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The Age of Cultural Revolutions: Britain and France, 1750-1820. Eds. Colin Jones and Dror Wahrman. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002. ix + 293 pp. Notes and index. \$48.00 US (cl); ISBN 0-520-22966-5. \$18.95 U.S. (pb); ISBN 0-520-22967-3.

Review by Christine Adams, St. Mary's College of Maryland.

Dror Wahrman's and Colin Jones's new edited volume, the fruit of a conference at the University of Warwick in 1997, is an exciting and theoretically rich collection of essays. It plays off Eric Hobsbawm's "dual revolutions" theory that the genesis of the modern world can be found in the French Revolution of 1789 and the Industrial Revolution in England.^[1] Traditionally, historians have emphasized the different nature of revolutionary change in these two countries, focusing on the economic changes in England that made it the world's first industrial nation and the political changes in France that presaged popular sovereignty and democratic government, effecting a "division of revolutionary labor between the two countries" (p. 2) and a different trajectory into the nineteenth century. The emphasis on the centrality of economics and class conflict as key to understanding the modern world fit comfortably with dominant historiographical trends of the 1960s and 1970s. However, as Jones and Wahrman point out, this narrative has come under attack from a variety of directions. Few historians deny that important changes took place in both France and Britain in the late eighteenth century. But today, influenced by Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas, many would cite cultural changes as the real revolution and question the degree to which French and British paths diverged. The purpose of this book is to rethink the changes that took place in the Franco-British context during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and to "allow readers a firsthand insight into the ongoing process by which our understanding of the nature and salience of this particular period is being reshaped and reformulated" (p. 3).

The selections in this collection were chosen carefully, and, for the most part, they cohere thematically despite the different topics. While some of the essays grapple more directly with the idea of "cultural revolutions" than others, it is a theme at least implicit in all of them. Few contrast the different trajectory of cultural change in France and England or explicitly compare the two countries at all. The exception would be Gareth Stedman Jones's essay, which, despite appearing near the middle of the volume, provides the historiographical context and methodological justification for the present collection. He examines the "shift in the collective theoretical stance of the *Annales*" school of history, which dominated the French historical establishment from World War II until the end of the 1970s (p. 94). Through his analysis of a collaborative volume edited by Bernard Lepetit, the late editor of the *Annales* journal, Jones finds that the original *Annales* program has all but disappeared in the writing of history. Many of its most cherished concepts—*mentalités*, *longue durée*, and the heavy weight of structures and socio-economic determinism—have proven less than useful in explaining either historical change or continuity. However, Jones finds that the new *Annaliste* approach—with its emphasis on situated action and individual agency—has problems as well and perhaps goes too far: "The danger of a view of history that not only rejects the role of the economy or other forms of structural determinism, but also substitutes for the regularities of discourse the creativity of idiolects and the microscopic variety of situational semantics is that the resulting ensemble will be too boneless to fulfill the rudimentary requirements of historical explanation" (p. 103). Jones suggests that the technique of British (and

perhaps American?) historians who have rejected the division of history into the social and the political and instead seek the socio-cultural dimensions of the political offers a more fruitful methodological approach.

The other essays deal with specific historical topics as opposed to historiography, and all treat at least one of three key topics in cultural history: social class, national or racial identity, and gender. The overarching theme is how revolutionary changes in these forms of identity since the late eighteenth century have contributed to the making of the modern world. The theoretical approaches are diverse and sophisticated, and this short overview will do little justice to the richness of the individual essays.

The study of social class may seem to be part of the “old style” of doing history, but in the hands of these authors it takes on an important cultural dimension. For example, Thomas Laqueur’s essay outlines a cultural revolution in the treatment of the dead in the early nineteenth century. Laqueur marks 1804, the year that Père-Lachaise cemetery was built in Paris, as a turning point, “a radical innovation in the spatial geography of the dead in relation to the living and of dead bodies in relation to each other” (p. 18). More important, it came to symbolize a bourgeois attitude toward death. The bourgeois elements of the modern cemetery include the focus on cleanliness; the separation of dead from living bodies (championed by public health officials); and increased size and space (a change from the untidy and promiscuous chaos of the church burial grounds) which allowed for prominent monuments to be erected over the bodies of the wealthy dead. Laqueur’s essay effectively effaces the boundaries separating cultural changes in England from those in France and, indeed, throughout Western Europe. He sees the cultural change represented by the new cemetery as taking place throughout Europe and extending to the European colonies. For example, the Park Street cemetery of Calcutta, an equally “modern” creation, predated Père-Lachaise by thirty-seven years.

