



Madness and Revolution

Elisabeth Roudinesco

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‘An impure Joan of Arc’ or ‘a radiant Penthesilea’—Theroigne de Mericourt remains one of the most misrepresented figures of the French revolution. Theroigne loved the Revolution; she refused the roles prescribed by her sex; and, at the age of thirty-one, she lost her reason. From these three facts, historians have woven tenacious myths about women, madness and revolution which reveal more about their own phantasms and allegiances than about Theroigne herself.

Elisabeth Roudinesco’s exploration of Theroigne’s life and afterlife restores a much-wronged woman to her rightful place in history. After vividly tracing Theroigne’s life, Roudinesco applies psychoanalysis to history, and history to psychiatry. She analyses the founding fathers of the asylum and the historians of the French Revolution, using their own assessments of Theroigne as revealing evidence. Her book adds a new dimension to our understanding of the French Revolution, early feminism and the birth of the modern asylum.

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