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Christopher E. Forth and Bertrand Taithe, eds., *French Masculinities: History, Culture and Politics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. xi + 249 pp. Figures, notes. \$100.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-230-00661-4.

Review by Mary Lynn Stewart, Simon Fraser University.

This collection of thirteen essays, with an introduction by the editors, Christopher E. Forth and Bertrand Taithe, and a conclusion by Robert Nye, covers intersections between French representations and practices of masculinity—and discord between masculine ideals and between ideals and behaviors—from the eighteenth century to the recent car burnings in the *banlieues* of Paris (and throughout France). The collection could be assigned in a class on masculinities, while individual essays might be assigned in more general history courses.

As the editors note in the Introduction, the country of Simone de Beauvoir has produced very few histories of men becoming, not being born, men. This lacunae may account for the fact that six of the contributors are American, three apiece hail from Great Britain and Australia, one is Canadian, and only one—André Rauch—is from a French university. Author of two important monographs on French masculinity, André Rauch briefly addresses the recent scarf controversy and violence in the *banlieues*, and suggests extending a feminist interpretation of the riots beyond a crisis of masculinity to include a generational conflict within the Islamic community and battles between suburban gangs and police, as well as between the gangs themselves. His concluding point about the utility of contextualizing a gendered analysis reflects the approach of many of the contributors to this volume. Another well-known gender historian, Miranda Pollard, whose principle work has been on Vichy's efforts to naturalize women, offers a template for an approach to masculinities under Vichy. Unlike many of the authors, who document the construction of a hegemonic and/or oppositional masculine identity, she identifies a triad of masculine models based on political leaders: Pétain, the aged symbolic father whose masculinity was compromised by collaboration; De Gaulle, a still active soldier who resisted collaboration and reasserted the tradition of honor; and the Parisian collaborationists whose paramilitary gatherings, marches and the like represented masculinity as action as opposed to feminine passivity. She considers the possibilities of gender incoherence in Vichy masculinity, but does not consider that interpretation sufficient. Indeed, the overall impression left by the book is the coexistence of a multiplicity of masculinities at any one time.

Although the editors have published extensively in the history of the body, these essays focus little on corporeality per se. When they do turn to the body, they are most likely to decode visual images or medical discourse. Sean M. Quinlan, in “Men without Women? Ideal Masculinity and Male Sociability in the French Revolution,” includes an analysis of images of “heroic sacrifice, redemption through violence, and purification by blood” in revolutionary festivals and monuments (p. 40). Forth's “*La Civilisation* and its Discontents: Modernity, Manhood, and the Body in the Early French Republic” demonstrates that medical opinion blamed sedentary habits of civilized life for softening men, reducing their potency and, more generally, for degeneration, especially after the military defeat of the Franco-Prussian War and during the build-up to the First World War. Even in the only essay on homosexuality, “High-heels or Hiking Boots? Masculinity, Effeminacy and Male Homosexuals in

Modern France,” Michael Sibalís focuses on stereotypes of homosexuals dressed and publicly behaving “effeminate,” not on actual sexual practices.

The essays are ordered chronologically and most refer back to previous essays, although some look forward to subsequent developments. They capture the variety and instability of notions of masculinity, not only in relation to national traumas like revolutions, wars and defeats, but also in relation to class, race, rural or urban residence. One of the emergent themes is the oscillation between ideals within and between classes, races, places and epochs. Ann C. Vila’s piece, “Elite Masculinities in Eighteenth-century France,” describes how elite ideals evolved from the honest gentleman versus the libertine early in the century, the military hero versus the *philosophe* later in the century. In “Making Frenchmen into Warriors: Martial Masculinity in Napoleonic France,” Michael J. Hughes traces Napoleonic efforts to combine martial and civic virtues through the army, schools and public rituals that promoted a vision of the Napoleonic soldier and citizen endowed with martial and sexual prowess. Later pieces argue that this vigorous male ideal did not survive the Restoration’s strong emphasis on civility. Robert Aldrich’s “Colonial Men” shows how recruitment material, novels, and films depicted the colonies as a way of avoiding degeneration and the anomie of modern life, with colonists as conquerors in the early nineteenth century, explorers for much of the remainder of the century, and as settlers in the twentieth century (conspicuously absent is any mention of the republican civilizers of the late nineteenth, early twentieth century). Conversely, representations of indigenous masculinity were suffused with anxiety about their imagined unconstrained sexual lust, as opposed to French men’s mastery of their sexual urges (which would seem to bring things back to civilization). Much remains to be done on the intersections between gender, especially masculinities, sexuality, and colonial exploitation.

Although most of the contributors are historians, three are from French departments and one from film studies. Some of their essays focus on masculinities in different genres. For instance, Claire Gorrar’s “Revolt and Recuperation: Masculinities and the *Roman Noir* in Immediate Post-war France” discerns in the new popularity of the dark and hard-boiled detective story—and in greater detail in two examples of this type of novel—a valuation of virile, violent, even criminal working class masculinities, “a site of counter-cultural politics, challenging the myths of a seamless and ahistorical process of modernization” (p. 158). And in “Cinematic Stardom, Shifting Masculinities,” Martin O’Shaughnessy insists that the changes in male film star’s physique, physical strength, maturity, and class from the 1930s through the 1960s owe much to the internal dynamics and demands of film production and distribution, primarily the need to fill cinema seat with women as well as men. These essays inspired this reader to take a second look at noir detective fiction and films on the 1950s. Upper-level students will find in them models for similar investigations.

As Robert Nye hints, the collection may underestimate the continuing connections between the key concept of virility, “procreative potency,” and citizenship. A notable exception to this is Judith Surkis’s “Enemies Within: Venereal Disease and the Defense of French Masculinity between the Wars,” which describes how anti-venereal campaigns linked fatherhood to citizenship and simultaneously abjected the indigenous subjects who had helped defend France by isolating them and subjecting them to separate regulations, because the French believed (as mentioned above) that North Africans could not reign in their passions. Fortunately, new scholarship on French fatherhood is even now appearing.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

Christopher E. Forth and Bertrand Taithe, “Introduction: French Manhood in the Modern World.”

Anne C. Villa, “Elite Masculinities in Eighteenth-Century France.”

Sean M. Quinlan, “Men Without Women? Ideal Masculinity and Male Sociability in the French Revolution, 1789-99.”

Michael J. Hughes, "Making Frenchmen into Warriors: Martial Masculinity in Napoleonic France."

Bertrand Taithe, "Neighborhood Boys and Men: The Changing Spaces of Masculine Identity in France, 1848-71."

Christopher E. Forth, "*La Civilisation* and Its Discontents: Modernity, Manhood and the Body in the Early Third Republic."

Judith Surkis, "Enemies Within: Venereal Disease and the Defense of French Masculinity Between the Wars."

Robert Aldrich, "Colonial Men."

Miranda Pollard, "In the Name of the Father: Male Masculinities in Vichy France."

Claire Gorrara, "Revolt and Recuperation: Masculinities and the *Roman Noir* in Immediate Post-War France."

Michael Sibalis, "High-Heels or Hiking Boots? Masculinity, Effeminacy and Male Homosexuals in Modern France."

Martin O'Shaughnessy, "Cinematic Stardom, Shifting Masculinities."

Jean-Pierre Boulé, "*Virilité* in Post-War France: Intellectual Masculinity, Jewishness and Sexual Potency."

André Rauch, "Threatening Virility in the French *Banlieues*, 1989-2005."

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