

defines itself against the positivism of eurocentric and androcentric science. See Patricia Hill Collins, "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought," *Signs* 14, no. 4 (Summer 1989): 745-73.

⁸⁰ See Maxine Baca Zinn, Lynn Weber Cannon, Elizabeth Higginbotham, and Bonnie Thornton Dill, "The Costs of Exclusionary Practices in Women's Studies," *Signs* 11 (Winter 1986): 290-303. For a survey of the institutionalization of women's history as evidenced by academic training and employment, publications, and organizations, see Judith P. Zinsler, *History and Feminism: A Glass Half Full* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), esp. 59-126.

⁸¹ See, for example, Nancy F. Cott, "What's in a Name? The Limits of 'Social Feminism': or, Expanding the Vocabulary of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 76, no. 3 (December 1989): 809-29; and Vicinus, "'They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong.'"

⁸² Denise Riley, *'Am I That Name?' Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 18.

⁸³ Christina Crosby, "Dealing With Differences," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 130-40, quotation on 131.

⁸⁴ Martha Minow, "Learning to Live with the Dilemma of Difference: Bilingual and Special Education," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 48 (1984): 157-211, quotation on 160, cited in Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 168; Spelman, *Inessential Woman*, 11.

⁸⁵ Renate Hof, "Gender and Difference: Paradoxieprobleme des Unterscheidens," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 37, no. 3 (1992): 437-49, quotation on 447.

⁸⁶ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, N.Y.: The Crossing Press, 1984), 44, 111.

⁸⁷ See the calls for an international perspective by Rebecca Rogers, "Crossing Boundaries: Writing Women's History Internationally," *Journal of Women's History* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 136-42; Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson, and Jane Rendall, eds., *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Leila J. Rupp, "Constructing Internationalism: The Case of Transnational Women's Organizations, 1888-1945," *American Historical Review* 99 (December 1994): 1571-1600; and, although the authors do not specifically address women's history/studies, Jane C. Desmond and Virginia R. Dominguez, "Resituating American Studies in a Critical Internationalism," *American Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (September 1996): 475-90.

GETTING TO THE SOURCE

"What! Such Things Have Happened and No Women Were Taught about Them": A Nineteenth-Century French Woman's View of the Importance of Women's History

Karen Offen

This remarkable meditation on the importance of women's history was published during the Revolution of 1848 by Henriette Wild (dates not known), who signed as "Henriette, artiste." Although she was among the French women active in the movement for women's emancipation and published her work in the revolutionary women's periodical La Voix des femmes ("Women's Voice"), little biographical information seems available. We do know, however, that she was a Protestant and that she was closely associated with Jeanne Deroin, one of the best remembered of the women activists for women's rights in the Revolution of 1848. In the 1850s, "Henriette, artiste" was engaged in a polemic with another women's rights activist, Jenny P. d'Héricourt, over the issue of female celibacy. In 1889 she spoke about Jeanne Deroin at the second international women's rights congress, held in Paris.

*The author's focus on the sage femme, which renders in English both as "midwife" and as "wise woman," is significant; a key issue in Parisian women's protest in the 1840s was the admission of women to the study of medicine and, more generally, to higher learning, to savoir or learned knowledge. The book referred to by the much-published Mme de Renneville (née Sophie de Senneterre) is doubtless her *Biographie des femmes illustres de Rome, de la Grèce et du Bas-Empire* (Paris: Parmantier, 1825). The *Areopagus* referred to in the text is the Athenian court, consisting of several male judges. The story of *Agnodice* told by Henriette Wild shows up again in Josephine Butler's edited collection *Women's Work and Women's Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1869), and in Hedwig Dohm's work *Women's Nature and Privilege* (London: Women's Printing Society, 1896) translated from the German *Frauen Natur und Recht* (Berlin, 1876). Dohm's work was reprinted in 1976 by Hyperion Press. This piece appeared in *La Voix des femmes* 28 (20 April 1848): 2-3.*

The original French text has been lightly corrected. The translation is by Karen Offen.

