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Steven Zdatny, *Fashion, Work and Politics in Modern France*. New York and Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. xv + 384 pp. Illustrations, select bibliography, and index. \$69.95 US. (hb). ISBN 1-4039-72170-6.

Review by Mary Lynn Stewart, Simon Fraser University.

Fashion, Work and Politics in Modern France is an unusual and valuable amalgam of cultural and gender history on the one side, and labor and business history on the other side, framed by the political history of France in the twentieth century. In addition to integrating these usually disparate approaches to history into a relatively seamless narrative, Steven Zdatny incorporates elements of his earlier scholarship on hairdressers and their organizations into a broader consideration of the gendered aspects of hairdressing, inside and outside the occupation, and of the political implications of economic strategies adopted by salon owners and employees and, by extension, by small business owners and their employees.

Zdatny's wide-ranging expertise is summed up by noting that he has already placed articles on topics discussed in this work in journals as diverse as *French Historical Studies*, *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, and *Mouvement Social*. The current book explains his comprehensive approach: "it is critical to remember that one person's hairstyle was another's business and still another's labor, and that the advance of ladies' hairdressing was also a social revolution that transformed life in the salons" (p 26). In *Hairstyles and Fashion: A Hairdresser's History of Paris, 1910-1920* (1999), an annotated edition of a remarkable primary source (a series of articles written by a prominent French hairdresser), Zdatny began to elaborate a promising line of argument that fashion is not imposed on women by *coiffeurs*, *couturiers*, or capitalism, but also does not simply arise from demand. In the book under review, he limits his argument to *coiffeurs*, claiming that their dispersal and dependence on clothing and hat styles kept them from governing hairstyles as powerful manufacturers dominated *couture*.

Here, too, Zdatny extends his earlier timeline by treating salon workers, owners and, customers, before, during, and after the Vichy Regime. Here, his major contribution to Third Republic, Vichy, and Liberation scholarship consists of identifying patterns of accommodation in hairdressing similar to patterns detected in other occupations. He describes how the failure of the collective contracts concluded under the Popular Front resulted in labor's repudiation of Francois Magnien, a formerly communist militant, which motivated Magnien to focus his energy on occupational education. These efforts necessitated cooperation with the *patronat*, and familiarity with the *patronat* facilitated Magnien's involvement in corporatist efforts under Vichy. In turn, Magnien's limited collaboration led, during the Liberation, to his exclusion from the labor movement for life. Zdatny adds that Magnien, like other labor leaders, businessmen, and bureaucrats compromised by Vichy, was not removed from all his duties. In Magnien's case, he continued to direct the hairdressers' occupational school.

Zdatny is equally skeptical about Vichy's so-called corporatist program in hairdressing, which he contends was makeshift. His even-handed consideration of the role of hairdressers in collaboration produces new instances of the banality of collaboration. Thus he reports that many provisional administrators of the aryanized salons came from the leadership of the salon owners' organizations, that some administrators were "shady characters," but that few of either group expressed anti-Semitic feelings. He concludes this section with the disturbing observation that "The most striking thing about

the dossiers of the *administrateurs provisoires* and *biens aryanisés* is not the gross mistreatment they describe. Rather, it is the tone of bureaucratic normality pervading the documents" (p. 188).

The comprehensive approach operates in the particular sections as well as in the overall narrative. His cultural history meshes material and popular culture. In the opening chapter on hairdressing before the First World War, this reader (who fancies herself a women's historian and a fashion historian) learned that the massive hairstyles of nineteenth-century ladies required many hairpieces made from human hair purchased from a world market in "raw hair" centered, in France, at the Limoges Bourse aux Cheveux. Heads full of curls on *grandes dames* or *grandes horizontales* required daily professional upkeep in their homes, not in salons. The trend toward smaller, simpler hairstyles in the early twentieth century takes on a whole new meaning in light of the time and effort involved in those earlier hairstyles.

Of course, Zdatny addresses the "hot" topics of modernity and the modern woman. The discussion of modernity in hairdressing is brief, revealing that there was a battle between the classicists (elaborate styles) and the modernists (simpler styles) among hairdressers. An entire chapter is devoted to "The Bob," the short haircut that aroused so much controversy in the 1920s. After due attention to the cultural commotion over the bob as a sign of sexual confusion, Zdatny identifies how hairdressers and their customers softened and thereby feminized their new cuts by applying permanent waves. From the owners' point of view, this had several advantages: more women than ever before went to the salons, where they paid three hundred or more *francs* for perms. More generally, as Zdatny states, "The significance of the bob thus lay not in a particular length or shape of hair, but in the collapse of the old social frontiers of fashion" (p. 71).

Another methodological mix in *Fashion, Work and Politics* is labor and gender approaches. In the late nineteenth century, we learn, hairdressing was ninety percent male, with men serving both as barbers for men and as hairdressers for women. At that time it was among the poorest trades, in terms of overcrowding, wages (lower than those of the average male laborer), and working conditions. Aside from working eighty to ninety hours per week and more than 300 days a year, hairdressers suffered from a variety of occupational illnesses like eczema, asthma, varicose veins, and tuberculosis as new technologies brought new toxins into the small and usually poorly ventilated salons. During and after the First World War, when the trade lost almost ten percent of its workforce, women moved into the salons as workers and as owners. Entering the occupation in a time of war and simplified hairstyles, many women did not get any training in the previously lucrative skills of making *postiches* (the main type of hairpiece for women). Although Zdatny does not make the point, this pattern of entry into less skilled work paralleled developments in retail clerking and office work. However, he notes that the continuing influx of women coincided, not with decline, as many labor historians argue, but rather with prosperity, at least until the depression.

The chapters on organization of the employers and workers read like the more traditional labor histories, listing unions, federations, splits between federations, and strikes, enlivened by identifying and following the trajectory of a few union leaders. The largely male unionized workers engaged in many strikes to get the forty hour week and English weekend, though they at best obtained fifty-two to fifty-seven hour weeks (the difference reflecting Paris versus the provinces). Zdatny recognizes that "A two-day strike involving fifty barber assistants.... probably does not rise to the level of national drama. Yet it has something important to teach us about working life and social reform in the early Third Republic" (p. 50).

Ultimately, probably the most positive feature of *Fashion, Work and Politics in Modern France* is linking the apparently frivolous topic of hairdressing with undeniably serious developments in economic and political history. For instance, Zdatny connects the growing practice of wet- (as opposed to dry-) washing women's hair with provision of municipal and household utilities, such as a public water supply and hot running water, as well as the development and marketing of shampoos. Similarly, he links

dangers to customers of hair salons, such as burns from noxious chemicals used in hair dying, to industrial health and safety issues such as respiratory disorders and occupational rashes among hairdressers.

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