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Dominique Kalifa and Jann Matlock, eds., *Aux marges de la France. L'histoire de France vue de Berkeley, Californie*. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2014. 350 pp. 25€ (pb). ISBN: 978-2-85944-803-5.

Review by Judith G. Coffin, University of Texas at Austin.

*Aux marges de la France. L'histoire de France vue de Berkeley, Californie*, is a tribute to the late Susanna Barrows, who died suddenly in 2010, at the age of sixty-five. The editors have collected essays from eight historians who studied with Barrows, two short appreciations, and a bibliography of the thirty theses she directed, most of which have been published as books—an extraordinary number. Barrows also helped to shape countless more Ph.D. 's during her time at Berkeley (1981-2010), and she touched the lives and work of many of us who were never her students.

There is nothing “marginal” about this Berkeley cohort. Barrows’ students people the ranks of history departments across the United States, publish up a storm, and break new ground in any number of domains. As editors Dominique Kalifa and Jann Matlock say in their introduction, Barrows’ protégés have helped to “reinvent the history of France” (p. 19), and they have done much else besides. Their accomplishments owe much to Barrows’ mentorship, her brilliance and erudition, her generosity, her seemingly boundless appetite for ideas, sociability, and not least the consummate ease with which she moved between Berkeley and the Boulevard Henri 4 in Paris, making connections and connecting both people and intellectual projects across the Atlantic. The editors salute Barrows’ rebellious spirit and cite her mantra: “Break a rule every day” (p. 15). They also signal her grace, her cultural range, and her facility with negotiating “Frenchness.” While she was a disrupter, disruption has rarely seemed so elegant. We know that elegance is not effortless; Susanna Barrows’ graciousness and gifts involved real self-sacrifice, making this anthology all the more poignant and her life all the more admirable.

Let me start with Barrows’ own article, “When the Pen was Mightier than the Barricade,” which is about angry letters to the government after the “coup of 16 May 1877.” On that date, arch conservative General Patrice de Mac Mahon attempted to slam the door on the rising republican opposition to his government of “moral order.” He closed down popular societies, shuttered cafés, dragged dissenters before the courts, dissolved municipal councils, threatened the press with fines and prison terms, purged prefects, mayors, and no fewer than 7,000 administrators, among them civil servants, teachers, mailmen, customs office workers, and veterinarians, as Barrows tells us in detailed passages worthy of Balzac. The essay is a joy for the pleasures of her prose and her eye for documents and the conditions of their production. Barrows reminds historians of France how much they owe to the daunting efficiency of the state’s bureaucracy and its rich and “obsessively classified archives” (p. 226). She also has a keen eye for the foibles and fabrications in those archives, especially police archives, compiled by scribbling officers who had to meet their monthly page quotas and prefects who, out of duty, boredom, or paranoia had to report just enough trouble in the realm to justify their salaries and positions, and who thus peppered their reports with rumors, suspicions, and supposed offenses to public decency.

In this article, however, Barrows relies on letters, and she is plainly delighted to give her usual sources the run-around. “Si souvent, en tant qu’historiens, nous devons recourir à des voix intermédiaires—greffiers, fonctionnaires, administrateurs, prêtres, avocats notables locaux, ethnographes érudits—, qui ont reconstruit, expurgé, toiletté ou refondu le langage et les motivations des gens du peuple” (p. 227). By contrast, letters seem to come unmediated. They do not, of course: as Barrows points out, manuals on epistolary etiquette in the nineteenth century instructed one on the proper way to express respect, ask for favors, and sign off. (Veuillez agréer, chère Madame... remains.) She finds few polite formulations in these letters to Mac Mahon; they are almost all anonymous, and hilariously irreverent. “‘Imbécile, capitularde, fainéant! [Mac Mahon had lost the battle of Sedan in 1870] Assassin! Des libertés... traître de nos institutions et de l’intérêt Social, grand brigand...’” The letters mixed insult with doggerel verse and satire, as well as citations from Victor Hugo. “Etrange république des lettres,” Barrows observes, “où les citoyens peu habitués à écrire ne résistent pas à citer des vers de Hugo au président de la République” (p. 237). Barrows asks what it meant to write these letters; she sees them as private acts of catharsis and expressions of republican bravado, as well as statements of political courage.