While Laqueur’s essay presupposes the reality of class consciousness, Sarah Maza challenges the notion that class awareness and antagonism in the Marxian sense date from the late eighteenth century. In this context, she takes on the classical interpretation of the French Revolution, based on class struggle, and in particular the idea that roots of bourgeois or middle-class identity can be found in the revolutionary struggles of 1789 and beyond. Maza successfully elucidates the slipperiness of the term “bourgeois” in the eighteenth-century context and the danger of equating it with our modern understanding of middle class. In her analysis of the meaning of the Third Estate and the image of the National Guards, she finds that these entities were perceived to represent a unified nation (although excluding the privileged classes) rather than a “middle class” or “upper middle class” as we understand it. She acknowledges that members of the Third Estate elected to the National Assembly, as well as the members of the National Guard, tended to represent an elite section of the non-noble French. But Maza is making an argument about class consciousness, about the discursive creation of class identity and antagonisms, rather than the demographic reality of the make-up of these revolutionary groups.^[2] On this point, her evidence is convincing; she persuasively demonstrates that revolutionary discourse celebrated unity, not diversity of opinion or class interest.

Carolyn Steedman confronts the problem of class consciousness by considering a segment of the working classes that has been studied in other contexts: servants.^[3] She links her analysis to seventeenth and eighteenth-century inquiries into the nature of personhood and to how questions of servitude and subordination fit into that debate. She is particularly interested in why the subordination of servants to masters—and the effective ownership of another person’s labor—did not seem to be a problem for eighteenth-century servants and their employers. Still, as Steedman writes, “the immense efforts of legal, political, and philosophical thinking devoted to the question of service in these years indicates great tension in this social relationship, a constant bid by the employing classes to regulate what was an ungovernable relationship” (p. 134). Masters tried to govern the “ungovernable” by persuading servants that their subordination was part of God’s great plan. Steedman makes the bold leap that domestic service was “one of the sources of working class consciousness, as well as of

bourgeois personhood” (p. 136), despite the fact that social historians have not previously discerned the origins of working class consciousness in this segment of the laboring population.

Implicit in these three essays is the linkage of a particular kind of class consciousness with the modern world. If we also link the ideas of national and racial identity with the modern world, can we argue that xenophobia is modern? David A. Bell’s analysis of the death of Jumonville sees the French hatred of the British during the Seven Years’ War and the later revolutionary wars as a crucible of xenophobic nationalism and, in a speculative conclusion, of modern racism. He analyzes the French propaganda campaign of the 1750s and 1760s that equated the British with “barbarians” and argues that enormous changes in French political culture during the second quarter of the eighteenth century accustomed the French to seeing themselves as a “nation” with a collective identity different from that of the British across the channel. Bell’s argument that there is something different about the nature of French propaganda and the identity of nationhood by the late eighteenth century is persuasive. However, it would be useful to consider more fully the longer history of Anglo-French relations. The history of the Hundred Years’ War might be instructive, and his own analysis of French hatred of the Spanish during the Wars of the Religion nuances his claim that xenophobia and its contribution to national identity was an eighteenth-century phenomenon.

Kathleen Wilson’s essay, which also considers race and national identity, opens with a meditation on the meaning of modernity, which she conceptualizes as “a set of relations that are constantly being made and unmade, contested and reconfigured, that nonetheless produce among their contemporaneous witnesses the conviction of historical *difference*” (p. 65). The inhabitants of the South Sea islands explored and analyzed by Captain Cook and others during Britain’s “Second Age of Discovery” provided that sense of “difference” for the British. Wilson argues that “capturing Pacific peoples in the ethnographic gaze characteristic of the period’s nascent social science, the representation allowed ‘travel’, geographic and temporal, by aid of the latest in visual sciences and technologies, while the Pacific islanders so arrayed provided examples to the English audiences of their earlier selves, ‘mirrors’ of a past once deemed lost, but now paraded before them in proof of present-day English ingenuity, civility, and cosmopolitanism” (p. 74). Wilson skillfully draws together threads of theatrical representation and the works of natural and social scientists to demonstrate the English fascination with the “other” and how it contributed to their sense of uniqueness and superior civilization and culture.

James Chandler’s essay also makes claims for the creation of national identity or, at least, a national culture. Although a work of literary criticism, Chandler’s piece reflects recent interest in the history of emotions, as he links sentimentality with modernity, stressing the modern origins of the word.^[4] Specifically, he argues that the “sentimental movement” of the late eighteenth century—a concept closely associated with sympathy, an emotion of particular moral value—“effectively developed fresh understandings of delicacy, nicety, and decorum” (p. 140), which were reflected both in literature and aesthetic response. Chandler sees this shift as “revolutionary” because it transformed both social life and its representations. What he calls “sentimental probability” came to structure the narrative of novels as “writers aspire to move national sympathies in the act of depicting them” (p.142), with novels gradually taking the place of theater as the dominant popular genre in England. And yet, with both media, “the heart of the audience is to be understood as a collective (national) sensibility” with the characters as “part of a collective national allegory” (p. 164). The task of the sentimental narrative was “to make a representation of the ‘sensibility’ of Britain’s commercial society to itself” and at the same time to encourage and shape that sensibility, allowing the modern commercial nation to realize its sentimental side (p. 164).

