Model Detectives: Modesty, Femininity, and Work in Interwar Romance Comic Strips

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From 1938 to 1940, Confidences: Histoires vraies, a weekly true romance magazine that became a sensation, printed two comic strips in its pages. The first, called "Rue de la Paix," featured the escapades of two girls working in a fashion house as they came from the countryside to make their way as working girls in Paris. The other, "Simone Darthel," recounted the exploits of a bourgeois young female detective and a sweet, homely secretary, who cracked cases of bank fraud and jewelry heists while flirting with handsome men from the upper classes.

A close reading of these two comic strips relates the fantasy lives of young women in France—spending money, wearing haute couture, and dating wealthy men. In "Rue de la Paix" the women's lives also mirror the working-class pulp fiction of the day, as they come to Paris relatively destitute and desperate for honest labor, but are able to attract a higher class boyfriend and enjoy a better lifestyle through their virtue, hard work, fresh looks, and access to fine clothing. They are able to "pass" in high society as they foil the crooks who attempt to ruin their reputations and the fashion house that employs them. In contrast, Simone Darthel, the eponymous heroine of her strip, emerges from the world of the bourgeois romance novel. She navigates the world of the super-rich—from ocean liners to fancy living rooms and night clubs—all the while acting as a secret agent in search of evil criminals. Her boyfriend has no idea about her secret identity, at least in this caper, and so she passes as a standard and proper socialite while concealing her work life. Her world is full of high intrigue that, on the surface, threatens her reputation and her happiness, but, in fact, is undertaken in the
service of justice and the state. These cartoon women serve as a fictional counterpoint to the risqué true love stories submitted by readers and featured in their home magazine, *Confidences: Histoires vraies*. Their wardrobes and looks also serve as an embodiment of the fashion and beauty advice that the magazine offered each week.

These comics serve as a window into the lives and desires of young women in the interwar period and as weekly morality lessons in the midst of the salacious "true romance" stories that accompanied them in the pages of the magazine. The heroines of the strip are modern. They drive cars and hold down exciting, active jobs in high-powered places. They have bright futures and careers ahead of them. In fact, they do everything an intrepid male hero would do. But they are explicitly not male. If anything, these women are hyper-feminized. In spite of their career goals and valiant natures, they are depicted with unequivocally female traits. Gorgeous, shapely, and graceful, they are always drawn in fashionable clothes, always aspire to romance and sexiness as well as career, and obsess more over their love lives than over their friendships and work. Their lives are a constant negotiation between ruggedness and soft femininity, their careers and their loves, with the plot driven mostly by the latter. They may be career girls, but they are explicitly not male in any way. Whenever they may tilt the balance toward traditionally masculine roles, the comics reassert their strong feminine side. The two comics appeal to a new generation of women by featuring contemporary kinds of heroes, but the personalities are always limited by normative gender expectations. Women must still maintain tradition.

Comics have a long history in print media, with political cartoons reaching their apex in the nineteenth century. In the late nineteenth century, comics changed their content, turning to jokes and serial stories. By the interwar period, comic strips appeared in French newspapers and magazines, usually as three-
or four-panel humorous stories. Mickey Mouse and his friends appeared in French newspapers regularly in the 1930s as "Mickey et Cie.," with the first comic book, *Le Journal de Mickey*, appearing in 1934. The most famous of the French comic strips, "Tintin," which was first produced as an album, or a book collection of weekly strips in 1929, typified the *bande dessinée* to come—full-length adventure stories for boys. Tintin first appeared in *Coeurs Vaillants*, a French Catholic weekly for adolescents, which competed at newsstands with the Italian *Jumbo* and the Belgian *Spirou*. With soldiers, pirates, and boy heroes, the serialized strips were usually written for male children or adolescents. This was a very different audience from the women who read "Rue de la Paix" or "Simone Darthel." Comic strips for women first appeared in the mid-1930s in newspaper advertising, in forms lifted from American publications, for products including Persil laundry soap and Palmolive bath soap. To advertise specifically French brands, comics appeared in weekly Cadum soap advertisements beginning in 1937 in women's magazines such as *Marie-Claire* and in daily newspapers such as *Le Petit Parisien*. These comics were singular, not serial, three-panel romances, with different stories and characters in each strip. Serialized comics for women were even rarer, and found a special home at *Confidences.*

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1 For general history of French comics in this genre, see Henri Filippini, *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des héros et auteurs de BD*, vol. 2, *Western, héros juvéniles, aventure, quotidien* (Grenoble: Opera Mundi Glénat, 1999). Politics have long played a role in French comics; for an overview, see Mark McKinney, ed., *History and Politics in French-Language Comics and Graphic Novels* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2008).