I wonder about that last point; anonymous comments, even on such a staid a website as the *New York Times*, often evince more off-the-cuff nastiness than courage. Is the pen mightier than the barricade? In what ways, and under what conditions? The overall argument, however, is that democracy was not limited to the polls, and that the electoral riposte to Mac Mahon in 1877, which confirmed the republican majority, was anchored in a larger and historically self-conscious popular culture of republicanism. It is a shame that the book-length version of this lively, shrewd, and sympathetic analysis cannot be part of the recent discussion of the Commune and its legacy.

No reviewer can do justice to all the articles in a volume. Josh Cole’s lead article is part of his ongoing work on violence, memory and the politics of colonialism. Here he probes the difficult political culture and tangled cultural politics of interwar Algeria through two figures: Mahieddine Bachetarzi, leader of the most important musical theatre troop to perform in a mix of Arabic and French, and Mohamed Salah Bendjelloul, elected after the grudging colonial reforms of 1919 to the Fédération des élus musulmans in Constantine. Both the playwright and the politician were forced to maneuver in a political field polarized by rising nationalism on the one side and reactionary colonialism on the other. They consistently raised issues that did not neatly fit the European/indigenous binary, searching for constituencies and audiences that made sense in a hybrid colonial society. Bachetarzi’s career after 1940 is distressing in a particularly thought-provoking way: he went from being a supporter of the Popular Front and increasingly sympathetic to Algerian nationalism to rallying behind Pétain. Cole leaves us thinking about what different nationalisms mean in a hybrid colonial context.

Sylvia Schafer’s article here is part of her ongoing work on the discursive framing of rights and responsibilities in the liberal state, animated by an interest in law, justice, the ethics of exclusion and inclusion, and the contradictions of liberal democracy. Schafer treats the reports and debates concerning access to law, or judicial assistance, through the tumultuous years surrounding the revolution of 1848. On the one hand, liberal reformers wanted civil justice to be accessible to all, for reasons that ranged from believing legal costs should not bar poor people from marrying or legitimizing their children to the more classically liberal conviction that citizens’ equality before the law had to be more than an empty slogan (p. 212). On the other hand, they were loath to open the courts’ doors to class conflict, especially once the spring of 1848 had raised the haunting specter of revolution or social republicanism. The state — emphatically not understood to represent everyone — would open the law’s door to the deserving poor, now defined as “étrangers civils,” but would not permit those whom liberals considered greedy and litigious indigents take advantage of the law’s “hospitality” (p. 223).

The histories of commerce, culture, sensationalism, the senses, sex, and eros are particularly well represented. Sarah Horowitz’s lovely essay “Luxe, amour et transactions,” looks at the enticing and dangerous culture of jewels in the ancien régime. Diamonds and other precious stones served as actual

currency as well as objects of desire, currency to which women had access and which they husbanded, as it were, as their own, in order to skirt male-dominated inheritance. Selling and gifting jewels could mark familial ties, generational connection, love, or sexual exchange. I highly recommend the article as a companion to Sarah Maza's justly popular work on the Diamond Necklace Affair.[1] Eric Jennings brings back the Vichy we hear little about, the spa and thermal baths where one "could take the waters," with its female attendants (*donneuses d'eau*), eroticized advertising imagery, and sensual pleasures, which Jennings aptly characterizes as "parasexual" (p. 159).

With Hazel Hahn, Katharine Norris, and Aaron Freundschuh, we are immersed in the pervasive sensationalism of Third Republic culture. Hahn's article on "extreme travel" focuses on the wildly popular *Journal des voyages et des aventures de terre et mer* which peddled "authentic" and "truthful" stories of faraway lands and cultures for the public's entertainment and edification. The journal did not so much revel in the spectacular savagery of Others—grisly tortures, executions, and cannibalism—as use descriptions of those practices to create what Barthes called "the effect of the real": the all powerful referents being Western notions of the hierarchies of civilization.[2] Katharine Norris's article is concerned with the medical profession's debates over child psychology, and children's propensity for all kinds of lies, invented memories, and false accusations. Out of the mouths of babes, it turned out, came all kinds of fabrications. Children were not necessarily innocent and their minds were not blank slates; both findings troubled the famously earnest educational project of the Republic and spurred doctors to investigate. La Petite Roquette, a prison for minors in Paris, held scores of children for falsely (or not) accusing adults of trying to kidnap, molest or murder them; their cases were grist for the mill of medical science. In the hands of one of the most prominent psychiatrists, "le mélodrame entourant le témoignage de l'enfant se transforme en arène où exhiber ses talents de médecin et où élaborer de nouveaux diagnostics" (p. 183). Medical science's determination to get to the truth about children's lies seemed to mire it more deeply in a world of specious distinctions, racist and misogynist stereotypes, and sensationalism.