Theater and politics are recurring themes in these essays. Paul Friedland examines the parallel evolution of theories of theatrical and political representation in the eighteenth century, with the “clear demarcation between actors and spectators that had never existed before, and which had as its most profound consequence the relegation of the audience to the role of passive observers to a spectacle

performed on their behalf" (p. 220). The removal of spectator boxes from the stage, the dimming of lights throughout the theater, and the concept of the "fourth wall" separating the audience from the actors had the effect of transforming the theater-going experience. In previous centuries, audience members had been active and unruly participants in the action. Now, as the "burden of belief" was transferred from actors to audience, the audience member was reduced to the role of "rapt spectator." Friedland argues that a similar transformation in the theory of political representation took place in the mid-eighteenth century as the absolutist model of representation was called into question. From the writings of Malesherbes and Turgot on public opinion, it was a short step to the theory of political representation championed by the Third Estate in 1789: "...declaring themselves to be independent from the will of their constituents expressed in the *cahiers*, the representatives of the third estate transformed themselves into the abstract representatives of the nation's will" (p. 246). Parallels with the changes in theatrical representation are clear: "Like its theatrical counterpart, the role of the political audience was theoretically limited to passive observation. And the new political actors, like *their* theatrical counterparts, would be less concerned with their own material legitimacy than with the outward perception of the appearance of legitimacy" (p. 246). A modern approach to politics indeed.

For historians of gender, the rise of domesticity has been one of the markers of the modern world. Michael McKeon asks the question: what did the modern separation of spheres, the public from the private, replace? This is a large question that he narrows by reformulating as a question of literary history: what genre did domestic *fiction* replace? McKeon focuses on "concentration narratives" and argues that "in observing the construction of these concentration narratives, we can watch domestic fiction emerge as a well-shaped but ostentatiously instrumental signifier, not a self-sufficient story but one in service to public and extradomestic ends" (p. 173). McKeon then moves from literary analysis to the larger historical and cultural context, tracing the conceptualization since the seventeenth century of both the modern family and the modern economy as "private sanctuaries from state political interference" (p. 180). And yet, as McKeon points out, relations between the private and the public are dialectical in a sense, as the separation of the state from civil society "relativiz[es] distinctions between public and private activity by successively discovering within the latter a new outpost of the former" (pp. 181-2). For example, as absolutism and patriarchy became increasingly unacceptable in the public domain of the state, women such as Mary Astell could ask similar questions about patriarchy in the domestic sphere. These analogies between the family and state are evident in what McKeon calls the "proto-domestic" fiction of writers such as Aphra Behn and Samuel Richardson, as we see "the internalization and thematization of public politics within the domestic realm" (p. 184). This, argues McKeon, is part of the logic of modernity.

Gender is also the focus of Carla Hesse's analysis of the cultural consequences of the revolutionary period in France for women. Her analysis of the explosion of print fueled by the deregulation of publishing in 1789 challenges the feminist argument of Joan B. Landes and others that the French Revolution signaled an end to the greater possibilities for female influence and power in the political culture of the old regime.[5] While not denying the misogynistic discourse and legislative activity of the revolutionary governments, Hesse is also struck by the fact that the number of women in print more than trebled in the decade after 1789, which reflected female writers' unprecedented access to the public arena. She suggests that women's new visibility may have led to the vicious backlash under the Directory highlighted by Geneviève Fraisse and Lynn Hunt, a backlash directed primarily at women as writers.[6] This debate, she argues, "went right to the heart of cultural life itself, questioning the suitability of women to the production of knowledge through reading and writing and advocating a limited education for women, tailored narrowly to their maternal role" (p. 193). Not surprisingly, women writers responded vehemently to these attacks on their sex, insisting on the intellectual (if not the physical and civil) equality of women with men as well as the need for women to separate their private persons from their public representations. Hesse sees these attacks on women, and the response that female authors formulated of the "doubled self," à la Kant, as setting into motion a set of poetic tropes of female literary inventions—including the proliferation of pseudonyms for female authors in the

nineteenth century—which allowed women “to insist upon the fictive nature of their elective public identities” (p. 201).