Les sages femmes d'Athènes

L'histoire n'existe point encore, a dit, en s'adressant aux femmes, l'un de nos meilleurs écrivains. Ce jugement, nous le partageons entièrement; l'histoire est toute à refaire, car nous n'en avons guère que les apparences quand ce n'en est pas la parodie même. Nous ajouterons que si l'histoire est compromise, c'est bien plus par les faux jugements et les omissions involontaires ou calculées, que par les faits eux-mêmes. Une appréciation nouvelle ayant pour base le redressement moral et intellectuel du jugement humain, voilà, croyons-nous, ce qui fera de l'histoire l'image de plus en plus vivante de notre vie antérieure et la conscience même de l'humanité. Bien que marchant à grands pas vers le progrès, je doute cependant que nous ayons atteints ce point élevé. Un ouvrier manque à l'oeuvre, et tant qu'il n'y participera point, d'immenses lacunes resteront toujours à combler. La femme comme l'homme est appelée à explorer le domaine de l'histoire; il y a là, comme en toutes choses, place pour tous deux, et tous deux aussi, y ont des attributions différentes et particulières. Le meilleur vouloir ne suffit pas pour l'avancement de certaines oeuvres, et là, par exemple, où l'observation se divise d'une manière fondamentale mais insensible, comment serait-il donné à un seul observateur de suivre en même temps deux lignes s'éloignant sans cesse l'une de l'autre? Voilà pourquoi, dans une pensée, l'histoire est surtout un mensonge pour la femme, et pourquoi la vérité n'y paraîtra que quand l'observation et l'intelligence féminine y prendront part, et surtout y rattacheront les intérêts féminins. Un scepticisme cruel et un profond découragement s'empareront de la femme le jour où, ayant sous les yeux les matériaux épars et dédaignés de son histoire, elle voudra les considérer et s'interroger sur leur haute signification. Sa pensée se troublera d'abord, ses forces paraîtront l'abandonner, car une tâche immense et pressante s'annoncera comme étant sa destinée. Ne pouvant douter longtemps, la femme enfin, par son incessant besoin de croire et de sentir s'élancera bientôt à son tour dans un domaine inexploré, son domaine à elle, dont elle avait été bannie. Pour faire sentir à nos lectrices toute ma pensée, et dans l'espoir de leur faire partager mes peines et mes joies, je ne puis mieux faire que de les appuyer du fait qui les a fait naître. Je l'emprunte à l'histoire et le trouve rapporté dans la biographie des femmes illustres, par Mme de Renneville.

«L'aréopage avait défendu aux femmes de pratiquer la médecine et de se livrer aux accouchements. Plusieurs dames d'Athènes, blessées d'une loi qui ne leur paraissait pas s'accorder avec celles de la pudeur aimèrent mieux mourir que de consentir à être secourues par des hommes. — La jeune Agnodice, touchée du malheur de ses concitoyennes, prit le parti de se déguiser, et alla, sous un habit d'homme, dans l'école célèbre

d'Hérophile, étudier la médecine, et surtout l'art d'accoucher. Ayant fait ensuite confidence de son sexe aux dames d'Athènes, elle fut bientôt le médecin à la mode, le seul même qui fut accueilli d'elles. Les accoucheurs, ne sachant comment expliquer la préférence que les femmes lui donnaient sur eux, l'accusèrent de chercher à corrompre les femmes sous prétexte de les secourir. Agnodice, citée devant l'aréopage, repoussa la calomnie en révélant son sexe; mais les accusateurs, tournant cet aveu contre elle, alléguèrent la loi qui lui interdisait la médecine; elle fut condamnée. A cette nouvelle, les femmes d'Athènes crièrent à l'injustice, et se plaignirent de la dureté des hommes, leur reprochant que c'était moins des maris qu'elles trouvaient en eux que des meurtriers, puisqu'ils condamnaient, dans Agnodice, la seule personne qui pouvait leur épargner une mort cruelle, à laquelle elles s'exposeraient plutôt que de recevoir d'autres secours que ceux qui leur viendraient de leur sexe. L'aréopage, vaincu par ces représentations, abrogea la loi, et il fut permis aux femmes d'exercer la médecine et l'art des accouchements.»

Que de questions se pressent dans ma pensée; que de surprise, que de douleur peut-être!

Quoi! une époque a déjà paru pour la femme où sa dignité était assez reconnue, assez respectée pour se rattacher aux intérêts du [sic] son sexe?

Quoi! cette pudeur collective dont je me plaisais sans cesse à la voir revêtue dans mes rêves d'avenir, a déjà montré sa valeur, elle n'était point une fiction?