Simone Darthel would gain an American cousin in Brenda Starr, who would only begin her seventy-year run in 1940. But both "Simone Darthel" and "Rue de la Paix" were unusual in France—serial adventure and romance comics written specifically for an adolescent and adult female audience, with heroines, not heroes, at their center. They were the perfect comic strips for a women's weekly.

*Confidences*, the women's magazine in which these two comic strips appeared, began its run in May 1938. It proved to be extremely popular, with over 675,000 printed copies sold each week by 1939.\(^4\) At the beginning of 1940, its print run had exceeded one million.\(^5\) The publication, imitating American counterparts like *True Romance*, prominently featured prurient, supposedly true stories in its pages. Though putatively "true," these stories featured kidnapping, adultery, and soap-opera levels of silliness, all masquerading as the "real" experiences of French women and (rarely) men. Among their "*passionantes récits vécus,*" were titles such as "*Aveugle rancune,*" "*J'ai joué avec le feu,*" "*Femme fatale,*" and "*J'ai quitté mon mari.*"\(^6\) These stories were generally serialized, continuing for three or four issues each. The magazine also purported to be a bit like any other women's journal. Along with story submissions, readers could send in household tips and recipes, ask for beauty advice, or write in for help with their relationship or work issues. In these sections on fashion and beauty, *Confidences* echoed the content of other women's magazines of the day, like *Marie-Claire* or *La Femme de France*. Yet, *Confidences* remained essentially about true romance.

The covers of the magazine always had color sketches or photos of American film actresses, internationally famous celebrities, such as Ginger Rogers, Bette Davis, or Joan Crawford, and often less prominent starlets, such as Jean Rogers

\(^{4}\) *Confidences*, 1, no. 48 (7 April 1939), 3.

\(^{5}\) *Confidences*, 2, no. 99 (29 March 1940), 3.

\(^{6}\) Ibid.; *Confidences*, 1, no. 45 (17 March, 1939); 1, no. 24 (21 October 1938); 1, no. 5 (10 June 1938).
or Eleanor Hansen, largely unfamiliar to French audiences.\textsuperscript{7} There was no celebrity news in the pages of the magazine at all, and almost no mention of Hollywood or the American film industry. When celebrities appeared, often in beauty stories about facial features or body types, they were usually French stars.\textsuperscript{8} Confidences did not purport to be about fantasy—rather, it was about the real lives of women. Stars' faces stood, not as something separate from the audience, more beautiful and exceptional, but rather as archetypical stand-ins for the readers' own appearance. Readers were to see themselves in the stars' bone structure or skin tones. And the price of the magazine reflected the reality of women's lives as well. At only one franc, with thirty-six pages, four in full color, it was an affordable indulgence.\textsuperscript{9} Confidences proved popular with women, but also had some unexpected fans. An urban myth posits that this women's magazine became the hottest read on the Maginot Line after September 1939.

The only fictional features regularly appearing in the pages of Confidences were the two comics "Rue de la Paix" and "Simone Darthel." They bracketed the magazine each week, with "Rue de la Paix" appearing in the first few pages, and "Simone Darthel" near the back. Both were drawn and written by uncredited authors.

"Rue de la Paix" appeared weekly in the magazine from May 1938 through May 1939 (Figure 1; all figures appear at end of article).\textsuperscript{10} At the beginning of its run it was featured prominently within the first few pages, on the first content page after the letters to the editor. The comic itself stood out because it occupied an entire page and was printed in full color (eight hues)—the only color page of the magazine apart from the front

\textsuperscript{7} Confidences, 1, no. 36 (13 January 1939); 1, no. 32 (16 December 1938).

