighting; these evince a noticeable change in tone, given a readership of anxious mothers, sisters, and grandparents waiting for news back home. They are laden with clichés about the brave boys thinking of their mothers as they face the enemy. It is clear that a combination of censorship and self-censorship affected all war correspondents' writing.

The final chapter goes beyond the Armistice and contains an impressive report by Elizabeth Frazier of the moment when the Peace Treaty was signed at Versailles. It skilfully blends the personal—"one corner of it, to be sure, was blotted out by a brandishing plume on a novelist's hat, but the rest I saw to perfection"—with precise reportage: "The American delegates, headed by Wilson, marching firmly, head erect, a smile playing about his lips. By my watch he signed at thirteen minutes after three" (280-81).

The book has some deficiencies. While the author provides some context at the start of each chapter, a bit more would have helped readers navigate the sections more easily. One also wishes for fuller discussion of reporting restrictions and censorship. That said, Chris Dubbs's thorough, wideranging collection of reportage nicely supplements more scholarly studies of First World War journalism.