Quoi! la femme a pu être dépossédée à ce point de sa première vertu qu'un sentiment naturel froissé, contre lequel elle n'a point réagi à lui-même amené l'abaissement de la femme?

Quoi! la sainte et étroite *solidarité* a été assez forte dans l'antiquité pour inspirer aux femmes le plus mâle courage, et leur faire révoquer les décrets de l'aréopage même?

Quoi! de pareils faits se sont passés, et toutes les femmes n'en sont point instruites, et ils ne sont pas gravés dans la mémoire de toutes les jeunes filles? . . . [in original] Femmes, femmes! et vous vous étonnez de votre chute et de votre abjection! Et vous ignorez les moyens de vous régénérer? Ouvrez les yeux, marchez: car voici déjà l'un des sentiers qui vous ramèneront à la voie d'honneur et de justice. Il n'y a plus de *solidarité* entre vous et votre sexe, parce que la fleur exquise de la pudeur qui y correspondait s'est desséchée en votre sein. Ravivez-la, renversez l'erreur qui s'y oppose et que vous vous êtes laissé imposer. Suivez l'exemple des nobles Athéniennes; l'agent naturel de votre délivrance est la femme. Et puisque, vous dit-on, pour vous mieux faire violence, la science lui manque qu'il n'en soit plus ainsi, faites instruire la femme. Que la sage-femme, cette sentinelle perdue, devienne pour vous la sentinelle avancée. Que

l'infériorité qu'on lui attribue, fausse vérité à laquelle une odieuse tyrannie a seule pu donner quelque apparence, tombe à votre voix, et que la vérité apparaisse enfin guidée par la fraternité et la liberté. Quant à l'égalité vous la possédez à présent; chaque heure, femmes, vous montre sous une face nouvelle votre égalité dans l'infortune et dans l'injustice des hommes. Soutenez la femme, agissez en son nom. Votre entrée au temple d'Esculape adoucira l'austère visage de ce dieu. Il ne rest, sans doute, que parce que, prêtresse par vocation, vous manquez à ses enseignements. La science de soulager les maux de l'humanité doit mener par vous, à celle de les prévenir. Le sacerdoce suprême, celui qui a pour objet le développement intégral et infiniment perfectible de l'humanité, se compromettrait désormais sans la femme. Demandez donc, demandez encore, demandez partout et toujours. Voici venir notre sérieuse révolution, car nous sommes nous-mêmes saintes révolutionnées.

—Que tout ce qui est déjà, fasse appel à tout ce qui n'est pas encore; que les femmes artistes, les travailleuses et les poètes soient en aide à nos médecins et à nos historiens; ils ont tant à nous dire sur les causes véritables de nos chutes progressives, sur notre déchéance, sur la perte de notre beauté, sur celle des objets de notre amour. N'est-ce pas femmes, que nous voulons tout savoir, et qu'en vous ayant rapporté ce que le hasard m'a fait découvrir, j'ai éveillé en vous tout un monde nouveau de désirs, de devoirs et d'espérances. Allons donc, sous la garde du Seigneur et marchons, par la force de notre sainte solidarité. Notre délivrance approche, l'heure sonne! L'heure a sonné.

Henriette, artiste

The Wise Women of Athens

History does not yet exist, said one of our best writers, addressing himself to women. We agree completely with this judgment; history must be completely rewritten, for as yet we have little more than appearances when it is not parody. We add that if history finds itself compromised, it is more by false judgments and involuntary or calculated omissions than by the facts themselves. A new appreciation having for its foundation the moral and intellectual rectification of human judgment, this is, in our view, what would make history more the living image of our earlier life and the very conscience of humanity. Even as we march toward progress with giant steps, I doubt that we have as yet attained this elevated position. One worker for the task is missing and as long as this worker does not participate, immense gaps will remain to be filled.

