

## Critical Books Review

YESTE, E.; CANOSA F. *Dones que surten del paper. Periodistes catalanes que expliquen un país.*

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### Pioneering and fearless journalism teachers

It's a book to enjoy the voice and experiences of the journalism pioneers in Catalunya. This anthology of articles fills the great cognitive void that history has administered to women's contributions. The proposal is immensely rich for those who approach the book with a historicist, feminist and journalistic perspective. Apart from allowing the direct and chronological reading of the history of the country over time, the book contains another treasure: through the 44 articles the audience discovers how journalists are incorporating for the first time the gender perspective in the discussions of social life.

They're not only pioneers, they practice journalism as professionals and as daring ones. Whether for the subjects they choose, the way they treat them, the writing resources they use, their surprising ability to place themselves in the front line, f rigour, or for an informative experience and precision that are hardly aired on tv. And all this was done in a hostile context of deep discrimination and absolute lack of rights, where the capacities of women were still being questioned in relation to those of men.

The work is an accurate selection made by Elena Yeste and Francesc Canosa, doctor and doctor, respectively, by the Universitat Ramon Llull, both of whom have a long and extensive journalistic and academic trajectory, very often centred on issues of historical memory and communication.

The articles, the chronicles, the reports and the interviews allow us to approach the desires of each period, from 1879 to 1938, from the Renaissance to the Civil War, through the experience of women. The perspective of the life and country of the generations of women journalists who published. A swimming pool to dive in to the history of Catalonia, with the feminist purple-tinted glasses of that time, to obtain a vision of our past that goes beyond patriarchy and usual androcentrism contained in history books and old diaries, and that, unfortunately, continues being a ballast today.

The fact that the articles haven't been corrected too much

and that the original Catalan has been kept is great news. The anthology allows access to the direct style and lives of the authors in a transparent way.

The 18 journalists who sign this anthology are Dolors Monserdà, Maria Josepa Massanés, Paulina Reig, Isabel Serra, Carme Karr, María Luz Morales, Llucieta Canyà, Irene Polo, Rosa Maria Arquimbau, Aurora Bertrana, Maria Teresa Gibert, Anna Maria Martínez Sagi, Anna Murià, Rafaela Ferro, Maria Pi de Folch, Mercè Rodoreda, Conxa Espinalt and Teresa Pàmies.

Of the 18 authors, some are more famous than others. This is the case of Rodoreda and Pàmies, for whom journalism was the starting point of their writing careers. Some are more known than others because they became head of newspapers, such as Morales and Murià, or those that had an important public position due to other reasons, such as Martínez Sagi, director of *Barça*, or Llucieta Canyà, the first woman to enter the *Ateneu Barcelonès*.

However, one thing is knowing their personality, and another is reading several of their articles in a chronological anthology. This global and structured proposal allows us to see the implication and contribution of these women in the construction of the country- one that thanks to their contributions, may now leave androcentrism behind.

The anthology begins with Dolors Monserdà, whose centenary of death is commemorated this year. It should be noted that she did not only criticize on paper the discrimination suffered by women, but broke boundaries and got involved in the improvement of women's living conditions by founding and directing the *Patronage for the Obreres de l'Agulla*. Today we call it *sorority*. In the first article of the anthology, Monserdà takes advantage of a cultural topic –the chronicle of an embroidery exhibition– to report the situation of labour discrimination against women sewers: “their miserable salary [...] at the price of 25 peseta cents. How can such exploitation of human blood be allowed?” (p. 28).

While we follow the top pioneer transfer the claims of women's rights to newspapers, the book proposes the articles of Maria

Josepa Massanés “Sobre la instrucció de la dona”; Paulina Reig and Sala, “L’home es superior a la dona”, where this superiority is questioned; Isabel Serra, who transfers “Feminal al Marroc”; and Carme Karr, who claims “El vot de la dona” with arguments such as: “Is there any evidence that those states that have already recognized women’s voting rights are worse than ours?” (p. 44).

The anthology continues with María Luz Morales and the article “El mejor piropo”, which requires the urgent modification of the Civil Code in favour of women’s rights. Morales is already asking herself something that we still do today through social media: “¿Dónde están las mujeres?” (p. 47). From the first director of *La Vanguardia* we can also read the articles “¿Qué leen los barceloneses?”, where she reveals the number and type of book read in each library and therefore states: “no matter how much the people from Barcelona read... they read less than they should” (p.194).

This is followed by three articles by Lluçietà Canyà on feminism, “La dona i la agricultura” and marital relations from a critical point of view. Five articles have been chosen from Irene Polo. In “Sallent, el cau de l’angúnia”, she explains as a special envoy the anarchist revolt of the potassa mines in 1933. In “Com ha donat el primer pas el feixisme d’Espanya”, narrates the details of her infiltration as a fascist follower in a demonstration of the Juventuts de Acció Popular. In the other articles, Polo shows the world of the “pawn shops”, reports illiteracy or talks to us about the female maillot before the declaration of the “platja immoral” of Barcelona in the thirties.

