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Susan Weiner, *Enfants Terribles: Youth and Femininity in the Mass Media in France, 1945-1968*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. viii + 251 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$38.00 US (cl). ISBN 0-8018-6539-5.

Review by Whitney Walton, Purdue University.

In *Enfants Terribles*, Susan Weiner examines cultural constructions of youth in France from the end of World War II through the 1960s. This is a fascinating and indispensable work of gender and cultural analysis, based on textual, visual, and statistical representations of young women and men in popular magazines, literature, films, and opinion polls.

Weiner argues that in the years following World War II, a new feminine figure emerged in French popular culture. This was the "bad girl" or the *enfant terrible*, a sexually adventurous, unmarried young woman who eluded traditional categories of femininity largely through her promiscuous, unemotional sexuality. The "bad girl" was a creation of the new mass media and reflected anxieties about the Cold War, the Algerian crisis, Americanization, and the loss of French cultural identity, as did similarly troublesome young men. "Youth," always figured as masculine, was disconcerting for its aimlessness, political apathy, and delinquency. But the problem of young men was more readily understood than that of young women, since public opinion viewed men as victimized by historical and political conditions. Weiner claims that the construction of these feminine and masculine identities of the young in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s brought public attention to youth long before the outbursts of May 1968. Indeed, she suggests that these constructs were a necessary precondition of the youthful radicalism that, Weiner claims, is often erroneously believed to have appeared out of nowhere in the late 1960s.

The first part of the book is the strongest, charting the gradual decline of the ideal of the *jeune fille* and her replacement by the "bad girl." Weiner describes the *jeune fille* as originating in the late eighteenth century and referring to the virginal daughter of the middle or upper class whose destiny was marriage and who was protected for that purpose during her youth. Although an alternative to the *jeune fille* in the form of the *garçonne*, a sexually liberated and independent young woman, appeared in the 1920s, her successor, the "bad girl," according to Weiner, became part of the public lexicon with the 1948 film version of Jean Cocteau's *Enfants terribles* (originally published in 1929). Weiner acknowledges that the term *enfant terrible* is not gender specific, but she argues that the film presented the female lead as the instigator of cruel and criminal behavior and therefore more of a disturbing figure—more of an *enfant terrible*—than her brother. Weiner then turns to another "disturbing" feminine figure, Brigitte Bardot, who, in her films, is exclusively identified with her sexuality. Weiner quotes Simone de Beauvoir's description of Bardot, *la femme-enfant*, as combining the "unripe fruit" of adolescent sexuality with the dangerous seductiveness of the vamp. Thus, Weiner constructs her "bad girl" out of two separate phenomena of French media, and she extends the meaning of *enfant terrible* to be feminine and sexual.

Weiner maintains that when feminine identities, that is the "bad girl," eluded categories of patriarchal desire, attempts to describe or contain them resorted to contrasting them with more familiar and stable identities—in this case, motherhood and [masculine] youth. Based primarily on *Elle* magazine, Weiner

analyzes the construction of the feminine ideal of the mother citizen that accompanied the creation of the Fourth Republic and its legalization of women's suffrage. Exercising her civic duty of voting and political participation generally, the mother citizen subordinated this to devotion to family and homemaking. Thus, this figure was both modern and traditional. However, in the early 1950s, with the popularity of existentialism and of Françoise Sagan's successful and scandalous novel *Bonjour Tristesse* (1954), younger women came to the fore in the popular press.

Sagan was one of several young women who published semi-autobiographical novels in the early 1950s focused on female sexuality. The characters in these novels were sexually adventurous but emotionally detached, and usually they were punished in some way for their transgressions, including their indifference to romantic love. Publishers made celebrities out of these authors, and the public avidly consumed fictional and filmic representations of "bad girls," while rejecting them as models for real-life feminine behavior. Weiner makes a strong case for the importance of this "bad girl" phenomenon as an episode in recent French cultural history. Yet she also maintains that the piquant sexuality of late adolescent women was less troubling than the problem of male adolescents.

The problem of young men, Weiner asserts, was their contradictory position as both survivors of the amorality or immorality of the Occupation and their victimization by the Algerian War and by heartless "bad girls." Constructing an effective parallel to the history of changing feminine figures from the late eighteenth century, Weiner presents young men of the post World War II era experiencing a *mal du siècle* similar to young men's anomie, moral confusion, and loss of purpose following the end of the Napoleonic Wars. According to Weiner, exemplifying the new *mal du siècle* that afflicted young men was the publicity over and film representation of the 1948 "J-3 affair," from the ration category given to boys and young men during the war. The event itself was the murder of a young man by his friend over a woman. However, textual analyses and visual representations of this crime elevated and defined the "problem" of masculine youth. From her close reading of the film, *Avant le deluge* (1954), Weiner concludes that French popular culture represented male juvenile delinquents as victims of "bad girls," in order to assuage guilt over France's morally ambiguous history during the Occupation.