I was especially taken with Aaron Freundschuh's article on the Pranzini affair of 1887, one year before the Whitechapel (a.k.a. Jack the Ripper) murders in London. The French episode involved a lurid triple murder on the rue Montaigne (in the 8<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, quite the opposite of the Whitechapel district) and a charismatic polyglot French "adventurer" born in Alexandria who had served with British imperial forces in Afghanistan and India; "a cosmopolitan gigolo," representative of a "catégorie spéciale de criminels, les rastaquoères assassins de femmes galantes, ayant dans les yeux cette langueur orientale des Levantins" (pp. 90-91) and destined to become a new kind of colonial/criminal archetype. The story gets creepy when someone connected to the police gets to Pranzini's guillotined corpse and profanes it, carving off patches of flesh and having them fashioned into a trophy *porte-cartes*; it becomes an "affair" when an enterprising journalist uncovers this second crime. The best part of the article, however, comes with Freundschuh's analysis of the fascinating rivalry between the police and the press; each side sets out to investigate and expose, trying to defend its reputation and expand its turf. The police accuse journalists of conducting unauthorized investigations; journalists assert the public's right to know; the crime becomes a legend.[3]

Alain Corbin closes the anthology with a tribute to Barrows, one that highlights her curiosity, keen eye, and wide-ranging interests, along with her intimate knowledge of the archives, and the breadth of her learning. All these helped to make her an extraordinary advisor. But there was rather more to her influence than that. She was unstinting with her time and enthusiasm. She turned her home into a salon, a center for the kind of person-to-person exchange of ideas that rarely happens outside of research institutes. She agreed to teach an overload, even as a single mother, during one of those semesters when everyone seems to be on leave. (These seem more common to students than to faculty.) As Susan Grayzel, who studied with her, told me, she also had a gift for welcoming people to study history and giving them the confidence to do it. History was there for everyone. Small wonder that undergraduate and graduate students alike found her inspiring, and that they lined up to work with her. "I don't know

how you describe what Susanna did on a c.v.," said Grayzel. "She made choices that benefitted her students rather than herself. I don't know what you'd call that. But it was miraculous."

How much do we miss Susanna Barrows? This anthology invites us to count the ways.

#### LIST OF ARTICLES

Joshua Cole, "À chacun son public. Politique et culture dans l'Algérie des années 1930"

H. Hazel Hahn, "Voyages extrêmes: les récits d'aventures en France à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle"

Aaron Freundschuh, "Anatomie d'un faits divers impérial. L'affaire Pranzini et la fabrication d'un archétype criminel"

Sarah Horowitz, "Luxe, amour et transactions. La culture des bijoux sous l'Ancien Régime"

Eric Jennings, "Donneuses d'eau. Une profession au cœur du thermalisme français (1840-1914)"

Katharine H. Norris, "Mentir à l'âge de l'innocence. Enfance, science et anxiété culturelle dans la France fin-de-siècle"

Sylvia Schafer, "L'Assistance judiciaire et l'étranger civil (1840-1851)"

Susanna Barrows, "Quand les plumes étaient plus puissantes que les barricades: Lettres politiques pendant la crise du 16 mai 1877"

Alain Corbin, "Susanna Barrows, une historienne américaine en France"

#### NOTES

[1] Sarah C. Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[2] Roland Barthes, "L'effet de réel," *Communications* 11.1 (1968): 84-89.

[3] Freundschuh's book, *The Courtesan and the Gigolo: The Murders in the Rue Montaigne and the Dark Side of Empire in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, will be out in January from Stanford University Press.

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