Three of Aurora Bertrana’s four articles have prostitution as their central topic or reflect it somehow. The first anti-abolitionist who writes in a newspaper says: “The first thing we have to do is find out what the interested parties think. Let’s interrogate them, since this is about their interests and we collect their signatures, for or against organised prostitution. Their opinion is more important than ours” (p.182). In the other article she explains the difficulties she must take pictures of women in Morocco.

Six articles that have been selected from Arquimbau allow us to enjoy this great chronicler of the time: In “Els memoralistes de la Virreina”, she explains the work of the few people who know how to write letters and offer themselves to a large illiterate population. She also focuses on a conflict in which “the gypsies of Barcelona complain about the crisis and competition”. A series of articles on the new and old peculiarities show curiosities, such as those who sell and buy the tobacco that comes out of cigarette butts thrown on the ground. And of course, she also explains what roles women and men have in this commercial environment. In “Les funcionaries públiques” she explains how “men who work as civil servants keep getting promoted while women who started in the same position stay with the same salary for years” (p.109). She highlights “Nosaltres”, a manifesto in which she points out that “women must have virtues and merits other than their physical appearance, since their look does not take any effort. We demand the things we’ve

earned; we don’t want anything else. “*Feminisme*” will mean feminine citizenship with all its consequences” (p. 98).

María Teresa Gibert reveals in an interview, the problems and desires of women when playing sports. “On the second anniversary of the Women’s Sports Club,” she says, “our girls are absolutely confused between what old men say (you get me, right? and what they feel. Apart from their undeniable desire for freedom, for self-government, we also find their fear for their father or mother (p. 87). In another article she calls for itinerant public libraries. She wants workers to be able to access books, since they cannot go to libraries due to incompatible timetables.

Six articles have been selected from Anna Maria Martínez Sagi. On the one hand, an interview with a “frank, simple, cordial” Caterina Albert who speaks of herself, of politics, of women, of Catalunya and, in “Les senyores de companyia”, she talks about this position with direct witnesses. On the other hand, a series of four magnificent chronicles on the “Front of Aragon” with the columns of the POUM, between the 4th and 12th August 1936. We must read them to find out what was happening, but also to find out what the war was like from a woman’s perspective and how journalism was practised from the front, when they still could. The daring Sagi explains an aerial attack on the car that was taking her in that moment: “I didn’t think I was going to make it” (p. 206).

The four articles of Anna Murià, director of the *Diari de Catalunya*, reflect her ideology. In “Les nits al ras” she says that “this winter” - the first one in the Republic - no one else should sleep in open air in Barcelona. In “El servei domestic”, where she interviews a lady and later, the girl, she states that “we will make the two of them talk and thus balance the scale” (p. 105) in order to be able to be as impartial as possible and reflect the “domestic service problem”. In the other articles she portrays the office workers and the life of a woman who irons.

Rafaela Ferro’s only article in the anthology also looks into a job that women do, shoe sewers, and talks about their precariousness. She assures that “There are no laws that favour and defend women who work [...] and if international ones exist, they have never been implemented here.” (p. 122).

María Pi de Folch speaks of secularism in schools. Rodoreda interviews the wife and daughter of Francesc Macià in “La casa dels canonges”. Finally, Teresa Pàmies closes the anthology with two war articles: “Les trinxeres li han fet d’escola” and “Marsén, no t’amaguis”.

The prologue, an essential part of the book (p. 9-23), should be highlighted as it perfectly situates the political context and the value of the new voices of journalists in the development of history, as well as in the construction of a new narrative of journalistic contents thanks to the perspective of women.

A glance that, despite the years that have passed by, still needs to be reclaimed in our days. With regard to content, as the director of the newspaper Público, Ana Pardo de Vera, pointed out at an event organised by the Association of Women Journalists of Catalonia (ADPC) in March 2019 at the Col·legi de Periodistes de Barcelona: “if you want to transmit good

information you have to apply a gender perspective and explain how issues affect half the population”.

As for the place of women in the media, we also must ask ourselves why Catalunya has only one director for generalist media: Ester Vera, in charge of the newspaper *ARA*. This fact shows that although the years go by, but there is still no standardised and balanced situation for journalism professionals. Data from the latest and most recent [research](#) carried out by the ADPC show that women account for 22% of media addresses and 32% of boards of directors.

And this is a very good path that these 18 authors –and many more– started and that must now be continued. Along with laws such as Organic Law for Effective Equality of Men and Women, which establishes, among other things, that female authorship must be included in the media through positive action mechanisms as well as guaranteeing the active participation of women, the equal presence of women and men, and a plural image of the two sexes in all areas, with special attention to the areas of knowledge and opinion.