\textsuperscript{8} See, for example, "Quelle femme êtes-vous?," Confidences, 1, no. 4, (3 June 1938), 15. This story featured Lisette Lanvin, Annabella, Danielle Darrieux, and Simone Simon, among others.

\textsuperscript{9} Compare this to Marie-Claire, at 1F50, and La Femme de France, at four francs an issue.

\textsuperscript{10} Confidences, 1, no. 2 (20 May 1938), 4, 28.
and back covers. Over the next few weeks, it changed into a sort of illustrated serial novel, with black and white illustrations (Figure 2). As the comic continued, it also moved from the front pages into the center of the magazine. It concerned two women who worked in a couture house, one as a salesgirl (the best in the house) and the other as a petite main, or page. The two share an apartment and adventures. They become enmeshed in a burglary scheme and help the police to catch a jewel and fashion thief. At the same time, they are able to catch two very eligible bachelors. Crime solved, marriage arranged, all in the same episode!

The second comic, "Simone Darthel," which remained a comic strip for its entire run (May 1938–July 1939), also appeared in full color for its first few weeks, initially appearing near the back of the magazine, but switching quickly into a smaller, less expensive format. (By the fourth week "Simone Darthel" appeared as a twelve black and white panel strip; the following week, it was cut to eight) (Figure 3). Like "Rue de la Paix," the story line featured two women, but these women were romantic rivals rather than friends, though both were on the same side of the law. The heroine, Simone Darthel, was an investigative journalist and detective who worked with her newspaper and the police to capture a notorious criminal. Her rival, and later friend, is the criminal's secretary, Janine, who inadvertently gets mixed up in crime. The comic strip slowly, glacially follows their exploits to capture Janine's boss.

At the inception of both of these strips, class serves as the great divide, complicating the women's friendships and erecting barriers to their success in career and in marriage. Ultimately, however, moral fiber counts for more than class. Both strips present two women: one from the bourgeoisie, who either by circumstance or by desire chooses to work; the other from the working class, who must work to earn her keep. They sublimate their class identities in the comics, and work together to help

11 "Rue de la Paix," *Confidences*, 1, no. 42 (24 February 1939), 18.
12 "Simone Darthel," *Confidences*, 1, no. 5 (10 June 1938), 28; and no. 30 (2 December 1938), 20.
each other, both in their careers and their love lives. In the modern world of young women, class might lead young women to work for different reasons, but the work itself binds them together. The title character in "Simone Darthel" bears all the marks of a society girl, yet works as a detective and journalist, while her working-class friend, Janine, is a secretary whom Simone generously brings into the newspaper business when she is fired and in desperate need of a job.

In "Rue de la Paix," the heroine Line goes to work with the couture house to escape a bad marriage even though she is from a wealthy family. She exclaims, "I really want to work, but my parents won't let me" (emphasis added). The "really" here—the "tant" of "Je voudrais tant travailler"—is an important emphasis. Line does not hide her real need and desire for work. Line sees work as preferable to a bad marriage. She has "had enough of her "existence absurde," a life dictated by her parents. She strikes out independently. She leaves home, a bourgeois apartment on a tree-lined street, and takes lodging in a seedy boarding house (gangsters and prostitutes pictured in the neighboring room) until she finds a place with Sylvie, the vendeuse who found her a job in the first place. That apartment is in working-class Montmartre, but is clearly safe and comfortable.

Since the comic strip is a workplace drama, her friend from the company, Sylvie, is also defined by her work, which is a necessity, because, although we never explore her background, she has no evident parental support. Sylvie must work for her keep. Sylvie aspires to a career as a designer. By the fifth comic in the series, we see her in her Montmartre apartment sketching and being reassured by her friend, "You're making progress every day. I'm sure you'll become a great fashion designer." This is the first time in the series that we get a sense of who Sylvie is beyond her day-to-day work in the shop. She is, at least

13 "Rue de la Paix," Confidences, 1, no. 2 (30 May 1939), 4.
14 "Rue de la Paix," Confidences, 1, no. 4 (3 June 1938) and no. 5 (10 June 1938).
15 Ibid., no. 4.
at the beginning of the strip, an aspiring career woman, living by her own work and envisioning a feminist future as a working woman in a male-dominated world.

