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Christopher E. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood*. Baltimore, Md. and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004. xii + 241 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$46.95 U. S. (cl). ISBN 0-8018-7433-5.

Review by Margaret H. Darrow, Dartmouth College.

Except for, perhaps, wine and Joan of Arc, the Dreyfus Affair must have the longest bibliography in French history. So central is it to the history of French republicanism that each successive analytic perspective must be refracted in its light. Recently the Affair has drawn the attention of scholars interested in gender construction. In her 2002 study, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France*, Mary Louise Roberts showed that by linking race and gender, feminism and republicanism, the Affair was a terrain upon which the New Woman came into being.[1] In Christopher E. Forth's new book, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood*, it is masculinity that is challenged and refashioned.

Forth shows that the Affair was the crux of three discourses--medicine, modernity, and masculinity--that shaped French political culture at the turn of the century. Like Venita Datta in *Birth of a National Icon: The Literary Avant-Garde and the Origins of the Intellectual in France* (1999),[2] Forth argues that pro- and anti-Dreyfusard discourse shared much more than we generally imagine. Unlike many political controversies, in the Dreyfus Affair the opponents mostly stood on the same ground and hacked savagely at each other with the same weapons, the same assumptions, language, and concepts. Above all, they fought for the same stake, the survival of the French nation, which they equated to French manhood.

To construct their arguments, pro- and anti-Dreyfusards both employed nearly interchangeable categories of gender and race and similar assumptions about health and degeneracy, modernity and democracy. Anti-Dreyfusards linked intellectual, degenerate, effeminate, and Jew to brand Dreyfus and his supporters the supreme threat to French manhood and thus to the French nation. They derided Dreyfus as a technocrat as well as a Jew, Picquart as a homosexual, Zola as a degenerate, all virtually synonymous. Dreyfusards, whose discourse is the wellspring of Forth's book, made use of the same stereotypes, twisting them back on their attackers. In the place of the physical courage of the military man, Dreyfusards lauded the moral courage of the intellectual; instead of the force of the sword, they claimed the force of will as the true measure of manhood. Intellectual vigor equaled physical health and manly action, witness "Emile Zola, whose virile work burns magnificently toward the Truth" (p. 128). By contrast, the irrationality, hysteria, and deceit of the anti-Dreyfusards revealed them, beneath their macho posturing, to be "little degenerates, with defective brains and pitiful physiologies" (p. 128). Dreyfus, Picquart, and Zola became heroes persecuted by an emotional, effeminate, degenerate mob, Christ persecuted by the Jews. Defending Zola against Drumont, Paul Marin wrote: "It is against this Hercules...that today you play the role of the Jew in regard to the Messiah!" (p. 101).

Forth's argument is not entirely new. Venita Datta sketched it in two chapters of her book, using some of the same evidence and illustrations that Forth presents. However, Forth develops it with a greater wealth of detail, more complexity, and, ultimately, takes it to a more depressing conclusion. While Datta's book left us with a Dreyfusard triumph having refashioned the intellectual as the apotheosis of the manly hero, Forth extends the narrative further, showing this was merely a brief moment rather than the final outcome of the struggle. In the end, the upright intellectual, speaking truth to power, lost out to a rehabilitated Just Warrior in whom a display of muscles as well as the ability to spill blood, whether others' or his own, reclaimed a central role. In short, the Dreyfusards won the battle over Dreyfus, but they lost the war over masculinity.

The book's title casually links these two battles with a non-committal "and." While the book demonstrates over and over that the Dreyfus Affair and the crisis of masculinity were intimately connected, the nature of their connection is murky. Is each merely an opportunity for the other, the Dreyfus Affair a stage for the manhood drama and masculinity a weapon in the Dreyfus battle? Does one magnify the other, the heightened rhetoric of the Affair, for

example, allowing us to see more clearly the efforts to reconstruct or shore up masculinity at this historical moment? Or does one affect the other, influencing the outcome of either crisis in a significant way? Forth states that the Dreyfus Affair "facilitated" (p. 4), "perhaps accelerating" (p. 5) the gender crisis but has little to say about the impact of the gender crisis on the Affair. Yet there are some tantalizing possibilities. For example, the prosecution placed intercepted love letters between the German and Italian military attachés in the secret dossier passed to Dreyfus's judges. They thus implied that Dreyfus was somehow involved in this homosexual liaison, adding, or rather, connecting, the charge of effeminacy to those of Jewishness, intellectualism, and treason (p. 46). That Dreyfus was degraded not only as a soldier but as a man, and that his supporters succeeded in constructing Picquart and, especially, Zola as manly men may indeed have made a difference to the course and outcome of the Affair.