Was Mary Wollstonecraft, the woman labeled by many as the founder of modern feminism, in reality a misogynist as well? And if so, what are the implications “of this antiwomanism for her emancipationist project” (p. 203)? This is the point of departure for Barbara Taylor’s article, which reconsiders not only the legacy of Wollstonecraft’s writings but also the misogynistic subtext that is often an undercurrent in feminist literature. Taylor links Wollstonecraft’s so-called misogyny, identified most explicitly by Susan Gubar,^[7] to Wollstonecraft’s own unhappiness, her savage self-hatred at times, her “resentment of women whose lives were easier, sexier, happier than her own” (p. 212), and to the cultural context in which Wollstonecraft lived: women were “objects of desire and derogation...denied any independent intellectual or moral existence” (p. 210). Taylor also tries to delve into what she calls Wollstonecraft’s fantasies and aspirations, the conscious and the unconscious; “the wild wish, in her own words, to see the ‘distinction of sex confounded in society’ in order that women may experience all their varieties of being” (p. 215). While it deals cogently with the specifics of Wollstonecraft’s life and historical context, in many ways this essay is less grounded in the cultural moment of the eighteenth century and is more a meditation on the contradictions of feminism and femininity—of woman as sexed subject—over time.

Dror Wahrman’s concluding essay also emphasizes shifting attitudes about gender roles. The political and gender imagery associated with the hierarchy of the beehive has been a favorite topic for historians, and Wahrman targets it as well.^[8] He sees a cultural revolution in gender representations in the late eighteenth century, one that “drove the Amazon queen out of the beehive” and “rendered the queen mother her most likely replacement” (p. 256). More specifically, he is interested in the cultural shifts that made the Amazonian figure, and by extension the nonmother, a disturbing and unacceptable figure and “produced the final and conclusive twist in the long-term advent of the new understandings of maternity that we may wish to call “modern” (p. 267). Wahrman links these shifts, which he sees in literature, art, fashion, and natural history, with “a much broader reconfiguration of understandings of gender in the late eighteenth century” (p. 274), changes that he calls revolutionary and substantive. Gender categories ceased to be loose and playful and became rigidly stratified or, in his words, “deterministic and immutable” (p. 275). Deviation from the norm was no longer unusual; it was “unnatural.”

Beyond questions of gender identity, Wahrman is interested in the question of identity writ large, and the final part of his essay draws the other contributions of this book into an analysis of changes in identity formation. Race and class, as well as gender “all went through the same late-eighteenth-century crucible” (p. 278), either launching or completing a process of realignment. This ferment in the eighteenth century had implications for our modern understanding of these categories and the fact that they are seen as essential attributes of modern personal selfhood, fixed and determined. This bold and useful attempt to pull the essays together under this unifying theme works better for some of them than others. Still, it is an exciting finish to a fine collection of articles that work well both on their own and as part of this meditation on, and overview of, recent directions in the cultural history of the eighteenth century.

LIST OF ESSAYS

- Colin Jones and Dror Wahrman, “Introduction: An Age of Cultural Revolution?”
- Thomas W. Laqueur, “The Places of the Dead in Modernity.”
- David A. Bell, “Jumonville’s Death: War Propaganda and National Identity in Eighteenth-Century France.”
- Kathleen Wilson, “Pacific Modernity: Theater, Englishness, and the Arts of Discovery, 1760-1800.”

- Gareth Stedman Jones, "The New Social History in France."
- Sarah Maza, "The Social Imaginary of the French Revolution: The Third Estate, the National Guard, and the Absent Bourgeoisie."
- Carolyn Steedman, "Service and Servitude in the World of Labor: Servants in England, 1750-1820."
- James Chandler, "Moving Accidents: The Emergence of Sentimental Probability."
- Michael McKeon, "The Secret History of Domesticity: Private, Public, and the Division of Knowledge."
- Carla Hesse, "The Cultural Contradictions of Feminism in the French Revolution."
- Barbara Taylor, "The Cultural Contradictions of Feminism: The Case of Mary Wollstonecraft."
- Paul Friedland, "Parallel Stages: Theatrical and Political Representation in Early Modern and Revolutionary France."
- Dror Wahrman, "On Queen Bees and Being Queens: A Late-Eighteenth-Century Cultural Revolution?"

NOTES

[1] See E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* (New York: New American Library, 1962).

[2] Maza makes a similar point in "Luxury, Morality, and Social Change: Why There Was No Middle-Class Consciousness in Prerevolutionary France," *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 69 (June 1997), 199-229.

[3] Theresa McBride, *The Domestic Revolution: The Modernisation of Household Service in England and France, 1820-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1976); Cissie Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies: Servants and Their Masters in Old Regime France* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984); Sarah Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).

[4] See, for example, William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[5] Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[6] Geneviève Fraisse, *Reason's Muse: Sexual Difference and the Birth of Democracy*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992).

[7] Susan Gubar, "Feminist Misogyny: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Paradoxes of 'It Takes One to Know One,'" *Feminist Studies*, vol. 29 (1994), 452-73.

[8] The best known is Jeffrey Merrick's "Royal Bees: The Gender Politics of the Beehive in Early Modern Europe," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol. 18 (1998), 7-37.

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