Line, as a modern woman, has the gumption to take life into her own hands. She will risk her reputation to capture the eye of a young man, counterfeiting a nude painting by having the artist superimpose her head on another woman's naked body (Figure 4). In the accompanying images, we watch her negotiate with the artist, an up-and-coming talent, who is the owner of a plantation in Mexico and Sylvie's love interest, and then observe her love interest, Philippe, looking at the painting. He is interested—and horrified—but he notices her. When she explains her ruse, he immediately forgives her, given how charming she is. Throughout the series, Line is never afraid to act. She also jumps into the action and enlists the help of a police inspector when she is convinced that she is being drawn into a crime. She is also willing to put herself at mortal risk in order to apprehend a dangerous criminal. Line is bright, capable and (mostly) in control.

Modern life is bountiful for these "new women"—they flirt with men in clubs, they drive fast cars, they even thwart jewel thieves by taking active roles in criminal investigations. They hop planes to exciting destinations, wear the most fashionable clothing and hats, and seem to live their lives their way, with no intervention by parents or traditional expectations. In Line's case, quite the opposite is true, as her parents' interference leads her to flee a bad marriage proposal from a man who turns out to be a criminal mastermind. Her parents are dupes, and she is truly better off on her own. She is a modern, independent woman who throws tradition and caution to the wind, and reaps only benefits.

Superficially, Simone Darthel does the same, and with even more aplomb, given her stable position in the upper class. She has no need for work, just the desire to do her part. We meet her on a cruise ship, returning to France from New York. The action

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16 "Rue de la Paix," *Confidences*, 1, no. 7 (24 June 1938), 4.
17 "Rue de la Paix," *Confidences*, 1, no. 2 (20 May 1938), 4.
starts *in medias res*, with Simone in the process of conducting an investigation into a jewel heist, pursuing and trapping the thief. As a woman who cares more about her career than her love life, she openly flirts with the jewel thief, willingly alienating her love interest in order to capture the villain. Like Line and Sylvie in "Rue de la Paix," Simone is an intrepid working girl, dashing and elegant, making her own way, not a father figure in sight. She is also able to make decisions for less intelligent men in order to follow the case through. She makes her own discoveries, and she goes on the chase, often alone, risking her own skin and potential romantic liaisons. At the very start of the narrative, she takes on a jewel thief—even though she must give up her chance at her true love to do so. For this modern, feminist woman, career trumps love every time.

Class divisions are more sharply drawn in this comic strip than in "Rue de la Paix," with a real distinction made between Simone Darthel and the less attractive, less worthy secretary Janine. For Janine has become the dupe of the jewel thief, working as his secretary, and providing him with a useful cover story as a wealthy businessman. The poor secretary is forced, after the cruise and the thief's unmasking, to look for work without references. It is Simone who then finds her employment at her newspaper, as a celebrity reporter (Figure 5). Before Simone steps in, Janine is entirely on her own without any family to help her. She is forced to be self-reliant, searching for work in the paper. This image deserves a closer look: Here is a modern girl, stylishly dressed, sitting at the counter in a cafe, totally self-sufficient, served by a barman, searching the paper for work. In another image, this time at the newspaper office, the two girls meet up and chat in Simone's office, a typewriter in front of them, and an article in progress, while Janine is perched jauntily on the desk (Figure 6). Behind them, a newspaperman, old and rotund, sucks on his pipe. These are two chic women, easily negotiating a place for themselves in a male world. They

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18 "Simone Darthel," *Confidences*, 1, no. 4 (3 June 1938), 28.
19 "Simone Darthel," *Confidences*, 1, no. 28 (18 November 1938), 28.
do not need men to assist or rescue them. They are thoroughly modern. They serve as a fantasy of capable urban women, determining their own future, making their own choices, and maintaining their dignity every step of the way.

