H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Mary W. Schaller, ed. *Deliver Us from Evil: A Southern Belle in Europe at the Outbreak of World War I.* Women's Diaries and Letters of the South Series. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011. Illustrations. 192 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-950-8.

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On May 27, 1914, a twenty-five-year-old southern socialite and her twenty-six pieces of luggage departed New York City on a ship bound for Italy. Funded by her father, a wealthy U.S. congressman from Kentucky, Nancy Johnson intended to spend the next several months fulfilling her presumed rite of passage: taking the Grand Tour of Europe. That trip would soon be cut short. Instead, events in Europe propelled Johnson on a far less pleasurable adventure. On August 12, just two months after her arrival on the continent, she found herself back on a ship, thankful to be escaping the escalating chaos of Europe's Great War. Getting out of Europe had proven a trying and frightening ordeal. Despite the difficulty and the disappointment, Johnson could take solace in one fact. She managed to flee with all twenty-six pieces of luggage in tow.

In *Deliver Us from Evil*, Mary W. Schaller recounts this engaging story in all of its fascinating detail. As Johnson's maternal granddaughter, Schaller spent her childhood hearing all about the ill-fated trip, an oral history supplemented by Johnson's large collection of photographs, correspondence, newspaper clippings, and other mementos. As an adult, Schaller has used this personal archive and her talents as a writer to bring her grandmother's story to life. Published as part of a series on Women's Diaries and Letters of the South, *Deliver Us from Evil* joins other works in the series in the mission to bring southern women's voices to life through their own informal writing.

To fulfill this objective, *Deliver Us from Evil* takes a hybrid form. Schaller presents a fuller narrative than is typical of edited or annotated collections of primary sources, yet she also intersperses her text with many letters and clippings reprinted in their entirety, allowing these documents to speak for themselves. Numerous photographs and scanned souvenirs from Johnson's scrapbook–thirty-eight images in total–illustrate the account and offer a powerful visual complement to the documents. Together, Schaller's engaging prose and this rich archival collection ably recapture Johnson's flamboyant personality and her dramatic experience in Europe.

After moving quickly through Johnson's early life as the pampered young daughter of a rising politician, Schaller dives into Johnson's trip to Europe, her time there, and her flight home. Readers get an intimate look at an elite American young woman experiencing Italy for the first time. Johnson took in the canals and cafes in Venice; indulged in daily gelatos and flirtations with Italian men; and quickly depleted her cash reserves, thanks to her penchant for shopping and dining out. For two months, she was blissfully unaware of the belligerency rising around her. This naïveté was immediately shattered when war erupted on August 1. Johnson then scrambled for twelve days to arrange passage out of the country. With banks and borders closed, communications cut off, and transportation scarce due to wartime mobilization, this proved a difficult task indeed. With no cash on hand, she eventually managed to find a spot on the *Principe di Udine*, a relief ship chartered thanks to the financial pull of another elite American tourist in Italy, Frederick Vanderbilt. Through her grandmother's story, Schaller thus gives insights into how a wealthy, unmarried, Kentuckian-turned-Washingtonian girl saw the world and how she experienced the earliest days of the First World War.

While focused on Johnson, the book offers more than one elite young woman's harrowing tale; Schaller situates Johnson's biography within the broader historical context as well. Interwoven with Johnson's own saga is a narrative of the chain of events that led Europe to war during the summer of 1914. Schaller details the causes, both long term and acute, behind the June 28, 1914, assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the eventual outbreak of war. At the same time, she discusses U.S. re-

lations with Europe at this heady moment in world history. While most Americans cared little about Europe and preferred to avoid its messy politics, tens of thousands interacted with Europe each year in a different way, as tourists. Schaller considers these roughly 120,000 Americans who found themselves in Europe when the Guns of August started blazing, and examines a few key individuals in good detail. Finally, she also describes U.S. governmental and public responses to Europe's escalating belligerency. Johnson's story thus serves as a window into the wider social and political history of the First World War, with particular attention to American political and public reactions to it.

Deliver Us from Evil is not a book that breaks new historiographical ground. This, however, is not intended as a criticism. Schaller tells a fascinating story. Moreover, she effectively weaves a collection of rich primary sources into an engaging narrative. Given these attributes, the book would work very well as a teaching tool, and is ideally suited to undergraduate seminars on such topics as the First World War or women in war.

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