Weiner strengthens the link between political history and culture in the matter of male youth in postwar France in her chapter on technology. Here she argues that consumerism, specifically technology, and the Algerian War both depoliticized and repoliticized young men in the 1950s and early 1960s. Depoliticized by marketing efforts to draw them to consumerism, notably through the magazine *Salut les copains*, and the creation of pop stars such as Johnny Hallyday and Françoise Hardy, young men found themselves drafted into a war that held little interest for them. They mentally escaped from the war through the transistor radio, the prime youth medium of the decade. Yet, according to Weiner, the radio also "repoliticized" them in 1961 with news of the attempted *putsch* that would have prolonged the war. Weiner analyzes two films from the 1950s, *Les Tricheurs* and *Adieu Philippine*, to prove her point that, in popular representations, young men were victims of unsentimental young women, but also of consumerism and of the Algerian War.

The penultimate chapter offers a sophisticated analysis of several different opinion polls regarding youth in the 1950s and 1960s. Among other things, Weiner maintains that the polls did not entirely support the popular image of youth, but they did legitimize the category of youth as an important sociological and cultural phenomenon. Weiner concludes the book by asserting that Jean-Luc Godard's film, *Masculin/Féminin* (1965), "accurately" portrayed young women and men as driven by consumerism. This was reinforced by the Situationist message that youth itself was commodified and that youth would only overcome this condition by understanding it. For Weiner, this is enough to explain May 1968; that is, through cultural and political revolt, young people explicitly asserted identities that were outside of corporate marketing. Yet, she asserts, even the protests of 1968 were short-lived, in the sense that youth charted no future alternative for itself, and that women in particular were still haunted by the persistence of the *jeune fille*, manifested in the novel and film endings in which

women who defied the *jeune fille* model always were punished.

Weiner has produced a superb work of cultural studies, and as a historian, I particularly appreciate her attentiveness to the historical specificity, as well as continuities, of her subject. Yet, as a historian, I wish for more and more concrete evidence for some of Weiner's assertions. This is critical when Weiner links cultural analysis to political change. For example, Weiner asserts that women's political apathy under the Fourth Republic was shared by the population as a whole. However, she writes, "when the charismatic Charles de Gaulle reappeared on the political scene in 1958, it was women's vote, according to sociologist Evelyne Sullerot, that brought him back into office" (52). Moving immediately to another subject, Weiner never explains this apparently significant fact. What brought women out of their "disaffection"? Did they vote for de Gaulle solely on the basis of his charisma? What is the impact of this development on Weiner's argument about the mother citizen of the Fourth Republic? In another instance Weiner extrapolates extensively from her documented contention that the transistor radio and TV broadcasts of the 1961 putsch rallied conscripts to De Gaulle and against the mutinous generals. She writes, "Through the intermediary of the transistor radio, icon of depoliticized individualism among French youth, the 'multitude of solitudes' who were young men in Algeria came to consciousness, realizing their potential to act together and to affect the course of events, even if it was first and foremost out of self-interest" (p. 156). This is key to her argument, and yet it is not developed. How did this affect all of youth, beyond conscripts in Algeria? And how did this moment of awareness converge with the more generalized young people's rebellion of May 1968? In these cases Weiner fails adequately to explain the process of historical change.

I also have some questions about the cultural analysis itself. On what basis did Weiner select the films she analyzes? I would like to know just how popular these films were—who and how many watched them? What were audience responses to them? And what about the influence of foreign films and music on the French popular culture scene? Weiner makes passing reference to American film stars James Dean and Marlon Brando as models of rebellious youth, but I would like to know more about the relationship between French cultural productions and American or other influences, particularly in the area of mass media and youth culture. Weiner touches upon this issue when she addresses rock music, but she provides no analysis of the music and the way young people heard it and interpreted it. This absence is notable because it contrasts starkly with Weiner's detailed and absorbing readings of fiction and films. And the links among the sexualized young woman, the apolitical young man, and the events of May 1968 are too tenuous for me. I am willing to believe that Weiner is correct about such links, but I would like to see her prove them, or show how a commodified youth suddenly recognized and overcame this particular oppression. But perhaps this is the subject of another book.

Enfants Terribles is an engaging and important study of gender and youth in postwar French culture. In several ways it resembles another work of cultural analysis, the influential *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1994) by Kristin Ross. Both books chart a path for the cultural history of France since 1945, and they challenge historians to test their theories and to pursue further research on a wide range of topics related to youth, gender, consumerism, popular culture, and mass media.

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