But all this hyper-modernity could not go untempered. These characters do absolutely everything that is avant-garde and up-to-date, as ideal working women exploiting their freedom to the fullest, negotiating all obstacles with aplomb. Their class and occupations seem to place no limits on their enjoyment of their single, working status. How many seamstresses in the 1930s hopped aboard cruise ships with their boyfriends, albeit in separate cabins (who paid for that?), as would happen in a later story line in "Rue de la Paix"? How many would have the aplomb to stop a street-side assassination and immediately forgive the assassin, (again in "Rue de la Paix")? Or climb fearlessly into abandoned country houses to look for a jewel thief, as Simone would do later in her comic strip? Still, the feminist activity and assertiveness of the heroines was only one aspect of the comic strip, for this was countered by a hyper-femininity which righted the topsy-turvy world of feminist accomplishment. In spite of their triumphs in their careers, the modern woman was also bound to traditional roles of femininity. Fashion and romance played a central role in their lives, and, ultimately, their finest achievement would be finding a husband and making a family, not in pursuing a career.

For all of Sylvie's desire to be a great fashion designer on the Rue de la Paix, her need to be loved and married is even greater. By the eighth strip, only three weeks after she appeared sketching in her apartment, she is seated on the same couch, this time sobbing over her inability to gain a wealthy man's heart (Figures 7 and 8). From a tale of career building and feminist success, her narrative is transformed into a standard Cinderella story, complete with a happy ending, as her wealthy lover and savior returns from Mexico to Paris, ready to commit to her.

21 "Rue de la Paix," Confidences, 1, no. 8 (1 July 1938), 4.
They even share their first kiss at the end of this story, a typical plot ending in teen romance novels of the day.\textsuperscript{22}

Line gets her happy ending, too, and in similar traditional fashion. Once her family has realized that the man they wanted her to marry was, in fact, a criminal, they are happy to see her with someone else. But she refuses to marry her newfound love (Philippe, the son of the fashion house owner) until he asks her parents for permission. Not only is she a minor, and cannot marry him without it, she needs him to "prove" his masculinity by taking the risk and confronting her parents. She actually breaks up with him in order to convince him to do so. He rises to the occasion, though that action takes place off stage. There are no images or description of his meeting with her parents, only the confirmation that they are engaged.\textsuperscript{23} Marriage, not career, is the proper end for these seemingly feminist women. Their gumption is properly directed toward their new tasks outside of the workforce and inside the middle- and upper- (this is, after all a fantasy fairy tale!) class home.

Such "ideal" women are juxtaposed with women who make bad moral choices. Wanda, the woman who posed nude for Michel and whose body was substituted for Line's in the counterfeit nude, is a model for the fashion house and a snob. She is having an affair with a jewel thief, and her easy virtue is a marker for her bad character. She even seduces her boss, and leads him into risky schemes. Her friend, Monique, tries to pick up rich men at clubs, and both end up with nothing when their criminal friends land in prison.\textsuperscript{24} The moral lesson is unambiguous, if heavy-handed.

\textsuperscript{22} "Rue de la Paix," \textit{Confidences}, 1, no. 24 (21 October 1938), 18. I have also done work with romance novels of the period, including "\textit{Bonjour Monsieur Amour!} Gender, Class and French Interwar Sentimental Novels," presented at the Western Society for French History, Lubbock, TX, 2 October 2004.

\textsuperscript{23} "Rue de la Paix," \textit{Confidences}, 1, no. 24 (21 October 1938), 18.