Like man, woman is called to explore the domain of history. As in all other things, there is room for both [sexes] and both also have differing and specific attributes. The best will in the world is insufficient to advance certain works, and in those places where observation is divided in a fundamental yet imperceptible manner, how could it be given to a single observer to follow simultaneously two lines that are incessantly diverging from one another? This is why, for woman, history is a lie and why the truth will only appear once feminine observation and intelligence enter into it and, specifically, link it to women's interests. Cruel skepticism and profound discouragement will take hold of woman the day when, with the sparse and disdained materials of her history before her eyes, she wishes to consider them and to question their deeper significance. Her thoughts will first be troubled, her strength will seem to disappear, for an immense and pressing task will announce itself as her destiny. No longer able to doubt, and because of her unceasing need to believe and feel, woman will in turn throw herself into unexplored territory, her own domain, from which she had been banished. In order to make my readers understand my ideas, and in the hope of encouraging them to share my sorrows and my joys, I can do no better than to support them with the incident that gave birth to them. I borrow it from history and find it reported in the biography of illustrious women by Madame de Renneville.

"The Areopagus had forbidden women to practice medicine and to participate in births. A number of women of Athens, wounded by this law which did not appear to them to be in accordance with the laws of modesty, would rather die than consent to be assisted by men. The young Agnodice, touched by the unhappiness of her sister citizens, took it upon herself to disguise herself and went, in men's clothing, to the famous school of Herophilus to study medicine and especially the art of midwifery. Afterwards, having let it be known to the women of Athens, she became the most sought after physician, the only one whom they would welcome. The male *accoucheurs*, not knowing how to explain the women's preference, accused her of seeking to corrupt the women under the pretext of assisting them. Summoned before the Areopagus, Agnodice answered this calumny by revealing her sex; but the accusers turned this revelation against her, invoking the law that denied her the right to practice medicine. She was condemned. At this news, the women of Athens cried out against the injustice and bewailed the harshness of men, reproaching them that they seemed to be less husbands than murderers because in condemning Agnodice, they condemned the sole person who could spare them from a cruel death, to which they would expose themselves rather than receive help from others not of their own sex. The Areopagus, defeated by these claims, abrogated the law, and

women were then permitted to practice medicine and the art of delivering babies."

How many questions flooded my mind; how much surprise, how much unhappiness perhaps!

What! A time had already existed for woman when her dignity was sufficiently recognized, sufficiently respected to attach her to the interests of her sex?

What! That collective modesty, which in my dreams of the future I hope to see rehabilitated, had already shown its value. It was not fictional?

What! It was possible that a woman had been dispossessed to this point that her first virtue, a natural sentiment shocked, against which she had not reacted, had itself led to the lowering of woman?

What! The holy and tight *solidarity* had been sufficiently strong in antiquity to inspire in women the most male courage, and get them to revoke the degrees of the Areopagus itself?

What! Such things have happened and no women were taught about them, and they were not engraved in the memories of every young girl? Women, women! And you are astonished at your own fall and your abjection! And you ignore the means of your own regeneration? Open your eyes, get going; here is one of the paths that can bring you back to the high road of honor and justice. There is no longer *solidarity* between you and your sex, because the exquisite flower of modesty that accompanies it has dried up in your breast. Revive it, reverse the error that opposes it and that you have let it impose. Follow the example of the noble Athenian women; the natural agent of your deliverance is woman. And when, they tell you in order to do you more violence, she lacks science—in order to change this, instruct woman. Let the midwife/wise woman [*sage femme*], this lost sentinel, become your advance sentinel. Let the inferiority attributed to woman, a false claim to which only odious tyranny has given some reality, fall at your voice, and let the truth finally appear, guided by fraternity and liberty. As for the equality you possess at present: every hour, women, you display your equality in misfortune and in the injustice of men. Support woman, act in her name. Your entry to the temple of Aescupalus will soften the austere face of this god. No doubt, it is only because, priestless by vocation, you lack his instruction. The science of alleviating the ills of humanity should lead, by you, to the science of preventing them. The supreme priesthood, that which has for its goal the integral and infinitely perfectible development of humanity, is henceforth compromised without the woman. Then demand it, demand it again, everywhere and always. Here begins our serious revolution, for we are ourselves the saintly revolutionaries. —Everything that now is makes its appeal to that which is to be. May women artists, women workers, women

poets come to the aid of our doctors and our historians; they have so much to tell us about the real causes of our repeated falls, about our disabled status, about the loss of our beauty, and the objects of our love. Is it not the case, women, that we want to know everything, and that in reporting to you what chance has allowed me to discover, I have awakened in you a whole world of desires, of duties and of hopes? Go then, with the protection of our Lord and march forward, in the strength of our holy solidarity. Our deliverance approaches, the clock strikes! The hour has struck!

Henriette, artist