Manipulating rather than refuting the anti-Dreyfusard discourse about gender, the Dreyfusards accepted most of its presuppositions, including a traditional gender order of active men over passive women. In this struggle to appropriate the masculine, women had to be sidelined. Forth argues that active Dreyfusard women, such as Séverine, reporter for the women's newspaper *La Fronde*, familiar to us from Roberts's work, were an embarrassment to the ultimate cause of the Dreyfus Affair, the rehabilitation of France via French manhood. Like anti-Dreyfusards, Dreyfus's supporters deployed the feminine as a slur to be cast upon their opponents. When they referred to their own cause or their allies, however, femininity could only be passive and dependent upon male action and strength. Most frequently, their iconography depicted the feminine as the literally naked Truth, persecuted by anti-Dreyfusard villainy and protected by manly Dreyfusard courage. Some well-chosen illustrations (pp. 161-5) support this interpretation.

Even more telling, the Dreyfusards' focus on intellect, morality, and will ultimately promoted the traditional qualities of action, courage, and force as essential to masculinity. In the end, it was not enough that Zola be a manly will and manly brain, he had to be revealed as a manly body as well. In a fascinating chapter, Forth explores the evolution of Zola's body from the voracious "belly of Paris" to "well-shaped" masculinity toned by an "iron will" in the Dreyfusard cause (pp. 176-202). It was also not enough for supporters to spill ink; they also had to spill blood. As other studies have shown, for example, Robert Nye's *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (1993),^[3] Dreyfusards participated enthusiastically in the cult of dueling. Forth argues that they also reacted rapturously to the attempted assassination of Fernand Labori, Dreyfus's defense attorney. Shot in a Rennes street, Labori embodied for the Dreyfusard cause the traditional manly virtue of risking one's life for a greater good. Marcel Proust enthused that due to Labori, the Dreyfusard "no longer even has to envy military glory the magnificent privilege of soldiers: Giving one's blood" (p. 88). Thus the Dreyfusards appropriated rather than defeated the military model of masculinity. In the process they modified it but only slightly and only temporarily.

In the book's final chapters, Forth leaves the Dreyfus Affair behind, to explore the rise of the cult of the male body at the turn of the century. The cultural discourse of race, gender, and health shared by both camps in the Affair led to a campaign for national regeneration in which truth seeking took a back seat to body building. Diet, muscle, and sports would rebuild the French body politic that the Affair threatened, a male body, of course. In the Dreyfusards' championing of masculine action, force, and even muscle, Forth sees the seeds of the New Man of the interwar period, the *ligueur*, and the Storm Trooper.

Forth has built his argument upon rich source material, in particular, wide reading in contemporary periodicals, speeches, cartoons, and advertisements. His prose is straightforward and largely free of jargon. He specializes in pulling from the close-up to the long-shot and back again, giving the reader an overview, then a close analysis of the discourse relating to specific incidents and issues, such as Dreyfus's degradation ceremony and Zola's stomach, that both illustrates and furthers his arguments. This makes for intriguing reading. It also makes the small linkages vividly clear, between the discourses of race and gender, gender and degeneracy, degeneracy and democracy. More daringly, in the book's final chapters, Forth connects the political discourses of the Affair to the popular culture of body building and then back to the intellectual advocacy of force and action of Agathon and their ilk on the eve of the First World War. By shifting the main focus from race to gender, from anti-Semitism to masculinity, Forth demonstrates just how deeply rooted in French culture the Dreyfus Affair was. If it was fears about the degeneracy of French masculinity that underlay the Affair, then the hysteria it generated is somewhat more comprehensible.

NOTES

[1] Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.)

[2] Venita Datta, *Birth of a national Icon: The Literary Avant-Garde and the Origins of the Intellectual in France* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

[3] Robert Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

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