\textsuperscript{24} "Rue de la Paix," \textit{Confidences}, 1, no. 12 (29 July 1938), no. 15 (19 August 1938), and no. 16 (26 August 1938).
The settings of these strips, too, are hyper-feminine. While the garment industry would have been a place for young working women in Paris, it is the front of the house—the selling floor and managerial offices—that supply the setting for "Rue de la Paix." Fashion, chic locations, and ostentatious wealth are focused on intensely. These women, while independent, are also gorgeous and engaged in the most feminine pursuits. In "Rue de la Paix," once the action moves away from Line and Sylvie—both now happily married, and thus less interesting—it shifts from the fashion house to the "institute of beauty." The main characters are employed, one as a seamstress (still implausibly financially independent and well-dressed) whom we never actually see at work, and the other as a salesgirl in the beauty institute. The love interest is provided by a chemist, a nerdy young man who is hopelessly smitten with the beautiful, but vain salesgirl. The men here, as in the first story-line, are educated, the women, working-class, or (as in Line's case) working beneath their social station. As in traditional romance, marriage is the ticket out of the working class and into prosperity. For all of the focus on their work, it is ultimately their relationships with men that define their future possibilities. Apart from a few brief mentions, Sylvia's aptitude for creating fashion never appears again. It is Philippe, Line's future husband, who will inherit the business, not Sylvie, who instead marries a painter/plantation owner (!) and, thus, has no reason to set foot in the fashion house again, except as a client.

Simone Darthel's story, too, is hyper-feminized. Beauty and fashion seem to trump everything in the evaluation of character, despite the masculine setting of Simone's job, in police stations and newspaper offices. It is her ability to flirt, and her sex-appeal, that get her scoops (Figure 9). No question about this image—Simone is all woman. And yet the comic underscores her feminine personality as well. For, despite her looks, she's shy and intimidated by love, declaring how "stupid" she is. She helps the ugly Janine to find a dress for the evening boat excursion, all

25 “Simone Darthel,” Confidences, 1, no. 4 (3 June 1938), 28.
the while remaining jealous and insecure. She's decisive at work, but indecisive and therefore feminine, at love. Her love triangle (or quadrangle, as it ends up) persists throughout the strip. Even after she escaped kidnapping, arrested a whole gang of villains, and headed up a major police investigation, she still despairs of landing her man (Figure 10). Subsequent strips are devoted to that point, as she sits immobilized by worry.²⁶

As a side note, as in "Rue de la Paix," fashion plays an important role in defining these women. Simone is extraordinarily well garbed, with trendy, fitted jackets and dresses. Even the robe and slippers she wears in this panel are fashionable. Her work clothes—suits, pencil skirts, and high heels—while trim and modern, show off her figure.²⁷ Her face is expressive and feminine, for clearly the cartoon artist has the French pout down pat. She is never the slightest bit masculine in appearance, only in work and action.

Janine, too, must prove her worth as a woman by changing her looks to make them a counter-balance to her careerism. To maintain her femininity in the masculine world of work, she needs to be beautiful. At the start she is unfashionable and ugly, and passengers on the boat comment on her awkwardness behind her back.²⁸ That night, to attend a formal dinner, she borrows a dress from Simone and begins her transformation from ugly duckling to swan. We even learn that her dreadful fashion is one of the reasons she was hired in the first place. Her boss, the jewel thief, believes that her ugliness will keep her from attracting outside attention to him and his schemes. She remains oblivious to him and his intentions, but she does want to be beautiful. She will let Simone be her guide, as learns how to dress well. Simone, ever kind and selfless, helps Janine, even though she thinks she may lose her love in the process. She even has the inevitable "Do you really need glasses?" moment and switches to contacts.²⁹ How modern is that! And how chic!

²⁶ "Simone Darthal," Confidences, 1, no. 48 (7 April 1939), 26.
²⁷ "Simone Darthal," Confidences, 2, no. 5 (10 June 1938), 17.
²⁸ "Simone Darthal," Confidences, 1, no. 2 (20 May 1938), 28.
At the close of the run of "Simone Darthel" in *Confidences*, the tables are totally turned, and it is Janine who gets her chance to turn on the sex-appeal when she impersonates a famous singing star and is harangued by the press (Figure 11). She is metamorphosed into the feminine ideal—beautiful, sexy, modern, and wealthy (at least it so appears). But she, like Simone, is in love and unlucky. As always she is preoccupied with romance, rather than her career.

So these two comic strips, "Rue de la Paix" and "Simone Darthel," are ambiguous in their depiction of working women. Whether working class or bourgeois, the women in these stories have careers and career goals. They must rely on their work to survive, much like many of the women who read the strips. They are, in many ways, feminists, equal to the men around them, navigating masculine worlds with little effort, often upstaging the men around them. But, in order to be transgressive in their comic strip adventures, they are hyper-feminized as well. They are extremely fashionable, even working in the world of fashion and beauty, and always gorgeous. It is that fashion sense that gets them what they truly want in the end—traditional lives with traditional marriages, that could take them out of the workforce and into the home.

Ironically (or perhaps naturally given both comics' limitations), these strips were replaced in *Confidences* in June 1939 with one that featured that exact archetype—the thoroughly modern working-class girl who leaves the outside world behind when she meets and marries her bourgeois hero. The comic that supplanted them both in the pages of the magazine was "Blondie," an American import with a female character who lived a modern life through her consumer habits. In one set of strips entitled "Les surprises du camping nocturne," she takes a very up-to-date family vacation, camping in a trailer with her husband Dagwood, the baby, and the dog. As a modern woman, her hair is cut short, and she is voguishly accessorized in a fashionable scarf. Yet Blondie plays a traditional role, waking

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30 "Simone Darthel," *Confidences*, 1, no. 45 (17 March 1939), 20.
before the rest of the family to make breakfast in her apron in a cute camper-kitchen. Blondie, like the heroines of the two French strips, had been a working-class, employed single girl before she met Dagwood Bumstead. Here she represents the older, traditionally feminine counterpart of Simone, Line, Janine, and Sylvie. "Rue de la Paix" and "Simone Darthel" ended their runs in the summer of 1939. The working girl's reign was over. The self-reliant feminist, still modern, still fashionable, was back in the kitchen. She had grown up, had a family, and put her childish, heroic—and therefore masculine—hopes behind her.

The two comics in *Confidences*, lasted barely a year, yet they give us a glimpse of the changing roles and expectations of young women in the interwar period. In the illustrated lives of these heroines, the world of women had expanded outward. Their narratives had them favoring independent movement and decision-making, the traditional role of men. This they did with no negative consequence—perhaps becoming a new kind of role model for young women in the 1930s. While young and unmarried, women could live freely as equals (and sometimes superiors) to the men around them. And they could do this without giving up their femininity. Perhaps this is a popular literary example of Joan Scott's French feminist paradox of equality in difference. That paradox was quite short lived, at least in the weekly magazine. For the women of France, however, that new independent spirit would come in handy during the dark years that followed. Simone, Line, Janine and Sylvie could serve as intrepid forbears of a generation of women who would need all of their independent wits to survive.

31 "Blondie," *Confidences*, 2, no. 60 (30 June 1939), 20.
Figure 1. "Rue de la Paix" in full color, full page format. Confidences, 1, no. 2 (20 May 1938), 4.
Figure 2. "Rue de la Paix" in its later form, as an illustrated one-color serial novel. *Confidences*, 1, no. 42 (24 February 1939), 18.

Figure 3. "Simone Darthel" in its later format, six-panel black and white. *Confidences*, 1, no. 30 (2 December 1938), 20.
**Figure 4.** Line has her face painted into a nude. *Confidences*, 1, no. 7 (24 June 1938), 4.

**Figure 5.** Janine searches for work in the paper. *Confidences*, 1, no. 28 (18 November 1938), 28.

*Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*
Figure 6. Janine and Simone at the newspaper office. *Confidences*, 1, no. 29 (25 November 1938), 24.

Figure 7. Sylvie sketching in her apartment. *Confidences*, 1, no. 5 (10 June 1938), 4.
**Figure 8.** Sylvie crying, in her apartment. *Confidences*, 1, no. 8 (1 July 1938), 4.

**Figure 9.** Simone, gorgeous and yet insecure. *Confidences*, 1, no. 4 (3 June 1938), 28.
Figure 10. Simone, in chic bathrobe and heels, bemoans her romantic fate. *Confidences*, 1, no. 48 (7 April 1939), 26.

Figure 11. Janine is mistaken for a starlet named Fifi Moore. *Confidences*, 1, no. 45 (17 March 1939), 20.